

EITHER A LITTLE LIBERAL OR A LITTLE CONSERVATIVE
Elections and Electioneering in King's Cliffe
By Canon John Bryan © 1998

Elections at King's Cliffe in the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). whether they were Parliamentary (after 1832), Parish Council (after 1894), or School Board (after 1872), were always occasions of great excitement. In those times the life that village folk lived was restricted - no radio, no ready communication with the outside world and many were the persons who, at least until about 1880, could neither write nor read. An election was as much an occasion of general interest as was ever the Village Feast on 25th July or the Friendly Society parades on Easter Monday. And to it all was added the clamour of electioneering, public meetings with notable speakers, vehement rivalry between village stalwarts who were either Conservative or Liberal, Church or Chapel, even.

Before the passing of the 1832 Parliamentary Reform Act the County of Northampton returned two "Knights of the Shire", i.e MP.s, to Parliament and these Members were elected by all those male persons who held freehold property worth 40s.p.a. or more. When an election was held "hustings" were erected at convenient centres : these were open platforms which qualified electors mounted, to declare openly for whom they cast their vote. This meant that your vote was cast under the eyes of all - the local squire, your employer, etc. Parties there were, either Whig or Tory, but there were no local party associations which drew like-minded voters together before ever an election took place. Rather, the candidates themselves, invariably persons of high social standing and wealth, spent vast sums in mobilising and "persuading" voters to cast the vote in their behalf. That this was a system open to bribery and intimidation on a vast scale will be obvious to all. If the reader will turn to the "Pickwick Papers" of Charles Dickens, he will there discover a splendid picture of the fictional pre-1832 election at "Eatanswill", where the gangs of Buffs fought with the opposing gangs of Blues in front of the hustings, where no one could hear whatever was said, and where free and unlimited drinking was organised by the rival candidates. Again, it will be remembered that when George Eliot's "Middlemarch" was filmed in Stamford, hustings for another fictional election were erected in St. George's Square, voters harassed by noisy crowds as they went up to vote before a returning-officer.

The Ballot Act of 1872 instituted the secret ballot at elections, and so put an end, almost, to intimidation of voters, but it required the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 to put an end to the giving or promising of money or any other valuable consideration to voters for the purchase of their votes. The only firm evidence I can find for the erection of hustings at King's Cliffe is given in a Stamford Mercury report of the general election of May 1859; before 1832 the number of 40s. freeholders in the village was so few, and they nearly all farmers or tradesmen possessed of horses, that a distant polling-centre at Oundle would have been reasonable.

What has survived from earlier times have been the Poll Books compiled from voters' declarations on the hustings; it will be well worthwhile to study a few of these for the names and numbers of voters in King's Cliffe at any one time.

In the Election for a "Knight of the Shire" - Northampton - in November 1695, King's Cliffe had but one voter; that was John Newton, Rector at that time ! If we then jump to the Election of November 1806, the candidates were Lord Viscount Althorp, a Spencer of Althorp, William Ralph Cartwright, Esq., of Aynho, and Sir William Langham, of Cottesbrooke. The Forty Shilling freeholders of King's Cliffe, all of whom voted for Ralph Cartwright, were: The Revd. Henry Kay Bonney, Thomas Law, John Howes, Benjamin Howes, John Boughton, George Richardson, James Carrington, John Michelson, Farmery Law, Thomas Gamble and William Moncur.

Parliamentary Reform became the great theme of debate from 1830 onwards, the year of the "Captain Swing" riots in the largely rural counties of southern England, riots which were nothing less than the protest of ill-used and impoverished agricultural labourers. These riots spread even into Northamptonshire, where on one occasion at Oundle fire-raising crowds had to be dealt with by Archdeacon Bonney, of King's Cliffe, in his capacity as a magistrate. With the fear of revolutionary trouble coming upon them, the Whig Government of Earl Grey (1830-1834) finally forced through Parliament a Reform Bill on 4th June 1832. This Act redistributed seats, away from the "rotten" and "pocket" boroughs to the new industrial centres, and extended the franchise, i.e, the right to vote, to wider bands of property-interests, though not to any great extent. For Borough elections the reformed franchise was to be property owners of £10 annual value, and £10 lodgers. For County elections the

franchise was given to 40s.freeholders, £10 copyholders, £50 tenants-at-will, £10 long leaseholders and £50 medium leaseholders.

What did it all mean for a village such as King's Cliffe? First, it meant a subtle analysis by the agents and lawyers of aristocratic landowners as to what constituted "freehold". There was the straight freehold of either land or house or both. Then there was such a thing as "Rent Charge", the lawyers decided, the supposed ownership of a financial interest vested in land but shared with others. Thus of almshouses which were endowed with freehold land, it could be argued that the inmates had a shared interest in the land through the "Rent Charge" which was levied to support the almshouses. Such was the case with the Lord Burghley Hospital in Stamford (by the bridge there) and the Jesus Hospital in Liddington, Rutland, another Burghley Foundation: each of these was endowed by Lord Burghley with the rents derived from Burghley lands in Cliffe Forest. Each alms-person, and certain poor pensioners ("labourers"), who also benefited by this Forest-endowment, were now considered to be entitled to the vote, their qualification being "Rent Charge". And it is with that in mind that I now turn to the Poll Book of the General Election for the Northern Division of the County of Northampton, held 18th and 19th December 1832, the Oundle Polling District and the village of "Cliff Regis". Who are now the voters in that village? Note, first, who were the landowner candidates: Lord Viscount Brudenell, of Deene; Thomas Tryon, Esq., Squire of Bulwick; Lord Viscount Milton, of Milton; William Hanbury, Esq., Squire of Kelmarsch.

No less than 12 inmates of the Lord Burghley Hospital were "Rent Charge" voters within the parish of King's Cliffe, as also were four inmates of the Jesus Hospital, Liddington, and eight labourer-pensioners of the Burghley Estate. Then come the 45 men who now, under the 1832 Reform Act, had the franchise by reason of their being either 40s. freeholders, or £10 copyholders, or £50 tenants-at-will: Bailey, John jun, publican; Bailey, Thomas, hardware-man; Blake, Edward, farmer; Bonney, the Ven. H. K.; Boughton, John, farmer; Burton, William, Gent; Carrington, Joseph, farmer; Cunnington, Robert, farmer; Cunnington, Thomas, cooper; Cunnington, Thomas, farmer; Dixon, John, shopkeeper; Haynes, Thomas, watchmaker; Henson, John, traveler; Hill, William, baker; Howes, Benjamin, farmer; Howes, Henry, butcher; Howes, John, draper; Howes, Philip, maltster; Howes, Thomas, butcher; Howes, Thomas, auctioneer; Huskisson, John, farmer; Jelley, Thomas, miller; Kirk, Thomas, yeoman; Law, Farmery, gent; Mann, John, farmer; Mears George, gent; Michelson, John, labourer; Munton, John, schoolmaster; Palmer, Thomas, fishmonger; Rate, Frederick, farmer; Rawlinson, Thomas, grocer; Rayson, James, gamekeeper; Rayson, Thomas, gamekeeper; Rettinger, John, yeoman; Richardson, James, auctioneer; Richardson, John, farmer; Royce, William, glazier; Sculthorpe, William, farmer; Sewell, Daniel, farmer; Stanyon, John, blacksmith; Wade, John, baker; Wadwell, William, baker; Walker, William, currier; Wood, Charles A., surgeon; Wyles, William, grocer.

