

Parliamentary career, 1780-1812

Though still a serving officer with the country at war, Harvey turned from gambling to politics at the age of 22. He was returned for Maldon at the by-election in May 1780 on the death of the Hon Richard Savage Nassau, son of the third Earl of Rochford, who had held the seat since 1774. Harvey owed his seat to his family connection (both his father and brother were MPs for Essex) and in return for agreeing with his fellow member at Maldon, John Strutt, to pay two-thirds of the election expenses. Harvey was not opposed and apparently felt it unnecessary to spend much on the election.

At the General Election in September 1780 it was unusually quiet in the country as a whole, expensive contests being very few. John Strutt of Terling Place (MP for Maldon since 1774) and Eliab Harvey were returned unopposed, although Strutt's correspondence refers to the proposed candidature of Lord Waltham of New Hall, Boreham. The freemen of Maldon were duly thanked and suitably rewarded. A joint address of thanks was issued by Strutt and Harvey on 6 September:

We give you our warmest thanks for the honour of your unanimous return of us again to represent you in Parliament. The appearance, so very numerous and so very respectable on our behalf upon the day of election, though no opposition was publicly declared, is a circumstance which we never can forget.

We shall return to Parliament warm and steady supporters of all those Rights and Privileges which belong to you as Englishmen and of that Old Constitutional Government which alone can insure to you the continuance of them.³⁷

The combined expenses of Strutt and Harvey at the uncontested election in September 1780 were £850. John White, Strutt's agent, wanted to knock over £24 off the publicans' accounts unless 'Mr Strutt approves of 8s per pound over charged in 60 pounds of Ham and thinks that six hundred and ninety six bottles of wine, ninety-two gallons of Beer, 28 gallons of Punch, besides Brandy, Rum, Gin and old Beer is a fair charge'.³⁸

Harvey was happy to pay his fair share of election expenses, writing to Strutt on 10 January 1781:

I concur with you entirely relative to the allowance for the time of the London voters, as we cannot expect their suffrages in future if we do not make good their losses on our account. If you have any occasion for money for this purpose, you may draw on me, and I will pay the Draft at sight. Many thanks for your kind invitation to Terling Place, am sorry that it is not in my power to accept of it at present, as I am engaged in making preparations for a sea voyage, but hope to see you in town first, that we may conclude our business. I shall not go before the meeting of Parliament, but soon after.³⁹ [Harvey was referring to resuming his naval career.]

He supported Lord North's administration and was considered a Pittite. In Parliament one correspondent reported that 'We never heard of Mr Harvey's abilities in the House as a speaker, he being content to give a silent vote'.⁴⁰

Strutt's correspondence from December 1783 refers to the threatened dissolution of Parliament and the proposed candidature of Lord Waltham; one of Strutt's supporters, Jacob Patisson of Witham, commented unfavourably on Harvey's suitability:

I sincerely trust some sensible Country Gentleman could be thought instead of a young man who appears to concern himself so very little with business as Mr H does

... I am confident no opposition will be thought of against you, but I am afraid the lovers of contest will throw out objections to Mr H.⁴¹

Pattison later reported on the favourable impression created on the electorate by Lord Waltham and the reaction against Harvey: 'It is really melancholy consideration that disapprobation of one gentleman should so violently and suddenly induce people to imbrace the first person offered, though equally improper'.⁴²

Harvey was in Paris during December, but had returned to England by the third week of January 1784, when Frank Smythies of Colchester reports on an interview with him:

At length I have seen Mr Harvey who seems wavering and says he shall be determined by what you advise him. He mentioned that he understood you had been prepared to put your son [Holden] in nomination with you. I told him that I knew you had [heard the rumours], but that you would not hear of it. I told him that the freemen in my neighbourhood were rather disgusted than otherwise at his never having taken any notice of them tho' they had returned him twice without opposition.⁴³

Smythies suggested that Harvey would do better to stand for Colchester, while White mentioned the possibility of Harwich, a Treasury borough. Harvey's candidature was not mentioned again, although he did not finally confirm his intention not to stand until a week before the Election.

Harvey resumed his interrupted political career in 1802 when he was returned unopposed as one of the two county members with the Whig, Colonel John Bullock, as the other. Since 1774 it had been customary for each party to take one county seat, thus saving the cost of a contested election. To quote a letter to the Essex freeholders published by Montagu Burgoyne in 1807:

At the General Election, in 1802, Mr Bramston withdrew, and was succeeded by the present Member, Admiral Harvey, of the same [Tory] political principles, these hav-

ing been ascertained when he represented the Borough of Maldon. At this Election, in 1802, the coalition of the two parties was, if possible, more evident than ever.

