

GRASSROOTS POLITICS IN WEST KENT SINCE THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Most studies and courses on political history focus on national politicians and parties, on the executive and legislative actions that have fashioned the affairs of State. This is obviously important, but it is not the main form of political activity in the country or in a county. Public interest is often focused on affairs at the local rather than at the national level. The vast majority of electors have never belonged to a national political party or taken an active part in their affairs; popular participation and even interest in politics, so we have been repeatedly told, has nosedived in the last few years. People are 'turned-off' by politics. However, at the grassroots level many people have taken action against policies that challenge what they perceive to be their interests and welfare. This happened when local people demonstrated in Tunbridge Wells and other Kent towns at the imposition of the 'Poll Tax' – the Community Charge in 1990. More recently, in 2005-6, villagers in Wye successfully campaigned against a threatened development project, orchestrated by Imperial College with the covert connivance of both the Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council, which would have turned their village into a town of 12,000 people with dire consequences for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.¹

New political passions have been released at the local level in the last two-hundred years by the growth of population, industrialisation and urbanisation with its accompanying geographical and social mobility; traditional hierarchies were eroded, a large working class emerged, and democratisation slowly extended. The political actions at the local level were often expressions of national political issues – agitations for political reform and an extension of suffrage; reactions to agrarian change due to mechanisation and the growth of foreign imports, particularly foodstuffs; demands for urban improvement schemes and the provision of clean water and modern sewage systems; campaigns to wrest from reluctant ratepayers social welfare provision for poor relief, health care, education, housing. There were also concerns over crime and policing, not

exclusively by the middle classes. The rising influence of religious dissent – the ‘Nonconformist conscience’, the development of national political parties, of trade unions, plus the ever increasing number of commercial and interest group lobbies, influenced national politics and inevitably led to the formation of local and regional branches and thus increased local political activity. In localities there were lobbies and campaigns similar to those conducted elsewhere in the country – ratepayers arguing for local permissive acts, campaigns for education provision, or for a by-pass road, or in opposition to the location of a new landfill site.² Many of these demands called for further expenditure by the Exchequer and from local rates. And at the ‘parish pump’ level there were political issues particular to a locality which often revolved around personalities.³

The purpose of the paper is three-fold: to add to work already undertaken on grassroots political activity in the County; to widen the scope of that enquiry; and to stimulate local historians to explore and analyse the rich seams of political activity in areas in which they have specialist knowledge.⁴

Local and grassroots politics have been a constant element in Kent’s affairs for centuries.⁵ In concentrating on the period since the late eighteenth-century the approach will have to be highly selective as to which political groups and organisations that are examined. Most of the political activities dealt with here are local expressions of national issues, sometimes shaped by particular concerns. It is a fruitful 250 years for the local historian to investigate due to the growth of democratic expression, the extension of literacy and printing, and the increasing volume of news reported in the burgeoning local press. In 1800 Kent had but a few newspapers; by 1850 there were 21, and twenty years later there over 40 published in the County, some appearing twice a week. Grassroots politics in Kent have not been ignored by scholars, although the tendency has been to look at radical actions.⁶ This leaves a rich range of topics, many with substantial sources, for the local historian to work on.

Social and humanitarian campaigns

From the 1760s onwards, and with greater clamour from the late 1780s, there was growing popular demand to end the British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The abolitionist cause resulted in the creation of the largest extra-parliamentary lobby ever seen, and eventually to the passing of the Abolition Act of 1807. Much of the motivation was driven by humanitarian concern although this is not to deny that some abolitionists thought in economic terms; most opponents of abolition certainly saw the campaign as aimed at their economic interests. The methods of the Anti-Slave Trade committee, in part initially organised

by the ‘Teston circle’ meeting in the Medway village, consisted of raising money, pamphleteering, encouraging the formation of local committees, petitioning Parliament, and organising boycotts, a pattern of lobbying which was copied repeatedly thereafter by a wide variety of political interest groups. The extensive literature on abolition has largely ignored local campaigns although a recent study has thrown light on the particular contribution made by people and towns in Kent.⁷

After abolition was achieved there was a further nation-wide campaign to end slavery in the British Empire. This was achieved in the late 1830s. In Kent emancipationists drew steadily on growing support across the County from men’s auxiliaries, and also from separate ladies’ Anti-Slavery Associations formed at Hythe, Ramsgate, Rochester, and Chatham between 1826 and 1833.⁸ In March 1824 Lord Barham, one-time MP for Rochester and a veteran abolitionist, presented to the House of Lords petitions for the gradual abolition of slavery signed by citizens of Sevenoaks, Strood, Margate, and other places in Kent.⁹ Two years later a further petition for the abolition of slavery from Sevenoaks was presented to the House of Commons.¹⁰ Wilberforce gave his last speech on the subject of emancipation in Maidstone in 1833, and in the following month an anti-slavery meeting in Exeter Hall, just off The Strand, was attended by 29 named people from Kent, including Henry Warters and John Gibbard from Westerham, and Thomas Shirley, George Pickance, Henry Webb, and Thomas Southeven from Sevenoaks.¹¹ After Imperial emancipation was achieved in the 1830s, anti-slavery societies to oppose American slavery were formed in Rochester, Margate and Maidstone in 1839.

Political reform and the franchise

This is such a large topic for research that the treatment here is highly selective; agrarian issues, including rural trade unions, are dealt with under a subsequent heading. Rural and urban unrest was an ever-present threat to the authorities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. High prices of food – grain, flour, and bread were crucial to many people living at subsistence level, and scarcity of work led to riots. The war years of the 1760s and the 1790s were crisis periods with riots and disturbances across the County, as were also the years following the end of the war in 1815 and into the 1820s-30s. Behind most local unrest lay a grievance which was or became a political cause. For example, the Militia Act of 1757, which permitted forcible billeting of soldiers in private houses, was greeted with popular hostility. Fear that it would be imposed resulted in riots in Canterbury and Sevenoaks. The Rector of Sevenoaks, Dr Curteis, believed by townspeople to be complicit in billeting, had the windows of his rectory smashed by an angry crowd and the poor man, fearful for

his life, fled across the neighbouring park to the safety of Knole House.¹² Breaking windows, and even destroying a house, was a common way for a crowd to display its anger at an individual. In 1820 Kippington House in Sevenoaks had most of its windows smashed because its owner was thought to be opposed to Queen Caroline, the estranged wife of George IV. This local riot was one among many displays of popular action which one authority has called the 'largest movement of the common people during the early nineteenth century'.¹³ A less violent way to express popular ridicule or objection was on November the fifth, 'bonfire night, when a publicly paraded effigy of an offending person was burned. Such events occurred in many Kent towns and villages into the early twentieth century, for example to Lord Sackville of Knole whose actions in closing the park to vehicles had offended a large section of the Sevenoaks townspeople, including many of the 'respectable classes'.¹⁴

