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# Lord Palmerston and Tiverton: Politics, Celebrity and Memory in Victorian Britain

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## Abstract

Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston, the ebullient Victorian foreign secretary and prime minister, is no stranger to historians; few stones in his life have been left unturned. One exception is Palmerston's relationship with the Devonshire borough of Tiverton, which he represented in Parliament for thirty years. Palmerston's biographers have traditionally downplayed the significance of the Tivertonians and this article offers a more sophisticated approach, by relating popular politics to the nascent historiographical subfields of celebrity and memory. It finds that, during Palmerston's lifetime, the celebrity status that he used Tiverton to cultivate became a source of civic pride and a pillar of the borough's identity. Then, after Palmerston's death, the politics of celebrity became intertwined with the politics of memory. Control of the political space that Palmerston's legacy occupied became a prerequisite for electoral success, as political debates mutated into bitter arguments over which faction had the better claim to his legacy. This article therefore seeks to illuminate new ways of reading Palmerston and to contribute to the growing body of work on Victorian celebrities and the political uses of the Victorian past.

**Keywords:** Palmerston; Tiverton; politics; celebrity; memory

## Introduction

Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865), is no stranger to historians. His career as Whig foreign secretary and Liberal prime minister was one of the most brilliant features of the Victorian Age. For thirty-five years, Palmerston delighted the British public with a series of diplomatic triumphs. He championed British interests and liberal nationalism abroad, led Britain to victory in the Crimean War and became the first major politician to use the press to cultivate a popular following. 'There never was a statesman', his obituary in *The Times* declared, 'who more truly represented England than Lord Palmerston'.<sup>1</sup> As in life, so in death, Palmerston's popularity proved enduring and ensured a ready stream of biographies. At first, he was

<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 19 Oct. 1865, 9.

depicted as the quintessential gunboat diplomat; the Foreign Office *beau sabreur* who preached *Civis Romanus sum* to European autocrats and regarded intricate questions of policy as ‘challenges to a boxing match’.<sup>2</sup> At best, Palmerston was the ‘last candle of the eighteenth century’ who governed through sheer force of personality; at worst, the ‘rogue elephant’ who dealt in ‘crude belligerence abroad and class fear at home’.<sup>3</sup> Things changed when historians began to examine Palmerston’s political hinterland, where they found a principled liberal interventionist who ‘accustomed the country to the idea of democracy’ and whose plebeian following anticipated the cult of Gladstone.<sup>4</sup> This wave of revisionism has left few stones in Palmerston’s life unturned – from his Irish estates to his political portraits – yet one notable exception remains, which this article seeks to address.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1835 and his death in 1865, Palmerston was returned at every election as one of two MPs for the Devonshire borough of Tiverton. Palmerston’s biographers, however, have displayed little interest in the constituency that he represented in Parliament for thirty years. The Tivertonians have typically been reduced to either a homogeneous crowd of cheering supporters or country yokels with little time for their celebrity MP. To H. C. F. Bell, Palmerston ‘smiled on Tiverton and Tiverton on him’.<sup>6</sup> To Jasper Ridley, the audience that cheered Palmerston at the hustings ‘had no idea’ about his policies.<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Bourne wrote that Palmerston’s dress was ‘by far the loudest thing’ about his constituency.<sup>8</sup> David Brown, Palmerston’s most recent biographer, suggested that while the Tivertonians regarded Palmerston as a useful ministerial ‘insider’ whose patronage they could exploit, they looked to John Heathcoat (1783–1861), a local industrialist and Palmerston’s fellow MP, as their ‘real advocate’ in Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

The primary objective of this article is therefore to offer a more sophisticated analysis of Palmerston’s Tiverton career. It does this through a study of electoral politics, for which there is ample scholarly precedent. Ever since the ‘linguistic turn’ of the

<sup>2</sup>Kingsley Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston: A Study of Public Opinion in England before the Crimean War* (2nd edn., 1963), 53. The classic studies of Palmerston in this vein include H. L. Bulwer and E. Ashley, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston* (5 vols., 1871–6); Philip Guedalla, *Palmerston* (1926); H. C. F. Bell, *Lord Palmerston* (2 vols., 1936); Donald Southgate, ‘The Most English Minister...’: *The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (New York, 1966); Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (1970).

<sup>3</sup>Guedalla, *Palmerston*, 459; A. J. P. Taylor, ‘Lord Palmerston’, in *British Prime Ministers and Other Essays*, ed. Chris Wrigley (1999), 74; John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857–1868* (1966), 146.

<sup>4</sup>E. D. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855–1865* (Cambridge, 1991), 5; Kenneth Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1874–1841* (New York, 1982); Muriel Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (Cardiff, 1987); Anthony Taylor, ‘Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847–1865’, *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 157–79; David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy 1846–55* (Manchester, 2002) and *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven, 2010).

<sup>5</sup>David Brown and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Palmerston Studies* (2 vols., Southampton, 2007); Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*; Tyler Anbinder, ‘Lord Palmerston and the Irish Famine Emigration’, *Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), 441–69; Henry Miller, *Politics Personified: Portraiture, Caricature and Visual Culture in Britain, c.1830–80* (Manchester, 2015), 167–97; Paul Brighton, *Original Spin: Downing Street and the Press in Victorian Britain* (2016), 129–51.

<sup>6</sup>Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, II, 416.

<sup>7</sup>Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (2nd edn, 1972), 443.

<sup>8</sup>Bourne, *Palmerston*, 542.

<sup>9</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 195.

1990s, Victorian elections have been regarded as windows into cultural and social issues.<sup>10</sup> To quote James Vernon, elections – hitherto the private hunting grounds of statisticians – became ‘arena(s) of struggle’ in which ‘competing groups contested each other’s definitions of the public political sphere according to their interpretation of the constitution’.<sup>11</sup> Jon Lawrence, meanwhile, drew attention to local geography and the ‘politics of place’: how the diversity of electoral behaviour in different communities shaped political debate.<sup>12</sup> Put simply, the language of election contests – preserved for scholarly use in speeches, handbills, newspapers, campaign rituals and the physical landscape of a constituency itself – can be used to examine how local and national identity was articulated by candidates, voters and non-voters in relation to the issues of the day.

But the field is not without its problems. In recent years, there has been growing concern that an explosion of local studies has not advanced our knowledge of Victorian political culture more broadly. Political history, it has been argued, has become worryingly parochial; it lacks coherence, explanatory weight and ‘the bold ambition to provide models, theories, and theses ... to explain political change across localities and decades’.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the emphasis on language has often come at the expense of causation: ‘discourse is often disconnected from people, and their practice of the business of politics, with all its manoeuvring, compromises and complexity’.<sup>14</sup> The implication for this article is that a study of Tiverton needs to extend beyond a new chapter in Palmerston’s biography, to incorporate wider debates about Victorian political culture. To that end, and to show how some of the above concerns might be addressed, the article draws attention to Palmerston’s Tiverton career by relating local politics to two emerging historiographical subfields: celebrity and memory.

Over the past decade, ‘celebrity studies’ has blossomed as an academic subfield. Its practitioners have overturned assumptions that celebrity culture is a product of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Simon Morgan, in particular, has demonstrated that a recognisable celebrity culture existed in the mid-nineteenth century, which saw new types of public figure created through the mass media, including popular politicians who – for the first time – could mobilise public opinion and bring it to bear in Parliament.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Jon Lawrence and Taylor, Miles (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997), 1–26. See also Frank O’Gorman, ‘Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England 1780–1860’, *Past & Present*, 135 (1992), 79–115; James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993); Phillip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties, 1832–1841* (Woodbridge, 2002); Jon Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>11</sup>Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 7.

<sup>12</sup>Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>13</sup>Luke Blaxill, ‘Elections’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1800–2000*, ed. David Brown, Robert Crowcroft and Gordon Pentland (Oxford, 2018), 409.

<sup>14</sup>Paul Readman and Geraint Thomas (eds.), *Culture, Thought and Belief in British Political Life since 1800: Essays in Honour of Jonathan Parry* (Woodbridge, 2024), 3.

<sup>15</sup>Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (Oxford, 1986); Simon Morgan, *Celebrities, Heroes and Champions: Popular Politicians in The Age of Reform, 1810–67* (Manchester, 2021), 5–11.

<sup>16</sup>Simon Morgan, ‘Celebrity: Academic ‘Pseudo-event’ or a Useful Concept for Historians?’, *Cultural and Social History*, 8 (2011), 100; Morgan, ‘Historicising celebrity’, *Celebrity Studies*, 1 (2010), 366–8; Morgan, *Celebrities*.

One point of criticism, however, is that radical celebrities have attracted the most attention, typically Daniel O'Connell, Feargus O'Connor, Richard Cobden and John Bright, as well as William Gladstone.<sup>17</sup> Morgan's primary object of study, for instance, are the politicians who 'roused the harness of popular feeling and channel[ed] it in the service of political reform'.<sup>18</sup> But it was not just radicals who mobilised public opinion and as Linda Colley observed, protest did not make up the whole sum of popular politics in the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> If the definition of a mid-Victorian celebrity politician worthy of study is someone who took advantage of new technologies – including the cheap press and the mass platform – 'to communicate more directly with their electorates', then Palmerston surely ranks as one of the foremost examples.<sup>20</sup> As Paul Brighton noted, the Irish peerage that kept Palmerston in the House of Commons grounded him in the rituals of popular politics in a way that few of his aristocratic contemporaries needed to be.<sup>21</sup>

There have already been some efforts to fathom the nature of Palmerston's popular following. David Steele, Anthony Taylor and David Brown have all made the point that Palmerston, through his speaking engagements in industrial towns, did as much as Gladstone and Bright to invent the popular Liberal rally of the 1860s.<sup>22</sup> Joseph Meisel, in a study of Palmerston's platform oracy, argued that Palmerston's willingness to adopt – and by extension, to legitimise – the mass meeting 'pointed the way to the future of British political culture'.<sup>23</sup> Henry Miller and Paul Brighton have also shown how Palmerston's portraits and use of the press helped to cement his fame.<sup>24</sup> There are clear parallels here with Morgan's argument that celebrity politicians, in their attempt to communicate more effectively with the people, 'engineered a shift in political culture itself, making the public platform more respectable and paving the way for the famous Midlothian Campaigns of William Gladstone'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Morgan himself acknowledged Palmerston as the only major politician systematically to court public opinion before Gladstone. Yet Morgan was reluctant to accept that this translated into genuine popularity, writing that 'the true extent of Palmerston's popularity ... has been disputed'.<sup>26</sup>

This body of work has therefore done two things: it has established the significance of Palmerston's popular following as an object of study and opened a link between Palmerston and celebrity studies. But it has also neglected Tiverton. The fact remains that Palmerston's speaking engagements in the 1860s fulfilled a very different role from his election campaigns in Tiverton, which have rarely been subjected to in-depth analysis. Then there is the study of memory – specifically the political use of the past – which a recent edited volume by Matthew Roberts found to be far more

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Politics Personified*, 3–4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), 372.

