

‘A man subject to vapours’: James Bertie, earl of Abingdon, and his brothers  
c.1670-1699\*

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In January 1684 in the speech given on the occasion of his election as recorder of the city of Oxford, Sir George Pudsey,<sup>1</sup> dedicated himself to the city's service, insisting that he would 'pray the aid of all the inns of court rather than you shall suffer.' But more than anything that *he* could do for them, Pudsey reminded the corporation of their peculiarly fortunate condition: 'Have you not', he asked,

opportunities enough to be happy? Does not the great and good earl of Abingdon offer his assistance, ready at all times upon his knees to beg his majesty's favour in your behalf? When he appears, make room for Oxford, cries the guards, the town is loyal grown... Why then don't we by his vast interest let in the beams of majesty upon us?<sup>2</sup>

Pudsey's hyperbole was not so very hyperbolic. At the time of his election, Oxford was emerging from a particularly troublesome period. Three years earlier the city had played host to the third Exclusion Parliament, had witnessed a notoriously damaging election for the city clerkship and been the venue for the trial of Stephen Colledge, which had resulted in Colledge's hanging, drawing and quartering. Oxfordshire in the Restoration period was sharply divided. During the Civil War the north of the county had been broadly parliamentarian, dominated by Viscount Saye and Sele at Broughton, the city of Oxford itself and other parts of the county largely royalist.<sup>3</sup> By

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\* Much of the material in this piece was researched in the course of preparing a biography of Abingdon for *The History of Parliament: the Lords 1660-1715* (forthcoming).

<sup>1</sup> Pudsey was a man of unimpeachable royalist credentials. The following year he was elected member for the city of Oxford in partnership with Henry Bertie.

<sup>2</sup> *The speech of Sir George Pudsey Knight at the time of his being sworn RECORDER of the City of Oxford, in the Council-Chamber of the same City, on Tuesday the Eight day of January, 1683/4 where they agreed to the Sealing the Instrument sent by his Majesty. [accessed from EEBO]*

<sup>3</sup> R. Eagles, 'Unnatural allies? The Oxfordshire elite from the exclusion crisis to the overthrow of James II', *Parliamentary History* xxvi. 347. For another assessment see *VCH Oxfordshire*, vol. i. 429-56, which emphasizes the complexity of the local loyalties. According to this, Saye and Sele's pro-Parliamentarian stronghold of Broughton was offset by the power of the Comptons of Compton

the 1670s the picture had become more complex. Families that had previously been royalist, like the Lovelaces of Water Eaton, had drifted into opposition while another local magnate, Henry Hyde, 2nd earl of Clarendon, charted a circuitous course from court to country and then back again. Oxford itself, with the traditional squabbles among colleges and between town and gown operated as a microcosm of the whole county, while the royal borough of Woodstock was closely fought over by various factions among them Lovelace, Sir Edward Henry Lee newly created earl of Lichfield and the Bertie family at the head of which was a younger son of the earl of Lindsey: James Bertie, Lord Norreys, ultimately earl of Abingdon, who succeeded to the estates and interest of his mother based on Rycote.

Norreys could hardly have come from a more staunchly royalist background. His grandfather, the earl of Lindsey, had been mortally wounded commanding at the head of his regiment at the battle of Edgehill; his father, the 2nd earl, had been one of a group of peers to offer themselves in the king's place after Charles I's conviction. Norreys's was a family with more than a touch of tragic romanticism about it. On his mother's side he was descended from the Norreys who had been Anne Boleyn's retainer, and who had gone to the block on a charge of adultery with the queen. It was from this family that he claimed the barony of Norreys to which he succeeded on the death of his mother in 1657 when aged just four. In the course of his career Norreys was to prove quite as stalwart a champion of royalism as his grandfather and father but without the unfortunate tendencies of his earlier forebear to lose his head in a crisis.