The 40s.freeholders, the £10 copyholders and the £50 tenants-at-will could be checked by the returning officer, if he so desired, against the 1832 Land Tax Assessment List for King's Cliffe, or they could produce the receipts to prove that they had paid their rates and other dues. The Land Tax was first levied in 1692 on real estate, personal property such as houses, shops and carriages; village by village. The lists for King's Cliffe can be studied at the Northants Record Office; for any one year they show the names of the proprietors of land and property in the village, and in the case of tenanted property, who the occupiers were - a most valuable reference for all such persons. Those without property or land are not to be found in the Land Tax Assessments: they were without the right to vote. However, the 1832 Act required that, from the first election under the Act, a proper register of all eligible voters was to be kept henceforth, open to revision by a Revising Barrister appointed for that purpose in each constituency. This was the beginning of "Electoral Registers" throughout the land.

No satisfaction was had by thorough-going reformers from this Act of 1832, and certainly working folk gained little or nothing. In 1836 there emerged, chiefly in the new industrial areas, the Chartist Movement which was a wholly working-class political movement and had for its aims annual parliaments, universal male suffrage, equal electoral districts, the removal of the property qualification for membership of Parliament, secret ballot and the payment of members. It organised three mammoth petitions to Parliament in 1839, 1842 and 1848, with little success, but the Movement did keep the issue of reform before Parliament and the country. No less than three Reform Bills failed before a Conservative Government, led by Benjamin Disraeli, stole the clothes of the Liberal Reformers and on 15th August 1867 carried into law a Reform Bill which changed the political scene quite drastically. For now the franchise in rural constituencies was given to male house-occupiers who paid £12 and over in annual rent and to owners of property worth £5 per annum. In borough

elections the qualification was given to householders with one year's residence and to £10 lodgers with one year's residence. It was a great step forward, adding some 938,000 voters to an electorate of 1,056,000. How did the Act affect Cliffe? In the absence of an Electoral Register for the General Election of November 1868 it is not possible to show who were the Cliffe voters under the new rules. There were few, if any, of the labouring folk of Cliffe who paid a rent of £12 for their cottages. And, as in all the county constituencies, the vote was still largely restricted to landowners, tenant farmers, middle-class householders and leading tradesmen.

But about this time political life and politics in the country at large underwent change. Benjamin Disraeli had forged an entirely new Conservative party, formerly "Tory". William Ewart Gladstone came forward as the leader of a new Liberal party, formerly "Whig". The new electorates needed to be educated in political principles and well organised at all levels, provincial as well as national. The vast mass of urban workers in the ever-growing industrial areas were beginning to "listen" and to demand improvement of their lot. Working-men favoured "Chapel" rather than "Church" (if they favoured any religious body), and it was in the democratic organisation of the Nonconformist chapels that they learned to speak and to organise. From 1860 onwards Nonconformity became closely associated with Liberalism; William Gladstone became the "Grand Old Man" both of the chapels and of the Liberal voters. In November 1867 the National Union of Conservative Associations was formed, with organisation from the centre down to the towns and the villages. The National Liberal Federation was formed in 1877, in effect out of a merger of the National Reform Union and the Reform League which had their beginnings in 1864. The consequence of such growth was that in King's Cliffe, with the formation of village associations, both Liberal and Conservative, each with its own "Reading Room", the clash of politics came to be heard on every front.

We now turn to the local newspapers to inform us on all these matters as they took shape in the King's Cliffe of those times, to learn how politics and political life became major sources of interest in the village. We shall discover that by 1860, if not earlier, the candidates for election came to visit and address electors, even in the villages.

Stamford Mercury, 15th April 1859:- "KING'S CLIFFE.- The contest for North Northamptonshire causes no little stir in this place. It being the first time this place will be used as a polling-place, causes much excitement. On Saturday last, Fitzpatrick Vernon, Esq., the Liberal candidate canvassed the electors, accompanied by Mr. Atter, solicitor, of Stamford, and on Monday last a similar visit was paid to the electors by Geo. Ward Hunt, one of the Conservative candidates, accompanied by Mr. Dabbs, solicitor, and Capt. Rickett. It will be a close affair as far as this place is concerned, Mr. Hunt having lost ground. Lord Burghley is considered safe. "

If the reader will now turn to Appendix I at the end of this essay, he will see the list of Cliffe voters in the Election of December 1857, and how each declared his choice. As we do so, we need to remember that from 1832 to 1867 the franchise qualifications for a rural county election were either 40s. freeholders, £10 copyholders, £50 tenants, or £10 to £50 leaseholders. There would have been few, if any, working men in this list.

By the year 1874 political interest - and politics - in King's Cliffe became very lively and a focal point was found to be the idea of a School Board, promoted by John Cunnington, a Cliffe ratepayer who lived at Tansor Lodge and had a soap manufacturing business in Brentford, Middlesex. He considered that a School Board would serve the new Elementary Schools in Park Street better than would the Law & Hutcheson Governors, led by Rector Du Pre. Two extracts from the Stamford Mercury reveal just how lively village politics had become;

18th December 1874 KING'S CLIFFE "On Wednesday evening the 9th a meeting of ratepayers was held in the Cross Keys large room upon the proposed School Board. Much interest was evinced by the very large attendance, among whom were the Revd. J. Else (curate), J. T. Law, Esq., J. Cunnington, Esq., of London (who was called to the chair), Messrs. R. and E. Dixon, T. Miles, W. Bollans, C. Dainty, H. Dixon, and others. The following were nominated upon the Liberal and Dissenting side, viz. Messrs. T. J. Law, J. Cunnington, E. Dixon, Ventross Green, and C. Stanyon; and as six have been nominated by the Rectorial party a strong contest is looked for on the 21st inst. Electioneering squibs and papers are now the order of the day, while the friends of progress are anxiously watching the course of events. The place has been so greatly neglected that now the only danger is our going to too great extremes. "

25th December 1874 KING'S CLIFFE "School Board Election. Never of late years has such extraordinary excitement been manifested here as during the past week, as has been shown upon the above subject and which reached its culminating point on Monday, the day of election of five members of the new School Board. As soon as daylight came people began to be astir upon the subject. The church bells began to ring and King's Cliffe band paraded the town and gave a first class selection of tunes. Then conveyances were seen hurrying to and fro, carrying voters of different parties to the polling place. The town was well supplied with squibs, and hand-bills had been distributed by hundreds, some of which were written in verses, and revealed some remarkably good poetry. Towards the close of the poll the excitement was intense, and the street impassable, and whether to call it a "red letter day" or "blue letter day" with propriety we do not know, but the final state of the poll showed that the blues had the victory, as only one of the five of the Rector's party got in. The following was the result of the poll; - Mr. T. J. Law, 244; Mr. Thos. Cunnington, 226; Mr. John Cunnington, 174; Mr. Elijah Dixon, 130; Mr. Ventross Green, 108. The Liberals were almost crazy when they found that the four men whom they put forward were declared elected, and till P.C. Cross put an end to the public time, scarcely anything could be heard but the shouting of the victors. We may say that the Liberals worked in great harmony: they made use of Mr W. Jobson's (jeweller, High Street) front room for a committee room. The numbers polled for those who were unsuccessful were as follows:- Revd. E. Du Pre 74; Mr. W. Dainty, 30; Mr. C. Dainty, 24; Revd. J. Else, 23."

