

# WILLIAM EW A BICENTENA

From December 2009 to March 2010, the University of Nottingham held an exhibition – ‘W. E. Gladstone: The “Grand Old Man” in Nottinghamshire’ – to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of the great nineteenth-century Liberal politician and statesman. The exhibition had two major objectives: first, to illustrate some of the larger themes of Gladstone’s life (in particular, his transformation from Macaulay’s ‘stern, unbending Tory’ of the 1830s to the ‘People’s William’ of the 1850s and 1860s, feted and adored through – amongst other things – a remarkably modern-looking exploitation of his public image); second, to highlight the hitherto unexplored connections between Gladstone and Nottinghamshire. Here we reprint two of the lectures given at the time; by **Richard A. Gaunt** and **Chris Wrigley**.



**A**T FIRST GLANCE, the second objective might seem an incongruous undertaking. Gladstone was, after all, the Lancashire-raised and Oxford-educated son of a wealthy Scottish merchant; his wife – Catherine Glynne (1812–1900) – was a member of a Welsh gentry family which was raised to a hereditary baronetcy; Gladstone’s

constituencies ranged from Newark in Nottinghamshire (1832–46) through the University of Oxford (1847–65), South Lancashire (1865–8) and Greenwich (1868–80) to Edinburgh Midlothian (1880–94). Gladstone himself spent most of his active political life in the heart of Westminster, first as a Conservative MP (1832–46), later as a Liberal

# WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

(1859–94). Ascribing to Gladstone a particular local attachment was problematic in his lifetime: as one contemporary observed, in 1865, Gladstone was ‘Oxford on the surface, but Liverpool underneath’. Yet there are good reasons for remembering the strong and continuing connections which Gladstone forged with Nottinghamshire throughout his life: connections which, in many ways, mirrored the political journey which he took from Conservative to Liberal over the course of his remarkable life.

The exhibition was supported by a series of lectures, from which the following two articles derive. Whilst the first concentrates upon Gladstone’s connection with Newark, his first parliamentary constituency, in the unashamedly Tory period of his life, the seeds of his future Liberalism emerge as the crucial reason for his departure from the constituency in 1846. Gladstone’s continuing connections with the county – the result of social and family ties to the Dukes of Newcastle-under-Lyne – are explored in the remainder of the article. The second article considers how it was that Gladstone, the opponent of parliamentary reform in 1831–2, emerged as the ‘People’s William’ of popular acclamation during his period as Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer (and then prime minister) after 1852, prepared to concede ever more in the way of reform. Together, the articles demonstrate that, even after two hundred years, what Lord Jenkins memorably described as the ‘galumfariou’ nature of Gladstone’s mind, continues to provide rich pickings for historians and political biographers.<sup>1</sup>

## From Conservative to Liberal: Gladstone as MP for Newark (1832–46)

Although there are many biographies and monographs studying Gladstone’s role in national political life, as the man who became Liberal prime minister four times between 1868 and 1894, Nottinghamshire was in many respects the cradle of his parliamentary career. As Gladstone commented in 1882, on the golden jubilee of his first election to parliament as Conservative MP for Newark, the county had provided him with the ‘first link of connection with political life’.<sup>2</sup>

It was the ‘High-Flyer coach’ from London to York which brought Gladstone to Newark, on Monday 24 September 1832, on what proved to be the first of his many visits to the county. The coach’s title – a reference to the great distance it covered at relative speed – was appropriate, given that Gladstone was already proving to be something of a ‘high flyer’ himself. At the time of his first appearance in the county, Gladstone was twenty-two years of age. He had been expensively schooled at Eton and Christ Church College, Oxford, where he attracted attention as a serious moralist and notable debater. Gladstone graduated from the university with a prized double-first-class degree in Classics and Mathematics. His father, John Gladstones, had silently dropped the final ‘s’ from the family name during his steady rise to social and political eminence amongst the Liverpool merchant elite. It was in Liverpool (at 62 Rodney Street) that William Ewart, his fifth and final son, was born on 29 December 1809. John Gladstone proved to

be a pivotal influence determining his son’s early career and a principal reason for his association with Nottinghamshire.

Two things pre-occupied the mind of the High-Flyer’s eminent young passenger as he arrived at Newark: one was the ‘painful sacrifice’ he had made, in travelling on the sabbath from Torquay to Newark for the purposes of electioneering. The second was the reception he was likely to receive upon arrival:

I had heard much of the extreme violence of [the opposing] party in Newark and on seeing a man waiting, evidently on the lookout for me, at the hotel gateway [of the Clinton Arms], I was in no way inclined to suppose him a friend but thought ... that he might be a spy stationed there for any purpose whether of violence or of fraud. He addressed and shook me cordially by the hand, proving to be the landlord of *our* hotel, Mr Lawton, and assuring me that the three days’ canvass which had already been completed [for my candidacy as the town’s MP] were of the most successful character.

With that warmer than anticipated reception at Newark, at the hotel which still bears the name of Newark’s most prominent political patron (Clinton being the family name of the Dukes of Newcastle), Gladstone commenced on all ‘the noise, the animation, and the aims, of a contested election’. Late in life, Gladstone recalled that he looked back on this as ‘the most exciting period of my life. I never worked harder or slept so badly, that is to

William Ewart  
Gladstone (1809–  
98) in 1833

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say so little'. The Clinton Arms provided both the headquarters for Gladstone's parliamentary campaign and the venue from which he later addressed the crowds as its victorious MP.<sup>3</sup> [Figure 1]

The Newark whose streets Gladstone traversed in the autumn of 1832 was a constituency which had come to the forefront of national attention during the preceding two years during the battle to achieve the passage of the Parliamentary Reform Act (the 'Great Reform Act'). As a constituency, Newark was relatively unusual in combining wholesale aristocratic influence with a remarkably wide franchise. Before the Reform Act, Newark returned two MPs under a franchise which gave votes to those who paid their annual household and poor rates (known as 'scot and lot'). This made the constituency a remarkably large one of nearly 1600 electors. The Reform Act abolished the scot and lot franchise, whilst allowing existing voters to retain it for their lifetime. The vote was now vested in owners and occupiers of property valued at £10 per year. This actually served to decrease Newark's mid-nineteenth-century electorate, before the effects of economic growth, inflation and further reform acts (notably those of 1867 and 1884) expanded the franchise from one vested in property owners to one enjoyed universally by men (and, eventually, women) alike. After 1885, Newark became a single-member constituency: a status it has continued to enjoy ever since.<sup>4</sup>

