

Parliamentary representation

Cheltenham was created a Parliamentary borough by the Reform Act of 1832, to be represented by a single member. In 1832 there were 919 electors in the town, a figure that rose to 2,170 in 1858, 3,536 in 1868, 4,307 in 1874, 5,577 in 1884, 7,169 in 1895, and 8,712 in 1911.¹ The boundaries of the constituency were increased in 1918 to take in the urban district of Charlton Kings.² This and the passing of the 1918 Reform Act swelled the total number of electors to 23,217 in that year.³ The electorate of the constituency rose to 35,993 in 1929, and was 49,282 in 1945.⁴ The boundaries of the constituency were the boundaries of the parish when it was created in 1832.⁵ A proposal of 1868 to extend the boundaries to take in the western portion of Charlton Kings was not adopted, but the north-east corner of Leckhampton was incorporated within the constituency at that time.⁶ In 1885 it was proposed to incorporate all of Charlton Kings north of the line of the Banbury & Cheltenham Railway within the constituency.⁷

Cheltenham was represented by an almost continuously line of Whig and Liberal members, all of them drawn from the Berkeley family. The first of these, Craven Berkeley, the youngest son of Frederick, 5th Earl of Berkeley, successfully contested elections for the seat four times between 1832 and 1847.⁸ In the latter year Berkeley was defeated by the Conservative Sir Willoughby Jones Bt., but the election was declared void upon petition in 1848.⁹ In the subsequent by-election Craven Berkeley was again victorious, on this occasion over the lord of the manor James Agg-Gardner (d. 1858), but this election was also declared void upon petition.¹⁰ With Craven Berkeley incapacitated from standing again until the next general election,¹¹ the seat was retained for the Berkeley interest by his cousin Grenville

¹W.R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the County of Gloucester* (Hereford, 1898), 145; GB Historical GIS, University of Portsmouth, 'Cheltenham PBCon/BCon: Total Electorate', *A Vision of Britain through Time* <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/12745333/cube/ELECTORATE_TOT> [accessed 18 Feb. 2017].

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³GB Historical GIS, University of Portsmouth, 'Cheltenham PBCon/BCon: Total Electorate', *A Vision of Britain through Time* <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/12745333/cube/ELECTORATE_TOT> [accessed 18 Feb. 2017].

⁴GB Historical GIS, University of Portsmouth, 'Cheltenham PBCon/BCon: Total Electorate', *A Vision of Britain through Time* <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/12745333/cube/ELECTORATE_TOT> [accessed 18 Feb. 2017].

⁵Boundary Commissioners' Report, 1832.

⁶Boundary Commissioners' Report, 1868.

⁷Boundary Commissioners' Report, 1885.

⁸Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 145–46; *ODNB*, No. 2205.

⁹Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 146.

¹⁰Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 147.

¹¹*ODNB*, No. 2205.

Berkeley in the second by-election of 1848.¹² At the general election of 1852 Grenville Berkeley stood instead for Evesham (Worcs.),¹³ in order to allow Craven Berkeley to successfully contest the seat once more.¹⁴ When Craven Berkeley died in 1855, Grenville Berkeley resigned as member for Evesham and successfully retained Cheltenham for the Berkeley interest.¹⁵ Yet only a year later he resigned the seat to take up government office, triggering another by-election, won by a third member of the Berkeley family, Francis Berkeley (2nd Baron Fitzhardinge from 1867).¹⁶

Berkeley successfully retained the seat in elections in 1857 and 1859, but his defeat by the Conservative candidate Charles Schreiber in 1865 brought to an end the domination of the constituency by the Berkeley family and the Liberal party.¹⁷ Over the following twenty years the seat would change hands between the two parties at each election. Three years after Schreiber's victory, Cheltenham was retaken for the Liberals by Henry Samuelson¹⁸, the son of Sir Bernhardt Samuelson, the Liberal MP for Banbury.¹⁹ Samuelson's defeated opponent was the Conservative lord of the manor, James Tynte Agg-Gardner, who reversed the result in 1874.²⁰ Agg-Gardner would go on to represent Cheltenham for the majority of the next fifty-four years. Ousted from the seat by the Liberal Charles Du Bois, Baron de Ferrières in 1880, Agg-Gardner was again victorious in 1885.²¹ He held the seat until 1895, when he chose not to stand 'for reasons not connected to politics'.²² As a result the seat was retained for the Conservatives by Col. (later Maj.-Gen.) Francis Russell.²³ Agg-Gardner stood for Cheltenham once more in 1900, when he was returned unopposed,²⁴ but he was defeated by the Liberal candidate John Sears in 1906.²⁵ The seat was won once more for the Conservatives by Vere Posonby, Viscount Duncannon (later 9th Earl of Bessborough) in the election of January 1910,²⁶ but he was unseated in December that year by the Liberal

