

Archaeologia Cantiana

THE KENTISH ELECTION OF MARCH, 1640

By FRANK W. JESSUP, C.B.E., M.A., LL.B., F.S.A.

WHEN our first Honorary Secretary, Lambert B. Larking, edited for the Camden Society, *Proceedings principally in the County of Kent in connection with Parliaments called in 1640*,¹ he drew his material mainly from the manuscript collections of Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, but he made use of other material also, including some notes by Sir Roger Twysden, the second baronet, on his election as one of the Knights of the Shire in March 1640. At that time Twysden's notes, now part of B.M. Add. MSS. 34, 163, were in Larking's own possession. Perhaps because he did not know of it, Larking made no reference to another, and longer, account of the election proceedings written by the rival candidate, Dering himself. This manuscript was bought at the Dering sale in June 1858, by Sir Thomas Phillipps, and has recently been acquired by the Bodleian Library (MS. Topogr. Kent e6). Since Twysden's *ex parte* statement has held the field for more than a century, it seems only fair that Dering's side of the story should now be published. Moreover, in his important paper on 'The growth of the electorate in England from 1600 to 1715',² Professor J. H. Plumb relies on the Dering manuscript as evidence for his contention that ideological considerations were affecting voting behaviour as early as the Short Parliament election, a contention which Dr. Madeline V. Jones seems disposed to accept in her admirable article on 'Election Issues and the Borough Electorates in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Kent'.³ The publication of Dering's narrative thus seems doubly justified, and is now possible thanks to the courtesy of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.

The first, and longest, part of Dering's note-book is an alphabetical list, not quite complete, of Kentish parishes, with the names of some of his and of Twysden's supporters. Dering describes it as 'A book of freeholders made since the 16 of March 1639 [1640] wherein are entered all the names that I can learn throughout the Shire'. It therefore does not resemble the lists of freeholders drawn up by candidates in the

¹ Camden Society, 1st Series, lxxx, 1862.

² J. H. Plumb, 'The growth of the electorate in England from 1600 to 1715', *Past and Present*, no. 45 (1969), 90-116.

³ Madeline V. Jones, 'Election Issues and the Borough Electorates in Mid-Seventeenth Century Kent', *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxv (1970), 19-27.

Elizabethan period, before the election, so that they could be checked at the poll, but Professor Plumb's surmise that Dering wrote his account of the election 'to relieve (? relieve) his feelings' seems to be borne out by its tone and style.

Dering's tale of the election proceedings, the second part of the note-book, occupies seven pages (pp. 81-7) and appears to have been written all at the same time, the writing becoming larger and more cursive towards the end. It is followed by a few notes which were evidently jotted down later. Only these two sections of the note-book are here transcribed (with spellings modernized) but an analysis of the 'book of freeholders' is given later in this paper.

A brief of passages concerning Knights of the Shire, 1639 and 1640.

8 December, 1639. Being at Dover I heard the newest news of a Parliament. Some friends there invited me and offered me to be their Burgess.⁴ The charge of the Knightship for the Shire made me decline thought of that for myself; but full of thought who might be trusted for us, I went to Mr. Knatchbull, lay there, and propounded my assistance to him for one. He was within a day invited forward by others; and holding me in suspense seven days at last resolved to enter that stage which, if he then had not, I had.

At the term after Christmas I acted what I could for him in London (as before in the country). I was solicited by Sir Roger Twysden for Sir Henry Vane, the Treasurer of the King's Household and Secretary to the King. I absolutely resolved that in times so desperate I would contribute no help to any privy councillor or deputy lieutenant, there standing then (with Sir Henry Vane) Sir Thomas Walsingham and Sir George Sondes, both deputy lieutenants.

Many more invitations I had to appear at the Assizes (February). I understood (what was before expected) that the two deputy lieutenants were both set down to make way to Sir Henry Vane. So then none stood but Sir Henry and Mr. Knatchbull. Now I was urged again and again by Mr. Dean of Canterbury, by Mr. Stroud, by letters from Dover, etc., to appear, nor was there any doubt of success. I yielded, and the effect was that Sir Henry Vane in great indignation did immediately sit down, and my Lord Chamberlain (the Earl of Pembroke)⁵ in great fury, not being able to make Sir Henry Vane (for whom he had long appeared) storming that the opposition was against him: presently set forward Sir George Sondes⁶ again by the

⁴ In fact Sir Peter Heyman of Sellindge and Sir Edward Boys of Fredville were returned for Dover. Dering had associations with the port, having purchased the office of Lieutenant of Dover Castle in 1629, but when it proved less profitable than he had hoped, he disposed of it a few years later.