Such was the political fervor in what was only an internal village election, an indication of the fast-growing interest in politics throughout Britain in the 1870s. We observe that there was a high poll: 244 persons voted for Mr. Thomas Law, the uncrowned squire of King's Cliffe at that time. What was happening in the country at large was that those who were without the vote, even under the 1867 Act, namely the labouring class, were both raising their voice and being courted by the leaders of the Liberal Party. The time was ripening for that further extension of the franchise, to include all male householders, which came in 1884.

On Monday, 12th June 1877, the Liberal voters of King's Cliffe met and decided to send two delegates, Mr. Ventross Green and Mr. Elijah Dixon, to a conference of Liberal voters at Wellingborough, where a Liberal Association for the North Northants Division had been formed. What then happened was reported in the Stamford Mercury of 6th July 1877:- "KING'S CLIFFE, The Liberal Association held a meeting at the Wheel Inn on Monday. Mr E. Dixon was appointed treasurer, and Mr. V. Green hon. Sec. It was unanimously decided that there should not be required any stated sum of money, to constitute membership, each one may subscribe as much or as little as he thinks proper. Mr. W. Bollans, Mr. Hy. Dixon and the secretary were appointed to assist in the registration of voters....."

Not to be outdone, the Conservatives of the village formed their association, as we learn from the Stamford Mercury of 31st August 1877: KING'S CLIFFE A meeting of the committee of the Cliffe Conservative Association was held at the Golden Ball Inn on Tuesday evening, at which were present six electors. The draft rules for the management of the association were considered, and with a few verbal alterations were agreed to. The question of providing a reading-room for the members was again discussed, and various suggestions were made upon the subject. Eventually it was decided to let the matter stand over until the meeting of Tuesday next. With respect to the prospects of the association it is stated that many influential gentlemen of the neighbourhood have intimated their willingness to join. "

The Stamford Guardian of 24th August reported the same Conservative meeting; from its report we learn this: "Preliminary arrangements were entered into the acquisition of a reading-room, and eight gentlemen were appointed as a committee of management, with Mr. Geo. Miles as president, Mr. Stokes as secretary, and Mr. Brooks (sic) treasurer. V. Stapleton, Esq, (Stamford), consented to become a vice-president. It was expected that the Conservative reading-room would shortly be ready; there would be a dinner early in October to mark the opening of the Association."

Then in the same edition there appeared this description of the electioneering in 'Cliffe which accompanied the North Northants by-election of 17th August 1887, occasioned by the death of George Ward Hunt, the member,
" KING'S CLIFFE: THE RECENT ELECTION - A respected correspondent though rather late, sends us a few particulars of the late electioneering. He describes the week as one of unusual excitement.

On Monday, the polling day, both Conservatives and Liberals seemed determined to use their utmost endeavours in securing the highest number of votes for their respective candidates, but the day passed quietly. Squibs were freely circulated by both parties. It was not known until Tuesday evening which was the successful candidate. When it was ascertained that Lord Burghley was elected loud cheers were given by the Conservatives; the blue flag was carried around the village, the church bells rang a merry peal, and the health of Lord Burghley was drunk by many a true old Tory. Such a victory was never expected by his lordship's most active supporters. On Wednesday the drum and fife band played through the village in honour of the event, "See the conquering hero comes" given with much spirit. A Conservative Association has also been formed. "

King's Cliffe had now come to thrive on politics and political contest. It was therefore no surprise that the opening of the Conservative Association and the announcement about a Reading-Room brought forth a snort from the Liberals in the shape of this "Letter to the Editor" of the Stamford Guardian of 31st August 1877-

"Sir,- The Liberals of Cliffe were very pleased to read the paragraph in your paper of the 24th inst., that the Conservatives have taken a leaf out of the Liberals book and have formed a Conservative association for this polling district, and that they intend to open a reading-room to educate their friends in Conservative principles. According to your correspondent a very large company of the principal inhabitants was present. We hear from a trustworthy source the very large company consisted of about a dozen electors, two or three gentlemen now lodging at Cliffe, and the Stamford visitors. We would ask what have these "principal inhabitants" been doing all this while that they have not started a reading-room before September 1877? As the influential company present promised such substantial support, and its birth is announced with so great a flourish of trumpets, we hope and trust that it will not come to an untimely end, as most great things do at Cliffe. Perhaps the reason our Conservative friends now intend to go ahead may be traced to their fear of the Liberals increasing. Mr. Stapleton is reported to have said at the meeting that when the two delegates were sent out there were no Liberals left at home. We think that he found more Liberals here on the election days than he ever expected. If your correspondent (who, by the way, we think is not a Cliffe person) really does not know, we beg to inform him that there is quite as many of the principal inhabitants of Cliffe as Liberal in politics as Conservative, quite as wealthy, quite as intelligent, and including classes much more numerous than our Conservative friends.

Never before did the number of Liberals vote at Cliffe as at the last election. If we were sold, and so defeated, we are not discouraged, and when the time arrives and the party is prepared with a Liberal candidate, the Liberals of Cliffe will again be ready to record their votes for the cause,

Yours, &c. , PROGRESS

King's Cliffe, Aug, 27th, 1877,

In due course the Liberals held a grand inaugural dinner at the Wheel Inn on 19th October 1877, when 40 members and friends regaled themselves under the chairmanship of Mr R. G. Rae of Oundle, the agent. He delivered a speech of an hour's duration, upon which he was congratulated by Mr. Stanyon, a Liberal stalwart and a deacon of the Congregation Chapel. After sundry toasts, the meeting was addressed by Mr Thomas, Mr. Elijah Dixon, Mr. W. Green, sen. and several others.

The Conservatives held their inaugural dinner at the Cross Keys "Hotel" (sic) on 29th October ; the Stamford Guardian of 2nd November 1877 delivered a rather mealy-mouthed report of the event:

KING'S CLIFFE INAUGURATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE ASSOCIATION,

"The Conservatives of King's Cliffe, following the example set them by their Liberal neighbours, have formed an association which bids fair to become a powerful organisation in the district. Its beneficial operations will not be simply of a political character, but the principal aim and object of the members will be to promote the general improvement and welfare of those around them, and more especially will the rising generation be likely to benefit from the institution. A capital reading and recreation room has been provided, and this place of resort alone will supply a long-felt need in the parish. There are other advantages connected with the Association, which may easily be known by intending members. We wish the movement every success it deserves, and as a neutral journal we express this wish not in a party spirit, but because we believe that whatever is started for the good of a locality ought to receive every encouragement. The inhabitants of King's Cliffe were highly honoured in having amongst them on the occasion of these opening proceedings the new member for North Northamptonshire, Lord Burghley, because it gave them and many others resident in the surrounding

country an opportunity of congratulating his lordship on his triumphant return at the recent election. Under all the auspicious circumstances therefore which favoured the undertaking, the inaugural festivities could not fail to be attended with every possible success.

THE DINNER

This indispensable adjunct to a Englishman's rejoicings could not have been entrusted to a more competent and willing caterer than Host Fane, at the Cross Keys Hotel. A large company was anticipated, and tables were laid for sixty. Just before five o'clock, the time fixed for the repast, the bells of the old church commenced ringing and continued to send forth merry peals at intervals. The hotel itself was appropriately decorated and, on the lamp over the door, in an illuminated design, were the words, "Long live Burghley". From the repeated arrival of vehicles, containing freights of passengers from Stamford, Oundle, and other places, it soon became evident that the most sanguine expectations of the committee were to be more than realized. And so it proved; for spacious as the large room of the hotel is for ordinary gatherings, on this memorable occasion it was taxed to its utmost limits, and the number of guests overflowing, a few had to be accommodated in another part of the house until after dinner."