The French Revolution and the distress that accompanied the war years of the 1790s encouraged social and political unrest in Britain and growing opposition to the government. A Reform Society was formed in Rochester in late 1792 and firmly opposed by a rival loyalist Association for Defending Liberty and Property which pursued the prosecution of radicals whom they labeled 'blackguards' and 'hot-headed revolutionaries'. The London Corresponding Society (LCS), formed the same year, demanded parliamentary reform. Subscriptions to the LCS were one penny per week and the c.3,000 members in the latter half of 1795 (larger claims of membership have been made) appear to have been drawn mainly from 'elite artisans'. The LCS corresponded with a number of Kent towns from Deptford to Maidstone, including the villages of Woodchurch and Chevening. In February 1796 the LCS sent its Deputy, John Gale Jones, to visit fellow radicals at the local branches (with 200 members in Gravesend and Rochester) which had been formed in north Kent and the Medway valley. Further visits by LCS 'missionaries' took place later that year and in 1797.¹⁵ A number of scholars suggest that the road system served as conduits for radical political ideas generated in London which then spread into Kent and other surrounding counties, although account must also be taken of the flow of ideas and literature from other directions, for example via ports, and ideas generated in towns and villages due to local discontent.¹⁶ Radicals held their first National Convention in Edinburgh 1794. Government responded with the two 'Gagging Acts' in 1795 which lost the London Corresponding Society half its membership, and drove the remnant largely 'underground'; in 1799 it was prohibited by name.

Who were the local supporters of the LCS in Kent? It is possible to identify the names and occupations of some; certain members are listed for Deptford and occasional names are given elsewhere, for example Henry Fellows of Maidstone who was imprisoned in 1796 for handing out reform

leaflets. Similarly, and perhaps an easier task to pursue although no less important, is to discover who belonged to the associations which were formed to thwart and to prosecute the radical opponents of government. Easier because such bodies invariably enjoyed official support and did not need to be covert. And how did radical ideas spread and is it possible to assess their possible influence on local political attitudes? For example, what can be found out about the dissemination and impact of the writings and ideas of Thomas Paine in Kent, of radical publications such as William Cobbett's *Register* (1802-35) which by 1817 had a circulation of 40,000-60,000 copies per week, or Thomas Wooler's more expensive satirical weekly journal *Black Dwarf* in the years 1817-24? Who was reading these radical publications, and to whom were they being read, in Kent and the south east counties, and with what effect?¹⁷

Government alarm at unrest and even revolution led to curbs on the activities of the small artisanal trade unions. The Combination Acts passed in 1799-1800 reinforced the illegality of trade unions, attempted to speed up the process of summary prosecution, and also made it illegal for employers to combine to reduce wages. In part these laws were directed at journeymen papermakers – Kent was a major paper-producing county, but these seem to have had little impact on either employers or employees. More work needs to be undertaken on the journeymen papermakers and their combinations, and perhaps the Cray-Darent valleys of west Kent would be a fruitful area for study. There does appear to be in this area, especially in the villages of St Mary Cray and Shoreham, a determined and sustained sense of working class endeavour for much of the nineteenth century typified first by the actions of the paper makers and then by agricultural labourers in the 1830s and then the 1870s.

The demand for reform at all levels was in the air from the 1820s onwards. It rode on the back of rural hardship and accompanying unrest such as 'Swing', resistance to the New Poor Law of 1834, trade union activity in the same decade, and agitation to end the Corn Laws. By 1841 one in ten of the population of Kent were paupers and the annual cost of relief had grown rapidly to over £201,000. A more significant figure was that there were over 3,100 able bodied adults in receipt of poor relief. Poverty and the unpredictability of an often harsh economic climate handed out personal despair but it also encouraged a search by ordinary men and women for new political solutions to these pressing problems. Clusters of radically-minded men and women lived in Tonbridge, Chatham, Sheerness, Dartford, Cranbrook, Maidstone, Tenterden, and Canterbury, although the crushing by the military of the 'rising' at Bosenden Wood in 1838 may have served to quell any thoughts of overt action by workers.¹⁸

Chartism in the late 1830s and through the 1840s was also present in Kent. A Canterbury Radical Association was formed which made

payments to the National Convention Association (NCA), as did similar bodies established in Tunbridge Wells (it made a modest contribution of 16s. 6d. in 1839), Tonbridge, Sittingbourne, Rochester, Sheerness, and Maidstone. Cranbrook sent representatives to the Complete Suffrage Association conference in Birmingham in April 1842. Convention lecturers toured the major Kent towns in 1842, and a new branch of the NCA was established at Crayford in 1845.

Roger Wells concludes that Chartism in southern towns was 'essentially weak', many workers being intimidated by local authorities, gentry, farmers, and police surveillance.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in April 1848, the year of revolution, public order plans with provision for special constables were made for Gravesend, Chatham, Rochester and Sheerness. A Chartist meeting in Maidstone met fierce opposition from supporters of the well-established New Reform Movement, while in Tunbridge Wells a dinner was held to honour the recent revolution in France. A further guide to the influence of Chartism in Kent is revealed by subscribers to the Chartist Land Plan.²⁰ People signed as subscribers in Maidstone, Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, and in Sittingbourne, where the largest group were labourers, half being brick-makers. There were further Chartist subscribers in Margate, Cranbrook, Rochester, Tunbridge Wells, Sittingbourne, Tonbridge, Sevenoaks, and metropolitan Woolwich. The Land Plan also attracted a good number of supporters in rural areas, for example the 15 parishes within a nine-mile radius of Maidstone contained 61 members who paid their instalments through the town branch.

Some of the former supporters of Chartism became members of the Reform League, created in 1864, which campaigned for the secret ballot and manhood suffrage. Next to nothing has been written on Reformist politics in Kent, although standard studies on the County mention the passage of the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 and the resulting increase in the electorate. Following the 1867 Reform Act a short-lived Labour Representation League branch was formed in Maidstone.²¹ But parliamentary elections and particularly the 'hustings', were not for faint hearts. They were open and often violent affairs which attracted the rival gangs of party-paid roughs. Many years later, Sir John Fortescue recalled that as boy of eight he watched the contesting forces battling each other on the Sevenoaks Vine during the final round of the general election of 1868:

... then the proceedings became lively. The crowd began to rock and sway in an ominous fashion, and the yells turned to the smothered growl of hounds worrying a fox. Presently the police rose to their feet, and falling in marched across the ground 30 or 40 strong in column of four.²²

This was a common occurrence at contested elections. Electoral corrupt

practices were also widespread, notably in Maidstone where politics were complicated by class, sect and party. Some Liberals in Maidstone formed the Society for the Promotion of Purity of Elections in 1835, but corrupt behaviour continued during several more elections throughout the century despite the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872, and the Corrupt Practices Act of 1885 which sought to regulate election expenses.