Gladstone was introduced to political life through the recommendation of the Earl of Lincoln, the eldest son and heir of the 4th Duke of Newcastle. This was the foundation of Gladstone's subsequent relationship with the duke himself. Newcastle relied almost entirely upon the high praise of Lincoln, who was Gladstone's contemporary at Eton and Oxford. Through a mixture of personal observation and an appeal to his father's vanity, Lincoln assured Newcastle that Gladstone would prove an asset to 'a most *unornamented* House, and an honor to the patron who shall introduce him to public life'.<sup>5</sup> At a time of almost universal despondency amongst Conservatives about the possible impact of the Reform Act, this was

a potential crumb of comfort. Nor could Newcastle have been in any doubt of Gladstone's position with reference to the Reform Act for he had denounced it roundly in the debating rooms of Oxford, having memorably stated that there was 'something of anti-Christ' about it. Lincoln's unimpeachable credentials as Gladstone's referee made Newcastle's choice of him certain, when he was invited, in the accepted language of the day, to 'recommend' a candidate to the Newark Conservatives, in advance of the 1832 general election. As Newcastle commented in his diary, Gladstone was 'a friend of Lincoln's and a very talented & highly principled young man, as he tells me, for I do not know him'.<sup>6</sup> Newcastle approached John Gladstone, who responded with qualified approval and an offer to share the costs of the election, which were estimated to be no more than £1000.

Whilst fully aware of the opportunity being held out to his son, John Gladstone knew that William was seriously torn between a career in politics, the church or the law. However, the matter was to all intents and purposes settled, even before Gladstone himself was approached. With the whole-hearted support of his family, Gladstone accepted the offer of Newcastle's electoral support and 'recommendation' at Newark. The terms upon which he did so were significant: 'if it should hereafter at any time appear, that any personal or political predilections which I entertain are such as to impair that general concordance, I am fully aware your Grace will find ... an adequate reason, why ... the [offer], now made upon a different supposition, should at once be withdrawn'.<sup>7</sup>

Newcastle's reputation as an electioneer and 'borough-monger', who enjoyed the majority of political influence in Newark because of the amount of property he possessed, both as owner and landlord, meant his name was public currency during the highly charged campaign for parliamentary reform in the period 1830–32. Gladstone later commented on the difficulty of saying anything in justification of Newcastle, during his election campaign, for fear of being accused of 'the most extreme tyrannical feeling'; although (to his credit) this did not prevent him from doing

Right, from top:  
Figure 1: The Clinton Arms, Newark, Gladstone's headquarters in 1832  
Figure 2: Gladstone's calling card in the 1832 election  
Figure 3: Ticket for supper with Gladstone, 1 November 1832

so. To Newcastle, it was a perfectly sensible proposition to find a promising young talent with similar political views to represent his interests in the borough where he enjoyed the greatest level of personal interest as a property owner.

Newcastle's choice was intimately related to his position in Newark. From the time of the infamous Newark by-election of 1829 – when Newcastle had evicted those of his tenants who would not vote for his chosen candidate, Michael Thomas Sadler – until Gladstone's election in December 1832, his influence was under almost continual assault. Newcastle's assertion of the right to 'do what I will with my own' in the borough attracted national attention and drew a local response. In 1830, an attempt was made to revoke Newcastle's lease of the 960-acre Crown Estates in the vicinity of the town. Newark kicked against the duke's electoral influence in the general election of May 1831 by rejecting his preferred candidate, Sir Roger Gresley, and returning in his place the radical lawyer Thomas Wilde. Wilde had first appeared as an 'Independent' candidate in the 1829 by-election and proceeded to contest every Newark election thereafter up to 1841; he was later raised to the peerage as the Liberal Lord Chancellor Baron Truro. Newcastle's electoral reverse in 1831 proved to be the final straw: 'I shall not try Newark again upon speculation or to spend money – if they solicit me, I will send somebody but I will be guaranteed against expense – in the mean time I shall raise my rents to the double and see how they like that'.<sup>8</sup>