That each party had now organised a local village association, and considered it essential to establish its own reading-room, is indicative of the growth of political life and activity in the 1870s. Moreover, each party at the national level realised that the time was fast coming when the vote could no longer be withheld from the rural householders. Another Reform Act was the aim of the Radicals within the Liberal Party; they rallied under the banner of Joseph Chamberlain, of Birmingham fame, and he it was who organised a campaign to reduce the blocking powers of the House of Lords. Out of the melee came, first the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 which transformed the character of electioneering, by virtually eliminating all those forms of bribery which, in particular, had been prevalent in rural areas. Then came the Representation of the People Act of November 1884, which enfranchised all householders and lodgers in the counties who had occupied their houses or lodgings for twelve months before registration. It also gave a £10 "occupation" franchise, and preserved the ancient property franchise, both of which meant a second vote for those who qualified. Most important of all was the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act which the Gladstone Government, in collaboration with Lord Salisbury and the Conservatives, accepted as vitally necessary. The effect of the Redistribution Act was to create new electoral districts of roughly equal size, and to transform all counties and most boroughs into single-member constituencies with an average of 50,000 population each. Now the old electoral "communities" were at an end; henceforward elections were to be fought on national rather than purely local issues. The old county 40 associations had to be remodeled and made subordinate to central party organisation. Democracy had arrived, even at King's Cliffe, and all that was now required to complete the picture was the County Councils Act of 1888 and the Local Government Act of 1894 by which parish councils and district councils were created.

We return to the affairs of King's Cliffe. There were now so many more voters in the village, a matter which will shortly be dealt with, and what followed was that the party associations held more meetings, with more speakers from on high, even M.P.s, to draw the new voters into their nets. This is illustrated by a report which appeared in the Stamford Mercury of 6th March, 1885:

"KING'S CLIFFE. The political parties here appear to be stirring themselves. Mr. Miles and Mr. Dixon were deputed to attend a Meeting of the Conservative Association at Kettering last week; and on the 3d. inst., the Crier announced a meeting of the Liberals at the Wheel Inn, for the purpose of electing delegates to attend a meeting at Thrapston on the 25th inst. of the Oundle Division Liberal Association, when Messrs. Wm Bollans, H. L. Dixon and V. Green were unanimously chosen."

Members of one party invaded the meetings of the other in order to argue, to heckle and even to disrupt. Thus a Conservative meeting held at the Cross Keys on 25th May 1885, when a Mr. Hodges, who was presented as a Conservative working man from Kettering, was the principal speaker, Mr. Ventross Green and Mr. H. L. Dixon challenged his credentials and what he had to say on behalf of the Conservative party. When "God save the Queen" was sung to close a noisy meeting, someone then proposed three cheers for Mr. Gladstone, which was heartily responded to "by a great many present." Then on the 8th June 1885, with a General Election pending, the Liberals announced that there was to be an open-air meeting at the Cross, but because of rain it was transferred to Mr. W. Walker's large barn in West Street (in the long yard behind what is now 46 West Street). Some 200 persons were present "including about a dozen Conservatives, who rudely made a running comment as the speaker proceeded." After mention of the fated General Gordon, the Tory disaster in

Afghanistan and the promise of the (Liberal) Jessie Collings' Allotment Act ("3 acres and a cow"), amidst some Tory barracking "a very successful meeting came to a close with hearty cheers for Mr. Gladstone". In preparation for the General Election the Revising Barrister held a court at the Cross Keys inn and declared that King's Cliffe would have 224 voters on the revised list.

The Cliffe Conservatives held their pre-election meeting on 3rd November 1885, in the large room at the Cross Keys. "T. S. O'Brien, Esq, of Blatherwycke Park, presided and on the platform were E. P. Monckton, Esq., Fineshade, the Revd. E. Dupre, &c. The meeting was addressed by Lord Burghley, Conservative candidate, who in his speech dwelt on the depressed state of agriculture at that time. Came the General Election on 23rd November, when the North Northants result was:
Lord Burghley, Conservative : 4487 Sir James Carmichael, Liberal: 4296

Ireland and its troubles pre-occupied every Government from 1886 onwards, the year when Mr. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill was defeated in the Commons, by reason of the Chamberlain Radicals voting with the Conservatives against the Bill. The Irish theme reached even to King's Cliffe, and on 4th December 1888, the Conservatives held a meeting in the girls' schoolroom, to hear a lecture on current politics from Mr. A. Brenchley, the Conservative agent. He claimed that Lord Salisbury's government had quieted Ireland, which hardly seemed to be the case.

In those days each village organisation in Cliffe, from the Pig Club to the Fire Brigade, had to regale itself with an annual dinner in one of the gathering-places and the political parties were well to the fore in such activities. And when we read, for example, of the Liberal Association Supper held 31st January, 1889, we need to pay close attention to the names mentioned for we then learn who were the leading lights of each party. Space does not allow that I should quote the next report in full; those old-time Cliffe Liberals could adore Mr. Gladstone until the break of dawn. But we shall observe also that they were nearly always "Chapel men", and if they were not that, then they were plain working men who wouldn't associate with any religious body - a burgeoning feature of the late Victorian era.

Kettering Leader: 8th February 1889

"LIBERAL SUPPER AT KING'S CLIFFE:- The members of the King's Cliffe Liberal Association held their annual supper in the Reading Rooms yesterday week, when between 50 and 60 members and friends partook of an excellent repast provided by the Committee. The rooms, which had been tastefully decorated, presented a very pretty and animated appearance.

"Mr. Elijah Dixon occupied the chair and, after the cloth had been withdrawn, in suitable terms proposed the health of their leader, Mr Gladstone. This was seconded by Mr. Close and in response to the chairman a song, "The Englishman", was given by Mr. F. Edgson. Mr. H. L. Dixon proposed the toast of Mr J. P. Coldstream, the Liberal candidate. He impressed on them the suitability of their candidate to represent them in Parliament - firstly because of his whole-heartedness in the Liberal cause, and also for his strict adherence to the principles of Home Rule laid down by Mr. Gladstone. " After more toasts and song, Mr. H. Edgson was called upon to give an address on Liberalism. This turned out to be a very long peroration on the virtues of Mr. Gladstone; there never had been his like before and no other country would ever produce such an honest, fearless and upright statesman. (At this time Mr. Gladstone was out of office; his first Irish Home Rule Bill had been rejected by the Commons, and in the Election of July 1886, the Conservatives had been returned to power, with Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister.)

Of interest is the very full and long report which the Stamford Guardian gave of the same meeting. For there we learn just how radical were some of the views expressed. Mr. H. L. Dixon declared that the Salisbury Government was not in power by the will of the people, but had won the day only because of the defection of those Liberal Unionists, led by Joseph Chamberlain, who had deserted Mr. Gladstone over his Irish Home Rule Bill. Mr. William Bollans said that if the working classes studied politics and their own interests more, they would send Mr. Coldstream in at the head of the poll. Mr. Ventross Green said that the Liberal Association at King's Cliffe fought its way through great difficulties, being within the shadows of the estates of Lord Exeter, where the farmers and many of the wealthy gave their interest at an election. But the working classes were learning the secrecy of the ballot, and they knew that a Liberal Government was the only hope of their restoration to the land, from which they were now alienated. In proposing the toast "Our Visitors" he urged upon the visitors the necessity of doing the utmost in their several localities to help get the land for the people. "Not by a sham Tory Allotment Act, but by a good Radical Land Reform, which will allow the people to work

thereon and by their work to live." Radical sentiments indeed! But the expression of them was to be preferred, one would think, to that tedious adulation of "The Grand Old Man" by Mr. Henry Edgson, reported in the Kettering Leader.