⁵ The Earl of Pembroke had been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Kent in 1624.

⁶ Sondes had his own reasons for wishing to be in Parliament: 'I am in a manner necessitated to it.' As sheriff in 1636-1637 he had behaved 'very reasonably', that is presumably shown partiality to his friends in the collection of ship-money, and moreover those who had been deputy lieutenants, as he was, 'had need to be present to justify ourselves the best we can when our actions are questioned as undoubtedly they will.' Sondes to Sir Thomas Walsingham (? December 1639). B. M. Stowe MSS. 743, f. 136, Kent County Archives, U. 47/47, Z.1, f. 194.

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strength of every deputy contributing unto him in the first or second place, indeed all in the first place except Sir Humphry Tufton, *de quo quaere*. The captains were almost all for him, excepting Sir John Sedley and his son, and very few or none else.

Sir Henry Vane in revenge did write and send about for Sir Roger Twysden who had for one quarter of a year laboured voices for him and now resolved to use them himself.

I had (in Christmas before) written to him to invite him forward which he refused, but now resolved with himself since he could not make one kinsman (Vane) he would hinder another (Dering).

The obscure and peevish sort that are separatists, or lovers of separation, did make it their cause, to have a child of theirs in the House. No pains was enough for them, and what they will, they will do pertinaciously, yet many adhered unto me and more (if not all) had done if false and lying aspersions (wherein they are never wanting) had not cooled and damped them.

Twysden had reported that I was not of their church. That I was cause of the shipping money. Some said I was a Papist. Others that I was a patentee for wine.

Notwithstanding all these black artifices, the day of the election coming (March 16), Dover, Sandwich, Fordwich, Romney, Lydd, Hythe, Faversham, the whole Hundred of Calehill being six parishes, and many out of East Kent came for me, beside from Westerham, Sevenoaks, etc. In the first place four appeared in the field, viz. Sir Roger Twysden, Sir Edward Dering, Sir George Sondes and Mr. Knatchbull. To preserve the integrity of friendship and the truth of my own proposal to Mr. Knatchbull I was an hour in the field before any other of them and instructed all that came for me to voice for Mr. Knatchbull in the first place. He had been sure if I had not done so, and I had been much surer if I had not done so.

Mr. Knatchbull being chosen and recorded presently did assist me (without all previous promise or engagement but of my assisting him). I had then all, or most of all, his strength and my own which was before disposed and contributed to him. The greatest part of his that came not unto me was the strength of Sir Thomas Culpepper and his dependance who went for Sondes.

The view then of my strength was so fair that divers gentlemen did affirm it better than both Twysden and Sondes.

After a while Sir George Sondes set down, whereupon his troops divided unto me and Twysden—ten to me for one to Twysden.

I was offered to cast dice for the choice when three of us stood. The Sheriff offered to draw lots between me and Twysden and the Clerk offered in the afternoon to cast dice again.

I wished the field on each side to be set in rank and file, but the Sheriff was made to warp strongly to Twysden.

The strength with me in eye and ear was a thousand more than on the other side and the Sheriff told so.

All the gentry of Kent, and most of the clergy were with me and a weighty advantage of freeholders, yet the poll must be taken.

The gentry with Twysden were, for aught I can learn, only Sir Francis Barnham, Sir Edward Boys, Edward Monins and William James, beside a long unresolved man who (I thought) dallied both with Mr. Knatchbull and with me, Mr. Spencer.

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The poll being being [*sic*:? being begun] Sir Francis Barnham among my friends publicly said that the work would hold all these three days, and that the country need not trouble themselves for this election since they could not choose amiss between two gentlemen both so worthy.

Multitudes hereupon took their ease and went home.

So that of ten thousand thought to be in the field (which in all sense could not be less than 6 thousand for me) there were polled on both sides but 2325, whereof for Twysden 1231, for me 1094, the odds being 137 even.

Nor had this odds been on that side if his brother Thomas Twisden⁷ had not gotten multitudes of names in at the back of the Shire House and divers bills been entered of men that were never seen or examined, all the clerks—5—being industrious for Twysden and cold for me except Mr. Win who was careful or just between us.

To prejudice me the Sheriff sware many on my side, few on his, so that the pens for him went faster than could for me by reason of that delay.

And I was whispered in the ear (that which I cannot prove) that one sheet of names for me was embezzled.

[A separate note, apparently written subsequently, reads]:

Plain it is that the Puritan faction made Twysden and could have made no man else but Twysden. Nor did make him but by foul play, false clerk, and warping Sheriff.

qu. Why the returns should not be as upon the oaths of them sworn.

qu. Why not the clerk sworn whether a sheet diverted or not.

