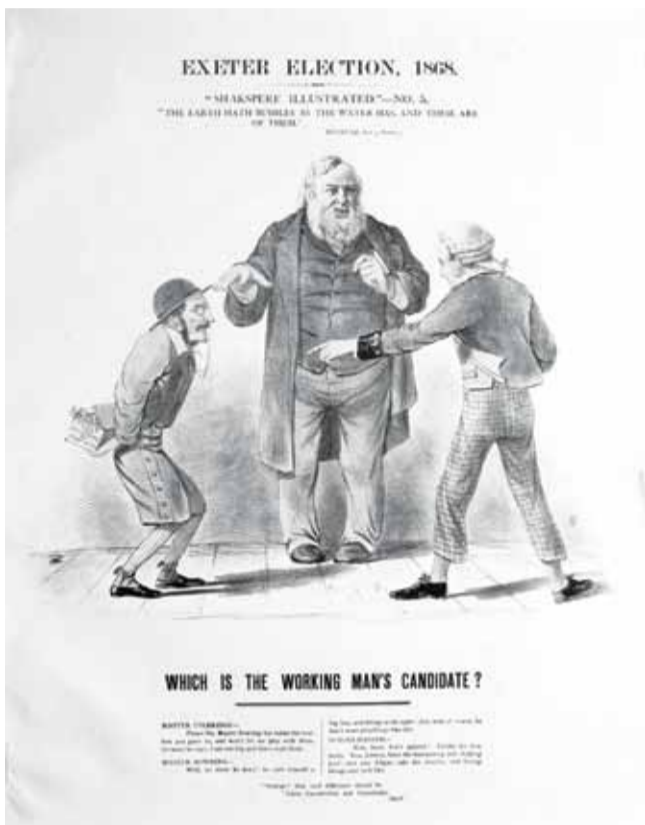


## DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION

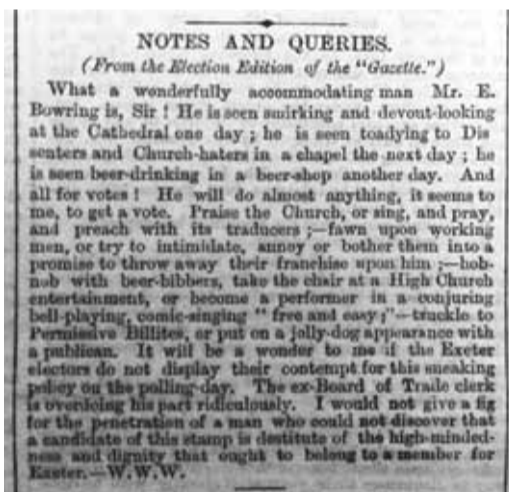
### THE VICTORIAN ART OF PERSUASION THE 1868 EXETER ELECTION CARICATURES

The Second Reform Act of 1867 greatly enlarged the electorate, extending the right to vote to around two million men in England and Wales, doubling the previous number. In the urban boroughs the working-class vote was as much as five times what it had been before.

In February 1868 Disraeli became Prime Minister, at the head of a minority Conservative government, which lasted only until the new electoral registers had been completed. The first General Election after the passing of the Reform Act was held in November.



This caricature, which appeared on 5 October 1868, shows Coleridge and Bowring arguing over possession of a box of carpenters' tools, which Bowring is holding behind his back. Between the contestants, and trying to calm them down, stands Thomas Latimer, the great reforming journalist and editor of the (Liberal) Western Times. The aristocratic Coleridge was thought to be less assiduous than his colleague in canvassing the working class voters.



Extract from the Gazette of 13 November 1868



Cartoon from Punch 1868-69

Campaigning was keen and vigorous: candidates had to appeal to a much wider electorate, and that meant, particularly in the cities, energy and expense. The public were interested as never before: campaign meetings were packed, and newspaper columns were full of detailed reports of speeches together with comment and satire.

In Exeter there were four candidates for the two seats available. Standing for the Conservatives were Sir John Karlake, who had been Attorney General in Disraeli's brief administration, and Arthur Mills, another lawyer, who was married to a daughter of Sir Thomas Dyke Acland of Killerton. The Liberal candidates were John Duke Coleridge, who had been an MP since 1865, and Edgar Alfred Bowring, the fourth son of Sir John, who had no parliamentary experience but had worked as librarian and registrar at the Board of Trade from 1848 to 1863.