Some attention has been given to the history of the fortunes of the Liberal and Conservative parties in nineteenth-century Kent. Compared to working class politics and activity they have been more closely studied, in particular their political organisation on the ground as concern increased with constituency politics from the 1880s onwards. The Tories sought a mass membership with the formation of the Primrose League in 1883. Within ten years the League had over one million members, half of whom were women (used 'as auxiliaries for men in political elections', declared John Burns in a Commons speech in April 1899), making it the largest political body in Britain. In Kent's urban districts the Conservatives were strong compared to the Liberals; Primrose League 'habitations' in Dartford had 2,500 members, in Gravesend 900, Dover 1,100, and Maidstone 1,700. Leading Tories such as Lord Hillingdon, and Lady Amherst in Sevenoaks, Earl Stanhope at Chevening, and Lord Harris of Belmont Park, near Faversham, exercised considerable local political pull.²³ The activities of the League and the role it played in the town and constituency politics of Kent in the latter years of the nineteenth century can be followed through the local press and the pages of the *Primrose League Gazette*. A Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) was formed in 1886; by the end of the century it had 60,000 members in nearly 500 branches across the country. In 1892 a schism occurred over the question of votes for women. Little appears to have been written on the activities of the WLF in Kent, a topic that might be pursued initially through the WLF annual reports and examined in relationship with the women's sections of the Primrose League.

One of the major demands by the various political parties and interest groups of the left – the SDF, the Independent Labour Party, and the predecessors of the Labour Party (formerly created in 1906), was the franchise for working class men. In 1914 Britain was far from being a democratic society. Women did not have the vote in national elections and almost one quarter of the male population was also denied that right because they lacked the income or property qualification required. Thus until the Representation of the People Act in 1918 only 30 percent of the adult population of Britain were entitled to vote. At the local level men and also many women were eligible to vote if they were ratepayers. The way in which this battle was fought in Kent to advance the democratic interests of working men and women is a story that needs a great deal of further research. Local studies are important not only because they help

to amplify what is already known of the national picture but importantly they give new shape to that picture.

Relatively little attention has been given to the growth of trade unions, to socialist politics, and the formation of the Labour Party in Kent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although Crossick has looked at late nineteenth century metropolitan Kent and Aubry's recent book covers the lower Medway valley, while a Kent thesis is focused on the Communist Party in the Medway towns.²⁴ It is a field with rich sources for local historians to examine, not only to put together a basic account but also to analyse the activities of local party and union branches: when, how, and by whom were they founded? who were the members? what policies were pursued? how were they fashioned by particular local issues and interests? and what was the relationship to the regional or national co-ordinating organisations that attempted to make them into wider effective forces? The growth of industrial and commercial trade unionism in the County during the twentieth-century, and also its decline in the latter years is an important part of Kent's political history yet to be told. Historians have captured several high points such as the General Strike of 1926, Kent miners' militancy in wartime and in 1972 and then their battle to save their livelihoods in the mid-1980s, but the current historical account is meagre to say the least.²⁵

Tonbridge and Ashford, both important railway towns from the mid-nineteenth century, along with the Medway and north Kent towns, had growing bodies of workers with radical ideas. Erith, for example, was described by a Tory newspaper in 1910 as 'a hot-bed of socialism and radicalism'; five years earlier there were six Labour councillors on Erith Urban District Council and in 1907 the town sent the first Labour representative to the County Council.²⁶ A branch of Hyndman's Marxist Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF) existed in Erith from 1895 onwards and also in several other major Kent towns. There was a strong branch in Deptford in 1886; another had been formed in Tunbridge Wells where an SDF hall was opened in 1884; two years later members organised a demonstration of the unemployed, and they unsuccessfully contested seats on the Board of Guardians in 1887, although an SDF candidate secured 559 votes in the 1888 election. By 1905 there were three SDF councillors on the town council.²⁷

Clearly political disquiet and protest did not always come from the left. The socio-economic and political impact of the First World War which resulted in the radicalisation of a more assertive political labour movement shook the position and the confidence of many middle class people. One response was the creation of the Middle Class Union (MCU) in early 1919 which initially proclaimed that it was not a political organisation although obviously it was. The MCU was nationally organised and published a regular journal. It contested local and a few national elections in various

parts of the country including in Kent, where, in March 1920, it won three seats in Sevenoaks. Dr Gordon Ward (1885-1962), Great War veteran, local doctor, the historian of the town, and vice-chairman of the MCU Sevenoaks branch, was elected and served until 1922.²⁸ The activities of the Union, rarely mentioned in histories of the middle class, overlap with bodies such as the National Citizens Union, and Anti-Waste, both also active in Kent, which in the early 1920s demanded cuts in public expenditure.²⁹

The Labour Party formed governments first in 1924 and again in 1929, and those who felt threatened by the rise of organised labour, or thought that they might win its support, sought alternative politics of the right, such as the British Union of Fascists which was active in the Medway valley during the 1930s. The fascist British People's Party, formed in April 1939 (it published the *People's Post* in 1939-40), ran Harry St John Philby (father of Kim) as a pro-peace candidate at the by-election in Hythe in July 1939 – he secured a mere 576 votes, while in Canterbury the local fascist leader was Reynall Bellamy.³⁰ Not that the right wing made all the running; in the 1940s the Communist Party held seats or contested them in Maidstone, West Wickham, and elsewhere in the County.

An example of ethnic minority politics at the local level in Kent can be seen among the Sikh minority that formed about nine percent of Gravesend's population in the mid 1980s. The gurdwara was a religious centre but it also became 'the political arena for communal strife'. An additional dimension was the formation of the Indian Workers' Association which during the 1964 Parliamentary election liaised with the Labour Party and also had to confront the hostility of local racists. Sikh and other Indian participation in local politics changed the scene of Gravesend's politics, a layer of activity that addressed interests and passions that were often foreign to electors and residents that had no contact with the south Asian continent.³¹