Not to be outdone, the Conservatives held a great dinner on 19th February 1889, and the Stamford Mercury carried a long report of it: - "The annual dinner of the King's Cliffe District Association was held on Tuesday in a large marquee erected in the School Yard. There were over 200 persons present.....Mr E. P. Monckton, Fineshade, presided and he was supported by Lord Burghley, M. P. for the Northern Division of Northamptonshire; Mr. Valentine Stapleton, Mayor of Stamford; the Revd. W. Hopkinson, Sutton; the Revd. E. Dupre, Rector of King's Cliffe; the Revd. H. S. Bagshawe, Woodnewton; Capt. White, Castor; Mr. J. H. Smith, Oundle; Mr. A. W. Tuck, Oakham; and Mr. A. Brenchley, Conservative organising secretary for the division. Mr. G. Miles filled the vice-chair." The toast list was of abnormal length, and there was also a long programme of vocal and instrumental music." One of the toasts offered was that by the Rector of King's Cliffe :- "The Revd. E. DU PRE, in proposing the House of Lords, said it possessed the greatest talent the world could show (Cheers). They were a great barrier to a hasty and ill-advised legislation (hear, hear); and it would be a very bad day for England if the House of Lords should ever be abolished and the affairs of the country trusted to one body of men."

It was altogether a splendid affair, illuminated by electric light! This must have been the first sight ever which Cliffe had of electric lighting, and one is moved to ask "What was the source of supply?

The Kettering Leader, ever a radical newspaper, carried this carping comment in its edition of 22nd February, 1889: "WHAT LEADER LEARNS

That the Tories at King's Cliffe had a rare old time of it, last Tuesday evening.

That the labourers were provided with a splendid dinner, beer and tobacco without stint, an exhibition of the electric light and other amusements - all for a shilling!

That Lord Burghley's was clearly an after dinner speech - his utterances being those of a lord but not of a gentleman.

That his references to Mr. Gladstone and Mr. William O'Brien showed an equal lack of good taste and judgment.

That his lordship will never be fit to hold a candle to the one, or black the boots of the other.

That at eleven o'clock Mr. George Miles - on the strength of his 51st birthday - presented the company with three additional 18 gallon casks of ale.

That this was "after the men had well drunk", and either the beer or the speeches seemed to affect several members of the party.

That these are the methods by which Lord Burghley hopes to retain his seat."

Times were changing. The House of Lords, aristocratic landowners, and the squires of Old England were not always being bowed to deferentially. After they received the vote in 1894 (as householders) the agricultural labourers began to lift their voices against the low wages and the deplorable housing they had to endure. Workers in the great industries were combining to make their Trade Unions strong; something was stirring. In the decade 1885 to 1896 there was a stirring in the depths of English political life; little notice of it was taken at the time by the Party Associations and no notice of it reached such places as Cliffe. This "stirring" was nothing less than the growth of independent political Radicalism. The 1832 Act had enfranchised the large mass of working-men and they, first in the industrial areas, later in the rural districts, began to assimilate socialist theories and to contemplate such independent political organisation as would promote their own class interests. In 1881 the Social Democratic Federation was founded. Then the severe trade depression of 1885-1886 witnessed widespread disturbances amongst the unemployed. Now well-organised in their Trade Unions, coal-miners began to demand that they put forward their own men for Parliament, as opposed to the middle-class "carpet-baggers" thrust upon them by the Liberal Party. Out of a conference held at Bradford in January 1883 there emerged the "Independent Labour Party" (I.L.P.); before long a "Labour Representation Committee" was established (February 1900), with J. Ramsay Macdonald as its secretary. The declared aim of the I.L.P. was to return a distinct Labour Group to Parliament, with its own Whips. However, for a time the Boer War of 1899-1902 overshadowed politics and political life. Came the famous General Election of January 1906, issuing in a massive landslide victory for the Liberals. The Labour party put up for election 50 candidates of its own, of whom 30 were returned to Parliament.

I give this resumé in the hope that it will remind the reader of the general background to English political life in those final years of the century. The rural party associations appear to have been blissfully unaware of all this. Clearly it was no time for out-worn patterns rooted in the past. The time would shortly come when a socialist "Land Nationalisation" propaganda-van would arrive in Hall Yard at King's Cliffe, and when also an avowed Labour disciple, a Cliffe working-man, would stand on a box outside the Red Lion inn to proclaim the gospel of Socialism.

But for a moment let us turn to the triennial event which caused great excitement in King's-Cliffe, at least during the 1870s, viz, the School Board Election. The reader will remember that Mr. John Cunnington, the soap-manufacturer of Brentford, resident at Tansor Lodge and a native of Cliffe (and rate-payer), had promoted the formation of a School Board in 1874, the aim being to counter the authority of the Law & Hutcheson School Governors and to circumvent the influence of the Rector of King's Cliffe as a principal amongst those Governors. In no time at all the School Board election had become a triennial contest between rate-payers who were either Liberals (mostly Nonconformists) or Conservatives (mostly Churchmen). The Stamford Mercury of 14th December 1877 carried this report; "KING'S CLIFFE. The triennial election of the School Board took place on Monday. On the one side the candidates were Mr. T. Cunnington, farmer; Mr. G. Miles, timber merchant; and Mr. R. Brown, butcher; on the other side, Mr. T. J. Law, farmer; Mr. V. Green, turner, &c.; and Mr. E. Dixon, grocer. At nine o'clock the Cliffe brass band met at the Cross and marched to the committee room, opposite to the polling-place, headed by a white and blue flag having on it in red letters "Vote for Law, Green and Dixon". Great interest was felt as to the result of the poll. Flies and traps ran to and fro to bring up the halt and lame and all that would ride. Many of the voters were illiterate, which took so much of the returning officer's time that it was feared all would not get in by the time the poll closed. The following is the official statement; Law 226, Cunnington 199, Green 199, Dixon 46, Miles 180, Brown 163." And of the pending election of December 1880 the Stamford Mercury could report: "A public meeting to consider the merits of the School Board candidature was held in the British school-room, King's Cliffe, on the 13th inst. Mr. Chas. Stanyon, who presided, said he hoped all would obtain a fair hearing. Probably some present would not agree with some of the sentiments of Messrs. Law, Green, and Dixon, but if anyone had anything to say in reply he hoped they would step on the platform. The opposing candidates, Messrs Cunnington, Miles, and Brown, with their friends, occupied the centre of the room. There was a good deal of wrangling and it was the most disorderly of meetings held in Cliffe."

Enthusiasm for the School Board ebbed slowly during the 1880s. The death of Mr. John Cunnington in 1882 had its effect; concern about the Schools focused more on school fees than on the composition of the Governing Body; so that when the election of a new Board took place on 17th December 1886, the Stamford Mercury could report that "It was a very quiet affair." On that occasion G. Miles was elected with 228 votes, J. L. Wade with 227, the Revd. E. Dupre with 217, V. Green with 190, and W. Walker with 166. Mr. W. Bollans was unsuccessful with 161 votes.