<sup>20</sup> Morgan, *Celebrities*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Brighton, *Original Spin*, 129.

<sup>22</sup> Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, 8, 35; Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism', 177; Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 468–71.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph S. Meisel, 'Palmerston as Public Speaker', in *Palmerston Studies*, ed. Brown and Taylor, 1, 59.

<sup>24</sup> Miller, *Politics Personified*, 167–97 and Brighton, *Original Spin*, 129–51.

<sup>25</sup> Morgan, *Celebrities*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

central to British politics than previously assumed. Of particular relevance is Roberts's conclusion that studying 'social or collective memory, posthumous and heroic reputation', and 'the contested and evolving creations of political traditions and canons' can 'shed new light on familiar historical figures'.<sup>27</sup> The field is in its infancy and has yet to examine Palmerston, but nevertheless this article builds on the chapters in Roberts's volume by Kathryn Rix and Richard Gaunt, on the memorialisation of politicians by their constituents, and the role of individual actors in shaping the posthumous veneration of Victorian statesmen.<sup>28</sup>

This article therefore has two objectives: to illuminate new ways of reading Palmerston and to relate his Tiverton career to the subfields of celebrity and memory. It does so in three parts. The first part explores how Palmerston became a local celebrity in Tiverton. It shows how, between 1835 and 1865, he used personality politics and new forms of communication to promote himself to a national audience. The fame that Palmerston cultivated in turn became a source of civic pride in Tiverton. The second part considers Palmerston's opponents on the hustings and the unrecorded voices in Tiverton. It argues that pockets of opposition should not detract from his wider popularity. The third part explores how, when Palmerston died in 1865, the politics of celebrity intersected with the politics of memory, as his fame was appropriated by his constituents and became a contested political battleground. Political debates mutated into arguments as to which of the town's factions had the better claim to his legacy. Candidates, newspapers, voters and non-voters found in Palmerston's memory a stock of common allusions with which to reinforce competing visions of local and national identity. This persisted until 1874, when the age of Gladstone and Disraeli finally ended the posthumous career of Tiverton's celebrity MP.

### Palmerston as a local celebrity

Mid nineteenth-century Tiverton was a market town thirteen miles north-east of Exeter, with a population of approximately 10,000 people. The parliamentary constituency encompassed both the town and its rural hinterland.<sup>29</sup> Tiverton had owed its early prosperity to the wool trade, but by the nineteenth century this was in decline across Devon. Tiverton, however, had continued to prosper because of John Heathcoat, an industrialist who opened a lace factory in 1816. Politically, Tiverton began the nineteenth century as a Tory corporation borough. Its MPs used patronage to reward the minuscule electorate with jobs, which on one occasion included the governorship of a Caribbean island.<sup>30</sup> Yet the town's population was Liberal in sentiment and when the franchise was extended in 1832, Tiverton became a safe Liberal seat which, between 1832 and 1885, only once elected a Conservative MP.

This was the borough that first returned Palmerston in 1835. Palmerston was aged 51 when he arrived in Tiverton. He had entered Parliament in 1807 as a Tory and served

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Roberts (ed.), *Memory and Modern British Politics: Commemoration, Tradition, Legacy* (2024), 1–2.

<sup>28</sup> Kathryn Rix, 'Living in Stone or Marble: The Public Commemoration of Victorian MPs', in *Memory and Modern British Politics*, ed. Roberts, 139–70; Richard A. Gaunt, 'Peel's Death as Family Tragedy: Remembering Sir Robert Peel in Public and in Private', *ibid.*, 171–91.

<sup>29</sup> William White, *History, Gazetteer, And Directory of Devonshire* (Sheffield, 1850), 306.

<sup>30</sup> F. J. Snell, *Palmerston's Borough: A Budget of Electioneering Anecdotes, Jokes, Squibs, and Speeches* (1884), 19.

as secretary at war for twenty years, before breaking with the Tories over Catholic Emancipation and joining Grey's Whig cabinet as foreign secretary. Palmerston had no connection with Tiverton before 1835. He was defeated in South Hampshire in the general election that year and a seat happened to become vacant in Tiverton.<sup>31</sup> Yet Palmerston's arrival in Tiverton coincided with his rise to fame. His high-handed approach to foreign policy was beginning to irk his fellow Whigs and Palmerston, lacking the family connections that would otherwise have insulated him from the cut-and-thrust of Westminster politics, began to cultivate a popular following outside Parliament. This popularity stemmed from his use of the newspaper press; Palmerston was the first major British politician to master the new medium. He ingratiated himself with journalists – they were frequent guests at Lady Palmerston's soirees, where they received advance notice of speeches that he intended to make – and with editors, who kept him abreast of his press coverage.<sup>32</sup> Before long, Palmerston had formed close relationships with the editors of some of the most influential London newspapers, including *The Times*.<sup>33</sup> By the 1850s, Palmerston was a plebeian hero: 'Pam', the 'People's Darling' who upheld England's name in sinister foreign courts. This popularity made him indispensable to the governments of which he was a part and eventually secured him the premiership in 1855.<sup>34</sup>

Tiverton was an important part of Palmerston's repertoire. He grasped the importance of addressing the whole nation, not just his constituents, in elections and perfected a means of doing so, a tactic which his contemporaries recognised and often sought to emulate. In the general election of 1859, Benjamin Disraeli began a speech to his constituents in Buckinghamshire by complaining that the Conservative government had been criticised 'by Lord Palmerston on the hustings of Tiverton – the noble lord knowing well that he was speaking not merely to his constituents, but through them to the country at large'.<sup>35</sup> Palmerston had honed this ability to 'speak to the country' from Tiverton since his arrival in the borough. In 1836, as part of a series of reforms to the postal system, he arranged for a mail coach to pass through Tiverton on its way to Exeter.<sup>36</sup> This gave him a direct link to London in the era before the railways. He also made sure that his local network included many key players, including two local newspapers, a fact which seems to have eluded all of Palmerston's biographers. Most work on Palmerston and the press begins with his early experiment with the *Hampshire Advertiser*, before progressing straight to his mastery of the London press.<sup>37</sup> Yet the *Tiverton Times*, a local edition of the regional *Western Times*, was founded by John Sharland, a town councillor who was a member of Palmerston's election committee from 1835 to 1865 and who clearly expected political favours in

<sup>31</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 194.

<sup>32</sup>David Brown, 'Compelling but not Controlling? Palmerston and the Press, 1846–1855', *History*, 86 (2001), 47; Brighton, *Original Spin*, 135, 145.

<sup>33</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 269; Lawrence Fenton, *Palmerston and The Times: Foreign Policy, the Press and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian Britain* (2013), 140.

<sup>34</sup>Martin, *Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, 70; Brighton, *Original Spin*, 129–51.

<sup>35</sup>*Exeter Flying Post*, 5 May 1859, 7.

<sup>36</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 194–5.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 84, 183; Brighton, *Original Spin*, 131–2.

return for his services.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Robert Were, who founded the weekly *Tiverton Gazette* in 1858, seconded Palmerston in every election that he fought between 1857 and 1861.<sup>39</sup> Palmerston was also on close terms with Francis Hoyle, who intermittently served as Mayor of Tiverton and who proposed Palmerston in the aforementioned contests. Hoyle – who as Mayor was also the returning officer – stage-managed several of Palmerston’s encounters with the press. In 1841 for instance, Palmerston persuaded Hoyle to hold the borough’s elections outside the town hall, where the reporters were seated on a waggon while he addressed them from an upstairs window. He then timed his speech so the reporters could catch the last train back to London, where the speech appeared in the morning papers.<sup>40</sup>

As a result of these efforts, Palmerston’s election campaigns began to attract national attention. In 1847, the Chartist leader Julian Harney stood against Palmerston to draw attention to his cause. Journalists from every national newspaper arrived in Tiverton on the day of the nomination and Palmerston’s speech to the voters appeared verbatim in every London ‘daily’ the next morning.<sup>41</sup> In 1852, when rumours circulated that he intended to join Lord Derby’s Conservative government, journalists followed Palmerston around Tiverton as he canvassed the voters.<sup>42</sup> This national attention in turn made Palmerston a local celebrity, a phrase which is no anachronism. In 1865, the Devonshire Association, a local learned body, met in Tiverton. According to a report of the meeting that was published in the newspapers, the members enjoyed a tour of the Mayoralty Room that included ‘the portrait of Lord Palmerston and more celebrities’.<sup>43</sup> When Palmerston became prime minister, his use of Tiverton to ‘speak to the country’ reached its zenith and so did Tiverton’s delight in its celebrity MP.