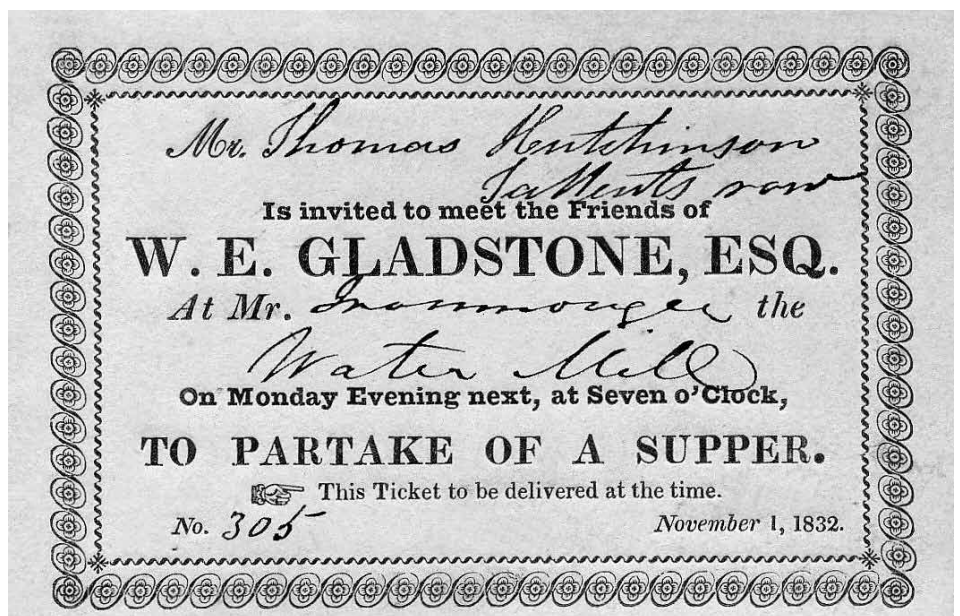
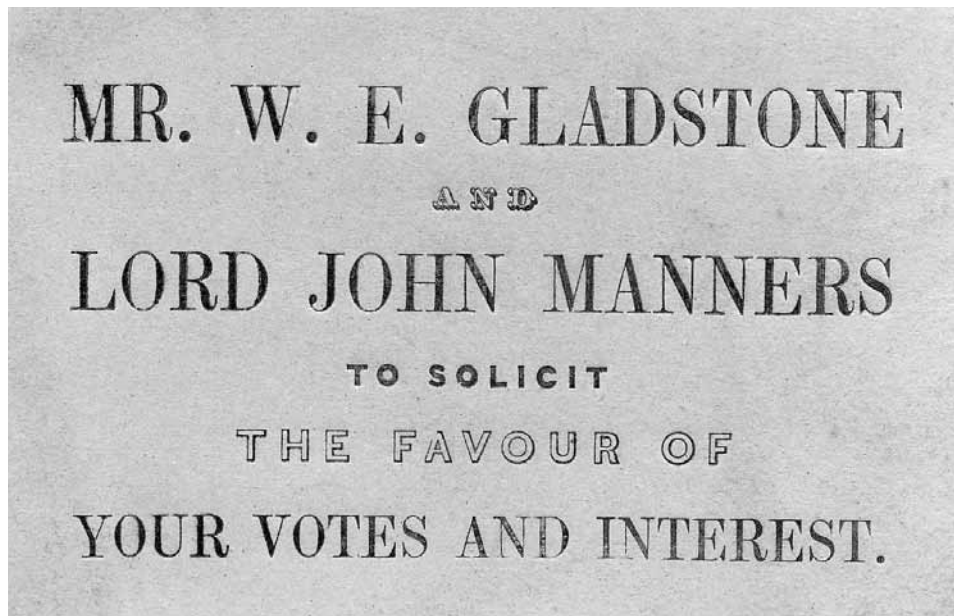
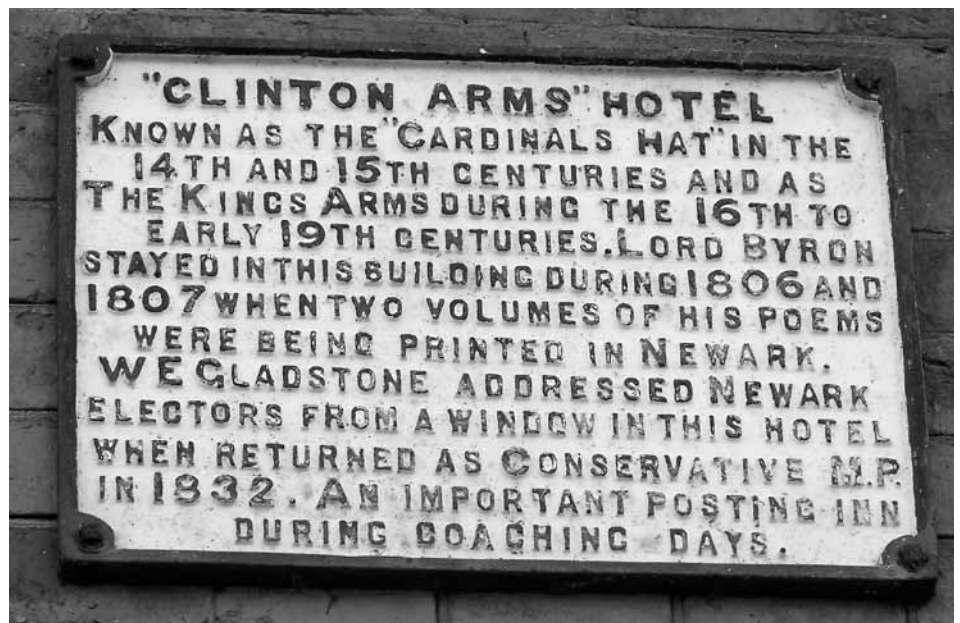
Punitive tactics of this sort were Newcastle's means of whipping the people of Newark back into obedience to him and ones which raised an understandable degree of public criticism. There was no secret ballot until Gladstone introduced it, as Liberal prime minister, in 1872, which meant that polling was held in public; the votes of every legitimate elector were recorded and published in poll books, thereby providing the duke, his agents and their opponents, with excellent material from which to identify supporters and expose malcontents. Surviving maps of the period, used in the distribution of coal from the duke to his tenants, show that those

designated to receive this boon had proved electorally obedient. The various political parties in Newark each had their own electoral colour: red was the Tory or Conservative colour, blue represented the independents or Whig-Liberals and yellow was used for the moderate or Liberal Tories.<sup>9</sup>

Gladstone was, at this period, a keen Tory; he later called his Newark election address 'that of a warm and loyal Tory who was quite unaware that it contained in it the seeds of change to come'. Consequently, he was 'in no degree ashamed of votes given through attachment to a landlord'. Rather, he saw it as:

... every way natural and proper, that [tenants] should look to those from whom [they have] received kindness [for] their recommendation ... the relation therefore between [the Duke of Newcastle] and those who hold [his tenancies] is one ... of favour on his part, of gratitude on theirs.

Whilst the election campaign was reported regularly to Newcastle, day-to-day management rested with Gladstone's local election committee. However, Newcastle was advised by Lord Lincoln to 'keep an eye upon our friends at Newark – Gladstone is they think raw'.<sup>10</sup> These 'friends' largely consisted of Newark's Conservative establishment from amongst its leading professional, business and retail families. Pre-eminent amongst them, at this time, were Edward Smith Godfrey and William Edward Tallents, both of whom were prominent in the administration of the town's affairs. Both acted, in succession, as Newcastle's land steward and political agent in the town. In the aftermath of the election defeat of May 1831, it was men like Godfrey and Tallents who spearheaded the Conservative revival in the town – a revival which Gladstone would both serve to accelerate and profit from. On Waterloo Day (18 June 1831), a Red Club was established, taking its name from Newcastle's electoral colour. Ultimately, the club grew from the parent body to encompass some 650 members, convened in branch Red Clubs of fifty members each. Gladstone's election committee was formed from its ranks,



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headed by Godfrey as President of the Club.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Reform Act became law in June 1832, electioneering still had some way to go towards the standards of propriety expected in a modern representative democracy. It was still conducted very much in the manner in which William Hogarth had portrayed it in his famous series of mid-eighteenth-century election prints, in terms of its colour, violence and symbolism. Campaigning was extremely sociable in nature, ranging from polite teas and election suppers to convivial and drink-fuelled gatherings at clubs, public houses and in the streets. Teas and suppers were important occasions used by Gladstone's campaign team to gather support for his candidacy. As 'ticket only' affairs, they expressed favour towards those who were invited to attend. 'Calling cards' were an important means of soliciting 'the favour of votes and interest' at election time, although they were not always well received. [Figures 2–3] 'One saucy body shut her door and rowed us from an upper window,' Gladstone recorded, 'another tore my card and flung the pieces at my feet – a third on hearing "Well Ma'am, shall we have a vote here?" – "I wouldn't give you one to save your life if I'd a hundred".' Meanwhile, Gladstone was swept up in an almost nightly parade of sociability amongst the branch Red Clubs of Newark. Amongst the many survivals of electioneering activity in Newark, during this period, are songs especially composed for the occasion:

