

A critique of luxuries and locality: in Chester of later eighteenth century

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As some historians of urban history pointed out, the city of Chester saw the rise of retailing and the new consumer culture in the eighteenth century. In this city, residents showed enthusiasm for the consumption of luxuries and pursued the cultural forms of gentlemen, regardless of their social positions. In this social situation, however, on newspapers, poems published, and sermons preached before the governors of the general infirmary, there were discourses by which some people intended to pacify lavish behaviours and encourage sobriety and frugality instead. It's interesting to know that these discourses turned to be the criticism against genteel lives especially in 1784. Critics emphasised the importance of the identity of middling sorts, and in the election of that year, they supported the rivals to the candidates recommended by the patron of this city, the Grosvenor family and the municipal corporation.

In 1784 the contested election for the representatives of Chester took place for the first time since the last election was held about 30 years ago. The contest reflected both the conflict between William Pitt, the younger and Charles J. Fox, and that between the supporters of Grosvenor and those against them. The incumbent members supported by the corporation, Thomas Grosvenor and his partner, were compelled to compete with candidates supported by "Independents" who opposed the oligarchy of the Grosvenor family: John Crewe, the loyal friend to Fox, who became famous for so called the Crewe's Act which achieved the exclusion of revenue officers from parliamentary elections, and Roger Barnston, the friend of Crewe and one of Independents of Chester. In this election, the candidates for the side of Grosvenor won the both seats, but after that, Independents unsatisfied with the result kept on challenging the oligarchy by actions against some assemblymen.

The analysis upon the voters' occupation suggests that the majority of those who can be identified as being the upper, like gentlemen in the city, voted for the Grosvenor's side. And on the newspapers published by Independents in 1784, there appeared the critical discourses against luxuries. These analyses mentioned above suggest the possibility that the discourses were applied into the criticism against the oligarchy in Chester.

This paper aims to suggest one possible perspective about how and how much the criticism against excessive consumption affected the political rivalry at the election took place in 1784 in the city of Chester.