In March 1857, Palmerston’s government lost a vote of censure because of its tacit support for the Second Opium War. The vote angered British manufacturers who wanted access to Chinese markets, giving Palmerston an excuse to dissolve Parliament and exploit his popularity as the victor of the Crimean War, which he had been planning to do for some time.<sup>44</sup> Palmerston moved quickly to frame the election on his own terms, by turning the China debate into an appeal to British patriotism. His written address to the voters in Tiverton appeared in all the London newspapers.<sup>45</sup> The address was an unapologetic reiteration of the British case for war. The Chinese Governor of Canton – ‘an insolent barbarian’ – had seized a British vessel on inflated charges

<sup>38</sup>John Sharland, *Recollections of the Great Lord Palmerston and Old Times in Devon* (Tiverton, 1898), i–ii. In 1838, Sharland wrote to Palmerston asking for ‘an appointment as Post Master in a County Town ... in England, Scotland, or Ireland’, or ‘a situation in any of the Dockyards or any other situation where ... I may render myself of service’. John Sharland to Palmerston, 5 Jan. 1838, Broadlands Papers, TMS62/PP/MPC/689.

<sup>39</sup>The general elections of 1857 and 1859 and the by-elections of 1859 and 1861. *Jubilee Supplement to the Tiverton Gazette and East Devon Herald*, 12 Apr. 1908, Tiverton War Memorial Trust, Devon Heritage Centre, 7344F/12/5/6/4.

<sup>40</sup>Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, 279; Snell, *Palmerston’s Borough*, 96–7.

<sup>41</sup>Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, 324.

<sup>42</sup>Snell, *Palmerston’s Borough*, 89.

<sup>43</sup>*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 30 June 1865, 6. See also Miller, *Politics Personified*, 183.

<sup>44</sup>J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism and the Arrow War (1856–1860) in China* (Cambridge, 1998), 218–19; Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, 50.

<sup>45</sup>Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, 231.

of piracy and ‘violated the British flag’.<sup>46</sup> Thousands of copies of the address were distributed across Britain.<sup>47</sup> Palmerston’s speech at the hustings and a banquet at the Tiverton Athenaeum had a similar effect and were quoted across the country by candidates of both parties, even those who had voted against him in Parliament.<sup>48</sup> The result was a landslide victory for Palmerston: the greatest Liberal majority for twenty-five years.

Tiverton responded with delight. Handbills reminded the borough that if it rejected Palmerston, ‘London and fifty other places would claim the honour of sending him to Parliament’.<sup>49</sup> When Palmerston arrived in Tiverton, church bells were rung in celebration and a brass band paraded the streets.<sup>50</sup> The spectacular public entry of a candidate into his constituency was, of course, a common sight in Victorian politics.<sup>51</sup> Yet what is significant about Tiverton is that these enthusiastic receptions of Palmerston occurred in elections where he was unopposed, which were often far quieter contests elsewhere.<sup>52</sup> To return to 1857, while Heathcoat and other dignitaries also addressed the Athenaeum banquet, it was Palmerston whom the reporters were there for. Even the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, a Conservative newspaper which regarded Palmerston’s foreign policy as the defence of ‘barbarous hostilities from which every truly Christian mind must shrink in horror’, acknowledged his popularity.<sup>53</sup> The *Gazette* devoted several columns of text to a verbatim report of Palmerston’s speech, which terminated abruptly with the following sentence: ‘At the conclusion of the above address a number of other toasts were proposed and speeches made, and the proceedings had not terminated when our reporter left.’<sup>54</sup> In other words, the reporter left the meeting when Palmerston had finished his speech.

Tiverton was equally enthusiastic about Palmerston in the general election of 1859, which coincided with the outbreak of a war between France and Austria in Italy.<sup>55</sup> This was a stroke of luck for Palmerston, whose career had stalled. A Conservative government was now in office and Palmerston had lost his seniority among the Whigs to his rival, Lord John Russell.<sup>56</sup> Yet the combination of a general election and a foreign war fought – at a safe distance – over Italian liberty gave Palmerston the chance to present himself as the man of the hour. As fears of British intervention mounted, he used Tiverton with consummate skill. The day after Austria invaded Lombardy, Palmerston arrived in Tiverton to promote a policy of British interest and moral enthusiasm.<sup>57</sup> At the nomination, he spoke from the hustings to an audience of journalists who had all been provided with copies of his speech in advance, demanding that Austria withdraw

<sup>46</sup>*The Times*, 24 Mar. 1857, 8.

<sup>47</sup>Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, 468.

<sup>48</sup>Caroline Jackson, ‘The British General Elections of 1857 and 1859’ (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1980), 176.

<sup>49</sup>‘To the Electors of Tiverton and North Devon’, 1857, Tiverton War Memorial Trust, 7344F/16298.

<sup>50</sup>*North Devon Journal*, 2 Apr. 1857, 7.

<sup>51</sup>Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 83–5.

<sup>52</sup>Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852–1886* (Basingstoke, 1998), 22–3, 62–4.

<sup>53</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 14 Mar. 1857, 6.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>55</sup>Derek Beales, *England and Italy: 1859–60* (1961), 36–45.

<sup>56</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 409–11.

<sup>57</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 30 Apr. 1859, 3.

from Italy and attacking the Conservatives for their inability to prevent war.<sup>58</sup> The campaign had its intended effect. Liberal MPs coalesced around Palmerston, including Gladstone who, though one of Palmerston's bitter foes, was implacably opposed to Austrian rule in Italy.<sup>59</sup> When Palmerston returned to Downing Street that summer, Gladstone accepted office as chancellor of the exchequer. 'The most brilliant stroke', Lord Aberdeen observed, 'was Palmerston's speech at Tiverton. His declared wish to see the Austrians turned out of Italy ... has secured Gladstone.'<sup>60</sup>

Once again, Palmerston's triumph became a source of local pride. It has been said of the 1859 election that 'the effect of Palmerston's speech on his constituents was never measured at the ballot box'.<sup>61</sup> This is true enough – his seat was uncontested – but Tiverton was far from apathetic. On the contrary, when Palmerston fell from office in 1858, the borough had sent him a memorial of support, the only part of the country to do so.<sup>62</sup> When he returned to office in 1859, Tiverton responded with acclaim. The local press – even the newspapers that Palmerston did not control – reflected with pride on the election, particularly the fact that Palmerston's speech on the hustings had appeared on the front page of a Paris newspaper, *Le Moniteur Universel*.<sup>63</sup> The *Western Times* noted that 'Lord Palmerston's speeches at the Hustings and the Banquet, reported in our Supplement, have gone forth to all Europe'.<sup>64</sup> The *North Devon Gazette* insisted that its version of the speech had appeared in the *Moniteur*, 'in the largest type, and on the front page'.<sup>65</sup>

Palmerston remained a celebrity in Tiverton throughout the final six years of his life. At a by-election in 1861, he was escorted to the hustings by a detachment of the Tiverton Rifle Corps.<sup>66</sup> In the 1865 general election, he was greeted at the railway station by a procession headed by a band.<sup>67</sup> On polling day, crowds came from surrounding villages, Exeter, and even Bristol to watch his speech.<sup>68</sup> The press displayed its usual excitement. Lady Palmerston, who had been unable to make her traditional appearance on the hustings, wrote to her husband that '*The Times* gives a good account today of your reception ... and your interesting speech ... and I regret not having been there.'<sup>69</sup> Again, the Conservative press was openly enthusiastic. The *Exeter Flying Post*, which had called Palmerston a 'cowardly bully' in 1857, admitted that it was 'no small honour' for Tiverton to be his patron.<sup>70</sup> The borough's close attachment to its MP was even noted

<sup>58</sup>Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, 486.

<sup>59</sup>Beales, *England and Italy*, 55.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>61</sup>James Chambers, *Palmerston: The People's Darling* (2004), 455.

<sup>62</sup>Mike Sampson, *A History of Tiverton* (Tiverton, 2004), 247.

<sup>63</sup>*Le Moniteur Universel*, 2 May 1859, 1.

<sup>64</sup>*Western Times*, 7 May 1859, 5.

<sup>65</sup>*North Devon Gazette*, 10 May 1859, 3.

<sup>66</sup>Palmerston's Diary, 26–8 Mar. 1861, Broadlands Papers, MS62/PP/D/21. In 1861, the office of Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports fell vacant. Palmerston attempted to abolish the sinecure but encountered such heated opposition that he decided to take it himself. The acceptance of office on behalf of the Crown required an MP to contest a by-election. Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, 507.

<sup>67</sup>*Western Morning News*, 11 Jul. 1865, 3.

<sup>68</sup>Snell, *Palmerston's Borough*, 99; Southgate, *Most English Minister*, 537.

<sup>69</sup>Emily Mary, Lady Palmerston, to Lord Palmerston, 11 Jul. 1865, Broadlands Papers, BR30/24/12.