In establishing himself as a power in his own right, Norreys did not have an entirely easy road. He was the son of a second marriage and ahead of him were a number of half brothers, the eldest of whom, Robert Bertie, Lord Willoughby – heir to the Lindsey earldom – had on paper the greatest opportunities for advancement. Yet Norreys could claim an important distinction over his other half-siblings: he had lands and a peerage in his own right and was thus able to reposition himself in a new territory away from the Lindseys' traditional stamping ground of Lincolnshire. By the end of his life he could claim influence in significant parts of Berkshire and Wiltshire

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Wynyates, while Parliamentary sympathizers around Henley faced royalists at Greenland and Mapledurham.

as well as Oxfordshire.<sup>4</sup> Besides, being a part of a large and noticeably close-knit clan brought Norreys other advantages. His younger brothers joined him in establishing themselves as political brokers in Oxfordshire and helped to ensure that the Berties as a unit maintained control on significant areas of the county and (quite as importantly) on important local offices.

Another important contributing factor in Norreys' rise was his close friendship with his relative by marriage, Sir Thomas Osborne (later earl of Danby and ultimately duke of Leeds). Danby was a frequent guest at Rycote. He spent much of the summer of 1676 there from whence he wrote to his wife how he had:

become as errand a Nimrod as ever you knew me, and your brother Norreys and I so in love with one another that we are both unwilling to think of parting. And I do assure you I find him heartily to endeavour both the king's interest and mine amongst the gentlemen of this country.<sup>5</sup>

In September 1678 when Norreys was engaged in a quarrel with the poet earl of Rochester (a relative by marriage) it was Danby who composed the matter and prevented the two from engaging in a formal duel.<sup>6</sup> After Norreys's stalwart support for the court in the elections to the first Exclusion Parliament, it was Danby who promoted Norreys' cause for promotion in the peerage, first broaching the matter with the king from his cell in the Tower in the late summer of 1679.<sup>7</sup>

All this made Norreys and his kinsmen supremely well placed to benefit from the latter stages of the reign of Charles II when the Tory reaction set in. Prior to that he had struggled against the opposition (later Whig) principals in the areas in which he was influential. In February 1679 it was related that Norreys had been 'very unkindly and unmannerly used at Oxford' at the time of the elections for the first exclusion Parliament – that he had 'very much lost his credit' in the county and that even his

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<sup>4</sup> *HP Commons 1690-1715*, ii. 12, 14, 21, 467-9, 475-6, 482-3, 695.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Browning, *Thomas Osborne earl of Danby and duke of Leeds, 1632-1712*, 3 vols. (Glasgow 1944) ii. 38.

<sup>6</sup> *HMC 7th Rep.* 494.

<sup>7</sup> *HMC Buckinghamshire*, 415.

own neighbours and tenants were set to vote against his nominees.<sup>8</sup> Matters did not much improve once he had taken his seat in the new assembly. Norreys' lively efforts on behalf of Danby and the court hid (or rather didn't) the fact that he was strikingly unwell. He had previously suffered from 'the black jaundice' (apparently an antique description of Weil's disease) and his lack of well-being became so notorious that his political opponents were not above employing it to their own ends. One perhaps apocryphal story related how Norreys, acting as one of the tellers for a division on the 1679 habeas corpus bill being known to be 'subject to vapours' was taken advantage of by his opposite number, Lord Grey of Warke. Grey, for a jest, counted one fat member as ten but, realizing that Norreys had not noticed let the tally stand and thus helped his side to win the vote.<sup>9</sup>

#### 1681: The Oxford Parliament and the trial of Stephen Colledge

Such lapses of concentration might appear to have made Norreys a peculiarly unlikely choice as the administration's strong man in Oxfordshire and yet that is the role that he took upon himself over the next decade or so after his upset in the 1679 elections. Most particularly it was the events of 1681 that were to secure for him his reputation as an efficient man of business for the administration.

Having dissolved the Cavalier Parliament after 18 years of its existence, the king had found himself sorely disappointed in its two short-lived successors (those of 1679 and 1680). Neither had proved very conducive to performing his business: both had sought to foist on him measures for excluding his brother, James duke of York, from the succession to the throne – hence their popular names, the exclusion parliaments. In the early months of 1681 Charles proposed to try again. But this time, rather than summon Parliament to its usual home at Westminster he decided instead that it should sit (as it had once before during his reign on account of plague in London and on two other occasions earlier in the century) in the royalist bastion of Oxford, away from London and its unwelcome agitations. It therefore fell to Norreys and to John Fell, bishop of Oxford, to take command of the preparations for the assembly.

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<sup>8</sup> *HP Commons 1660-90*, i. 357.