[And on the last page of the manuscript these further notes appear]:
obiter

Entered in opposition to my Lord Chamberlain.

Entered in opposition to Sir Henry Vane.

Entered in opposition to the Deputy Lieutenant.

was a commissioner for the knighting money
was the cause that shipping money was paid
is another Buckingham
will not go up to the rails at Communion
is a papist
is a patentee for wine
called ministers hedge-priests
can not endure Bishops
set up first altar in Dover Castle
my wife keeps popish pictures
is a courtier.

The 'book of freeholders' contains the names of 352 parishes but there are no entries under 228 of them. Dering gives the names and

⁷ Thomas Twisden, a successful lawyer able to accommodate himself to diverse situations, became a serjeant-at-law during the Commonwealth and a judge of the King's Bench within two months of the Restoration.

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qualities of those of his supporters and of Twysden's 'that I can learn' and indicates which of them were at Penenden Heath for the election and actually voted. As Twysden was elected with 1,231 votes against Dering's 1,094, the votes cast totalled 2,325, but Dering records the names of only 194 voters—less than 9 per cent of the total. Not only are the lists seriously incomplete, but they are understandably more incomplete on Twysden's side than Dering's. Of the 1,231 electors who voted for Twysden, Dering records only 60—barely more than 5 per cent.

It is tempting to try to discern some social, geographical, or ideological grouping amongst the lists of supporters, but the incompleteness and partiality of the record make such an attempt hazardous in the extreme. Dering claims that the better sort of men, 'all the gentry of Kent and most of the clergy', were with him, and if, in social quality, the omissions were proportionate to the inclusions, the figures would seem to give some credibility to his claim. Here is a summary of the lists, for what it is worth (very little, I fear):

	Dering supporters		Twysden supporters	
	At the poll	Non-voters	At the poll	Non-voters
Baronets and Knights ..	11	2	3	1
Esquires	13	16	4	6
Gentlemen	30	42	2	9
Clerks-in-Orders	8	14	5	5
Freeholders	68	279	45	61
Mayors and Jurats	4	1	—	—
Not Freeholders	—	4	—	—
Not described	—	3	1	2
	134	361	60	84

If these figures can be regarded as statistical evidence of anything it is, perhaps, that those higher in social rank were better able than mere freeholders to find the time and money for the journey to Penenden Heath and a two- or three-day sojourn there, and that known supporters of the candidates outnumbered actual voters by more than two to one. As evidence of gentry influence on the voting behaviour of freeholders, it is worth noting Dering's remark that when Knatchbull, as expected, was chosen for the first place, the greatest part of his supporters then transferred to Dering 'except the strength of Sir Thomas Culpepper and his dependance who went for Sondes'. This seems clearly to be a case of a gentleman delivering *en bloc* the votes of his tenants and followers.

As for geographical grouping, Dering records his main support, as might be expected, as coming from his own district of Pluckley, Egerton, Bethersden, Hothfield, Lenham, Charing, Ashford, Willesborough, Westwell, and Mersham. At Chilham, and probably at Godmersham and Crundale, he had some support from those who were originally for Sondes, and at Folkestone and Newington he counted nineteen supporters, only three of whom actually voted. Dover, Sandwich, Maidstone (lying midway between Dering's Pluckley and Twysden's East Peckham), and Smarden appear to be fairly evenly divided. Apart from these four divided parishes, Twysden's only areas of substantial support are shown as Yalding and Headcorn. That Dering fails to record any voting freeholders in Twysden's own country, East and West Peckham, Wateringbury, Hadlow, Town Malling and East Malling is surely evidence of invincible ignorance. And is it conceivable that the powerful Sir Henry Vane, at whose instance Twysden became a candidate, really failed to send his freeholders from Plaxtol? Nor does it seem likely that Twysden was without support in Great Chart where the family still held Chelmington and the neighbouring manor of Singleton was owned by Richard Browne whom Twysden put forward as a candidate at the October election. The truth is that Dering's lists are too partial and incomplete to justify any conclusions about the geographical distribution of support for the two candidates.