Oh the Newark Red Club is a  
glorious thing;  
For freely, when there, we can  
chat, laugh and sing;  
Without any fear of the slightest  
commotion  
While turning our views to  
[young] Gladstone's promotion ...  
Sing Gladstone for ever hurrah  
Reds!  
Gladstone for ever hurrah Reds!  
Gladstone for ever hurrah Reds!  
For he is the Man of our choice!<sup>12</sup>

A particularly sensitive election issue, insofar as Gladstone was concerned, was the emancipation of West Indian slaves. Britain had finally abolished the slave trade in

1807, after a hard fought campaign led by William Wilberforce. But the condition of slavery continued to exist in the British Empire until 1833. Public interest made the question a key issue in the general election of 1832. John Gladstone had extensive property interests in the West Indies and had publicly defended slavery as recently as 1830. Election handbills were issued in which charges were made against Gladstone because of these views. Gladstone responded with a handbill of his own in which he based his opposition to the immediate emancipation of the slaves upon passages in the Bible. Gladstone argued that slaves could not be given their freedom immediately but first had to prove their fitness to use that freedom responsibly. He supported schemes of education and apprenticeship in order to prepare slaves for a future state of independence. He also suggested that the living conditions of factory workers in England and the Irish poor were as deserving of attention as the plantation slaves in the West Indies.<sup>13</sup> Gladstone was closely questioned on the issue at the election, especially by members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society who were keen supporters of abolition. Gladstone respected their opposition as being 'moderate and conscientious ... they acted as men who had a duty to fulfil, and knew it, and who discharged it'. Gladstone's maiden speech in the House of Commons was delivered during the debates on the abolition bill in 1833 and, the following year, after reports of riots in the West Indies reached England, Gladstone remarked that it was a natural consequence of the expectations which the Whig government had raised by their abolition bill, when what continued to exist in the West Indies was a form of 'modified slavery'.<sup>14</sup> There is little doubt of the moral anguish which the issue caused Gladstone as it was intimately bound up with the financial fortunes of his family. It is tempting to speculate that the large amount of money which Gladstone subsequently spent (from the 1840s to 1880s) in attempting to 'rescue' prostitutes derived from the products of John Gladstone's West Indian operations.

However, as a candidate, Gladstone repaid Newcastle's faith (and

that of the Red Club), by unstinting campaigning in the 1832 election contest. This went a substantial way to returning him at the head of the poll, with 887 votes to his opponents 798 and 726, at the election itself. Elections frequently ended with the successful candidate being 'chaired', or paraded around the constituency. Flags played an important part in the procession and several election flags, dating from Gladstone's time as MP for the town, are still extant; given the frequency with which they were used, waved and marched about the town, their survival is truly remarkable. In 1832, the competing flags of the contending parties were the subject of a tremendous 'flag fight', as one local resident noted:

The fight and row was tremendous, on having secured them, they called out 'down with the Yellow flags', the Reds immediately rushed on to attack the Yellows who had 4 Orange and 4 Yellow flags, after a severe contest we captured 3 Orange and 3 Yellow Flags, the other two escaped much damaged. The poles of the others were broken to pieces.<sup>15</sup>

However, the election had an unexpected and (for Gladstone) unfortunate aftermath. Election expenses and the problem of rewarding electors with free liquor were perennial problems in campaigns of the period and ones from which Newark was not immune. The election expenses for the 1832 contest came in at almost double the £1000 agreed by John Gladstone and the duke. Gladstone blamed his election committee for the excessive financial costs of his return, believing they had allowed the excessive distribution of free ale to supporters and ignored his express instructions against keeping public houses open. The dispute took eighteen months to settle and caused serious difficulties between Gladstone and his supporters in the town. Gladstone, the young moralist, feared that the committee would repeat the tactic of keeping open house, in future election contests, if he did not stand his ground and refuse to settle the extra election bills. The tone of frustration was revealed by a resolution which Gladstone's

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committee passed in July 1833 in which they expressed their 'extreme dissatisfaction' with Gladstone's position and observed that 'such a state of affairs is calculated most seriously to injure the Interest by which Mr Gladstone has been returned to parliament as well as his own individual Character with his Constituents'.<sup>16</sup>

The election accounts were ultimately revised and settled but the issue cast an early – and decisive – pall over the formation of good relations between Gladstone and his chief political supporters in Newark. For many of them, customary electioneering tactics of the liquid variety were a given, and any disruption of them entailed the fracturing of a careful network of local political and social relationships. The Newark Reds felt themselves as much the guardians of a cherished principle as Gladstone; one, moreover, founded on an intimate knowledge of the constituency and long experience of its character. When Gladstone continued to press his claims for the election committee to make specific pledges against treating, in advance of the 1835 general election, Newcastle finally intervened decisively to assuage both sides and offered to put £500 towards the costs of any future contest. This intervention was decisive enough for Gladstone to enter that election – at which he was returned unopposed – with his committee behind him. Nevertheless, Gladstone remained doubtful of putting his reliance in the 'unpledged sincerity and honesty' of his committee and was relieved that it was not tested by an election contest. In retrospect, the commemoration of Gladstone's name in more than one public house in Nottinghamshire has more than a touch of irony about it.<sup>17</sup>

Newcastle's support for Gladstone in his dispute with the committee undoubtedly strengthened Gladstone's respect for the duke; a respect which influenced his actions in 1846 when political circumstances changed, policies divided them and their roles were reversed with regard to the Election Committee. This dispute arose from Gladstone's evolving political Liberalism. Newcastle's growing irritation was recorded in his diary, where he observed that his former protégé was:

A man of extraordinary powers of speech, intellect and research – yet it always appeared to me to be a gross impropriety to exalt and place him in the Cabinet – for however clever he had no experience and consequently was made the tool and puppet of the wily Peel.<sup>18</sup>

