



Image representing voting fraud in Victorian times

Revising Barrister's Court

Mr. A. Mortimer attended at the Town Hall, on Tuesday morning, to revise the lists of voters for the parishes of Bishopstrow, Boyton and Corton, Brixton Deverill, Chitterne, Codford, Corsley, Heytesbury, Hill Deverill, Horningsham, Imber, Knook, Longbridge Deverill, Maiden Bradley, Norton Bavant, Sherrington, Stockton, Sutton Veny, Upton Lovell, Upton Scudmore, and Warminster. With one exception the proceedings were devoid of public interest. When the Heytesbury, Knook and Upton Scudmore lists were taken, the question of the service franchises arose and a long discussion ensued. In Heytesbury parish, 32 labourers, carters, shepherds, &c., claimed to be on the County Council lists as householders: in Knook the number was 12, and Upton Scudmore, 16. These men were all parliamentary voters, but have been left off the County Council list, because the houses they occupy belong to their employers, and are given to them in part payment of wages. The Liberal representatives (Mr. Spencer and Mr. Beaven) strongly urged that this was an injustice, and pointed out that these were the only parishes in the division where the overseers had taken upon themselves to disfranchise men in these positions. Some of the men were called, and they stated that they agreed with their employers for so much wages and the cottage. The men holding their places always occupied these cottages. They could, however, do their work just the same if they lived elsewhere. If they left their work they would have to leave their cottages. The barrister said if he were overseer he should put these men on the list unless he had direct evidence that they were not tenants in the legal sense of the term; but from what the witnesses had stated before him he could not so regard them, and should disallow the claims. It was not a question whether a person was a householder, but whether he was a tenant. A bank manager's was a typical case. It was necessary that someone should reside on the bank premises. If the manager did that, he voluntarily disfranchised himself, but if he lived elsewhere he would probably be entitled to his vote for the County Council, but not so the person who took his place at the bank. He regretted that he must so rule in these cases, but he was anxious to do his duty. It was an extraordinary thing that in framing the Local Government Act the burgess qualification was taken as a basis instead of the parliamentary. Mr. Beaven said this was a question of universal importance to the district, and he asked whether the Barrister would state a general case. The Barrister replied that he could not do that. If he stated a case, it must be upon the evidence taken by him in court. Mr. O. W. Cruttwell, of Frome, represented the Conservatives, and Mr. J. W. Spencer, of Trowbridge, the Liberals.

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