Ideological groupings are equally elusive. Twysden, whose own note-book deals with the events leading up to the election and not with the election itself, records that his own desires were, first, that the religion now established should be preserved, and, secondly, that the subjects' liberties should be in no way diminished. These were propositions that, in the spring of 1640, commanded overwhelming acceptance amongst the Kentish gentry and they might equally well have been enunciated by Dering. It might nevertheless seem not audaciously sanguine to seek in Dering's list of the prominent supporters on both sides for some foreshadowing of the division which was to emerge by the summer of 1642. However, even with the advantage of hindsight, no neat pattern presents itself. Dering records that he was urged to stand, again and again, by Mr. Dean of Canterbury. This was Isaac Bargrave, a chaplain to Charles I, who preaching before the King in 1627 had called rebellion a sin, a good royalist shibboleth; yet it was Dering who, in May 1641, introduced the Root and Branch Bill (although admittedly he was opposing it by the autumn). Of Dering's supporters who were of the rank of baronet or knight, five might subsequently be classified as royalists (Sir Thomas Palmer, Sir John Honeywood, Sir John Culpepper, Sir Thomas Peyton, and Sir William Brockman), six as parliamentarians (Sir James Oxinden, Sir Edward Master, Sir Michael Livesey, Sir Peter Heyman, Sir John Sedley, and Sir Humphry

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Tufton), and two (Sir John Rayney and Sir William Meredith) I cannot classify. On Twysden's side, Sir Edward Boys was later a parliamentarian, Sir Thomas Culpepper a royalist, Sir Francis Barnham a parliamentarian who subsequently withdrew, disillusioned, and Sir Thomas Hendley (Sheriff in 1637) seems to have succeeded in achieving political obscurity in the 1640s. Barnham's support of Twysden, born of a long-standing friendship, was enough to throw Tufton into the Dering camp, for Tufton and Barnham were fierce rivals at Maidstone (at the October election Tufton came to blows with Barnham's supporters⁸) and in any case Dering was a nephew of Tufton by marriage. Although Tufton became a parliamentarian, he could not be counted as an anti-royalist in 1640 for he won commendation for his 'wary and cheerful manage' of the Kent militiamen mustered in May to fight the Scots.⁹

The absence of any clear ideological division is further evidenced by the contradictory rumours about himself which Dering angrily records. Some of the *obiter* remarks—such as that he entered in opposition to Pembroke, Vane, and the Deputy Lieutenant (Sondes)—are *prima facie* true, and not necessarily sinister. If they are intended to suggest that he was against the 'Establishment', they seem to be nullified by the allegations that he was the cause ship-money was paid and was a courtier. As for his being a commissioner for the knighting money, Sir John Sedley wrote to Dering on the 7th March, 1640: '... Sir Roger Twysden who as I hear hath endeavoured as far as may be to poison the good opinion the county hath of you by possessing them how diligent and eager a servant your were for the knighting moneys'.¹⁰ But Dering knew Sedley's splenetic nature—as did all his neighbours, to their mortification—and it is hard to believe that he really attached much importance to this canard. As one of the natural governors of the county, Dering was inevitably in a number of commissions, but he had no exceptional responsibility for compounding with landowners of £40 a year who had failed to assume the honour of knighthood.

That Dering 'was another Buckingham' may refer to the fact that he had married as his second wife (who died in 1628, the year of Buckingham's own assassination) Anne Ashburnham, whose mother was related to the Duke's mother, and as a member of the privy chamber he had waited on Buckingham. But perhaps the allegation was intended merely as vulgar abuse.

It seems likely that Dering may have called at least one minister, Copley, the vicar of Pluckley, a hedge-priest, and that there was at least one bishop, Laud, whom he could not endure, but no doctrinal

⁸ M. F. Keeler, *The Long Parliament, 1640-1641*, Philadelphia, 1954, 4.

⁹ *Cal. S.P.Dom.*, 1640, 148.

¹⁰ B. M. Stowe MSS. 743, f. 140.

significance need be attached to these attitudes. For several years in the 1630s, Dering was at odds with Copley both about tithes and about an enlargement of the family vault at Pluckley which Dering had made without authority. First Archbishop Abbott and then Archbishop Laud intervened, to Dering's patent exasperation, and from Dering's derogatory comments to Laud about Copley it seems quite possible that he may at some time have referred to him as a 'hedge-priest'.¹¹ It is one of the minor ironies of Dering's 'Book of freeholders' that he records Copley as one of his supporters at Penenden Heath.

