

= Taunton by @-@ election , 1754 =

The Taunton by @-@ election of 1754 to the Parliament of Great Britain was held across thirteen days , from 10 ? 24 December 1754 in Taunton , the county town of the southwestern English county of Somerset . It took place following the death of the incumbent Whig Member of Parliament , John Halliday . The by @-@ election was contested by Robert Maxwell on behalf of the Whigs , and Sir John Pole , 5th Baronet for the Tories . Maxwell was elected with a majority of 56 . The election had over 700 rejected votes , and the result caused rioting in Taunton , during which two people were killed .

The election was fiercely contested , and both sides incurred great expenses during the campaign . There was not another contested election in Taunton for almost twenty years , and during that time the Taunton Market House Society was set up with the aim of preventing the bad blood of a contested election , and to spend money that would have otherwise been spent on campaigning on improving the town . Maxwell remained as one of Taunton 's members of parliament until 1768 .

= = Background = =

= = = Vacancy and nominations = = =

In the mid @-@ 18th century , the parliamentary constituency of Taunton , which had an electorate of around 500 , returned predominantly Whig members of parliament , partly due to an agreement between Charles Wyndham , 2nd Earl of Egremont and the local Dissenters ; Lord Egremont , the chief landowner in the borough , would nominate a candidate for one of the two seats , while the Dissenters would name the second . Nationally , parliament had been controlled by the Whigs since 1715 , in what was dubbed the " Whig Supremacy " by Basil Williams . At the 1754 general election , Lord Egremont put forward his brother @-@ in @-@ law , George Carpenter , 3rd Baron Carpenter , while the Dissenters nominated one of their own , John Halliday . The pair were elected unopposed . Two months after the election , on 8 June 1754 , Halliday died , resulting in a by @-@ election being called to fill the vacant seat .

The Dissenters proposed Robert Webb , who had previously served as the member for Taunton from 1747 until the general election in 1754 , to fill the vacancy . The recent history of the elections in Taunton suggested that no opposition would be offered : the last contested election had been in 1741 . That however proved not to be the case , and a group of Tories put forward their own candidate , Sir John Pole , 5th Baronet of Shute in Devon . Webb did not want the expense of a contested election , and withdrew , leaving the Dissenters without a candidate . Unable to find a suitable candidate , the Dissenters appealed to Lord Egremont to locate someone to stand for the Whiggish interest . The Mayor , Henry Manly , was sent to London to meet with the Whig Prime Minister , Thomas Pelham @-@ Holles , 1st Duke of Newcastle , to try and secure a candidate . Manly reported that the Duke of Newcastle did not want the seat to go to a Tory , and was willing to fund the election from the secret service account (more accurately the King 's private money , a fund which was not accountable to Parliament) . Eventually , through communication with both Lord Egremont and the Duke of Newcastle , Robert Maxwell came forward as the Whig candidate . Maxwell offered to spend up to £ 3 @,@ 000 on the election , in addition to the money promised from the secret service fund .

= = = Candidates = = =

John Pole was the only son of Sir William Pole , 4th Baronet . The family owned the Shute House estate in east Devon , and had returned six generations of members of parliament , including John Pole 's father . He had inherited the estate , and the baronetcy upon his father 's death in 1741 . Robert Maxwell was the oldest son of John Maxwell , 1st Baron Farnham , an Irish politician and peer . Robert had been a member of the Parliament of Ireland since 1743 for the constituency of

Lisburn . He had not stood for the British parliament during the 1754 general election , though he was by that time almost certainly resident in England .

= = Result = =

When Halliday died in June , parliament was in recess . As a result of this , a writ could not be issued until parliament reconvened in the winter . This extended the election campaign to run for six months , causing major disruption to the wool trade in the town . In his History of Taunton , Joshua Toulmin reported that the length of the campaigning allowed " the display of every manoeuvre , and the exertion of every power , by which the parties could counteract each other 's views . " A lot of money was spent on both sides of the election ; in addition to the £ 3 @, @ 000 which Maxwell said he was willing to spend , the government put forward £ 3 @, @ 675 of secret service money for his campaign . Both men had plates and mugs made which were given free to the voters , generally full of food and drink . A number of delft plates bearing the enscription " Sir John Pole for ever " still exist , and one such plate sold for over £ 2 @, @ 000 in 2011 . A drinking glass with a similar inscription is housed at the British Museum in London . The public houses became aligned to one of the two candidates , and much of the campaign money was placed into these to gain their support . Toulmin lamented that " the houses of entertainment were kept open during all this time ; [...] habits of idleness and licentiousness were formed . " In a letter to Lord Sackville , Maxwell wrote that the election campaign involved " a great deal of smoking , some drinking , and kissing some hundreds of women . "

Maxwell travelled down to Taunton in August to contest the seat , and the vacancy was nationally advertised in October . Despite this , the voting did not commence until 10 December 1754 . The voting ran for thirteen days , and closed on 24 December ; Maxwell received 198 votes to Pole 's 142 , giving Maxwell a majority of 56 . During the course of the voting , over 700 votes were discounted , and it has been referred to as being " notoriously corrupt " .

When the result was announced , the public showed " their displeasure by assaulting the friends of Mr Maxwell . " Maxwell himself had to be escorted back to where he was staying , but during the rioting that ensued , the houses of those known to support Maxwell were attacked . The Derby Mercury reported that Robert Pearsall , a Dissenter minister who had been prominent in Maxwell 's campaign , was threatened with having his house pulled down and being sacrificed . Two people , a man and a woman , were killed during the rioting , which prompted two troops of dragoons to be sent to the town , placed at the command of the Mayor , in case of emergency . One of the murderers was caught and sent to the County Jail in Ilchester , but the other escaped .

= = Aftermath = =

Maxwell , who became the 2nd Baron Farnham upon his father 's death in 1759 , and then Viscount Farnham in 1760 , was returned unopposed at the 1761 general election . He pressed for a position in parliament , suggesting " being in the Admiralty or being paymaster of the pensions . " However , this desire was only because he thought that such a position would provide a stepping stone to a higher peerage , and he was made the Earl of Farnham , in the Irish peerage in 1763 . He initially stood at the general election in 1768 , but withdrew from the election in the face of strong opposition .

The Market House Society was formed in Taunton in 1763 by a group who wished to avoid a repeat of the expensive and violent election in 1754 . They made it their aim to " prevent the evils and drunkenness of a contested election " , and vowed to spend the money that would have otherwise been spent on campaigning on improving Taunton . They put forward two candidates in 1768 , who after the withdrawal of Maxwell and another , were returned unopposed for Taunton .