<sup>9</sup> *A Short History of Parliament: England, Great Britain, The United Kingdom, Ireland and Scotland*, ed. Clyve Jones (Woodbridge 2009), 65; *Honour, Interest and Power: an illustrated history of the House of Lords, 1660-1715*, ed. R. Paley and P. Seaward (Woodbridge 2010), 238.

Norreys was eminently well qualified for the role. First, he was the local lord lieutenant and as such a significant political broker in the county. Second, he was half-brother to the hereditary lord great chamberlain – Lindsey – the household officer responsible for managing Parliament. Thus, while the bishop attempted to ensure that elections in the county passed off peacefully by negotiating a temporary truce between Lovelace and Norreys,<sup>10</sup> Norreys bustled about with preparations in the city itself. When the king arrived, Norreys met him on the borders of the county with a troop of horse and accompanied the royal party all the way into the city.<sup>11</sup> Besides his formal responsibilities, Norreys was also looked to by the still imprisoned Danby to ensure that his petition seeking his release on bail was presented to the House. When others proved unable to attend or overly-cautious about taking on the role it was Norreys who eventually assumed the burden of presenting Danby's petition.<sup>12</sup> And yet for all his efforts, Norreys was unable to secure a favourable outcome for his friend and kinsman. The Lords proved fairly evenly divided on what to do with the former treasurer and willingly concurred with the proposal made by Halifax (no friend of Danby's) that the matter be postponed for a few days.<sup>13</sup> The delays proved conveniently long enough to give the king time to lose faith in his latest Parliament and bring the session to a close after it had been in existence for just one week.<sup>14</sup>

The Oxford Parliament of 1681 was inglorious enough and Norreys's role sufficiently ineffective that one might be forgiven for thinking that he should have expected little return for his management there. Within a matter of weeks, though, he was once more in the throes of managing a controversial political event when the trial of Stephen Colledge was referred to the Oxford assizes after a jury in Middlesex had unhelpfully refused to proceed with a trial there.<sup>15</sup> By referring the re-trial into the hands of Norreys the court made plain both its confidence of his abilities to manage the affair and how determined the administration was to ensure Colledge's condemnation.

Stephen Colledge was a well-known figure. Dubbed 'the Protestant Joiner', he had managed to surmount his relatively humble origins to become accepted in

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<sup>10</sup> Bod. Lib. MS Top. Oxon. c. 325, f. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 70.

<sup>12</sup> BL, Sloane 3065, ff. 32-3; *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice* [hereafter Morrice, *Entering Book*], vol. ii. The reign of Charles II, ed. John Spurr, (gen. ed. Mark Goldie, Woodbridge 2007), 273.

<sup>13</sup> Bod. Lib. MS Carte 79, f. 164.

<sup>14</sup> Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 72.

<sup>15</sup> Morrice, *Entering Book*, ii. 282, 284.

(opposition) elite circles as a pamphleteer and political agitator of some skill. His broadsides had attacked the court propagandist Roger L'Estrange, as well as the king himself and other members of the court. He was a prominent exponent of the belief in a Popish plot and as such came to be associated with other dubious figures such as Titus Oates.<sup>16</sup> Ironically it was as a part of the wider 'Popish plot' that the administration eventually proceeded against Colledge – and it was bizarrely enough as a suspected Catholic that he ultimately went to the scaffold. In his trial he was even accused of having been instrumental in converting the countess of Rochester. Needless to say, Colledge was not the only conspirator in the government's sights. The conviction of Colledge, it was hoped, might pave the way for a far more enticing prospect: the trial and condemnation of Shaftesbury.

They came from different social groups and different ends of the political spectrum but Norreys would have seen Colledge before. Colledge had been one of those to give evidence at the trial of Viscount Stafford in the winter of 1680 (Norreys was among the minority of triers to find Stafford not guilty). More particularly, Colledge had been a conspicuous figure at the Oxford Parliament. He had ridden into the city wearing armour and bristling with weapons because, he claimed, he was there to protect Protestantism from the continuing threat of a Popish insurrection. According to evidence presented at his trial, he had then tried to cause a commotion in the lobby of the House of Lords in an attempt to spark a wider eruption. He was also said to have distributed blue ribbons emblazoned with appropriate slogans (no Popery, no Slavery) among his followers so that they would be able to tell one from another when the predicted rioting began. As the man in charge of keeping Oxford peaceable and orderly for the duration of the session, Norreys must have been all too pleased to have the opportunity to exact his revenge on the troublesome Colledge.