The rumour that Dering was a papist, if indeed there was such a rumour in circulation, is so opposed to the known puritanical leanings of the Dering family that it is hard to believe that it gained much credence, but Dr. Jones has noted how a candidate's chances in Sandwich were seriously damaged by the smear that he was 'a rank papist'.¹² That it was not his practice to go up to the rails at Communion was true, and he and Twysden had seriously but amicably argued about the propriety of Laud's injunction in that behalf, which Twysden found himself conscientiously able to accept.¹³

This makes the more incomprehensible Dering's allegation 'that the Puritan faction made Twysden', that 'the obscure and peevish sort that are separatists, or lovers of separation, did make it their cause, to have a child of theirs in the House'. Dering and Twysden, old friends that they were with many common interests, including antiquarian and historical interests, had naturally discussed matters of religion, and Dering must have known that Twysden was no puritan, nor had any attraction for the separatists. He was the most orthodox of Anglican constitutionalists, as appears plainly from all his writings and especially from *An Historical Vindication of the Church of England in point of Schism as it stands separated from the Roman, and was reformed I Elizabeth*, which although not published until 1657 was written some years earlier. One is forced to the conclusion that 'puritan' and 'papist' as terms of political or religious description were used with about the same precision as 'red' and 'fascist' to describe ideological positions today.

Why, indeed, did Dering go to the trouble of writing his 'brief of passages concerning Knights of the shire'? As Professor Plumb says it was to relieve his feelings; it was an exercise in self-exculpation for the disgrace of having lost the election. Twysden, in his private memoranda, says that initially he was reluctant to stand, because of the expense, and 'not expecting to be elected'. Dering writes 'The charge of Knight-

¹¹ *Cal. S.P.Dom., 1631-1633*, 361; *Cal. S.P.Dom., 1633-1634*, 568; *Cal. S.P.Dom., 1636-1637*, 447.

¹² Jones, *op. cit.*, 21.

¹³ B. M. Stowe MSS. 184, f. 10.

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ship of the shire made me decline thought of that for myself'. Yet plainly he was thinking of it, for he goes on to say that if Knatchbull had not come forward when he did, he (Dering) would have done so. Both were wealthy men, and it is more likely to have been fear of public defeat than fear of the cost that caused their reluctance. It was fear of a contested election that caused Secretary Vane to withdraw to the safety of a burgess place at Wilton¹⁴ when Dering emerged as a candidate.

It was surely to save the embarrassment of one of two baronets, both so eminent in the county, suffering the humiliation of a defeat at the poll that caused the sheriff or his clerk to suggest, on three occasions, that they should cast dice or draw lots. Probably the sheriff agreed with Sir Francis Barnham that 'the country need not trouble themselves for this election since they could not choose amiss between two gentlemen both so worthy'. By electing Twysden in March and Dering in October the county seems to have shown that it was of Barnham's opinion.

Dering refers to a 'warping' sheriff, and Sedley, writing to Dering on the 26th October, 1640, before the next election, reminds him 'how grossly he [*sc.* the sheriff] abused us all last time by his partiality.'¹⁵ We have already remarked upon the unreliability of Sedley as a witness, especially in any matter where Twysden was concerned (Sedley's discomfiture in their long feud over a pew in Great Chart church undoubtedly still rankled). But the fact that casts the gravest doubt on the allegation that 'the sheriff was made to warp strongly to Twysden' is that Dering records, amongst the names of his supporters who came to Penenden Heath and voted for him, those of Sir Edward Master, and his son-in-law, John Nutt: and Sir Edward Master was the sheriff. It looks suspiciously like the losing side blaming the umpire.

The conclusion seems inescapable: the brief and the book of freeholders must be used with the utmost caution as evidence of political affairs in the spring of 1640, but they are fascinatingly informative, even if unintentionally so, about Dering himself.

There is a final ironical footnote to the contest of March 1640: the dolorous journey that the two old friends, cousins, and quondam rivals made together to London on the 30th March, 1642, to submit themselves to the House of which both had formerly been members (for Dering, elected in October 1640 had been expelled in January 1642) and to answer for their temerarious association with the notorious Kentish petition got up at the March Assizes. It has become customary to term both Twysden and Dering 'royalists'. Dering indeed joined Charles at Nottingham in August 1642, though his enthusiasm for the King's

¹⁴ V. A. Rowe, 'The influence of the Earls of Pembroke on Parliamentary elections, 1625-1641', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 1 (1935), 252.

¹⁵ B. M. Stowe MSS. 184, f. 15.

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cause was little less tepid than Twysden's. If they must be given a label, parliamentarian constitutionalist would be more accurate than royalist. Like the great majority of their fellow gentry they were increasingly worried throughout the 1630s and 1640 about constitutional and religious questions. But at that time the attitude was one of concern and anxiety rather than of commitment to any tenet more specific than 'fundamental law' and 'true religion'. In the debates of the Long Parliament the issues were sharpened, and it was then that ideologies began to emerge.