It was Sir Robert Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws which delivered the final blow to the relationship between Gladstone and Newcastle; the same event marked the end of the strict Conservatism which had hallmarked Gladstone's youth. The price of corn was a key issue in nineteenth-century Britain because it had a direct impact on the price of bread. At times of economic hardship, crowds would take to the streets in support of lower prices. In 1815, the British government introduced a Corn Law to protect domestic farmers from the pressure of international competition by regulating prices in the face of imports. Landowners and farmers supported this 'protectionist' policy but it was deeply unpopular with the wider population. The contrasting images of a large and small loaf came to symbolise the battle between those who defended economic protection, on the one hand, and supporters of 'free trade' on the other. Gladstone was a supporter of the Corn Law, and was pledged to its maintenance at the general election of 1841. However, the Irish Potato Famine of November 1845 forced him and others to reconsider their views.<sup>19</sup> He supported Sir Robert Peel when he decided to repeal the Corn Law in 1846 and joined the Cabinet as Colonial Secretary. At this period, the acceptance of ministerial office necessitated that an MP put himself forward for re-election. Gladstone wrote to Newcastle regretting their differences but the duke managed to leave some ambiguity in his reply. Gladstone conjectured that the duke would refrain from intervening and allow him to try his luck with the Newark electorate. After becoming aware of this misunderstanding, Newcastle responded accordingly and mobilised every possible source of support in order to defeat him. The duke secured a notable ally in the shape of the Duke of Portland. Portland's son, Lord George

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Bentinck, together with his close friend and colleague Benjamin Disraeli, became the leading opponents of repeal in the House of Commons. The mid-nineteenth-century Conservative and Liberal parties emerged from the political schism of 1846.<sup>20</sup>

However, since the resolution of his difficulties with the election committee over the disputed election expenses, Gladstone had built up a strong reservoir of personal loyalties at Newark. A very real possibility was now emerging of an alliance between Gladstone and his committee *against* the duke. The Newark Conservatives complained that they would not accept another candidate. A deputation was despatched to Clumber, in January 1846, with a resolution expressing their continuing support for Gladstone:

That it is the opinion of this Committee that advantage ought not to be taken of the circumstance of Mr Gladstone having accepted the office of Secretary of State for the Colonies to deprive him of his seat during the remainder of the present Parliament but that he be requested to offer himself again to the constituency and that the exertions of this Committee be used to secure his election.<sup>21</sup>

It was a remarkable reversal of the position over the election expenses twelve years before. Newcastle withdrew from this conversation in depressed spirits, thoroughly convinced that a candidate who was not of his way of thinking would be forced upon him. In his diary, he recorded with drama how he proceeded to open his post the same day and found that, through the intervention of the Protectionist party organisers in London, he had secured a more congenial candidate in the person of Mr John Stuart QC. The duke's relief was palpable: 'Gladstone's agent had been made over to Mr Stuart, the malcontents had been overruled, my standard again waved on the walls of Newark'. Godfrey Tallents, who had succeeded his father as the duke's political agent at Newark, was bold enough to express the hope that Gladstone might be returned for the constituency at the next general election.<sup>22</sup> That renewal was not to



Gladstone's friend and ally, the Fifth Duke of Newcastle (1811–64)

under their wing and helped to look after them whilst their father attended to his distressing personal affairs. This entrenched the already strong personal ties between them. Gladstone even undertook a quixotic mission to 'rescue' Lady Lincoln, which ended with him dressing up as a minstrel and rowing across Lake Como in Italy to spy upon the villa where she was staying. Gladstone's subsequent discovery that Lady Lincoln was expecting another man's child placed him in the invidious position of having to inform his friend. This was doubly distressing to Gladstone: he had helped provide the evidence for a legal divorce which his otherwise high moral standards shrank from – a fact which was thrown back at him when he later opposed the Divorce Act of 1857.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1850s, Gladstone and Lincoln (who succeeded as 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Newcastle in January 1851) were political colleagues in the Liberal–Conservative Cabinet (composed of 'Peelites' and Whigs) which fought the Crimean War against Russia. Newcastle, as Secretary of State for War, bore a large degree of public criticism for the political failures and military unpreparedness of the British forces. [Figure 4] The war, and the duke's domestic misfortunes, broke his health and led to his relatively early death, at the age of fifty-three, in 1864. Gladstone was appointed a trustee of the Newcastle estates and acted as guardian to the duke's children. This was a role he continued to take seriously and one which drew him back to Nottinghamshire time and again over the next twenty years. Mindful of the unhelpful light which an official biography might cast upon Newcastle's life and reputation, Gladstone subsequently counselled the duke's youngest son, Lord Edward Pelham-Clinton, against acceding to requests for a biography of his father – unless strict editorial conditions were imposed.<sup>25</sup> Gladstone also removed the most sensitive of the duke's personal papers (dealing with his divorce) from the family archive at Clumber, keeping them with his own voluminous correspondence at Hawarden Castle in Flintshire. Today, they continue to form a separate section of the Glynne–Gladstone family archive.<sup>26</sup>

be. For all their genuine concern at Newcastle's high-handed treatment of them, the Newark Conservatives were ultimately bound on the corn question in a way that Gladstone could never be once he had so personally committed himself to Peel's proposal and that question would not disappear overnight from the thoughts of an agricultural constituency. Though the committee continued to struggle with the resolution of its own conflicting loyalties to Newcastle, Lincoln and Gladstone, the duke continued to return his preferred choice of MP at Newark during the remaining five years of his life.

would probably never have become MP for Newark and, were it not for that friendship, his connections to Nottinghamshire might well have dissolved after his departure from the constituency in 1846. That they did not was largely owing to the fact that the two men were close personal and political friends. The gradual dissolution of Lincoln's marriage to Susan, daughter of the Duke of Hamilton, during the 1840s, was a blow which Gladstone found distressing to observe on personal grounds. As he told the Nottinghamshire Liberal MP (and future Speaker) John Evelyn Denison, in 1849:

Quite apart from my affection for Lincoln, it would be most deeply gratifying to me on account of the Duke of Newcastle whose many and steady kindnesses I never can forget, could any thing be done towards diminishing the weight of care and sorrow which presses upon and overhangs his family.<sup>23</sup>

As the marriage moved towards divorce, Gladstone and his wife Catherine took Lincoln's children

### A lasting friendship: Gladstone and the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Newcastle (1846–65)

Whilst Gladstone himself subsequently moved beyond Newark, both personally and politically, he did not escape the orbit of the Newcastle family. Indeed, he was well placed to witness the family's social and economic decline over the course of the next two generations. Had it not been for his friendship with Lord Lincoln, Gladstone