The case against Colledge stemmed from the king's justification for his premature closing of the Oxford Parliament, having claimed that there was a plot to assassinate him. Even before Parliament had opened rumours had been spread that there was to be an uprising in Oxford; there was even talk of a massacre.<sup>17</sup> Colledge had been overheard making various derogatory remarks about the king and seems to have let slip an aspiration to have the monarch seized if not necessarily murdered. He

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<sup>16</sup> J. Kenyon, *The Popish Plot*, 276-7. Oates by this point was a far less popular figure. Luttrell noted in the spring of 1681 how Oates's government allowance had been cut to 40 shillings a week, and how some other informers had had their pensions cut entirely. Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 77.

<sup>17</sup> Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 70.

had also put his hand to an inflammatory cartoon with an accompanying ballad, A Ra-ree Show, in which he depicted the king as a janus-faced pedlar carrying a peep-show comprising the two Houses of Parliament. Two copies of this caricature (once thought lost) are in the Bodleian.<sup>18</sup>

Norreys's incentive for overseeing Colledge's trial is easy enough to determine and there can have been no criticism from the court of the way in which Norreys personally ensured that the appropriate outcome was arrived at. The grand jury was headed by Norreys' brother, Henry, as foreman. Like his brother, Henry Bertie had been established early on in Oxfordshire following a stint at the university of Padua and a false start as the MP for Westbury in Wiltshire. He had married the daughter of Sir Edward Norreys, another Oxfordshire magnate, and set himself up at Chesterton. From there he was able to maintain a local interest that enabled him to secure election for New Woodstock and then for Oxford itself.<sup>19</sup> Alongside him sat a former MP for Woodstock, another man closely associated with the Bertie clan, Sir Thomas Spencer. The Oxfordshire grand jury proceeded to do what the Middlesex had singularly failed to achieve (they even criticized the Middlesex jurymen for ducking their responsibility) – and committed Colledge for trial.<sup>20</sup> With this first step achieved without a hitch Norreys was then able to preside in person over the subsequent proceedings held in the court house between 17 and 18 August 1681. One of the prosecuting attorneys was a certain George Jeffreys, soon to become notorious for his role in cleaning up after the Monmouth rebellion.

The trial began at 3 in the afternoon with the usual discussion about the jurors. Eight were challenged by the prisoner, one failed to show up and another, Gabriel Merry, was excused on account of being not far short of 100 years old. Testimony against Colledge included accounts of how he had ranted that the king should rid himself from his council of corrupt elements such as the Hyde brothers: Clarendon and 'cunning Lory Hyde' as well as Halifax 'that great turn-coat'. His invective was directed at the king directly as well and he was said to have railed how the king came

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<sup>18</sup> B.J. Rahn, 'A Ra-ree show – a rare cartoon: revolutionary propaganda on the treason trial of Stephen College', *Studies in Change and Revolution*, ed. P.J. Korshin, (1972), 77-80.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Bertie's example reminds one of the incestuous nature of Oxfordshire politics. By his marriage to his kinswoman, Philadelphia Norreys, he eventually inherited the manor of Weston, further strengthening the Bertie stranglehold on the county. *VCH Oxfordshire*, vi. 346-52 mistakenly suggests that it was Abingdon's son, also Henry, who was married to Philadelphia Norreys and the eventual owner of Weston.

<sup>20</sup> The foreman of the Middlesex jury was even arrested on a charge of high treason shortly before the proceedings against Colledge commenced in Oxford. See Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 116.