<sup>70</sup>*Exeter Flying Post*, 12 Mar. 1857, 4; 5 Jul. 1865, 5.

abroad. The *Glasgow Morning Journal* translated a sketch from a French newspaper, *Le Charivari*, in which Tiverton's voters were tricked into thinking that Palmerston was planning to retire:

'Milord, we, the electors of Tiverton, have hurried up to London on learning the disastrous news ... that your lordship has determined on resigning office, and on retiring into private life' ... Lord Palmerston burst out into a hearty laugh. 'I am still Prime Minister; I mean to live and die Prime Minister' ... The electors of Tiverton retired elate, shouting out at the top of their voices, as they straggled along Park Lane on their way to the Great Western Railway, 'Old Pam holds on! Hurrah for Old Pam!'<sup>71</sup>

Yet while the national press laughed at the thought of country bumpkins hurrying up to London, there was more to Palmerston's popularity in Tiverton than that. It is true that Tiverton's affection for 'Old Pam' was not based on a particularly detailed scrutiny of his policies. It had, after all, been predisposed to return a Liberal candidate since 1832 and the safety of the seat was what first attracted Palmerston. After his first election in 1835, he wrote to his brother that Tiverton was 'a quiet borough which gives me very little trouble and which by all I can learn, I am very likely to keep'.<sup>72</sup> Notwithstanding voices of opposition on the hustings, his prognosis was correct. As the *Exeter Gazette* concluded after Palmerston's death, 'In relation to the world, Tiverton is so small, and Palmerston was so great – Tiverton has so little to occupy its attention, and Lord Palmerston's personality offered so much.'<sup>73</sup>

But Palmerston's fame in Tiverton was noticeably different from his popularity elsewhere. He was certainly a celebrity outside the borough, and not just in London salons and the chancelleries of Europe. The mid-nineteenth century was a period when political likenesses attained a remarkable popularity, hence the story of a postman who recognised Palmerston on a visit to Wales because he had 'seen your picture in *Punch*, my lord'.<sup>74</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to reduce Tiverton simply to 'Palmerston's Borough', as some historians have done.<sup>75</sup> As Palmerston used Tiverton to cement his fame, so Tiverton's factions used Palmerston's fame for their own ends. At first, this relationship was largely confined to patronage. There is no doubt that Palmerston genuinely was a useful ministerial 'insider', whose patronage helped to grease the wheels of local politics. In 1836, for example, Heathcoat forwarded Palmerston a letter from Edwin Beedell, a master at a local public school, who wanted Palmerston to find him a 'situation in any of the public offices under your Lordship's influence'.<sup>76</sup> Heathcoat made sure to add that finding employment for Beedell 'would be satisfactory to any of your Lordship's supporters'.<sup>77</sup> Palmerston did as he was bid and later

<sup>71</sup>*Glasgow Morning Journal*, 26 June 1865, 2.

<sup>72</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 194.

<sup>73</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 26 Oct. 1872, 4.

<sup>74</sup>Miller, *Politics Personified*, 1; M. H. Spielmann, *The History of 'Punch'* (New York, 1895), 203.

<sup>75</sup>Most accounts of Palmerston's relationship with his constituency rely on Snell's *Palmerston's Borough*.

<sup>76</sup>Edwin Beedell to F. Hoyle, 13 Jan. 1836, Broadlands Papers, MS62/PP/MPC/61/encl. 2.

<sup>77</sup>John Heathcoat to Palmerston, 20 Jan. 1836, Broadlands Papers, MS62/PP/MPC/61.

that month, Beedell became a clerk in a customs office in the Port of London.<sup>78</sup> Many similar requests for Palmerston's endorsement survive from this period, including a nephew of the mayor of Tiverton, who became a clerk in the diplomatic service, to would-be tithe commissioners, a clergyman seeking a vacant vicarage and a farmer who wanted Palmerston's help apprehending sheep rustlers.<sup>79</sup>

Yet this was all perfectly typical of an early nineteenth-century English constituency.<sup>80</sup> If Palmerston was assiduous in his dispensation of patronage, it reflected less his devotion to Tiverton, or his adoration by the borough, and more the workaholic nature that characterised his life. But the Tivertonians did not just exploit Palmerston's patronage; they exploited his image too. The *Exeter Gazette* did not exaggerate when it wrote that his personality offered much. Palmerston's growing fame changed the dynamic between him and his constituents and added a new factor to local politics. The more famous he became, the more profitable it was for local interests to associate themselves with him. The most powerful of these interests centred on Heathcoat, Tiverton's principal industrialist and Palmerston's fellow MP.

In 1816, Heathcoat opened a lace mill in Tiverton. The effect was immense. Lace was highly marketable and Heathcoat could offer extremely attractive wages. A Devonshire farm labourer in the 1830s earned up to three shillings per week; Heathcoat's factory hands earned twenty-five shillings and an annual bonus of five guineas.<sup>81</sup> By 1852, Heathcoat's mill employed a tenth of Tiverton's population.<sup>82</sup> Heathcoat was no Mr Bounderby either; he invested heavily in the borough. When his daughter married in 1826, he feted 1,500 Tivertonians with bread and cider. He also paid for a new school and a church with seating for over a thousand worshippers.<sup>83</sup> But Heathcoat, like Palmerston, was political. He entered Parliament as a Whig in 1832 and was re-elected at every election until his retirement in 1859, whereupon he was succeeded in business by his grandson, John Heathcoat-Amory, who brought forward a local barrister, George Denman, to stand for the seat. The arrangement was common knowledge. The *Exeter Gazette* complained that in Tiverton, 'the "Factory interest," which is called the Liberal interest, reigns supreme'.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the Heathcoat dynasty – the most powerful in town – had a monopoly over local politics that was just as great as Palmerston's. The Factory Interest matched influence with manpower. Conservative newspapers repeatedly blamed election violence on crowds of 'factory roughs' who turned out on polling day to form 'vigilance committees' and blockade Conservative headquarters.<sup>85</sup> The Liberal newspapers, for their part, always enjoyed the sight of Conservatives 'cowed by the sight of our honest factory men'.<sup>86</sup> If it was true that Tiverton looked to

<sup>78</sup>Palmerston to Heathcoat, 28 Jan. 1836, Broadlands Papers, MS62/PP/MPC/61/encl. 3–4.

<sup>79</sup>Bourne, *Palmerston*, 446, 571; Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 195; John Heathcoat to Palmerston, 27 Aug. 1836, Broadlands Papers, MS62/PP/MPC/236; George Coles to John Heathcoat, 12 June 1839, Broadlands Papers, MS62/PP/MPC/1014.

<sup>80</sup>See David Eastwood, 'Contesting the Politics of Deference: The Rural Electorate, 1820–60', in *Party, State and Society*, ed. Lawrence and Taylor, 27–49.

<sup>81</sup>Sampson, *Tiverton*, 208.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 215, 226, 246.

<sup>84</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 12 Mar. 1860, 6.

<sup>85</sup>*Western Morning News*, 11 Jul. 1865, 3; *Exeter Flying Post*, 6 Nov. 1872, 7; *ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1880, 5.

<sup>86</sup>*Western Times*, 3 Feb. 1874, 5.

Heathcoat as its real advocate, it may well have been because Heathcoat made sure of it.

The Factory Interest therefore exerted a powerful influence on local politics. It was also highly possessive of Palmerston's fame and took great care to associate itself with Palmerston. In 1857, a banquet in celebration of Palmerston's election took place in the Tiverton Athenaeum. The building had just been renovated at Heathcoat's expense, and the guests drank to a toast that Tiverton was 'honoured in having two such men as Lord Palmerston and Mr. Heathcoat for its members – representing foreign policy on the one hand, and home policy on the other'. The Vice-President of the Athenaeum, who chaired the meeting and proposed the toast, was none other than Heathcoat's grandson, John Heathcoat-Amory.<sup>87</sup> In 1859, when the Tiverton Conservatives could find no candidate to field, the *Exeter Gazette* complained that 'the noble lord is as much the nominee of Mr. Heathcoat as his colleague Mr. Denman is'.<sup>88</sup> In the 1861 by-election, when Palmerston was escorted to the hustings by the Tiverton Rifle Corps, it was Heathcoat-Amory himself who captained the detachment.<sup>89</sup>

Then, in the 1865 election, Denman and his Conservative opponent, John Walrond, both accused each other of being unfit to share the borough with Palmerston. Denman told Liberal meetings that Tiverton would 'stultify itself' by electing a Conservative who would offer Palmerston 'factious opposition' in Parliament and vote 'for the expulsion of my noble colleague from power', which would reduce Tiverton to 'a pitiful figure before England and all Europe'. To illustrate his point, he compared Palmerston's foreign policy – specifically his support for Italian Unification and for British neutrality during the American Civil War – with that of the Tories, who had apparently 'deserted the struggling nation of Italy' and would have 'involved this country in a war for the slave states in America'. Walrond defended himself, insisting that 'whatever Mr. Denman might say, I can agree with Lord Palmerston more than Mr Denman can'.<sup>90</sup> In the end, it was Walrond who was elected alongside Palmerston, and the *Western Times* was emphatic in its interpretation of the result as 'a slight to the Great Premier', suggesting that:

certain classes of the constituency took it into their heads to be offended with Mr. [Heathcoat] Amory, the chief proprietor of the great factory, and to punish him Mr. Denman was turned out of the seat ... we fancy the Tiverton people could have taken vengeance upon Squire Amory without insulting Lord Palmerston with a [Conservative] colleague pledged to thwart his policy.<sup>91</sup>

It seems reasonable to speculate, therefore, that just as Palmerston profited from Tiverton, so Tiverton's Factory Interest profited from Palmerston.

### Palmerston's opposition in Tiverton

Of course, speeches on the hustings and arguments in newspapers did not always reflect local opinion. Nor did election results, since less than a tenth of Tiverton's

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Apr. 1857, 10.

<sup>88</sup> *Exeter Gazette*, 2 Jul. 1859, 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Mar. 1861, 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Jul. 1865, 5; 11 Jul. 1865, 3; 14 Jul. 1865, 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Jul. 1865, 2; 18 Jul. 1865, 2.

population could vote during Palmerston's lifetime.<sup>92</sup> The politics of place in Tiverton – as in every Victorian constituency – were bisected by differences in class and culture, which meant that however prominent national questions were, local issues could acquire equal status. Palmerston was not always returned as the first-place candidate either. Between 1832 and 1837, elections in Tiverton were always contested, and Heathcoat topped the poll by a long way.<sup>93</sup> Thereafter, although Palmerston was usually unopposed at the nomination, he did encounter vocal opposition from among his audience. Political historians have long understood the risks of reaching conclusions about nineteenth-century politics in waters as murky as these, since the voices of candidates and party activists can easily be conflated with those of the less politicised majority whose representation they sought.<sup>94</sup> The traditional response to these tensions among Palmerston's biographers was to consider his constituents as a unity, and to overlook the differences that undoubtedly existed between them. Adherents to the 'new' political history, meanwhile, have been more inclined to regard these differences as proof that Palmerston's popularity could not have extended throughout the entirety of the borough.<sup>95</sup> Yet if Palmerston's cultivation of Tiverton cannot be conflated with a homogeneous body of support, nor should voices of opposition automatically detract from his wider popularity. The next part of this article examines demonstrations of anti-Palmerstonian sentiment that took place in Tiverton. Notwithstanding the efforts of Chartist agitators, Conservative newspapers and Tiverton's non-voters, popular support was never drawn away from Palmerston in sufficient quantity to undermine the local significance of his fame.