Burgoyne was amongst those expressing dissatisfaction at the compromise: 'on the day of nomination I called on the freeholders to vindicate their Rights, and put an end to this unnatural coalition. I assured them that I should be more proud of being instrumental in the Recovery of their Rights, than of being the object of their choice'.

Having failed to persuade any other candidates to stand, Burgoyne said that he

permitted myself to be proposed and though on the show of hands, the Sheriff declared that the majority was in favour of the present members, yet the very great appearance of Freeholders in my favour fully convinced me that my principles were approved of, and that, if I had persevered, my prospect of success would have been favourable, not withstanding that the united strength of the two Parties was leagued against me: but having declared I would abide by the show of hands, I felt myself bound in honour to be governed by it.

Harvey was again returned unopposed with Bullock in 1806, in the afterglow of Trafalgar. Admiral Harvey's services were enthusiastically recalled – his supporters dined at the Black Boy, Chelmsford – the sign exhibited 'Harvey and the Navy of Old England' – showing the Admiral in *Temeraire* engaging two ships of equal force and compelling them to surrender.

Harvey does not seem to have taken part in the by-election of 1810 caused by the death of the veteran Whig, John Bullock. John Archer Houblon of Hallingbury challenged for the Tories the seat which should have gone to the Whig party under the terms of the compromise. He was opposed unsuccessfully by Burgoyne, who had married the daughter of Eliab Harvey, KC, MP, of Claybury (uncle of Admiral Harvey).

At the General Election of 1812, a full-scale contest appeared likely with Harvey and Houblon for the Tories and Charles Western and Burgoyne as Whigs, although the former refused to run in harness with the radical politician. Over a week before the start of the election on 12 October, Harvey announced that 'circumstances of a private nature, combined with the danger of involving myself in expense without limit, induce me to relinquish the important trust you placed in my hands ten years ago'. Harvey wished to give up 'that wrangling House of Commons' but to do so without loss of character: 'I am complained of for not visiting the different towns, but I am idle and like my farm better than the blackguard canvass of low and interested freeholders.'⁴⁴

Burgoyne suggested in his election address that Harvey's withdrawal was

evidence of an understanding between Houblon and Western to keep him out: 'The resignation of Admiral Harvey has partly fulfilled my prediction concerning the strength of the Whig interest in this County. Enable me to resist a detestable compromise and you will hear no more of this odious system of modern politics.' On nomination day, Harvey made a savage attack on Burgoyne, accusing him of securing from the government sinecure positions worth £4,000 a year.

Burgoyne never had a chance, and day by day the votes piled up against him. At the end of the seventh day of the election the position was:

Houblon	1417
Western	1251
Burgoyne	339

Burgoyne decided to withdraw, and the successful candidates were carried through the streets of Chelmsford in triumph.

Naval career and Trafalgar Campaign

In 1793, at the outbreak of the French Revolutionary War, Harvey was appointed to the *Santa Margarita* frigate and served under Sir John Jervis at the reduction of Martinique from March to April 1794. (Jervis went on to become Lord St Vincent, another eccentric and cranky old admiral, who lived at Rochetts, South Weald, Essex.⁴⁵) In 1796 Harvey had command of the *Valiant* (74 guns) in the West Indies under Hyde Parker, but he returned to England in 1797 due to ill health. In May he was one of the successful opponents of the Whig petition calling for the dismissal of Pitt's government, which was already facing military defeat, a financial crisis and a naval mutiny. A meeting at Chelmsford broke up in disorder – Western, Honeywood and the other Whig speakers being dragged away on the wagon on which they were speaking in front of the Shire Hall.

In March 1798 the government decided to raise a force of Sea Fencibles, recruited from the waterside population to reinforce naval personnel in case of enemy invasion. On 24 March, the *Chelmsford Chronicle* understood that 'Captain Eliab Harvey of Chigwell, is appointed by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to the command of this coast from Leigh to Harwich and is now actively employed in this service'. Conditions of enrolment issued by Harvey include service confined to 'their own coast, except in the event of enemy landing', protection from impressment, watching beaches 'wherever the wind and weather shall be favourable for the