'of the race of buggerers'. The Raree Show was employed to show how Colledge had foolishly committed to paper his treasonous thoughts about the king and his Parliament, while witnesses described him singing the ballad in the local coffee houses. In his defence, Colledge denied being the author of the ballad or caricature, and in this he was reasonably successful as much of the evidence concerning this was dismissed as circumstantial. Success here figured little though. Colledge's defence counsel, Aaron Smith, found himself censured and was later indicted and Colledge's own witnesses failed to improve matters for him. One, the son of a London quaker, openly admitted that he had been suborned to give evidence on Colledge's behalf, even though he did not know him. When the young man protested to the men trying to recruit him, he was told that it was of no matter and that he would be instructed what he should say. Another was the increasingly discredited Titus Oates, who earned himself a dressing down from the attorney general for his pains in turning out for 'so notorious a traitor.' Colledge had no chance whatsoever. As Luttrell put it, 'his defence was as good as could be against positive proof'. Roger Morrice noted that the Oxford scholars thought Colledge had spoken so well 'that he was certainly a Jesuit'.<sup>21</sup> The proceedings closed at 2am and within the hour the no doubt exhausted jury brought in the predictable verdict of guilty; the court was then adjourned to 10 the next morning for the sentence to be handed down. The only mercy subsequently done to the unfortunate man, sentenced to the customary hanging drawing and quartering, was a concession by the king to deliver the pieces back to his family so that the remains could be buried rather than strung up as would otherwise have been usual.

#### The suppression of the Monmouth Rebellion 1682-85

Norreys' efforts in 1681 earned for him the court's gratitude and (ultimately) promotion in the peerage to the earldom of Abingdon. Secretary Jenkins warmly congratulated him for his zeal in the service of the court, while Judge Raymond

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<sup>21</sup> Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 117; Morrice, *Entring Book*, ii. 285.

declared that 'such a lord lieutenant, such a sheriff, and such a grand jury would keep the king's crown fast upon his head.'<sup>22</sup>

The closing years of Charles II's reign proved the apogee of Abingdon's career but it was his actions during the reign of James II that brought him greater notoriety. Abingdon began the new reign as he had concluded the last – as the undisputed strong arm of the Stuart dynasty in Oxfordshire. In the years following the Oxford Parliament and the trial of Colledge he had been careful to cultivate the heir to the throne. When James visited Oxford in the early summer of 1683 Abingdon met him with a deputation of gentry at Sandford, their great shout at his welcome being (reputedly) heard as far away as Merton. James was then feted at Rycote, where it was reported that there were '9 choice cooks to dress the meat.'<sup>23</sup> Just under two year later, he personally oversaw James's proclamation in the city – processing from Carfax to each of the city gates to make the formal announcement, with (as Wood recorded in his diary) 'great shouts and acclamations, the conduit running claret all the while'. At the subsequent entertainment eight of Abingdon's immediate retinue were made freemen of the city.

Abingdon and his kinsmen proved similarly forward in the new king's cause at the outbreak of the Monmouth rebellion later that summer. Concerned that Oxford was insufficiently supplied with troops, Abingdon and Bishop Fell collaborated on the establishment of a new university militia under the command of Abingdon's young heir, known by his father's former title of Lord Norreys (a student at Christ Church). A nephew, Philip Bertie, a student of Trinity College, was appointed captain of a scholars' volunteer company of foot.<sup>24</sup> Commenting on events in the West country, where Monmouth had landed, Charles Bertie reported proudly to the countess of Rutland how the king's forces there had succeeded by the close of June in 'hemming in Monmouth' and how the rebellious duke 'must of necessity fight his way through or perish'.<sup>25</sup> For the time being Monmouth evaded the king's army. Abingdon was proud to report to his neighbour Clarendon how the new university unit was growing 'expert apace' and how he expected them soon to be 'for their number the best militia of England.' He ordered the bells rung and bonfires lit in Oxford to play down

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<sup>22</sup> *CSP Dom.* 1680-1, pp. 374-5.

<sup>23</sup> M. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family*, 2 vols. (London 1907), ii. 338-9.

<sup>24</sup> *HP Commons 1690-1715*, iii. 204.