In 1847, Palmerston's seat was contested by Julian Harney, a Chartist specialist on foreign affairs. Harney attacked Palmerston on the hustings in a speech that lasted for two hours, describing him as 'a foe to the liberties of the people' for his prosecution of the First Opium War.<sup>96</sup> Palmerston swatted the objection aside, comparing the accusation of forcing the Chinese people to buy opium to a man being 'accused of forcing the people of England to buy beer'.<sup>97</sup> Harney, however, won the show of hands that preceded the nomination and it was only when Palmerston demanded a formal poll that Harney withdrew from the contest in protest at the restricted franchise, since few of his supporters could vote.<sup>98</sup> David Brown interpreted this as a pivotal moment in Palmerston's career, arguing that Harney succeeded 'in winning the popular support of the people' and illustrated 'the capricious nature of popular support'. This, Brown maintained, was what forced Palmerston to work so hard at cultivating public opinion in later years.<sup>99</sup> This may be true where Palmerston's parliamentary career was concerned, but the picture of Tiverton should not be distorted.

<sup>92</sup>Fewer than 500 Tivertonians could vote before the 1868 Reform Act, which increased the electorate to roughly 1,500. F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1832-1885* (Aldershot, 1989), 308–9.

<sup>93</sup>In the 1837 general election, for example, Heathcoat and Palmerston were elected with 323 and 246 votes, respectively, against a Conservative candidate who won 180: *ibid.*, 308.

<sup>94</sup>Jon Lawrence, 'The Dynamics of Urban Politics, 1867–1914', in *Party, State and Society*, ed. Lawrence and Taylor, 92.

<sup>95</sup>See Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 194–5, 297–8.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>97</sup>Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, 441.

<sup>98</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 298.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 292, 298.

The fact remains that Harney did not herald from Tiverton. Nor had he been invited to contest the seat by a local organisation. Throughout the 1840s, Harney attempted to educate the British working classes on foreign affairs. The pages of his radical newspaper, the *Northern Star*, were regularly given over to columns on the subject.<sup>100</sup> Harney's appearance in Tiverton should be viewed in this context, especially considering the publicity that Tiverton offered for his ideas. In literature published after the nomination, Harney described himself as the 'People's Member for Tiverton', but in private correspondence he admitted that he stood no chance of election and was there for the purpose of 'getting at' Palmerston. Nor did Palmerston display any concern about the result, writing that he had given Harney 'a good dressing down'.<sup>101</sup> Celebrity was key. Harney, a popular politician who wanted to educate his followers on foreign policy, simply went to the constituency which the charismatic foreign secretary happened to represent. But here the politics of personality worked against him. Harney, who relied on his notoriety, faced a public figure who used similar techniques of rhetoric and image management to appeal to a popular following, but who could also leverage elite status to cultivate his fame. Harney was outclassed, unable or unwilling to go to the poll and engage with the formal process of election in the official political space.<sup>102</sup> The question of whether Harney was an official candidate in 1847 has bedevilled psephologists, but the show of hands can easily be located in the context of the era.<sup>103</sup> It was a common sight in mid-century politics for dramatic outsiders to contest a seat for publicity purposes and to win the show of hands at the nomination. But this was not always regarded as proof of a local following, or of genuine electoral intent. It was often a performative gesture; a way for the audience to express appreciation of the candidate but without investing him with the binding authority of the formal poll which they knew would determine the actual result.<sup>104</sup> That is not to say for certain that this happened in Tiverton in 1847, only that it could have happened and that it is a perfectly valid explanation of the result.

The same is true of the Chartist agitators who followed in Harney's wake. In 1857, Bronterre O'Brien, another Chartist, arrived in Tiverton before the election to rally Heathcoat's workers against Palmerston. He told a public meeting at the factory gates that he would 'put the premier through his facings' at the hustings.<sup>105</sup> O'Brien made no appearance on the hustings, however, and left Tiverton on the day of his arrival, having failed to generate a local following.<sup>106</sup> It is just about conceivable that Heathcoat,

<sup>100</sup>Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside* (Monmouth, 2007), 37; Morgan, *Celebrities*, 15.

<sup>101</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 298; Snell, *Palmerston's Borough*, 78, 90.

<sup>102</sup>Many years later, a letter to the *Tiverton Gazette* from 'one who was present at the Tiverton election of '47' suggested that Harney declined to go the poll because he was unable to pay his election expenses. *Tiverton Gazette*, 23 Jan. 1906, 5.

<sup>103</sup>Craig's *Parliamentary Election Results*, for instance, lists Harney as an official candidate in 1847, even though he was not officially recognised at the poll. Confusingly, however, Craig did not list any of the figures who contested the nomination – but not the poll – in later elections as official candidates. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1832–1885*, 308–9.

<sup>104</sup>See O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals', 79–115 and Miles Taylor, 'Interests, Parties and the State: The Urban Electorate in England, c.1820–72', in *Party, State and Society*, ed. Lawrence and Taylor, 50–78.

<sup>105</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 4 Apr. 1857, 1.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

who went to great lengths to capitalise on Palmerston's fame in 1857, had made sure of his workers before O'Brien's arrival. After failing to rally the factory hands, O'Brien reportedly shouted 'look up, men! Why don't you cheer? Are you afraid of your master?'<sup>107</sup> Yet the Conservative press, which never missed an opportunity to condemn the sinister influence of the Factory Interest, was silent on the issue. Then, in 1859, Simon François Bernard and Thomas Allsopp – radical democrats whose attempt on the life of Napoleon III led to the fall of Palmerston's ministry in 1858 – were present in Tiverton and heckled Palmerston when he spoke on the hustings.<sup>108</sup> Yet their objections to Palmerston quickly subsided. The *Exeter Gazette* noted they left Tiverton 'delighted' with Palmerston's support for Italy.<sup>109</sup> There is nothing to suggest, therefore, that these agitators found a well of anti-Palmerston sentiment in Tiverton. All that can be said for certain is that radicals with advanced opinions on foreign policy were attracted to Tiverton like moths to a flame. Palmerston's fame gave them and their issues exposure to the press, but they soon found themselves outmatched by the aristocratic celebrity, who held the ring against all comers.

As for Tiverton itself, only two native sources of opposition to Palmerston were present during elections, neither of which outweighed his local support. Each came from the political fringes. On the right were the local Conservative newspapers. In 1857, while Liberal newspapers either supported Palmerston or were managed directly by him, the *Exeter Flying Post* and the *Exeter Gazette* were openly critical. The former called him a cowardly bully; the *Gazette* complained that he had 'degraded' his speech at the Athenaeum by 'the utterance of a second electioneering manifesto'.<sup>110</sup> It also toed the Conservative line on foreign policy. In the parliamentary debate that preceded the election, Derby accused Sir John Bowring, the Governor of Hong Kong who began hostilities with China, of having a 'monomania' over British entry into Canton.<sup>111</sup> Shortly thereafter, a rendition of *Bonnie Dundee* entitled 'Bowring's Monomania' appeared in the *Exeter Gazette*:

Canton is a place where they've capital tea, But they strongly object to give any to me: But since Palmerston's war-making genius has shone Over England, I'm sure we may enter Canton.<sup>112</sup>

But as noted above, the Conservatives were a minority in Tiverton. Only one Conservative MP – John Walrond – was elected for Tiverton in the fifty years after 1832. He was returned by a majority of three in 1865 and was never elected again. Moreover, both Walrond and the Conservative press had come round to a pro-Palmerston point of view by 1865, and the regional newspapers were unanimous that it was Denman's seat that Walrond targeted, not Palmerston's.<sup>113</sup> As the next part of this article will demonstrate, Conservative support for Palmerston only intensified after his death.

<sup>107</sup>Snell, *Palmerston's Borough*, 76.

<sup>108</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 7 May 1859, 2.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 Apr. 1857, 2.

<sup>111</sup>Lord Derby, 24 Feb. 1857, Hansard, CXLIV, 1177.

<sup>112</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 7 Mar. 1857, 6.

<sup>113</sup>*Western Times*, 8 Jul. 1865, 2. Snell, *Palmerston's Borough*, 107–8.