Women's rights and roles

For many years the struggle for female parliamentary suffrage was thinly treated by most books on British history. Only recently have scholars begun to look at the campaign in the localities but more can still be done including in Kent. The first organisation that petitioned for women's suffrage in the County appeared in Tunbridge Wells in 1866. Over the next five years similar petitions were sent by Folkestone, Dover, Margate, Chatham, and Maidstone. Branches of the various suffrage organisations had proliferated around the County during the first decade of the twentieth century, often to be strongly opposed by local branches of the Female Anti-Suffrage League (FA-SL) which was formed in 1908.³² Many of the women involved in the FA-SL believed 'that on balance women would exercise more real power by building up their own sphere of influence in civic organisations and local government than by playing an

inevitably subsidiary role in a Parliament absorbed by Imperial questions and dominated by men'.³³ At the local level many women were already involved in a range of local government activities. For example, by 1893 half-a-million women were probably working 'continuously and semi-professionally for a wide variety of charitable and public causes'. From 1870 female ratepayers could vote in elections for school and poor law boards, and a growing number of women were being elected to those boards, most as 'independents'. With the passing of the Education Act in 1870, Emily Davies successfully contested the Kent town of Greenwich and won handsomely, the first of two women to be elected to public office.³⁴ Women were elected in Rochester in 1881, and Mrs Evans, was elected on a Tory ticket to the city's school board in the 1890s. In local elections, argues Hollis, 'women voters turned out to vote in much the same proportion as men'. For example, in Tunbridge Wells, where there was an active women's movement, 114 of 165 women electors voted in 1896 (men 514 of 976).³⁵

The Society for Promoting the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians, more familiarly known as the Women Guardians Society (WGS), was formed in 1881. Once elected as guardians women tended to press for a variety of social reforms and often took a personal interest in the conduct of the local workhouse. Greenwich had a strong women's movement, and a branch of the WGS, as did Bromley by the mid 1880s. There and at Lewisham, women were elected as guardians in the 1880s. At Tunbridge Wells, the conscientious and diligent Louisa Twining, was elected a guardian in 1893. In the London vestry elections of 1894, two women won seats in Bromley, a Kent town that was part of the Poplar board.³⁶

The reforms of 1884 and the creation of parish councils gave more women ratepayers the opportunity to be involved in local politics. One activist was Jane Escombe of Penshurst, then a village of some 1,600 people, who campaigned strenuously and successfully in the 1890s for the Sevenoaks Rural District Council to build houses for working people under the provisions of the new Housing Act.³⁷ The election of women to town elections increased in the first decade of the twentieth century; in 1912 two women doctors were returned at Bromley while other women were also elected in Ramsgate and Folkestone.³⁸ However, it was not until 1922 that Eleanor Wigan was elected as the first woman county councillor, representing Strood. Two years before the Women's Citizens Association sponsored an independent candidate in the Maidstone council elections of 1920.

Agrarian issues

The agrarian changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were accompanied by considerable political activity. The 'Swing' riots in the

late 1820s and early 1830s, about which much has been written, began in Kent and swept across southern England.³⁹ This local and violent expression of agrarian labour politics was shaped by a combination of poor harvests, low wages and consequent food shortages, rival Irish labour, and the introduction by farmers of threshing machines. But it also overlapped with farmers grievances over rates, tithes, and taxes. ‘Swing’ was accompanied by serious incidences of threatening letters and arson, first in west Kent in mid 1830, followed by the destruction of threshing machines, strikes, and riots across the County.⁴⁰ Local landowners responded by forming Anti-Incendiary Societies and Vigilante organisations, and cooperating with the authorities in using the military and the courts to deal harshly with troublesome labourers. An extreme official over-reaction was used in Bosenden Wood against Tom’s protest in the Blean area in 1839. Trade unionism fostered by rural discontent grew fitfully among labourers in the 1830s, but its roots were shallow and easy prey to farmers and land owners. Farmers were not always unsympathetic to the lot of farm labourers, but they also had their own grievances, particularly the tithe system which, by use of their greater political weight, was partially resolved by the Tithe Redemption Act of 1836.

A more vigorous campaign connected to agriculture, and a running sore for much of the first three decades of the century, was the question of duties on corn, first introduced in 1815, which kept up the price of bread and, so it was argued, raised the price of labour for many employers. Petitions were sent to Parliament demanding reform of the Corn Laws, for example by over one thousand citizens of Margate.⁴¹ Much of the literature on the Anti-Corn Law Association, formed in 1836, and the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) in 1839, has focussed on the northern counties of England, but both bodies were active in the south. Kent, where there were 23 local ACLL branches, was part of the ‘London district’ along with Sussex, Essex, Surrey, and Middlesex. In west Kent the first ACLL branches were formed in the metropolitan area, in Greenwich in December 1840, and then in Deptford two months later in February 1841; further branches were established in Chatham, Dartford in September, and Maidstone in December the same year. Woolwich, Crayford, and Bromley followed in 1842. Through its monthly magazine the Crayford ACLL made a strong appeal to readers to join the Association and to uphold the heritage of Kentish rugged independence, further branches being spawned at Dartford, Gravesend, and St Mary Cray.⁴² Major League speakers such as Sidney Smith addressed local meetings in Kent, while Richard Cobden and T.P. Thompson spoke at an ACLL gathering of 3,000 people assembled on Penenden Heath in June 1843.⁴³ Another meeting on Penenden Heath the same month, organised by Lord Stanhope, a strong opponent of the ACLL, was poorly attended due to heavy rain.⁴⁴

When Peel attempted to repeal the Corn Laws the landed interest in his own party rebelled and eight of the 12 Kent MPs, encouraged by Disraeli, the erstwhile member for Maidstone, opposed the bill. The voting record of Kent MPs on a proposal to repeal the Corn Laws in 1843 was duly noted in the *West Kent ACLL Magazine*.⁴⁵ Not all members of the landed interest upheld the Corn Laws. David Salomons, later MP for Greenwich, who lived at Broom Hill, Tunbridge Wells, and served as president of the Groombridge Agricultural Society, argued for a reformed system that involved 'free trade and high farming'.⁴⁶ Even after repeal in 1846 many Kent landowners continued to lobby for protectionism, a pro-Corn Law rally being held on Penenden Heath in late January 1850.

The nineteenth century saw the growth of many commercial-political bodies that pursued demands on behalf of their members. By the latter part of the century there was hardly an interest group, whether farmers, millers, corn chandlers, carriers, victuallers, shipbuilders, tanners, or candle makers that did not lobby local and central government in one way or another. Many commercial bodies also published a regular journal. The hop industry, at the heart of Kent's economy, involved farmers, maltsters, brewers, and others both within the County and also in Southwark.⁴⁷ In the mid nineteenth century hops carried a duty. A campaign to repeal the duty developed in the early 1860s with meetings at Cranbrook, Maidstone, Staplehurst, and Canterbury. A.J. Beresford-Hope of Bedgebury was chairman of the Central Hop Duty Repeal Association (and also chairman of the Kent Excise Duty Repeal Association), and along with its secretary John Nash of Reed Court, Rochester, brought together hop growers from Kent, Sussex and Worcestershire in a campaign that secured repeal in 1862.⁴⁸

As agricultural fortunes recovered after mid century so rural trade unionism revived. In 1865 the Kent and Sussex Agricultural Labourers Protection Union was founded by Alfred Simmons, the editor of the *Kent Messenger* published in Maidstone. Simmons who went on to help organise the Sussex and Kent Agricultural Labourers Union (SKALU) in 1872 said that it was not a political organisation although it is difficult to see how any body that contested the power and influence of the landed interest could avoid being other than political.⁴⁹ As the Union grew with branches across the County it was met by strong opposition from farmers who blacklisted prominent members. By the late 1870s whatever weight the Union had accrued was borne down by the opposition of farmers using lock-outs and dismissal.⁵⁰ Agricultural trade unionism again revived during the years of the First World War with branches of the National Union of Agricultural Workers, only to decline in the early twenties. All the Thanet branches disappeared in the hard times of the early 1920s; by 1930 only two branches were left in Kent, although that figure had risen to seven in 1938. Aspects of rural trade unionism have attracted the

attention of historians but a good deal awaits study in the localities, for example in the Darent Valley where the SKALU found early enthusiastic support.