Of interest in the on-going saga of political life in Cliffe is the return made by the Revising Barrister at the court he held at the Cross Keys sometime in the week beginning 19th September 1885. This court took cognizance of the 1884 "Representation of the People" Act, and showed an increase of 72 new voters for King's Cliffe, making a total of 224 for the village. This was the time when political life at Westminster was tormented by "The Irish Problem"; the more so when in the General Election of November 1885 the Liberal majority (Mr. Gladstone) over the Conservatives under Lord Salisbury turned out to be exactly the same as that of the Irish members returned under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell, viz. 86! Out of the ensuing confusion in Parliament came Gladstone's third ministry, when against the campaign of murder and maiming in Ireland itself, and dynamite outrages in London, Mr. Gladstone embarked on his first Irish Home Rule Bill. But little of this disturbed the doves of King's Cliffe!

The fashion of the time - for King's Cliffe and anywhere - was to hold a party meeting and put up a speaker of status. It was the age of public meetings and addresses - the only way, other than newspapers, in which ideas and programmes could be set before the public. The party associations of Cliffe did not fail the village in this respect. Thus on Wednesday, 7th October, 1885, with an Election pending, the Liberals secured Sir James Carmichael, Liberal candidate for the Division, to speak to a crowded meeting in Mr. Walker's barn, off West Street. In his address, which was constantly interrupted by Mr. George Miles and his allies, Sir James promised to vote for "free trade, free religion, free education, free land, the abolition of the game laws, &c." The Conservatives, for

their part, organised a meeting on 3rd Nov.," in the large room at the Cross Keys inn. H. S. O'Brien, Esq., of Blatherwycke Park, presided, and on the platform were E. P. Monckton, Esq., of Fineshade, the Revd. E. Dupre &c." The chief speaker was Lord Burghley, the sitting MP. He dwelt upon the distressed state of agriculture and asked what the difference was between protection and fair trade. "During the time Lord Burghley was speaking many questions were asked, which brought forth cheers, groans, and hisses from the opposing parties." Lord Burghley was the victor in the ensuing Election of November 1885, the famous election referred to above which made C. S. Parnell the arbiter of a Parliament in which he could swing the Irish members' votes whichever way suited his purpose.

Just what the Tory reaction in the village was to the Election results we learn from the Stamford Guardian of 9th December 1885; - "THE ELECTION.- On the result of the poll being made known, it was resolved to burn the effigy of Sir James Carmichael. About seven o'clock the procession started from Park Street to the west-end of the village. The effigy of Sir James was placed on a pole, and two lighted tar barrels were rolled round. Two large blue flags were carried at the head of the procession, which was followed by a crowd of people, several shouting "Burghley for ever". After parading the streets, the effigy was taken to a field, kindly lent by T. J. Law, Esq., and there burnt. Scores of the people witnessed the proceedings."

We return to that year of 1889 when the Conservatives held their grand tea-party in a marquee equipped with electric light in the Schoolyard.

In the General Election of July 1889, following on the rejection of Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill by the Commons (assisted by the defection of the Liberal "Unionists" under Joseph Chamberlain), the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists won the day, under the leadership of Lord Salisbury. The very name "Unionist" signaled a split in the ranks of the Liberals, and this at a time when the situation in Ireland was at its worst. The surprising thing is that very little of all this shows up in the newspaper reports of the activities of the King's Cliffe associations. Nor does anything show up of the election to the new Northamptonshire County Council which had its origin in the famous County Councils Act of 1888.

But there was a report in the Stamford Mercury of 27th September 1889 which speaks, first, of a new venue for political meetings in Cliffe, second, of the pattern of Liberal policy: "At King's Cliffe until lately political meetings have been held either in the open air, in barns, or in small rooms at public-houses. Some time ago the governors of the schools decided that both Conservatives and Liberals should have the use of the schools. The Liberals held a meeting there on Friday. There was a fairly large and a very appreciative audience. Mr. R. G. Roe, of Oundle, presided, and said that he was pleased they could now hold their meetings in the schools..... Mr. Coldstream, the Liberal candidate, addressed the meeting. He said he would vote for the Liberal programme of "one man, one vote", a 'good' Land Bill, the abolition of the House of Lords, the dis-establishment of the Church and a 'real' Allotment Bill. He went on to criticise the grant of £36,000 p.a. for the children of the Prince of Wales. Mr. H. L. Dixon proposed and seconded a vote of thanks to Mr. Coldstream. "

The legislation which profoundly affected King's Cliffe, and which invoked party politics in the most certain terms for years to come, was the Local Government Act of 1894. Usually called "The Parish Councils Act", it established elected Parish Councils, Rural and Urban District Councils, in lieu of the ancient Parish Vestries. A notable feature of this Act was that it enfranchised women who were local ratepayers, entitling them to vote in elections to these local government bodies. So it came to pass that in the 1897 Electoral List of the King's Cliffe Polling District "Persons entitled to vote as County Electors and Parochial Electors, but not as Parliamentary Electors" included no less than 40 ladies of the parish.

There were several meetings leading up to the very first election for a Parish Council, held Monday 17th December 1894, when the rivalry between Liberals and Conservatives gave rise to much excitement and not a little heat. The Stamford Guardian of 21st December 1894, reported thus: "KING'S CLIFFE.- The election for eleven councillors took place on Monday in the schoolroom, Park Street. Mr. Richardson, Oundle, was returning officer. The poll opened at noon, and out of 247 voters on the register 217 polled. There were twenty-one candidates, twelve Conservatives, seven Liberals and two independents. The Liberals issued their address on Saturday night, and this seems to have put the Conservatives on their mettle, as on Monday morning the crier was sent round, and a

messenger was dispatched to Stamford for some printing. The Conservative candidates used a conveyance to take voters to the poll, and occasionally got a load of non-electors. The Liberals trusted to their supporters' good legs. In the result the Conservative candidates headed the poll,

G. Miles, timber merchant	(C) 157
T. J. Law, farmer	(C) 149
W. Dainty, farmer	(C) 131
J. Nichols, engine driver	(C) 118
T. Bailey, publican	(C) 115
W. Brookes, schoolmaster	(C) 116
W. H. Fane, publican	(C) 112
T. Lewis, surgeon	(C) 111
C. Sharpe, publican	(C) 107
E. J. Hawkes, plumber	(C) 106
L. Dixon, publican	(C) 102

W. Bollans, turner	(L) 100
C. Stanyon, ret'd. tradesman	(L) 90
V. Green, turner	(L) 90
E. Dixon, grocer	(L) 84
W. Green, turner	(L) 74
J. Elliott, railway lab'r.	(L) 72
S. Roberts, cottager	(L) 53
T. Clarke, turner	(l) 43
J. Elderkin, cordwainer	(l) 39
Revd, E. Dupre, Rector	7

It is a noteworthy fact that, out of a council of eleven, four are publicans. What this signifieth, who shall say ?"

In the earlier years of Parish Councils the elections were annual, preceded by a Parish meeting at which nominations were received, a show of hands made, and, if there were objections to that process, a formal poll was held later. At a later date elections were ordered triennially. The Peterborough Advertiser of 10th April, 1897, carried an interesting report on the Election of that year, together with two " Letters to the Editor" following-on, letters which show that feelings ran high on the vexed question of the day, viz. how were the dilapidated footpaths of the village to be repaired?