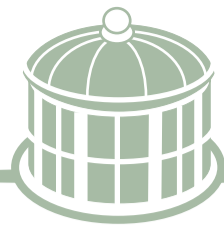


John Duke Coleridge, c.1868



"The Rivals" shows Coleridge as "Julius Caesar, an ambitious senator", and Sir John Bowring as "Brutus, an honourable man, father of Cassius"





# DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION

## THE VICTORIAN ART OF PERSUASION THE 1868 EXETER ELECTION CARICATURES

On 4 September the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, which enthusiastically supported the Conservative cause, reported gleefully that ‘one of the best of the election squibs yet issued’ had been sent to their office.



“It is a cleverly executed caricature of an Exeter Knight representing him as holding a large “Greek Pie” with a sprig of holly at the top on which the figures “1,300” appear. The motto is a Shakesperian one: “Would you praise Caesar? Say, Caesar – go no further!”

The “Exeter Knight” was unmistakably Sir John Bowring, and the reference was to events which had taken place more than 40 years before, when Bowring had been secretary of a London Greek Committee set up to raise loans for the Greeks in their War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire. The money raised was largely wasted, and Bowring was said to have profited at the Greeks’ expense. William Cobbett had accused Bowring and others of “cramming their fingers” into a Greek Pie.

This was the first in a series of ten illustrations by G Palmer produced by the Devon and Somerset Printing Company. The Institution holds a complete set. Each poster parodies the Liberal candidates using complicated symbolism, literary references and biographical details.

The caricatures must have enjoyed a certain success in Exeter, and they could not be entirely ignored by their victims. A packed Liberal meeting at the Royal Public Rooms in Exeter on 25 September heard a “vigorous” speech from Sir John Bowring which was reported fully in The Western Times the following Tuesday:

“He alluded to the pleasing jokes which the Tories have indulged in lately; respecting the caricatures, they had aroused him much. He reminded his Tory friends of the proverb - “He laughs best and laughs longest who laughs last”

(Western Times, 29 September 1868)



“Perhaps the cleverest and certainly the most significant of the Exeter Election caricatures . . . represents Mr Coleridge as Mephistopheles - a fancy portrait - and the face and figure are admirably drawn. Mephistopheles is slyly drawing from his satchel a label marked “Papal Ascendancy”, the short sword in his belt is marked “Church Destruction”, and he places his finger on his lip and winks his eye as he shews his trick.”

(Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 23 October 1868)

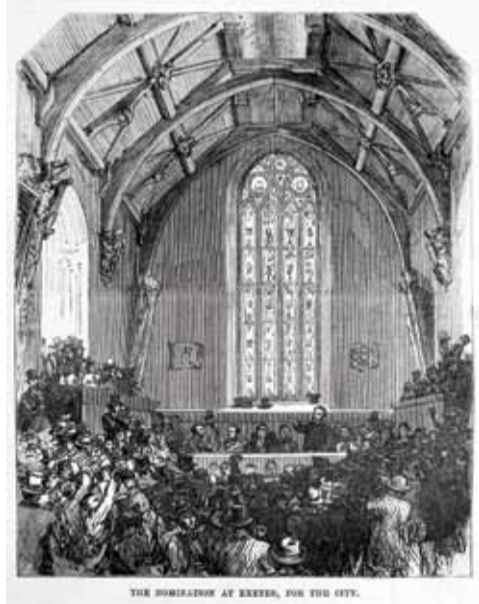
The Shakespearian motto at the top is from Henry VI, part 2: “Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep” and for good measure there is a misquotation from Hamlet at the foot:

“To be or not to be, that is the question, ‘Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.”



“The Son of His Father” (Edgar Bowring), “whose peculiar physiognomy is admirably hit off”. He is depicted “seated on a bench marked “Tory Expenditure” with his foot upon “Retrenchment”. He holds in his lap a “Board of Trade” pie, the dish of which is labelled “Place”. The reference is to Bowring’s previous employment at the Board of Trade. Out of the pie he has pulled a large plum, inscribed “£400 per annum”. He is being accused of being a “placeman” whose selection as Liberal candidate is a reward for political support. Above the portrait are three lines from “Julius Caesar”.

(Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 11 September 1868)



Scenes at the General Election, The Illustrated London News November 8 1868

The election took place on Tuesday 17 November and Coleridge and Bowring successfully polled 2317 and 2247 votes, against the Conservatives’ 2218 and 2026. In the country as a whole, the General Election of 1868 was a resounding victory for Gladstone and the Liberals, who won 387 seats to the Conservatives’ 272. Disraeli had to await the General Election of 1874 before turning the tables and regaining power.



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