There was only one clear native voice of opposition to Palmerston in Tiverton. William Rowcliffe, a local Chartist butcher, regularly questioned Palmerston during elections, arguing that that his foreign policy constituted a reactionary attempt to distract the country from the question of parliamentary reform.<sup>114</sup> At the hustings in 1859, Rowcliffe said that a Bill which Palmerston had introduced to arrest the would-be assassins of Napoleon III was ‘a joint concoction of the noble Lord and the Emperor of the French’, before asking Palmerston point blank whether he would support manhood suffrage and the ballot.<sup>115</sup> Rowcliffe made another appearance in the 1861 by-election. True to form, Palmerston’s speech from the town hall was dominated by foreign affairs, specifically how British influence had led to the growth of constitutional liberty in Europe. It was at this point that Rowcliffe intervened:

The noble lord has been speaking a great deal about foreign affairs, but we have not heard a single word about home affairs ... my lord, what you have done with the Reform Bill, you pledged yourself, the last time you were here on the hustings? ... You come to Tiverton to gull the labouring classes who are the producers of wealth. You trust your servants with property ... but you will not trust them with a vote!<sup>116</sup>

Rowcliffe was certainly a popular figure. He was a regular speaker at meetings of local reform associations and his presence on election day was always met with cheering.<sup>117</sup> His complaint about Palmerston’s neglect of reform was also a common theme in radical politics. But as with Harney and O’Brien, there is little evidence that Rowcliffe’s dislike of Palmerston represented a distinct body of opinion. The newspapers may have prioritised the speeches of candidates and party activists, but even so, certain things can be inferred from their reports. The same crowd that cheered Rowcliffe also cheered Palmerston for his witty retorts, including his response to Rowcliffe’s demand for a Reform Bill in 1861: ‘In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king ... perhaps Mr. Rowcliffe wishes to be sovereign in the land of ignorance; he is only half enlightened and therefore might be qualified.’<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, the local press was unanimous in its depiction of Rowcliffe as a figure of fun. ‘Set-tos’ between Palmerston and Rowcliffe became a long-running joke – ‘one of the humours of a Tiverton election’ – that was eagerly anticipated whenever Parliament was dissolved.<sup>119</sup> Even the Conservative papers, so full of alarm about Tiverton’s ‘factory roughs’, looked on Rowcliffe with affection, displaying no alarm at the articulation of his radicalism in Tiverton. The *Exeter Flying Post* was delighted with Palmerston’s ‘joust with the jolly butcher’, while the *Exeter Gazette* wrote in 1861 that ‘if Mr. Rowcliffe had not considerably attended to bait the noble Premier, the whole affair would have passed over with the most contemptible tameness’.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>114</sup>Snell, *Palmerston’s Borough*, 77.

<sup>115</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 7 May 1859, 2.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 Mar. 1861, 5.

<sup>117</sup>*Western Times*, 2 Jan. 1866, 6; *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1866, 8.

<sup>118</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 29 Mar. 1861, 5.

<sup>119</sup>*Western Morning News*, 22 Mar. 1880, 2; *Plymouth Mail*, 3 Apr. 1861, 4; *Western Times*, 30 Mar. 1861, 4.

<sup>120</sup>*Exeter Flying Post*, 5 Jul. 1865, 5; *Exeter Gazette*, 29 Mar. 1861, 4.

In fact, it was probably Palmerston – who seems to have only attended the by-election to pay a social call on the Earl of Shaftesbury – who ‘baited’ Rowcliffe in 1861 to give the crowd a show.<sup>121</sup> The *Exeter Gazette* reported that, when Palmerston finished his speech and ‘was about to retire from the window ... Mr Rowcliffe, who was standing at an open window in another part of the building, addressed his lordship’. It seems inconceivable that Palmerston, considering his extensive network of contacts in Tiverton, was unaware of Rowcliffe’s presence. This would explain the unusually abrupt termination of Palmerston’s speech on foreign policy: ‘I will no longer delay you. There are no other topics which it is at present necessary for me to enter into.’<sup>122</sup> A more obvious cue for Rowcliffe could not have been provided. Any lingering doubt over Rowcliffe’s intervention in 1861 can be laid to rest by Palmerston’s diary entry for that day: ‘Rowcliffe attacked me and asked questions. I answered and made people laugh at his expense.’ This was hardly the entry of a man whose constituents had given him cause for concern, especially since Palmerston – though a poor diary-keeper – did keep private notes when current affairs alarmed him.<sup>123</sup>

Nor can any letters to the local newspapers be found which took Rowcliffe seriously and which merit consideration. Writing to a newspaper has been described as a ‘veritable cottage industry’ in this period; correspondence columns – which were cheap to produce and extremely popular among local readers – often occupied more newspaper space than editorials.<sup>124</sup> But throughout Palmerston’s lifetime and after his death, very few Tivertonians wrote to their newspapers to commend Rowcliffe for his ‘jousting’. Those who did can hardly be said to have spoken for the town. In 1861 for example, a Mr J. D. Bassett wrote to the *North Devon Journal* in defence of Rowcliffe, insisting that Palmerston had launched the country into ‘unjustifiable wars’, and commending Rowcliffe for reminding the noble Lord that ‘he had passed over in his speech topics of the most vital importance’.<sup>125</sup> Bassett, however, was the exception that proved the rule. A habitual letter-writer with advanced opinions, his letters to the Devonshire newspapers covered everything from the introduction of competitive examinations in schools to the opening of new tin mines in Cornwall.<sup>126</sup> The public correspondence that did concern Rowcliffe usually came at his expense. In 1859, the news of Heathcoat’s retirement led to the publication of a satirical handbill, which took the form of an

<sup>121</sup>MPs did not always attend Ministerial by-elections, particularly if they were uncontested. In 1861, the *Exeter Gazette* observed that the by-election excited ‘more than ordinary interest, in consequence of his Lordship’s announcement that he should personally seek a renewal of the electors’. This was attributed ‘to the circumstance that the Earl and Countess of Shaftesbury are at present staying in Torquay’. The Shaftesburys did indeed winter in Torquay that year for reasons of family health, where they were joined by Palmerston before the by-election and again over the following weekend. Palmerston’s diary entries for the weekend contain numerous references to the health of Shaftesbury’s daughter and it seems he had simply decided to pay them a visit. *Exeter Gazette*, 29 Mar. 1861, 5; Palmerston’s diary, 26–9 Mar. 1861.

<sup>122</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 29 Mar. 1861, 5.

<sup>123</sup>Palmerston’s Diary, 28 Mar. 1861. His diary entry for polling day in 1859, for instance, made no reference to Rowcliffe, but did express concern about ‘information received of Treaty offensive and defensive between France and Russia’. Palmerston’s Diary, 27 Apr. 1859.

<sup>124</sup>Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), 187.

<sup>125</sup>*North Devon Journal*, 4 Apr. 1861, 6.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 Apr. 1861, 7; *Exeter Gazette*, 1 Nov. 1861, 10; *ibid.*, 17 Apr. 1868, 3; *Western Times*, 3 Dec. 1869, 6.

address from a mysterious new candidate for Heathcoat's seat, one 'W. M. Roeclift'. The contents of the handbill made its target abundantly clear:

I trust to receive an overwhelming majority ... My political fight on the Hustings with Lord Palmerston will long be remembered as a brilliant achievement ... should you be pleased to return me as one of your Representatives, I will strenuously endeavour to upset the whole of the British Constitution.<sup>127</sup>

While it has been suggested, therefore, that colourful figures like Harney and Rowcliffe drew popular support away from Palmerston, there is little evidence that their opinion of Palmerston was shared by a significant cohort of voters and non-voters in Tiverton. Whatever differences existed in class or occupation, the political ideology at the basis of Tivertonian choices was not sufficiently antagonistic to Palmerston to undermine the significance of his celebrity status. On the contrary, his popularity seems likely to have been an underlying point of unity. The strongest indication of this appears after Palmerston's death, when his legacy became a bitterly contested political battleground.

### The memory of Palmerston

When Palmerston died in 1865, a new factor was added to the celebrity culture that had grown up around him in Tiverton: the politics of memory. The posthumous veneration of MPs was common in in this period; Kathryn Rix has shown how statues of politicians appeared in towns and cities across Britain. These MPs, who tended to be prominent industrialists with a connection to the area, were celebrated not just for having represented these places in Westminster, but for their wider contribution to public life.<sup>128</sup> Palmerston, however, did not hail from Tiverton; his family estates were in Ireland and Hampshire. He was assiduous in his dispensation of patronage, but this was par for the course in nineteenth-century politics, and nothing compared to the contribution that Heathcoat made to the local economy. Indeed, Tiverton's posthumous veneration of Heathcoat exemplifies the process of veneration that has recently been traced by Rix. When Heathcoat died in 1866, so many Tivertonians tried to attend the funeral that the church he had built could not accommodate them.<sup>129</sup> What is particularly interesting about Palmerston's veneration in Tiverton is that he was remembered, not for the physicality of his legacy, but for having been a celebrity.

In recent years, historians have debated the role of audiences in the 'productive consumption' of celebrities.<sup>130</sup> The field has been characterised by debate about how far a celebrity's status was the result of deliberate self-promotion, as opposed to their commodification by mass culture. A key factor that has subsequently emerged to identify a historical celebrity has been the marketability of their persona. Morgan concluded that the point when a public person became a celebrity was when a sufficiently

<sup>127</sup>'To the Independent Electors of the Borough of Tiverton', 1859, Tiverton War Memorial Trust, 7344F/16298.

<sup>128</sup>Rix, 'Living in Stone or Marble', 141, 148, 159.

<sup>129</sup>Sampson, *Tiverton*, 248.

<sup>130</sup>Morgan, *Celebrities*, 6.

large audience was interested in their personality to create a market for information about their lives and views.<sup>131</sup> These elements were certainly present in Tiverton after 1865, but this was arguably because Palmerston's persona had acquired a new meaning. During his lifetime, Palmerston used Tiverton to cultivate a public image in support of his own career. His constituents then found themselves in a position to leverage that image to their own advantage. This persisted throughout Palmerston's lifetime and – as noted above – was arguably a more prevalent theme in local politics than voices of opposition that occasionally made themselves felt. From 1865, however, the real figure of Palmerston was transformed, and his image broadened from a celebrity politician into something that more closely resembled an imagined character.