"ELECTION.- The only contest in the Oundle District was here. Mr. Richardson was the returning officer. Cliffe is famous for elections, and the present one although not on a par with previous battles was none the less exciting, as it was really fought out on the footpaths question. Twenty candidates were nominated for eleven seats. The eleven retiring councillors were again nominated, while eight who might be termed the opposition were nominated against them..... The opposition were against the footpaths. The eleven retiring councillors were again elected. The figures of the first eleven were:-

T. J. Law 162, G. Miles 158, W. Dainty 145, T. W. Lewis 134, J. T. Bailey 132, W. Brookes 130, J. Nicholls 129, L. Dixon 120, E. Hawkes 116, J. Bailey 113, W. Fane 112. Not elected : V. Green 89, John House 68, George Bollans 54, Robert Green 50, Geo Coleman 43, Thomas Clarke 42, F. Skinner 35, J. L. Blake 23. "

The first letter came from Mr. William Bollans (whose name had somehow been omitted from the list of results), appearing in the Advertiser of Saturday, 17th April. He wrote: "The statement that the opposition were against the footpath question is not correct. The eight in opposition were, as a matter of fact, in favour of the footpaths being done, but not to hire a loan of £1000 for that purpose, in addition to £137 9s. 1d. allowed by the District Council. Two of the largest ratepayers returned on the Council signed against borrowing £1000, viz. Mr. T. J Law (head of the poll) and Mr. Wm. Dainty (third), so that the contest could not be said to have been fought on those grounds. I was a candidate myself, and had the honour of having 87 votes.

I am, Sir, yours respectfully'

WILLIAM BOLLANS. Candidate at the late Election."

This was followed by a letter in the Advertiser of 24th April from Mr. Harry Dixon, which is of special interest for the observations made about the village in general:

"SIR, I notice a letter in last week's issue from Mr. W. Bollans. He will accept, I am sure, the explanation that it was an error that his name was omitted from the list in question. He was close up in the running for parochial honours, and deserved better consideration. I was more than pleased to see that there is no opposition now to the new footpath scheme, and it is now only a matter of how much is spent on them. I certainly should like them done in the best and most permanent manner possible, and there is no better pavement than Victoria stone, which the Stamford Corporation is now laying down. I am opposed to laying down footpaths for cheapness. I don't like the idea of spoiling the ship for a pennyworth of tar, and when the difference between the price of bricks and Victoria stone is so insignificant compared with their relative merits as a pavement, I certainly should support the party that would carry out the work thoroughly and well, in a manner that shall be a lasting memorial and credit to the parish; and I feel sure that the bugbear of cost will eventually wear off. To men who own property, the footpaths will be a great boon and increase the value of the property. We are making progress, for when the census (1891) was taken there were 47 houses unoccupied, and today there is not one to let. The old thatched houses are slowly disappearing, and are being replaced by modern brick or stone and slated houses, so that the village is bearing a different aspect, which it would be a pity to mar by laying down blue or black brick. Mr. T. J. Law was very much imposed upon as to the cost of the footpaths, and does not wish to have his name connected with that same party, whilst Mr. Dainty seconded the proposition to borrow £1000 for this purpose at a meeting of the Rural District Council held at Oundle. I may further add that the Marquis of Exeter, who is Lord of the Manor, is entirely in favour of the new footpaths for the parish. It will be remembered, too, that there is a petition signed by an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants placed with the Rural District Council, as that there is every probability of the footpaths becoming an accomplished fact.

I remain, Sir, yours truly,

HARRY DIXON King's Cliffe, April 19th, 1897.

October 1899 witnessed the outbreak of the South African "Boer War", a war which was to bring many setbacks for the British Army before the tide turned against the skilful Boer "guerilla" fighters. Encouraged by Joseph Chamberlain, whose "Liberal Unionists" had by this time joined forces with the Conservative party, Lord Salisbury called a General Election for October 1900, which did, in the event, return the Conservatives. Echoes of this election are to be found in the Peterborough Standard of 29th September 1900, when it reported on a pre-election meeting at King's Cliffe:

"NORTH NORTHANTS. MR. STOPFORD SACKVILLE AT KING'S CLIFFE,

As becomes a village which claims the enviable distinction of being a Conservative fortress, Kingscliffe offered Mr. S. G. Stopford Sackville the most cordial of welcomes on Wednesday evening. The Conservative candidate met the electors in the schoolyard at six o'clock, and in spite of the inconvenient hour and the stormy aspect of the weather, there was an inspiring gathering. The audience followed the speeches with keen interest, and their appreciation of the sentiments expressed repeatedly found vent in rousing cheers. Mr. A. T. Lawrence-Law, president of the Kingscliffe Conservative Association, filled the chair, and had the immediate support of Mr. Stopford Sackville. Mr. E. P. Monckton (the former member), Dr. Lewis (vice-president of the Association), Mr. G. Miles (secretary), Mr. A. Jolly (Apethorpe), etc. Among those present were the Rector (Revd. J. N. B. Woodroffe), Dr. Pink, Messrs. W. Dainty, W. Brookes, W. H. Fane, J. T. Bailey, H. Bailey, J. J. Bailey, J. Chapman, R. Johnson (Apethorpe), H. E. Dixon, and a gratifying number of the working classes. Mr. Stopford Sackville, who was accorded a splendid reception, referred to his former association with the constituency, and his present connection with the public life of the county. He devoted considerable time to an explanation of what had forced on the war in South Africa, and appealed to the electors not to make that the final settlement to a party who had made such an ignominious blunder after Majuba Hill. The sacrifices of the soldiers in the present war was not to be in vain. Mr. Sackville spoke of his connection with the Northants Militia for upwards of thirty years and of the necessity of perfecting our home defences."

Mr. Monckton followed and recommended Mr. Sackville to the electors; his Liberal opponent, a Mr. Barlow, was a man of whom they knew practically nothing. "During the meeting rain commenced to fall, but Kingscliffe folk are not mere fair weather politicians. Instead of the audience dwindling down, all remained to the finish, and many recruits were forthcoming. At seven o'clock Mr. Sackville and Mr. Monckton drove off amidst ringing cheers for Polebrook, where a second meeting was held. "

Then on Thursday, 29th November, 1900, the Cliffe Association held a "Public Dinner" in the Schoolroom to celebrate the return of Mr Sackville as Member for North Northants. The tickets went on sale at 1s. 6d., and were to be had of Mr. G. Miles. It would appear that the Liberals were not stirred into action by any of this - or at least no newspaper found any Liberal meeting to be newsworthy. The Boer War came to an end in 1902, and from then on until the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 King's Cliffe was a haven of tranquility, oblivious of the rumblings of war in a troubled Europe. Only the issues of a new burial ground and of a piped water supply seem to have caused dispute, and then only by reason of the expense involved.