While rural labourers fought for higher wages and better working conditions, so also did tenant farmers. Across Kent large numbers of farmers rented their farms, although it would be helpful to find out how many and where. Under existing tenancy agreements they were not reimbursed for improvements that they made to the value of land and buildings during their period of tenure. This was a matter of growing importance in an age of increasing mechanisation and capital investment in agriculture, and more so at a time when many farm incomes were declining. Two main organisations were formed to campaign for a permanent change in the law.⁵¹ The Land Tenure Reform Association was less effective than the Farmers' Alliance which was founded in April 1879, although claims by some contemporaries that it helped win county seats for the Liberals in the general election of 1880 were exaggerated. In east Kent, Basil Hodges, of Vincent Farm, Thanet, was a prominent activist while in west Kent one of the outstanding names was that of Albert Bath, a tenant farmer at Halstead, on the North Downs above Sevenoaks. As a nonconformist, Bath was an ardent campaigner against tithes, which he refused to pay to the rector of Halstead, and for religious conscience to be acknowledged in local affairs; as a Liberal he opposed any dominance of local affairs by large landowners and espoused the interests of tenant farmers. Bath chaired the West Kent branch of the Farmers' Alliance and regularly appeared and spoke at the annual general meetings of the Alliance in London. He took an active part in local politics, for example in the dispute over access to Knole Park in 1883-4, and as an elected member of the Sevenoaks UDC opposed Anglican schools being funded from the rates following the 1902 Education Act.⁵² Along with many of the other political activists in the period covered by this essay, Bath's life deserves a diligent and critical biographical study.

Farmers created their own National Farmers Union (NFU) in 1908. Formed to represent the interests of farmers, as opposed to labourers or landowners, the NFU set out to lobby Parliament and to influence legislation. By 1920 it had 76,000 members nationally, by 1939 131,000. A Kent County NFU was formed in December 1918 but its fortunes and activities, for example in opposing tithes (a Tithe Resistance Association was formed in Thanet in the early 1930s), need to be explored. Other agricultural issues also merit local research across the County: the demand for allotments and the role of the Land Cultivation Society and the National Union of Allotments Holders. The latter had a regular journal, *Vacant Lot*, at one time edited by a radical socialist, the ex-Salvation Army employee, Frank Smith. Allotments exist across the County, and many of these plots of land have recently become local political battle grounds as allotment

associations and local authorities face growing demands to find 'brown sites' for house building. A recent organisation that claims to represent rural interests is the Countryside Alliance which has placarded the fields and lanes of Kent in order to proclaim its political message. Studies are beginning to appear on the national organisation of the Alliance but there is no better time to start such research than now when oral evidence can be collected from members across the County.

Religious issues

In our post-Christian, even post-religious age, it is often difficult to imagine that in the past religious belief generated great political passion. Through the eighteenth century Britain was shaped as a Protestant nation with the established Episcopal Church having a privileged place while Dissenters laboured under various disqualifications. Until 1829 Roman Catholics were excluded by law from public office; popularly they were often seen as loyal to a foreign secular monarch and thus of dubious loyalty to the Crown. By the third decade of the nineteenth century demands for Catholic emancipation had increased, to be met by equally vociferous demands that the legal disabilities be maintained. This is demonstrated vividly by the large anti-Emancipationist demonstration, variously estimated at between 30,000-60,000 people, which gathered on Penenden Heath in October 1828.⁵³ Despite this and similar public demonstrations around the country, the Emancipation Act was passed in 1829. For many Protestants caution and hostility increased, and the Protestant Association was formed in July 1835 spurred by concern over the activities of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Ireland.⁵⁴ When the RC hierarchy was re-established in England in 1850 there was a further increase in anti-Catholic political activity. It would be interesting to know more about anti-Roman Catholic feeling in Kent, the sources of such hostility and whether it remained strong after the late 1820s. Jewish disabilities were also gradually lifted, demonstrated at an élite level by the parliamentary ambitions of David Salomons (1797-1873) who unsuccessfully contested Maidstone in 1841, and Greenwich in 1847, to which seat he was elected as Liberal MP in 1851 only to be disallowed. Following the Oaths Act and the Jewish Relief Act of 1858, Salomons was again elected for Greenwich, a seat which he held until his death.

Throughout the nineteenth century religious dissenters suffered a variety of legal disabilities which they often contested, for example the payment of tithes, and of rates to support schools run by the established church. Although Kent was predominantly an Anglican County, there were concentrations of dissenters in the eastern Weald and also in north-west Kent.⁵⁵ The Anti-State Church Association formed in the 1840s, which became the Liberation Society in 1853, represented many

dissenters who demanded the disestablishment of the Church of England. Anti-Tractarianism was a constant issue in Kent politics from mid-century onwards, a subject central to the interests of the Liberation Society. By the time that its leader, the Congregationalist Edward Miall retired, incidentally to live in Sevenoaks, the dispute between Anglicans and dissenters had grown more furious as a result of the 1870 Education Act which provided for Church schools to be funded from local rates.