<sup>25</sup> *HMC Rutland*, ii. 89.

defeatist talk that the rebels were advancing and fulminated against the injustice that prevented him from marching to engage Monmouth's army himself.<sup>26</sup> Abingdon's brother, Henry, was more fortunate. He had been active as a militia officer at the time of the Rye House Plot, searching neighbouring estates for arms, and was now one of those mobilized to face off the Monmouth threat. He reported back to his brother from the front with a series of letters detailing the progress of the insurrection and the government's steady success in seeing it suppressed. He assured his brother in Oxford that the people further west were not 'so much fretted as they are with you' and continued enthusiastically how 'all the way as we march the people brought us out drink and [made] our people welcome'.<sup>27</sup> With him was his half-brother, Richard, who had succeeded him as MP for New Woodstock and was now present with the army as captain of a troop of cavalry. He seems to have been well-regarded by the king, who dubbed him familiarly as 'Dick' and was said to have had in mind for him a more significant command.<sup>28</sup> Along with their kinsman, Willoughby de Eresby (the heir to the Lindsey earldom) they were the 'three battering rams of our family'.<sup>29</sup>

Bolstered by the loyalty of men like the Berties, James had little difficulty in defeating Monmouth's ill-prepared and ill-equipped army. The affair appeared to indicate that in spite of the king's Catholicism the country was more willing to accept him than an adventurer of uncertain birth. And yet within a matter of months the tide began to turn against James and his regime. Abingdon soon became disquieted by the new king's Catholicising policies. He was stripped of his lieutenancy in the county and when James dismissed the fellows of Magdalen and replaced them with Catholics, Abingdon sent to the deprived members, lamenting that he could not offer them each places but promising them food and a warm welcome at Rycote should they wish to avail themselves of his hospitality. Abingdon's kinsmen, who had so very recently risked their lives in defence of James against Monmouth were also removed from their posts: Henry, Richard and Peregrine Bertie, along with Willoughby de Eresby were all stripped of their places.<sup>30</sup>

Abingdon's actions in defence of the Magdalen fellows gained him new friends in Oxford. In September 1687, in a pointed gesture of defiance, the

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<sup>26</sup> Bod. Lib. MS Top. Oxon. c. 325, f. 46.

<sup>27</sup> Bod. Lib. MS Eng. hist. c. 51, f. 31.

<sup>28</sup> *HP Commons 1660-90*, i. 645.

<sup>29</sup> *HMC Rutland*, ii. 97. The reference is to the Bertie arms, which features three battering rams.

<sup>30</sup> J. Childs, *The Army, James II and the Glorious Revolution*, (Manchester, 1980), 47.

corporation elected him their high steward. Nothing represented a more obvious change of circumstances than the occasion on 16 September 1687 when William Wright (the alderman who had previously been such a fierce critic of Abingdon) in his role of deputy recorder delivered the speech marking Abingdon's unanimous election to the post. Lauding Abingdon as the 'the darling of the city', Wright emphasized Abingdon's worthy place in the apostolic succession of greats who had previously held the place among them Henry VIII's friend and brother-in-law, the duke of Suffolk, Lord Williams of Thame, and most recently the former king's childhood companion, the duke of Buckingham.<sup>31</sup> Such praise was then mimicked the following year after Abingdon's restoration to the high stewardship (having been temporarily displaced on the king's order by his kinsmen, Lichfield) by the lighting of 6 bonfires and the ringing of (some) bells – evidently not everyone was glad to have him back.

If Abingdon's restoration as high steward was an attempt by the king to claw onto his former ally's residual sense of loyalty, it proved too little and too late. He was already deeply involved with the army conspiracy, alongside of Charles Bertie, Willoughby de Eresby and (most significantly) Danby, one of the principals in the plot to bring over William of Orange. Early in November 1688 Abingdon left Oxford and a few days later rode into William of Orange's headquarters at Exeter. With him was a party of 50 horse as well as a substantial contribution to the prince's war chest.<sup>32</sup> He was the first of the English peers to appear openly in arms. Most of his family also turned out for the invader – Danby led the rebellion in the north and Henry Bertie rode to the rescue of Lord Lovelace, who had been captured en route to Prince William's army and imprisoned at Gloucester.

### Final years

Abingdon's position post-Revolution was never as assured as it had been in the period between the summoning of the Oxford Parliament and the accession of James II.

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<sup>31</sup> Wright had prior to this made moves to moderate his behaviour, particularly in the wake of the Rye House Plot. In August 1683 he had applied to Abingdon, via Richard Hawkins, to be forgiven and admitted back in the earl's favour. See Bod. Lib. MS Top. Oxon. c. 325, ff. 24, 68. His speech on the occasion of Abingdon's election in 1687 was later printed. See *Honour, Interest and Power*, ed. R. Paley and P. Seaward, 306.