¹²Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 147.

¹³Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 147.

¹⁴Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 147; *ODNB*, No. 2205.

¹⁵Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 147.

¹⁶Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 147–48.

¹⁷Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 148.

¹⁸Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 148.

¹⁹*ODNB*, No. 35930.

²⁰Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 148.

²¹Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 149.

²²*ODNB*, No. 53505.

²³Williams, *Parliamentary History*, 149–50.

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²⁶*ODNB*, No. 35567.

Richard Mathias.²⁷ Controversy surrounded the election of Mathias, however, and the result was declared void after it emerged that the Liberals had overspent.²⁸ Agg-Gardner secured the seat again for the Conservatives, and he subsequently held the seat until his death in 1928.²⁹ Sir Walter Preston held the seat for the Conservatives, and retained it until his resignation from Parliament in 1937.³⁰ In the by-election that followed, the Jewish former Liberal mayor of Cheltenham, Daniel Lipson, successfully stood as an Independent Conservative after the Conservatives had declined to nominate him.³¹ Lipson retained the seat in 1945, this time standing as a National Independent,³² but he was ousted in 1950 by the Conservative William Hicks Beach.³³

Hicks Beach of Witcombe Park was a solicitor and partner in the family firm of Payne, Hicks Beach & Company. He held the seat for 14 years before retiring due to ill health.³⁴ At the election in October 1964 the Conservative Douglas Dodds-Parker was elected. A former SOE operative, Dodds-Parker had been MP for Banbury between 1945 and 1959 and served as a junior minister between 1953 and 1957. Having retired to devote himself to business, he stood for election in Cheltenham in 1964. From 1970 to 1973 he was chairman of the Conservative parliamentary foreign and Commonwealth committee and served as a member of the British delegation to Strasbourg from 1973 to 1975. He was knighted in 1973.³⁵ Re-elected in the spring of 1974, Dodds-Parker chose not to contest the second election of that year and was replaced as candidate by Charles Irving, a borough and county councillor and former mayor of Cheltenham. He was Chairman of the Select Committee on Catering from 1979 until 1992 and a member of the All Party Mental Health Committee 1979–1992. Generally regarded as a Tory ‘wet, he opposed the ban on unions at GCHQ.³⁶ Support for the Liberal Democrats in Cheltenham grew steadily during the 1980s. Following Irving’s decision in 1990 that he would not contest the next election, Conservative Central Office selected John Taylor, a barrister of Afro-Caribbean descent, as their candidate against local opposition.³⁷ The subsequent election were marred by racist controversy.³⁸ The Liberal Democrat Nigel Jones narrowly took the seat. In Jan. 2000 he was attacked in his constituency office by a constituent wielding a Samurai sword and his assistant, local

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²⁹ODNB, No. 53505.

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³⁴*The Times*, 4 Jan. 1975

³⁵<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/97431>

³⁶*The Times*, 31 Mar. 1995

³⁷*The Times*, 5 Dec. 1990

³⁸*The Times*, 31 Mar. 1992

councillor Andrew Pennington was killed.³⁹ Nigel Jones stood down on health grounds in 2005.⁴⁰ In 2005 he was created a life peer.⁴¹ In 2005 and 2010 Martin Horwood retained the seat for the Liberal Democrats, but was defeated in 2015 and 2017 by the Conservative barrister Alex Chalk.

³⁹*The Times*, 29 Jan. 2000

⁴⁰*The Times*, 10 Sep. 2004

⁴¹*The Times*, 29 Apr. 2005