Tiverton's appropriation of Palmerston was peculiarly idiosyncratic, even though it mirrored developments in national politics. Gladstone, who by this time was leader of the Liberal Party, had no interest in defending Palmerston, whom he regarded as brash and chauvinistic. As a result, Gladstone obscured his predecessor's liberal credentials and left Disraeli free to tap into Palmerston's patriotism.<sup>132</sup> Yet the appropriation of Palmerston in Tiverton took place independently of outside influences. The structures of national politics would not emerge until the 1880s, and the politics of place continued to set the tone for political debate. An interesting comparison that can be made here is with Richard Gaunt's work on the afterlife of another Victorian prime minister, Sir Robert Peel. Gaunt drew attention to the ways in which memory of Peel was regulated by his family, who were consulted and informed about acts of remembrance.<sup>133</sup> In Tiverton, however, Palmerston's family had nothing to do with his posthumous veneration; the borough acted entirely of its own accord. This period, unsurprisingly, has received little attention from Palmerston's biographers.<sup>134</sup> It is clear, however, that in election contests between 1865 and 1872, Palmerston's legacy became a contested political space, which gave local factions a stock of shared allusions with which to promote competing visions of local and national identity.

This appropriation of Palmerston's legacy began in 1866, when a by-election was held for the seat which his death vacated. The Conservative candidate, a distinguished naval officer named Sir John Hay, who was previously the Conservative MP for Wakefield and was now standing for Tiverton, tried to appropriate Palmerston's patriotic appeal.<sup>135</sup> He laboured the 'void in the borough of Tiverton' that had been left by the death of 'a great and eminent Englishman', whose love for his country had been felt in 'many instances of foreign policy', particularly during the American Civil War.<sup>136</sup> The chairman of Sir John's committee told a rally that 'anyone who had supported Lord Palmerston is in consistency bound to support Sir John Hay'.<sup>137</sup> The Conservative

<sup>131</sup>Morgan, 'Celebrity', 98.

<sup>132</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 486.

<sup>133</sup>Gaunt, 'Peel's Death', 186.

<sup>134</sup>For one exception, see James Gregory, 'After Palmerston: The Mount Temples and Christian Higher Life at Broadlands', in *Palmerston Studies*, ed. Brown and Taylor, I, 173–96.

<sup>135</sup>Andrew Lambert, 'Hay, Sir John Charles Dalrymple, third baronet, (1821–1912)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 Sept. 2004).

<sup>136</sup>*Western Times*, 12 Jan. 1866, 6.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*

press followed suit, arguing that ‘respect for the memory of Lord Palmerston’ would be more truly manifested by the election of Sir John than of ‘the cipher brought forward by Mr. Amory to fill the seat of one of the foremost statesmen of the age’.<sup>138</sup> That ‘cipher’ was Denman, who told his rallies that it was ‘an insult to the memory of the late Lord Palmerston to call him Conservative’, since Palmerston, not the Conservatives, had preserved British neutrality in America, with the support of ‘the working men themselves of this kingdom’. A Conservative victory in Tiverton, the *Western Times* concluded, would be an outrage to ‘the honour of the borough’ and the ‘memory of the greatest statesman of our day’.<sup>139</sup>

The Liberals also sought to appropriate Palmerston for their reform campaign. They were able to do this because Palmerston had always been vague about his commitment to the extension of the franchise; his reformist credentials were sufficiently murky that both sides of the debate could lay claim to him.<sup>140</sup> Denman reminded one pro-reform meeting that Palmerston’s cabinet had pledged itself to a Reform Bill in 1860 and ‘meant to carry it’.<sup>141</sup> The *Western Times* argued that Palmerston had been distracted from the Bill by ‘the disturbed state of Europe and America’.<sup>142</sup> Hay told his supporters the exact opposite: ‘as long as Lord Palmerston was at the head of affairs the English people knew that there would be no Reform Bill’.<sup>143</sup> The *Exeter Flying Post* charged the Factory Interest with attempting to spread ‘enthusiasm among Lord Palmerston’s old constituents in favour of a revolutionary scheme of Reform which was opposed by their sagacious and veteran representative’.<sup>144</sup> The contest reached its climax when it transpired that in the previous election, when Sir John had stood in Wakefield, he had called Palmerston a ‘pitiabile old man’ on the hustings.<sup>145</sup> The *Western Times* printed the speech verbatim, explaining that Sir John, who had spoken ‘in the most contemptuous spirit’ of Lord Palmerston, now had the audacity ‘to ask the electors of Tiverton to give him the seat which Lord Palmerston vacated’.<sup>146</sup> Sir John denied ever having made the Wakefield speech, but it was to no avail. Denman brought a copy of the *Wakefield Journal* to the poll and read the incriminating passage verbatim. He won a decisive victory.<sup>147</sup>

The general election of 1868 was a more subdued affair. Two Liberal candidates – Denman and Heathcoat-Amory himself – were returned unopposed. The *Exeter Gazette* complained that Tiverton had become a ‘manufacturing pocket-borough’.<sup>148</sup> Both men supported the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and with no Conservative candidate to make the case for antisestablishmentarianism, supporters of the Church of Ireland took to the press, where they justified their position with carefully selected quotations from Palmerston’s speeches. The *Exeter Gazette* recalled the case that

<sup>138</sup>*Exeter Flying Post*, 3 Jan. 1866, 5.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 Jan. 1866, 7; 20 Feb. 1866, 8. *Western Times*, 1 Feb. 1866, 2.

<sup>140</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 359–61.

<sup>141</sup>*Western Times*, 2 Jan. 1866, 6.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 Jan. 1866, 5.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1866, 6.

<sup>144</sup>*Exeter Flying Post*, 3 Jan. 1866.

<sup>145</sup>*Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 7 Jul. 1865, 3.

<sup>146</sup>*Western Times*, 19 Jan. 1866, 8.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 Mar. 1866, 7.

<sup>148</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 6 Nov. 1868, 5.

Palmerston had made for Catholic Emancipation in 1813: 'I can never bring myself to believe that there would at any time be found in this House a sufficiently powerful and numerous Protestant party, so profligate in principle ... as to barter away the religious establishment of any part of the Empire.'<sup>149</sup> The accompanying editorial explained that what 'the great statesman whom we have lost could not bring himself to believe has actually come to pass', for such a party had now been formed under Gladstone.<sup>150</sup> The same tactic was used in correspondence columns. An anonymous letter to the *Exeter Gazette* quoted from the 1813 debate. The admission of Catholic MPs to Parliament, Palmerston had said, would not threaten the Church of Ireland unless the Irishmen 'got hold of some great political body', whereupon the nation would at once reject 'the insolent claims of an alien Church'. According to the anonymous missive, the first half of this prophecy had now been fulfilled and 'God grant Lord Palmerston may have been equally correct as to his opinion of the ultimate result.'<sup>151</sup>

These attempts to construct rival versions of Palmerston and to impose him on the borough became even more inventive in 1872, when Denman retired and triggered a by-election. The seat was contested between Walrond and the Factory Interest's new candidate, a barrister named William Massey, with a track record as a reformist Liberal MP.<sup>152</sup> The political climate favoured Walrond; Gladstone's ministry had made itself unpopular by a Licensing Act to curtail the sale of alcohol, and by its foreign policy. Britain had agreed under international arbitration to compensate the United States for damages inflicted by the *Alabama*, a British-built Confederate warship.<sup>153</sup> With Walrond gaining ground, the Liberals turned to a curious feature of the built environment. Palmerston's principal place of residence in Tiverton had been a local inn, the Three Tuns Hotel. In the 1870s, a new owner renamed the building the Palmerston Hotel and – ironically – used it as the local Conservative Headquarters. This was the context for an election address that appeared in the Liberal press in October, ostensibly penned by Palmerston's ghost:

TO ELECTORS OF THE BOROUGH OF TIVERTON

33, Mount Pleasant, Elysian Fields,

It disturbs me mightily to find that the Hotel which bears my name, and which once was the headquarters of Liberal principles, has now fallen into the hands of the enemy ... I am jealous for the fair fame of Tiverton, as an old man is for the honour of his young bride. And, if you have any kindly memory of me ... you will return MASSEY by a triumphant majority.

The only problem was that Massey believed in Reform and extending the franchise, which Palmerston had always been wary about. The author, however, decided that Palmerston would have changed his mind by 1872:

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 Nov. 1868, 10; Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 110–11.

<sup>150</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 13 Nov. 1868, 10.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1868, 2; *Western Times*, 15 Dec. 1868, 5.

<sup>152</sup>H. C. G. Matthew, 'Massey, William Nathaniel (1809–1881)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 Sept. 2004).

<sup>153</sup>See Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006), 295, 300.

MASSEY is a man of ability ... I recollect Russell was very angry with him for voting against an ugly, misshapen little bantling of his, which he christened 'Reform Bill' ... he was, as he then openly declared, for Household Suffrage, pure and simple. He was in fact too Liberal QUITE to suit my taste, but the march of progress, no doubt, has altered this ... and I dare say there is no fear of his being too advanced for your taste.

You will elect him. He will do you credit. *Civis Romanus est*.  
Your faithful friend and quondam representative.  
PALMERSTON<sup>154</sup>

The effect of the address was immediate. Neither candidate mentioned Palmerston before its publication on 12 October. That very evening, however, Walrond referred a meeting of his supporters to 'the gentleman whose name is attached to an address which has been published to-day ... whose policy we are all of us as Conservatives ready to follow – your old and tried representative, Lord Palmerston'.<sup>155</sup> Massey echoed Denman's line from 1861: Palmerston had only been prevented from extending the franchise by the state of world affairs. Even 'a Liberal Minister of more advanced opinions' might 'at that particular juncture' have found it difficult to introduce a Reform Bill.<sup>156</sup>

In the following weeks, both sides tried to claim Palmerston for their own. The Liberal press complained that 'Lord Palmerston's house has become the Tory House'.<sup>157</sup> The *Exeter Gazette* was particularly forthright:

Lord Palmerston was a greater Tory than perhaps any public man of the present day ... he would never have consented that the castle of *Civis Romanus* should be broken into ... in a mock search for intoxicating liquors ... any more than he would have altered the law of England to be enabled to bribe kinsmanship with three millions and a quarter of the people's money.<sup>158</sup>

Letters to the newspapers insisted that, if Palmerston were alive, he 'would wish success to Mr. Walrond' and would never have permitted the 'Fenian measures' that Gladstone had conceded to Ireland.<sup>159</sup> Yet once again, Walrond failed to dislodge the Factory Interest and was defeated on polling day.<sup>160</sup>

The 1872 by-election was the climax of Palmerston's afterlife in Tiverton. Thereafter, he largely disappeared from local politics. Of course, Palmerston did not suddenly pass out of living memory after 1872. He remained a popular – and

<sup>154</sup>*Exeter Express and Echo*, 22 Oct. 1872, 2. Russell's 1852 Reform Bill was often depicted as a sickly child in political cartoons. See Miller, *Politics Personified*, 188.