Mention has been made already of the landslide victory of the Liberal Party in January 1906. Led by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberals captured 377 seats, the Conservatives & Unionists 157, the Irish Nationalists 83, and the Labour representatives 53. At King's Cliffe the Liberal Association held a meeting in the Schoolroom on 16th January in support of Mr. George Nicholls, the Liberal candidate for North Northants, who by now had acquired the title of "The Second Joseph Arch". The Advertiser of 20th January carried this report:

"ROWDYISM AT KING'S CLIFFE, A meeting in support of the candidature of Mr Geo. Nicholls, held in the Schoolroom on Monday evening, was characterised by three distinct features - the enthusiasm of the Liberals, the excellence of the speeches, and the abominably bad behaviour of the Opposition. Effectively captained, the opponents of Mr. Nicholls kept up a ceaseless interference..... Before the meeting was over, a good number of the gallant Sackvillites quitted the room for refreshment and returned like giants refreshed and resumed the attack. "

Clearly the political partisans of King's Cliffe had not lost enthusiasm for a good row! At the same meeting Mr. George Close entered into a misguided altercation with Mr Thomas Henry Bailey, as a result of which he had to make a public apology which appeared in the Advertiser of 3rd February. The Great War of 1914-1918 resulted in a cessation of political activity throughout the country, to be renewed once the country returned to normal. There was still need for the public meeting as such to promote party political interest at the local level, and we find an instance of this in a crowded meeting summoned by the Cliffe Association on 3rd November 1922, to be addressed by their constituency candidate, Mr. H. L. C. Brassey, of Apethorpe Hall. A General Election was pending. Mr. Brassey was opposed by Mr. J Mansfield, Labour, and by Mr. George Nicholls, Liberal. It was the first political gathering to be held in the newly-created Memorial Hall. The Peterborough Standard of 8th November reported at great length:

"GREAT GATHERING AT KING'S CLIFFE. Mr. Brassey has said that he always enjoyed meetings at King's Cliffe, and certainly he was in his happiest vein when addressing his nearest neighbours in the Memorial Hall, on Monday evening..... The hall was filled, the audience probably numbering 300. Amongst them were: The Revd. W. Hopkinson, Mr. Howes, Mr. and Mrs. J. Kingston, Mr. J. Adams and Mrs. J. Adams, Nurse Norman, Mr. Normanton, Mr. Miles, Mr. S. Fenn, Mr. W. Walker, Mr. E. Bollans, Mr. C Fawkes. Mr. Kerfoot, Mr S Saddington, Mr. F. Giddings, Mrs. Lyman, Mr. and Mrs. Fryer, Mr. and Mrs Beal, Mrs. Culpin, Mr. A. Mee, Mr. F. Gore, Mr. A. G. Dann, Mr. H. Broughton, Mrs. G. Green, Mr. C. Burge, Mr. T. Smith, Mrs. Portess, Mrs. Ellis, Mr. Gordon Green, Mr. Cottingham, Mr. H. Chapman, Mr. C Bollans, Mr Woolley, Mr. A. Brown, Mr. H. E. Dixon, Mr. Portess, Mr. Ellis, Mr. A. R. Bailey, Mr. Blake, Mr. Harker, Mr. A. Robins, Mr. Roberts, Mrs. Elsom, Mr. J. Elliott, Mr. J. Dicks. Mr. and Mrs. Shelton, etc.etc. "

Miss Hopkinson opened with a speech in which she said she did not care whether a man was a Liberal or a Conservative so long as he put the needs of the country first: that he was not self-seeking and was ready to put first the needs of this great Empire. She went on to say they must support the man who would help the Prime Minister in this period of unemployment, public waste and bad trade. When they understood Socialism they would no more support Mr. Mansfield than they would a roaring tiger. Mr. Nicholls was not 'large' enough to represent them in Parliament. He had changed so often.

" Mr. Brassey was most warmly received on his arrival from other meetings, and he addressed the gathering in his happiest vein, observing that he always enjoyed meetings at King's Cliffe." He spoke at great length on the follies of the Liberal Government of the day. He then asked: "Why had he been elected three times to represent that constituency? It was because he had had the majority of the working men's votes. (Applause). The majority of the electors were working men, and if they had not voted for him, he would not have been elected. He totally denied that the others represented the views of the working men of this country. (Applause). He then went on to condemn Labour policy, which was to declare war on all private capital and private enterprise, to nationalise the land, the

mines and railways and to reduce the population of the country to two classes: officials - probably the Labour leaders - and others, the rest of the people who would have to find money to pay them. At the close of a capital meeting a vote of confidence was passed on the motion of Mr. L. Dixon, seconded by Mr. J. Gregory."

Now the Stamford and Rutland News reported the same meeting, but not at such length. To its report (8th November 1922) it added two items of information, viz. that "Major" H. L. C. Brassey had served as M.P. for North Northants since 1910, and that he had had a baronetcy conferred on him in Mr. Lloyd George's final Honours List "as published on Saturday last."

This General Election, held 15th November, resulted in a Conservative majority of 88 over all other parties, with Mr Andrew Bonar Law returned to the office of Prime Minister. The Liberals gained only 117 seats, Labour 142 seats, the Communists two seats. It was also memorable in that Mr. Winston Churchill lost his seat at Dundee. He had been MP since 1901.

The result for this constituency was:
H. L. C. Brassey (Con.) 13,560; J. Mansfield (Lab.) 8,568; G. Nicholls (Lib.) 6,290
No change; a Conservative majority of 4,892.

+ + + + +

Here I must bring my tale of elections and electioneering at King's Cliffe to a close. The question I have often asked myself is this : How does it come about that, bearing in mind the 1884 extension of the franchise to working men, this village - with a considerable if not vast majority of working men up until the social and economic changes of the 1960s - was so consistently conservative (with a small 'c') in its general outlook and largely Conservative in its politics? I lived in the village from early 1955 to the close of 1985, and never ceased to wonder at this.

APPENDIX 1

Copy of Poll of Election held Dec 14 1857, Oundle Polling District

CANDIDATES Geo Ward Hunt Esq. (Conservative)
Henry Vernon Esq. (Liberal)

Duly Qualified Voters of King's Cliffe

Adams, William	West St, King's Cliffe	Hunt
Bailey, John	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Bailey, Matthew	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Berkeley, Joseph Miles	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Bollans, William	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Broughton, Henry	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Burton, William Jackson	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Cunnington, John	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Cunnington, Thomas, jun.	Park St, King's Cliffe	Hunt
Cunnington, William	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Dainty, Charles	King's Cliffe Lodge	Hunt
Dain, Frederick Robert	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Haines, Robt. Boughton	Stamford	Hunt
Howes, George	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Howes, Philip	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Huskisson, John	King's Cliffe Lodge	Hunt
Ireson, John Watts	Tansor	Hunt
Kirk, John	New house on Apethorpe Rd,	Hunt
Law, Farmery John	104, Pall Mall, London	Vernon
Law, Thomas James	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Palmer, William	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Rate, Frederick	West St King's Cliffe	Hunt
Richardson, James	All Saints' Place, Stamford	Hunt
Richardson, John	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Royce, Richard	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Royce, John	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Skinner, William Amable	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Skinner, John	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Stanyon, John	King's Cliffe	Vernon
Stokes, Charles	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Wade, John	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Wadwell, William	King's Cliffe	Hunt
Walker, William	West St, King's Cliffe	Vernon
Wood, Charles Atkins	Park St. King's Cliffe	Hunt
Wyles, William	King's Cliffe	Hunt

Qualified People who did not poll

Baker, George	Rock-terrace, Stamford
Bonney, the Ven. Hy. Kaye	King's Cliffe
Brown, William	King's Cliffe
Burwell, Thomas	Leamington
Cunnington, John	New Brentford, Middlesex
Cunnington, Thomas	King's Cliffe

Dawson, William	St. Mary-street, Stamford
Gostling, William	King's Cliffe Lodge
Henson, Thomas	King's Cliffe
Holland, Edmund	42, Grosvenor-place, London
Howes, Henry	8, Brook's-market, London
Howes, John	All Saints'-place, Stamford
Jelley, Henry	King's Cliffe
Law, William Farmery	St Mary-street, Stamford
Law, Farmery	King's Cliffe
Munton, John	Exton, Rutland
O'Brien, Henry-de-Stafford	Tixover Grange
Wyles, William Henry	King's Cliffe