### 'The Grand Old Man' in Nottinghamshire (1865–98)

The 5th Duke's death opened a new chapter in Gladstone's relations with Nottinghamshire. The Dukes of Newcastle had owned Nottingham Castle and Park since the 1660s. By the early nineteenth century, the castle was no longer a principal family residence and its future was uncertain. The growing population of the town made it inevitable that the family would consider allowing use of the land for building purposes. Residential development of the park, initially around the margins of the estate, was halted after Nottingham Castle was set on fire, during the Reform Bill Riots of October 1831, in protest at the House of Lords' rejection of the bill. Subsequent poor relations between the 4th Duke and the Nottingham authorities limited further building, though plans were resumed under the 5th Duke in 1851 and the Nottingham architect Thomas Chambers Hine was commissioned to transform the park into a high-quality residential area. As a trustee of the 5th Duke's estate, Gladstone was closely involved in superintending developments in the park after 1864. His signature

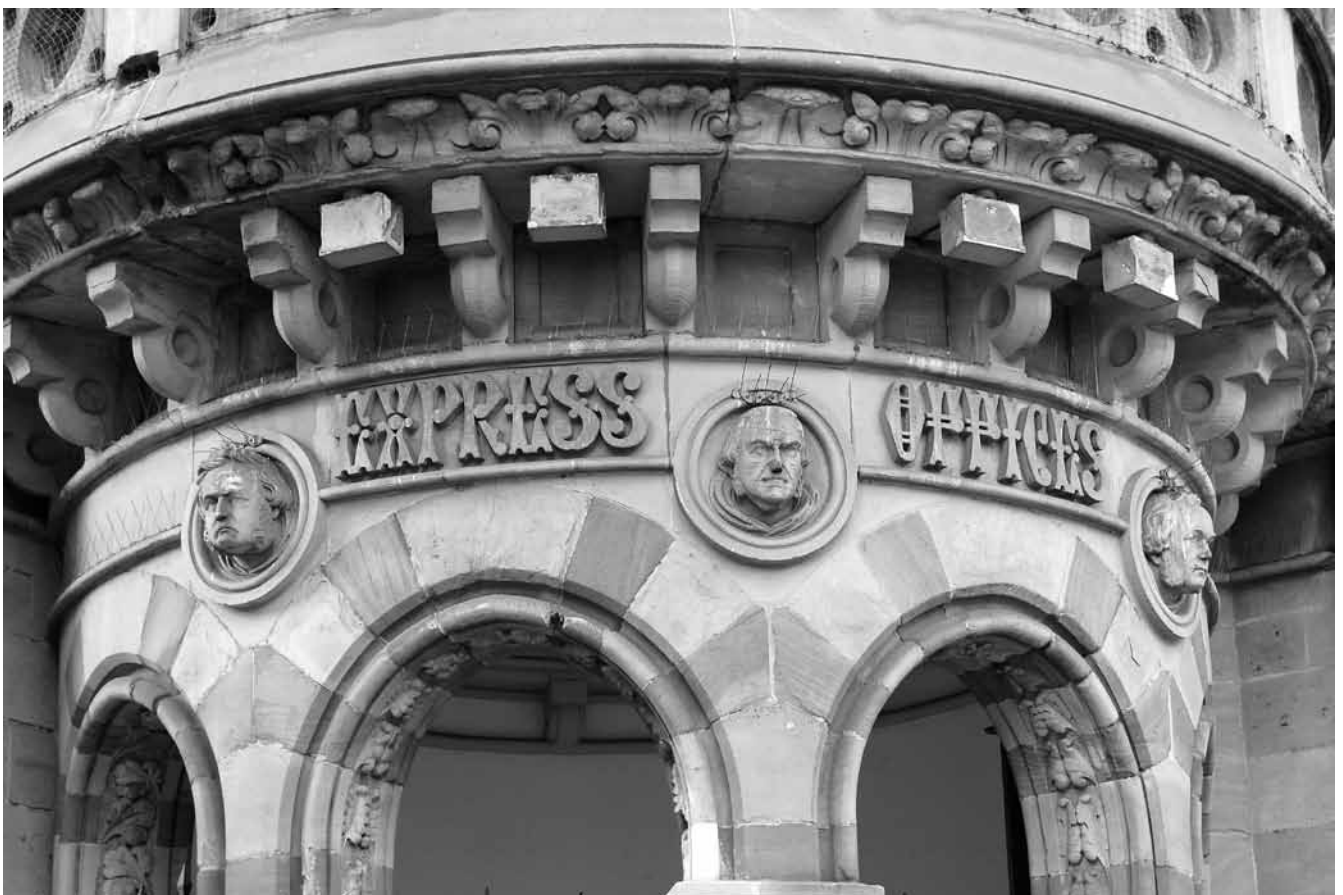
was required on all transactions regarding the lease, sale or development of property. Gladstone also oversaw the transition of Nottingham Castle from the burnt out shell left behind by the Reform Bill rioters into the country's first provincial museum of fine art, under the auspices of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in July 1878.<sup>27</sup> After a major fire at Clumber, in March 1879, Gladstone arranged for the temporary storage of items at the castle, conscious that the people of Nottingham were 'desirous to have more of the pictures and valuables for their well-regulated museum'.<sup>28</sup>

Gladstone's periodic visits to review developments at the castle and park became celebrity events which attracted newspaper comment. A notable example occurred on Tuesday 11 May 1875, when Gladstone cut down a large Siberian elm in Nottingham Park – an event which is still commemorated today by a plaque near the site. Gladstone noted that it was a 'bad axe but soft tree' and concluded operations within the hour, watched by an eager audience. By this time, Gladstone's abilities in wielding an axe (physically as well as politically) had become an