<sup>32</sup> J. Childs, *The Army, James II and the Glorious Revolution*, 149, 185; Luttrell, *Brief Relation*, i. 476.

Despite his early mobilization on behalf of Prince William, Abingdon balked at handing the invader the crown and he was later to be found among those busily attempting to find a middle way by which William might rule but James continue to reign. Throughout 1689 he trod a difficult line. Although he was restored to his local offices,<sup>33</sup> towards the end of the year he was forced to head off an attempt made by the earl of Macclesfield to include the Colledge trial within the deliberations of the committee for examinations looking into judicial decisions made in the last years of Charles II. Abingdon was said to have risen to his feet and insisted that the trial had been carried out with all fairness and that anyone that said otherwise was a liar. Macclesfield backed down, but Abingdon's heated interjection caused comment and underlines the extent to which he was concerned for his own safety at that point.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the year he had retreated to the country. The following year he contemplated giving up the Oxfordshire lieutenancy. His neighbour Clarendon begged him to keep it, concerned that if Abingdon resigned he would be replaced by Lovelace.<sup>35</sup> Over the next few years Abingdon was able to benefit from the central position enjoyed by Danby but his attitude to the Williamite regime remained uneasy.<sup>36</sup> His health too, never robust, appears to have been poor and at one point Charles Bertie noted that Abingdon 'much out of order' was suffering from 'a great stoppage of the lungs'.<sup>37</sup>

Abingdon's death at the close of the decade, 'not surprising though very afflicting news' according to Arthur Charlett, was a considerable loss to the Tories of Oxfordshire – as well as to the Bertie-Osborne grouping in Parliament.<sup>38</sup> One of the more unusual manifestations of it was a pastoral eclogue composed by Robert Gould and dedicated to his old friend Danby (by then promoted once again to the dukedom of Leeds) in which Abingdon's death was bewailed in suitably histrionic form. After the dedication, the poem opens with the shepherds Menalcas and Damon seeking to comfort the swooning Alexis. When Damon asks the other the cause of the young swain's misery, Menalcas answers:

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<sup>33</sup> *CSP Dom.* 1689-90, pp. 125, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Morrice, *Entring Book*, v. 305.

<sup>35</sup> *HMC 14th Rep.* ix. 456; *State Letters of Henry earl of Clarendon*, (Oxford, 1765), ii. 377.

<sup>36</sup> Browning, *Danby*, ii. 207-8, 216, 224-5.

<sup>37</sup> *HMC Rutland*, ii. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Bod. Lib. MS Tanner 21, f. 71.

The worst that cou'd the wretched Youth attend:  
Bertudor's Dead! his Master, Patron, Friend!  
Bertudor! than which yet a Worthier Name  
Was e'er took up, or sounded off by Fame...<sup>39</sup>

Another lengthy panegyric in his honour was addressed to Dryden, seeking that he might accord to Abingdon the same distinction he had made to the dead earl's first countess and compose a suitable funeral eclogue.

Dryden! Quick the sacred pencil take,  
And rise in vertue's cause for vertue's sake;  
Of heav'n's the song, and heav'n-born is thy muse,  
Fitting to follow bliss which mine will lose...

Abingdon's career (and that of his family) speaks much about the nature of local politics in the later 17th-century. They fulfilled certain well-defined roles that were available to peers (and some of the greater gentry): lord lieutenant, militia commander, civic dignitary and holder of a minor office of state related to managing forests and game. Abingdon's relation to so great a political figure as Danby needless to say brought him more into the spotlight than many of otherwise similar standing and the holding of two significant national events at Oxford in 1681 helped to cement his already fast developing reputation at court as a safe pair of hands. That he was able to do so in spite of clearly lamentable health is all the more remarkable. The defence of Protestantism remained his principal consideration and in his penultimate session in the Lords, he proposed that an address be sent to the king seeking him to use his influence to persuade the king of France to cease his persecution of French protestants. Sadly for Abingdon, the proposal attracted minimal support and was dropped. By the close of his career Abingdon may not have achieved quite what he intended but he without doubt deserved a more discerning epitaph than Gould's pastoral eclogue.

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Gould, *The mourning swain a funeral eclogue [sic] humbly offer'd to the memory of the Right Honourable James Earl of Abingdon* (London 1700) [text retrieved from EEBO].