<sup>155</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 14 Oct. 1872, 3.

<sup>156</sup>*Western Times*, 15 Oct. 1872, 8.

<sup>157</sup>*Express and Echo*, 23 Oct. 1872.

<sup>158</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 19 Oct. 1872, 4.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 Oct. 1872, 4; *Tiverton Gazette*, 29 Oct. 1872, 8.

<sup>160</sup>*Western Times*, 5 Nov. 1872, 8.

commercially lucrative – feature of local history until the early twentieth century. In the 1890s, two popular books of anecdotes about Palmerston were published by Tivertonian antiquarians, one of them by the Palmerston Press, a local publishing firm.<sup>161</sup> In 1900, a function for the Western Branch of the Sanitary Inspectors' Association was held in Tiverton Town Hall, where a speaker praised 'the town of the late Lord Palmerston', whose funeral he had attended 'when I was a little boy in London'.<sup>162</sup> Yet while Palmerston's legacy retained its cultural appeal, it lost its political influence. By the 1870s and 1880s, political culture had moved on from Palmerston's heyday. The 1872 Ballot Act had already replaced open nominations with the secret ballot, but of greater significance to political debate was the centralisation of rudimentary party structures, as Britain readied itself for the age of mass-party politics and the Disraeli–Gladstone rivalry.<sup>163</sup> These changes certainly affected Tiverton. In the 1850s and 1860s, Palmerston and Heathcoat had separate election committees based in separate buildings.<sup>164</sup> In the 1870s, the Liberal candidates, Massey and Heathcoat-Amory, headquartered themselves in the same building and Walrond became sponsored by a local branch of the newly formed Conservative Working Men's Association.<sup>165</sup> These changes in political culture in turn affected the language of political debate. From the general election of 1874, local debates took place along tightened party lines and increasingly came to resemble a national conversation. No candidate, newspaper or letter-writer in Tiverton referred to Palmerston that year, and it is surely no coincidence that he vanished from the discourse just as Gladstone and Disraeli arrived in force. This process intensified in the general election of 1880, when Gladstone toured Britain by special train and gave speeches to specially assembled crowds of voters and journalists. This new politics was manifest in Tiverton, where Sir Stafford Northcote, Disraeli's chancellor of the exchequer, spoke in support of Walrond and drew his audience's attention to the change that had taken place: 'One man is answering another from one end of the country to the other. A speech is made in Scotland, and it is answered in Devon. It is taken up in Lancashire and again followed up in the Metropolis.'<sup>166</sup> Speaking from the balcony of the Palmerston Hotel, Sir Stafford did his best to counter this Gladstonian tour de force by appealing directly to

The people of Tiverton, whose names are inseparably bound up with that of the name of the great Lord Palmerston ... the spirit which has animated the Government has been much more nearly akin to that of that great statesman than it has been to that of the Liberals of the present day.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>161</sup>John Sharland's *Recollections of Lord Palmerston* and F. J. Snell's *Palmerston's Borough*; *Crediton Gazette*, 27 Jul. 1895, 1; *Tiverton Gazette*, 4 Sept. 1900, 3.

<sup>162</sup>*Tiverton Gazette*, 16 Oct. 1900, 5.

<sup>163</sup>See H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (1959), xvi; Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, 290; Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 336; Miller, *Politics Personified*, 200.

<sup>164</sup>*Western Times*, 4 Apr. 1857, 9.

<sup>165</sup>*Western Daily Mercury*, 28 Jan. 1874, 3; Sampson, *Tiverton*, 257.

<sup>166</sup>*Exeter Gazette*, 2 Apr. 1880, 2.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*

It was to no avail. No editorial, writer or candidate took up the subject of Palmerston. Political success in Palmerston's borough no longer required such elaborate genuflections before the altar of his fame.

## Conclusion

Lord Palmerston emerges from Victorian history as a complex and fascinating figure, and his biographers have done much to convey his charming nature and the reason why he was such a central figure in politics. Palmerston's personality – the Foreign Office *beau sabreur* – both congruous and incongruous with the politician – the skilful Whig operator – did much to drive the political dynamics of mid nineteenth-century Britain. Yet while it is easy enough to reconstitute Palmerston's doctrine and *modus operandi*, it is harder to gauge how his constituents responded. Harder still is determining whether the Tivertonians felt duty-bound to engage with the nuances of their celebrity MP's policies or were simply drawn to the cavalier image that Palmerston crafted for himself. The problem is as ironic as it is inconvenient: the more Palmerston used Tiverton to advance his career, the more his celebrity status obscured the voices of voters and non-voters alike, a problem compounded by the lack of contested elections. This tension has led his biographers either to adopt a rose-tinted view of Tiverton politics or to approach his local following with a more sceptical eye. In examining the relationship between Palmerston and Tiverton, this article has therefore sought to fill a notable gap in Palmerston studies, and also to relate popular politics to the emerging historiographical subfields of celebrity and memory.

Between 1835 and 1865, Palmerston used Tiverton as a platform from which to project himself to a national audience. In the process, he became a source of civic pride and a pillar of the borough's identity. Contrary to most assumptions, the Tivertonians took a great deal of interest in their celebrity MP, and Palmerston's appeal reflected the presence of a recognisable celebrity culture in mid-Victorian Britain. Morgan cautioned against using 'celebrity' in relation to a society 'where birth still mattered far more than achievement, and the path to social advancement from outside the elite was still largely dependent on aristocratic patronage'.<sup>168</sup> Even so, historians of Palmerston and electoral politics clearly have much to gain from celebrity studies, for Palmerston succeeded in leveraging elite status to cultivate mass appeal, translating aristocratic standing into political capital. At around the same time that elections in Tiverton ceased to be contested, Palmerston's celebrity status became an established fact in the borough. It is idle to speculate how votes might have been distributed had there been more candidates in the field, or more Tivertonians been able to vote. It is altogether more instructive that, although Harney won the show of hands in 1847, a Tory was elected alongside Palmerston in 1865 and Rowcliffe was never deterred from his 'jousts', Palmerston held the field against all comers. The fact that he saw all of this off speaks volumes for his fame.

That fame was clearly of use to Tiverton, both during Palmerston's lifetime and after his death. Miller argued that, before the advent of mass parties in the 1880s, the picture of contemporary figures was not fixed by national organisations, 'but [was]

<sup>168</sup>Morgan, 'Celebrity', 105.

dynamic, their image changing over time and presented in different ways through different media', largely in response to local demand.<sup>169</sup> This was undoubtedly the case with Tiverton. Palmerston invested a great degree of time and resources in the borough, using the press to speak through his constituents to the country at large. But his patronage notwithstanding, Palmerston was less interested in the Tivertonians themselves; there is nothing to suggest that the sentiment he expressed to his brother in 1835 about the delights of a 'quiet borough' changed over the next thirty years. Palmerston's fame was politicised – and his memory contested – in Tiverton because it was within the interests of local factions to do so. Just as Palmerston used Tiverton, so Tiverton used Palmerston.

After Palmerston's death, his celebrity status became intertwined with the politics of memory. Heathcoat did far more for Tiverton than Palmerston, of whom – aside from the Palmerston Hotel – there was remarkably little physical commemoration. But even so, Tiverton invested a great deal of political capital in the posthumous veneration of Palmerston. His fame provided a stock of common allusions that were used to reinforce competing visions of local and national identity. It consequently became a bitterly contested political space, even after the introduction of the secret ballot. Both sides constructed their own version of Palmerston from fragments of his memory, which they tried to impose on the borough. As the *Exeter Gazette* noted in 1872, Palmerston's personality offered much; its appeal was large enough to be of use in elections and broad enough that different factions could claim it for their own. They were particularly inventive in doing so and grew bolder as time went by. In 1866, both sides were tentative about critically evaluating Palmerston. The Liberals accused Sir John Hay of calling Palmerston a Conservative, but Hay never actually did so; his Tiverton campaign appropriated Palmerston's patriotism but it avoided specifics. In 1868, the Conservatives quoted directly from Palmerston's speeches; in 1872, the Liberals invented them, and the *Exeter Gazette* openly declared Palmerston a Tory. Candidates, editorials and letter-writers all took part in the debate, which included almost every form of media available in a nineteenth-century election: written and verbal addresses, newspaper editorials and correspondence columns, handbills and the built environment of Tiverton itself. Cobden liked to complain that Palmerston used the press to create an 'artificial public opinion' in support of himself.<sup>170</sup> In Tiverton, however, that support was about as genuine as it possibly could be. This in turn attests to the potential of recent work on the physical commemoration of MPs by their constituents, and the role of family in posthumous memorialisation. What this article shows is that memorialisation did not begin and end in places where there were statues; it could have a linguistic component too, and the politics of place could permit the veneration of Victorian statesmen independently of external actors. Historians may still conclude, as Morgan did, that the true extent of Palmerston's popularity will continue to be disputed. One hopes, however, that they will no longer have to dispute the true extent of his popularity in Tiverton.

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<sup>169</sup>Miller, *Politics Personified*, 12.

<sup>170</sup>Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography*, 404.

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