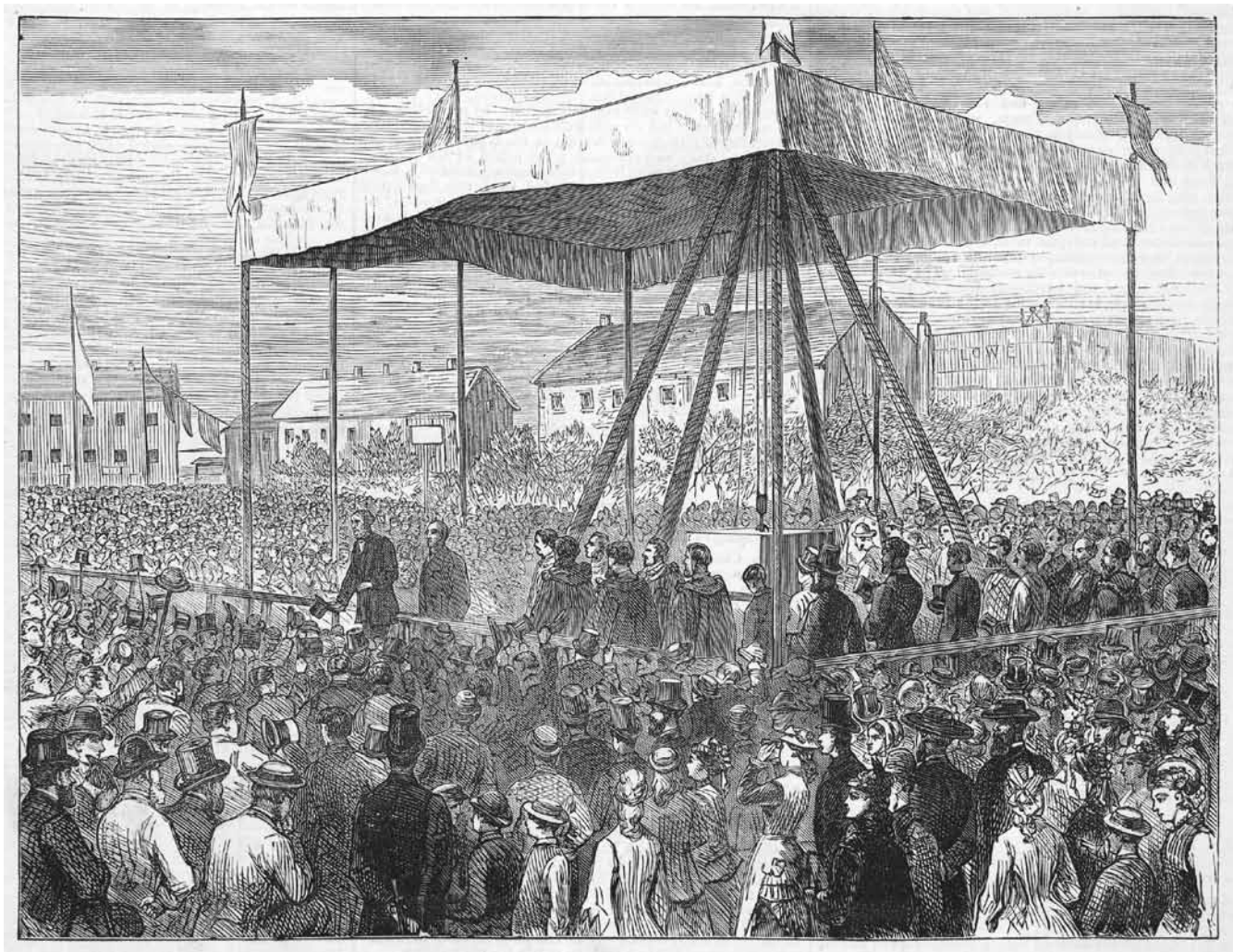
important ingredient in his evolving popular image.<sup>29</sup>

A rather different form of connection between Gladstone and Nottinghamshire showed a contrasting aspect of the Grand Old Man's personality. Thomas William Bush was a journeyman baker who was born at Nottingham and lived for many years at Canal Street in the town. Bush exhibited a strong interest in mathematics and astronomy from an early age and exhibited a thirteen-inch Newtonian telescope at the Workman's International Exhibition, held at the Agricultural Hall in Islington in July 1870. Gladstone, who was prime minister at the time, visited the exhibition with his wife, paying particular attention to the Bush telescope and remarking how impressed he was by the fact that its inventor was not a professional scientist. Bush's celebrity was reinforced when he was presented with an exhibition gold medal by Queen Victoria. In appreciation of Bush's achievements, Gladstone gave him a number of scientific instruments (bearing inscriptions to this effect), including a spectroscope used to observe the operation of the spectrum. Bush continued his

Figure 5: Offices of the *Nottingham Daily Express*, with faces of (from left) John Bright, William Ewart Gladstone and Richard Cobden







astronomical work, notably at Lord Forester's observatory at Willey Park, and subsequently became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.<sup>30</sup>

By the period in which Gladstone met Bush, he had become the leading Liberal politician in the country and was increasingly coming to be known by the sobriquets of 'the People's William' and, later, 'the Grand Old Man'. The origins of this process are explored in Chris Wrigley's article below. During the 1870s, when Gladstone served both as prime minister and as unofficial leader of the opposition, he maintained his schedule of visits to the county. He did so as a trustee of the Newcastle estate and as a close friend of local families such as the Denisons of Ossington. Gladstone's near-celebrity status in the country's affairs was increasingly reflected in local public commemorations. From this period, street names began to record the names of 'Ewart' and 'Gladstone' and babies were even christened in honour of

the statesman.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the widely retailed paraphernalia of cups, plates, jugs and bowls, bearing the images of Gladstone and his wife, vernacular architecture – such as the new offices of the *Nottingham Daily Express*, on Parliament Street, completed by Watson Fothergill [Figure 5] – incorporated Gladstone's image in to their exterior face alongside the heads of other Liberal heroes such as Cobden and Bright. Gladstone had, by now, completed the long political journey from ultra-Conservatism to high Liberalism and was celebrated as such by acceptance into the pantheon of contemporary Liberal heroes.