Dissenting opposition increased at the turn of the century as the Education Bill 1902 was pushed through Parliament. At the Sevenoaks by-election in August 1902, the Liberals fielded as their candidate Beaumont Morice, a Baptist, a barrister, Recorder of Hythe and Vice Chairman of the Erith School Board. Encouraged by their recent victory in North Leeds, the Liberals hoped to win Sevenoaks from the Tories. They had the support of the national Baptist leader Dr John Clifford, then on holiday in Tunbridge Wells, who, so the nonconformist *Christian World* assured its readers, would 'sound his trumpet cry throughout the division' to condemn 'that most reactionary and mischievous Education Bill'.⁵⁶ The Tories retained the seat but with a considerably reduced majority. National opposition to the new education law was spearheaded by John Clifford's Passive Resistance Association established early in 1903.⁵⁷ Active opposition to the law occurred all over the County; at Erith two overseers refused to serve summonses against more than 50 passive resisters; in Tenterden warrants were issued against the Rev. W. Holyoak and Messrs Reid, Banks and Faulding – all Baptists; in Chatham those who refused to pay school rates had their goods distrained;⁵⁸ in Cranbrook 88 children were withdrawn from religious teaching at the Church-run National School 'and are receiving simple Biblical instruction from Rev. W.J. Palmer, Presidents of the local Citizens' League'.⁵⁹ Religion was rarely separated from politics throughout the nineteenth century. The 'nonconformist conscience', which reached its peak of influence in the 1870s, served as a bellwether for a range of public and private issues such as Sunday observance, licensing laws, contagious diseases, the treatment of children, women, animals, and much else. Dissenting organisations, in particular the strident voice of the Salvation Army was vociferously opposed, especially in southern England, often by brewers, publicans, and certain Anglican clergy, who encouraged the so-called 'Skeleton army' that acted as their bully boys. In 1887 when the Salvation Army arrived in Sevenoaks and marched up the London Road from Tubs Hill station to the Old Baptist chapel in the centre of the town, it was constantly abused by the 'rough element'. The subsequent meeting in the chapel was disrupted by rowdies who controlled the gallery, stamping their feet and shouting abuse. As the Salvationists left the building they were pelted with stones.⁶⁰

Social and welfare questions

Social and welfare questions are matters of contest because they involve dispensing entitlements and are paid for by local rates and taxes. These issues became more important from the 1830s onwards as government at both local and national level took an increasing role in providing and apportioning poor relief, education, and other welfare services vital to the health and well-being of an expanding population that was increasingly urban. One of the largest and most sustained political protests concerned the administration of the poor law. Until the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 this was the responsibility of individual parishes. Thereafter new principles were introduced under central state direction that created union workhouses with a generally punitive regime in order to discourage the poor from requesting public assistance. The only Kent MP to oppose it was T.L. Hodges, the sitting Whig MP for West Kent. A majority of farmers, landowners and other ratepayers supported the New Poor Law provisions while opponents claimed that the new system would undermine local control and result in a harshness of operation. In many areas of Kent there was widespread popular opposition. Roger Wells argues that ‘the New Poor Law was primarily responsible for the invigoration of southern radicalism ... the vehicle for an important intensification of rural politicisation’ that ‘facilitated the penetration of the countryside by a major popular political movement’.⁶¹ Opponents at Sittingbourne petitioned against the Act; there was unrest at Rodmersham in 1835; a riot at Chiddingstone in February 1836, and arson in various areas, for example 15 ricks belonging to Lord Templemore, the ‘architect’ of the Sevenoaks Union, were fired at his yard near Sevenoaks in early September 1835, and his clover stack similarly attacked exactly a year later with total losses of £2,600.

The leading national figure in opposing the New Poor Law was Lord Stanhope of Chevening. He was supported by other local worthies including Thomas Curteis, Rector of Sevenoaks, who wrote a 74-page pamphlet addressed to the Duke of Wellington, arguing that the out-door relief provided by the parish-administered system was marked by charity as well as local knowledge of real need.⁶² The failure of the Sevenoaks parish to adopt the Act led to the old workhouse in the town becoming overcrowded, a situation condemned by *The Times* as a ‘scandal’. The conduct of poor relief – essentially the system created in 1834 – remained a contentious political issue until its demise in 1929.

There were other political campaigns that touched personal social welfare issues: the campaign against compulsory vaccination (and wrongful imprisonment in lunatic asylums); opposition to the Infectious Diseases Acts which applied notably to the naval and garrison towns of Kent; and action among the advocates of temperance who were often

closely allied to nonconformists in demanding control over places where alcohol was sold and consumed. Such issues, that continued to be politically significant well into the twentieth century, were often important factors in parliamentary and local elections, for example in Maidstone in 1892 and 1898, where local Tories were closely associated with brewing interests.

Petitions from groups of local rate-payers date from the seventeenth century. In the late eighteenth century urban improvement became a political issue in many towns. Although it seems too simple to divide the politics into two groups: the 'improvers', whose schemes involved higher local rates, and those who opposed such expenditure, this was indeed often the case. From the 1830s onwards there was not only an increasing number of ratepayers but a growing number of locally elected bodies such as the Poor Law Guardians (1834), the Highways Board (1866), Rural Sanitary Authorities (1870s), School Boards (1870), and other local social and welfare provisions. Elections to these bodies were often uncontested, but at times political passions ran high as conflicting interests fought to promote or fight a cause such as the supply of clean water and the provision of main drainage and improved sanitation. For example, in Sevenoaks and the neighbouring villages of Seal and Otford the cost of a main drainage system, installed in the 1880s-90s, brought sharp division between those who advocated an improved environment and others who opposed a further charge on the rates.⁶³ Sevenoaks owes a great deal to James German (1819-1901), an unrecognised and largely unremembered Liberal councillor and sanitary reformer, who championed the local main drainage system which, when completed, not only improved the hygiene of the town but helped reduce levels of infection and also infant mortality.

At first glance war memorials do not appear to be politically controversial monuments, but many are. The money was often collected from the public with the result that there were conflicting social class views as to how funds should be spent – a monument, a village hall, or whatever? And if a memorial hall, then who could use it, and for what purposes? The Sevenoaks war memorial is in a prominent position opposite the Vine just to the north of the town on a triangle of land given by Lord Sackville. The site agreed in 1919-20 caused great dissension when the local authority decided to cut a short road thus placing the memorial on an 'island' of land. An alliance between the newly formed Middle Class Union and trade unionists argued against local rates bearing the cost of the new road, a dispute that was only resolved following a public enquiry. In the village of Shoreham, north from Sevenoaks along the Darent valley, the war memorial beside the river does not include the name of Private Thomas Highgate, a boy aged 17 who was the first British soldier of the Great War to be shot for desertion in September 1914. Over seventy years later,

a campaign, not without its local political overtones, sought to have the name of the unfortunate fellow added to the memorial. It was rejected by local vote.⁶⁴