On 27 September 1877, Gladstone visited Nottingham to be present at the laying of the foundation stone of the new University College (the forerunner of the University of Nottingham), on Shakespeare Street [Figure 6]. This event gave rise to a major public pronouncement upon the value of higher education, which was

Figure 6: Laying the foundation stone of the new University College, Nottingham – Gladstone addressing the assembly

reported extensively in the press.<sup>32</sup> Gladstone's unrelenting schedule for the day is reflected in the fact that, as well as speaking 'to a great concourse' at the foundation ceremony, before attending the luncheon at two o'clock, he visited the castle (to check on progress with the museum) and later:

... went to the [Alexandra] Rink & addressed near 10000 for perhaps [an hour]. They were most patient & heard well. It was a hard day's work for the voice. We wound up with ½ [an] hour at the Theatre: *School for Scandal*, very well done [then] back to Bestwood [Lodge] for dinner at [nine].<sup>33</sup>

Similar frenetic activity, combining social and political objectives, was recorded well into the 1880s. In 1887, Gladstone visited a meeting of the National Liberal Federation at Nottingham and supported his wife in her role as President of the Women's Federation. Each return visit

to the county provided Gladstone with opportunities for recalling his earliest experiences as a young, aspiring and very Conservative politician and noting the contrast with his current situation. Rather than providing hostile material for charges of political inconsistency, the 'Gladstonian journey' became (literally and metaphorically) an important component in the forging of his political capital beyond Westminster.<sup>34</sup>

A renewal of Gladstone's formal political connections with the county was never to be, but a tantalising hint surfaced shortly before the 1874 general election that Gladstone seriously considered the offer of fighting Newark once more, this time as a Liberal candidate. Given the political influence which had helped to secure Gladstone's return to parliament in 1832, there is more than a little piquancy in the fact that, as the remaining trustee of the Newcastle estates and their property interests in the constituency, he was now responsible for controlling the deployment of the family's remaining electoral influence at Newark. In this capacity, Gladstone asked Godfrey Tallents 'to make provision ... for preventing any intervention of the agents of the Newcastle Estate in the coming Election in a sense adverse to the Liberal party'.<sup>35</sup> It is one of the stranger ironies of history that the man who first made his connection with Nottinghamshire through being returned as Conservative MP for Newark, with the assistance of the Newcastle family's electoral influence, was almost returned (with similar assistance) as a Liberal MP for the borough, some forty years later. This fact alone would have been sufficient to make the 4th Duke of Newcastle spin in his grave.

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1 Two exhibition films have been released on You Tube and the exhibition boards are available to download (free of charge) in PDF format. See <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/>

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- exhibitions/online/gladstone/wegladstone.aspx.
- 2 Nottinghamshire Archives (NA), uncatalogued Newark Museum Collection, D48.74, Gladstone to Godfrey Tallents, 13 December 1882.
  - 3 All quotations from Gladstone, unless otherwise stated, come from John Brooke and Mary Sorensen (eds.), *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone, Vol. 1: Autobiographica* (HMSO, 1971), pp. 39–40 and *Vol. 2: Autobiographical Memoranda, 1832–1845* (HMSO, 1972), pp. 3–20.
  - 4 For more detail on these issues, see Richard A. Gaunt, 'A Stern Unbending Tory and the Rising Young Hope: Gladstone, Newark and the Fourth Duke of Newcastle, 1832–1846' in Peter Francis (ed.), *The Gladstone Umbrella* (The Monad Press, 2001), pp. 14–34.
  - 5 University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections (UNMASC), Ne C 5700, Lincoln to Newcastle, 15 June 1832.
  - 6 Richard A. Gaunt (ed.), *Unhappy Reactionary: The Diaries of the Fourth Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne, 1822–1850* (Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, 2003), p. 94.
  - 7 UNMASC, Ne C 5381, Gladstone to Newcastle, 9 July 1832.
  - 8 Gaunt, *Unhappy Reactionary*, p. 80.
  - 9 See Richard A. Gaunt, 'The Fourth Duke of Newcastle, the "Mob" and Electoral Contests in Nottinghamshire, 1818–1832', *Midland History*, 33/2 (2008), pp. 196–217.
  - 10 UNMASC, Ne C 5576, Lincoln to Newcastle, 13 August 1832.
  - 11 Richard A. Gaunt (ed.), *Politics, Law and Society in Nottinghamshire. The Diaries of Godfrey Tallents of Newark, 1829–1839* (Nottingham: Nottinghamshire County Council, 2010), covers these events from the perspective of one involved participant.
  - 12 For a modern recording of the song, see the exhibition films referenced at n. 1.
  - 13 NA, DD/NM/2/1/74–75, Election Handbills, 4, 8 December 1832.
  - 14 UNMASC, Ne C 11774, Gladstone to Lincoln, 27 September 1834.
  - 15 Gaunt, *Godfrey Tallents*, p. 42.
  - 16 UNMASC, Ne C 5405/3, 15 July 1833.
  - 17 For these events, see R. A. Preston, 'W. E. Gladstone and his disputed election expenses at Newark, 1832–1834', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, LXXX (1976), pp. 74–80 and Gaunt, 'Stern Unbending Tory', pp. 20–21.
  - 18 Gaunt, *Unhappy Reactionary*, p. 136.
  - 19 For Gladstone's evolving views, see John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), p. 284.
  - 20 For these events, see J. B. Conacher, 'Mr Gladstone seeks a seat', *Report of the Canadian Historical Association* (1962) and Gaunt, 'Stern Unbending Tory', pp. 22–27.
  - 21 UNMASC, Ne C 7894/2, 5 January 1846.
  - 22 Gaunt, *Unhappy Reactionary*, p. 138; UNMASC, Ne C 7893, Godfrey Tallents to Newcastle, 9 January 1846.
  - 23 UNMASC, Os C 602, Gladstone to Denison, 12 August 1849.
  - 24 Anne Isba, *Gladstone and Women* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006), chapter 5; UNMASC, Ne C 11788/1–3, Gladstone to Lincoln, 28 September 1849.
  - 25 UNMASC, Ne C 13139, Gladstone to Edward Pelham-Clinton, 12 July 1887.
  - 26 The papers are accessed through Flintshire Record Office, which is situated next to Gladstone's Library, the residential library established in Hawarden as a national memorial to the statesman.
  - 27 Ken Brand, *The Park Estate Nottingham* (Nottingham Civic Society, 2009); UNMASC, MS 575/1; Ne D 556.
  - 28 UNMASC, Pw K 1756/1, Gladstone to the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Portland, 16 April 1879.
  - 29 H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 9: 1875–1880* (Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 35–6.
  - 30 UNMASC, Ux W, contains papers, correspondence and artefacts relating to Bush's career.
  - 31 For example, UNMASC, CU/R2/1, Membership Register for Castle Gate Congregational Church, Nottingham (1790–1912), entry for 'William Ewart Gladstone Dexter' (1904).
  - 32 *The Times*, 28 September 1877; *Illustrated London News*, 6 October 1877; *Nottingham Daily Journal*, 28 September 1877.
  - 33 Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 9*, p. 253. Also see UNMASC, Not 3.F19 NOT O/S X.
  - 34 H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 12: 1887–1891* (Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 71; *The Times*, 19, 20 October 1887.
  - 35 NA, DD TL 2/6/30–31, Gladstone to Godfrey Tallents, 25 January 1874.