These local issues of great concern which generated political action, and the ratepayers' associations that they often spawned, are important and neglected aspects of a community's history which all too often have been ignored by local historians or relegated to a few lines or a brief footnote in the books that they write. Modern ratepayers' associations are often conservative-minded bodies with an active political agenda to watch the expenditure of local rates. Residents' associations may equally be politically motivated with an active watch on local law and order, development, and vehicle parking issues within a specific community but with an agenda for public money to be spent on improving a particular area. Action by vigilante and prosecution associations and societies was a common means of dealing with law and order issues in the past. In more recent times people have usually been content to leave this to the police, although in certain communities pressure for populist action often simmers just beneath the surface and occasionally spills over.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has primarily been two-fold: to suggest that there is more to the study of the history of local politics than merely focussing on the policies and actions of the major political parties; and to look selectively at some of the grassroots politics that are worthy of study, hoping that they will attract the attention of local historians. There are various other topics that might reward close investigation in Kent. One of the great agitations of the years 1867-86 was provoked by the false claimant to the Tichbourne family fortune, which led to Tichbourne societies being formed all over the country, an indication that in an age of growing and rapid communications, the railway, the telegraph, and the national and provincial press, public passions perhaps could be more easily engaged and sustained.⁶⁵ To what extent did the controversy impinge on communities in Kent, and did it assume identifiably political form? Similar questions could be asked about the campaign for protectionism waged in the two decades before 1914. In more recent years some of the major national political issues have strong local resonances that deserve the attention of historians: the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2007; the campaign for comprehensive education and, of course, its opponents who advocated a selective secondary school system; local lobbies to build new roads and by-passes such as the campaign in the late 1960s to thwart Buchanan's plan for the building of the Eastern Way by-pass through Knole Park in Sevenoaks, or the current campaign being waged by Borough Green for a by-pass;

the great outburst of popular dissent to the Thatcher Government's Community Charge – the Poll Tax – in 1990; ecological campaigns; the United Kingdom Independence Party and other anti-European Union parties urging Kent to avoid getting too close politically to our near neighbours. And mixed in with the many 'Independent' candidates who stand across the County in national and local elections, there are often mavericks espousing causes that are sometimes sensible or very silly. Local historians should be adventurous in their research and agendas, asking questions, noting social and economic change, posing and testing hypotheses, and uncovering and writing the history of the distant and recent past in the context of the national picture.

ENDNOTES

¹ David Hewson, *Saved. How an English village fought for survival... and won* (Leicester, 2007). Certain current development schemes have been met with opposition, for example the widespread opposition, not only from local people but also from wild-life bodies such as the RSPB, to plans to build London's third airport in north Kent; the siting of a new coal-fired generating station at Kingsnorth, Hoo, to which approval was given in January 2007 by the Medway Council Development Control Committee; various proposals by the Thames Gateway Project have also generated a great deal of local political response.

² See J. Prest, *Liberty and locality. Parliament, permissive legislation, and ratepayers democracies in the nineteenth century* (Oxford, 1990); and Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the people. People, party, language and popular politics in England 1867-1914* (1998), which offer examples from other areas of England.

³ For the variety of local politics, see Jean Fox, David Williams and Peter Mountfield, *Seal. The history of a parish* (Chichester, 2007), ch. 3. The author is also grateful to Peter Mountfield for sight of his working notes on 'local government'.

⁴ There is a dearth of studies of the history of local political activity (as against the history of political parties); see the comments of Roger Ottewill, 'Virgin territory? Researching the local political history of interwar Britain', *The Local Historian* 37, 1 (2007), 45-53.

⁵ For example see Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: religion, politics and society in Kent, 1500-1640* (Hassocks, 1978); Alan Everitt, *The community of Kent and the great rebellion* (Leicester, 1966); and Colin Lee, "'Fanatic magistrates": religion and political conflict in three Kent boroughs, 1680-1684', *The Historical Journal* 35, 1 (1991), 43-61. It is worth noting the title of the volume by Nigel Yates and James M. Gibson, eds, *Traffic and politics. The construction and management of Rochester Bridge, AD 43-1993* (Woodbridge, 1994).

⁶ For example, the work of E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969). Geoffrey Crossick, *An artisan elite in Victorian society: Kentish London 1840-1880* (London, 1978), is a splendid study of the politics of metropolitan Kent. The chapters in Frederick Lansberry, ed., *Government and politics in Kent, 1640-1914* (Woodbridge, 2001), begin to address Kent political life; Brian Atkinson's chapter on 'Politics' in Nigel Yates, ed., *Kent in the 20th century* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 153-97, provides a very top down view focused on national party politics, while in other chapters on agriculture, transport, housing, health and education the authors say little of the political struggles relating to their topics; in an appendix to the volume Paul Hastings addresses a political crisis, 'The General Strike in Kent, 1926', pp. 379-94. A recent but little noticed study, which unfortunately lacks the references to sources, is Bruce Aubry, *Red flows the Medway. A labour history of the Medway towns 1760-1918* (Rochester, 2005).

⁷ David Killingray, 'Kent and the abolition of the slave trade: a county study, 1760s-1807', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxvii (2007), 107-25.

⁸ *First Report of the Rochester and Chatham Anti-Slavery Society* (Strood, 1828). See Clare Midgley, *Women against slavery: the British campaigns 1780-1870* (London, 1992).

⁹ *The Times*, 23 March 1824, p. 2b.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 22 March 1826, p. 2b.

¹¹ School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. WMMS papers. Box 662 FBM 44 fiche 1966. 'Signatories of petition to Colonial minister on question of Negro Slavery ... 22 April 1833'.

¹² John Dunlop, *The pleasant town of Sevenoaks* (Sevenoaks, 1964), p. 135.

¹³ Jonathan Fulcher, 'The Loyalist response to the Queen Caroline agitations', *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995), 499.

¹⁴ David Killingray, 'Rights, "Riot" and ritual: the Knole Park access dispute, Sevenoaks, Kent, 1883-5', *Rural History*, 5, 1 (1994), 63-79.

¹⁵ See John Gale Jones, *Sketch of Political Tour through Rochester, Maidstone, Gravesend, etc* (London, 1796; new edn Rochester, 1997). Mary Thale, ed., *Selection from the papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 265, 355, and 408-9. David Featherstone, 'Review article: The spaces of politics of the LCS', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30, 4 (2004), 783-91.

¹⁶ John Rule and Robin Wells, *Crime, protest and popular politics in southern England 1740-1850* (London, 1997), p. 10 fn 30. E.P. Thompson, for example, suggested that the ideas promoted by the London Corresponding Society (LCS) may have influenced the naval mutineers at Sheerness in May 1797.

¹⁷ See Ian Dyck, 'William Cobbett and the rural radical platform', *Social History*, 18, 2 (1993), 185-204.

¹⁸ See the splendid study by Barry Reay, *The last rising of the agricultural labourers. Rural life and protest in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁹ Roger Wells, 'Southern Chartism', *Rural History*, 2 (1991), 53.

²⁰ Malcolm Chase, "'Welcome object lessons": the Chartist Land Plan in retrospect', *English Historical Review*, 118 (2003), 59-85.

²¹ *Bee-Hive*, 23 April 1870, p. 148.

²² *The Times*, 27 May 1929.

²³ Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 103-4 and 222-3.

²⁴ Crossick, *Artisan elite*; Aubry, *Red flows the Medway*. David Turner, 'Reds at the heart of the Empire: aspects of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the Medway towns', Ph.D University of Kent, 1999. Other useful but brief starting points are provided on various pages in Lansberry, *Government and politics*, and Yates, *Kent in the 20th century*. Armstrong, *Economy of Kent*, largely ignores trade unions.

²⁵ R.E. Goffe, 'Kent miners: stability and change in work and community, 1927-1976', Ph.D University of Kent, 1978. Paul Hastings, 'The General Strike in Kent, 1926', in Yates, *Kent in the 20th century*, Appendix III, pp. 379-94. Malcolm Pitt, *The world on our backs. The Kent miners and the 1972 miners strike* (London, 1979).

²⁶ Prudence Ann Moylan, *The form and reform of county government, Kent 1889-1914* (Leicester, 1978), pp. 42-4.

²⁷ Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre, Bexley. PE/JWW. Erith SDF Minute books, 1895-1912. See also *Justice*, the organ of the SDF 1884-1916.

²⁸ The local activities of the MCU can be followed in the pages of the *Sevenoaks Chronicle*, while the broader picture is given in the Union's journal *The New Voice*, 1920-26. Herbert Knocker, a local solicitor and an antiquarian of some note, was also a member of the Sevenoaks MCU.

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²⁹ Austin Harrison, 'Crushing of the Middle Classes', *English Review*, 29 (1919), 463-4.

³⁰ Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts. Fascists and fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London, 2005), pp. 280, 286 and 291.

³¹ See Arthur Wesley Helweg, *Sikhs in England* (Delhi, 2nd edn 1986), pp. 64-5, 72-3, 83-7, and 176-180.

³² Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's suffrage movement in Britain and Ireland. A regional survey* (London, 2006), 'South-east England', pp. 172ff, 'Kent', pp. 189-94. See also Julia Bush, *Women against the vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (Oxford, 2007).

³³ Susan Pedersen, review in *London Review of Books*, 20 March 2008, p. 20.

³⁴ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English local government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 72-8, for the elections, and pp. 82-8 for their activities on the Local School Board.

³⁵ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 33.

³⁶ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp. 214, 243, 344 and 359.

³⁷ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp. 367 and 369.

³⁸ Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp. 397-8.

³⁹ Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*.

⁴⁰ Paul Hastings, 'Radical movements and workers' protest to c.1850', in Lansberry, *Government and politics in Kent*, pp. 95-138.

⁴¹ R.K.I. Quedsted, *The Isle of Thanet farming community. An agrarian history of easternmost Kent: outlines from earliest times to 1993* (privately printed, 2nd edn, 2001), p. 103.

⁴² Kent branches are listed in Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People's Bread. A history of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Leicester, 2000), Appendix I. There were ACLL branches in the eastern part of the County and the *Dover Chronicle* served as the journal for that cause.

⁴³ Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League*, 2 vols (London, 1853), vol. ii, pp. 97 and 101-2. See also, Michael J. Turner, 'The "Bonaparte of Free trade" and the Anti-Corn Law League', *Historical Journal*, 41, 4 (2001), 1029.

⁴⁴ The radical 4th Earl Stanhope had opposed the introduction of the Corn Laws in 1815; 30 years later his son argued firmly for protection of the agricultural interest. See Aubrey Newman, *The Stanhopes of Chevening: a family biography* (London, 1969), pp. 167-8 and 306-7.

⁴⁵ For the Kent MPs who voted for total and immediate repeal, see Pickering and Tyrrell, *The People's Bread*, Appendix II. Also the *West Kent Anti-Corn Law Magazine* (Gravesend), No. 6, June 1843, p. 56.

⁴⁶ David Salomons, *Reflections on the operation of the present scale of duty regulating the importation of foreign corn, addressed to the Borders of Kent and Sussex Agricultural Association* (London, 1838); reprinted in Alon Kadish, ed., *The Corn Laws*, vol. 2 (London, 1996).

⁴⁷ See Celia Cordle, 'Hop cultivation and marketing: Wealden Kent and Southwark 1744-2000', Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 2006.

⁴⁸ *The South Eastern Gazette*, 11 March 1862.

⁴⁹ See evidence given to *Final Report on Agriculture. Parliamentary Papers*, vol. XVIII (1882), pp. 114-15.

⁵⁰ Rollo Arnold, 'The 'revolt of the field' in Kent, 1872-1879', *Past and Present*, 64 (1974), 71-95.

⁵¹ Disraeli's government had introduced permissive legislation in 1875 but the voluntary nature of the Act failed to satisfy many tenant farmers.

⁵² J.R. Fisher, 'The Farmers' Alliance: an agricultural protest movement of the 1880s', *Agricultural History Review*, 26, 1 (1978), 15-25. Albert Bath's career can be followed through the national and local press: e.g. as a member of the Anti-Extraordinary Tithe Association, Bath refused to pay tithe to the Rector of Halstead and the auctioneer who tried to sell items was pelted by villagers, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 Nov 1883. Farmer's Alliance London meeting, *The Times*, 25 April 1881, p. 12, 16 February 1886, p. 10; *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 25 Sept 1881.

⁵³ Kathryn Beresford, 'The "Men of Kent" and the Penenden Heath meeting 1828', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxv (2005), 151-171.

⁵⁴ An initial meeting was held in Exeter Hall 1832; see Cheryl Y. Campbell, *The effectiveness of the Protestant Association as a pressure group 1835-1841* (Waikato, 1981).

⁵⁵ See Alan Everitt, 'Nonconformity in the English countryside', in T.G. Cook, ed., *Local studies and the history of education* (London, 1972), pp. 37-58.

⁵⁶ *Christian World*, 14 August 1902, p. 3b; and 21 August, p. 3e.

⁵⁷ See D.R. Pugh, 'English nonconformity, education and passive resistance 1903-6', *History of Education*, 19, 4 (1990), 355-73; also Roger Ottewill, "'Education, education, education": researching the 1902 Education Act', *The Local Historian* 37, 4 (2007), pp. 258-72. By late 1903, 430 citizens' leagues and committees existed across England and Wales.

⁵⁸ *Chatham News*, 3 October to December 1903.

⁵⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 9 July 1902, p. 6d.

⁶⁰ *Sevenoaks Chronicle*, 16 September 1887.

⁶¹ Roger Wells, 'Resistance to the New Poor Law in the rural south', in Malcolm Chase, ed., *The New Poor Law* (Middlesborough, 1985), reprinted in John Rule and Wells, *Crime, protest and popular politics in southern England 1740-1850* (London, 1997), quotation from p. 119.

⁶² Rev. T. Curteis, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, Bart., on the Principle and Operation of the New Poor Law* (London, 1842). Newman, *The Stanhopes*, pp. 233-6.

⁶³ Dennis Clarke and Anthony Stoyel, *Otford in Kent. A history* (Otford, 1975), pp. 215-222.

⁶⁴ *The Independent* (London), 13 March 2000, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Rohan McWilliam, *The Tichbourne claimant: a Victorian sensation* (London, 2007)

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