Oxford and Cambridge have each two represen-

Q. Is the object of their election particular or

A. The deputies, though elected by separate districts, represent the whole body of the nation; for they are returned to serve not merely their constituents, but also the commonwealth, and to give good advice to his majesty.

Q. What are the qualifications required for

being a member of the house of Commons?

A. The candidate for a seat in the house of Commons must be born a subject of Great Britain; for representing a county, he must be possessed of a landed estate of 600l. a year; and of 300%. for representing a city or borough.

Q. Is it of importance to be circumspect; the choice of representatives?

A. Yes: it is essential that such members be delegated to this important trust, as are most eminent for their probity; for on the purity, virtue, and independence of members of parliament dependence of members of parliament. ment, depend the rights, liberties, and happiness

Q. By whom are the representatives of the

A. The knights of shires are chosen by a majority of persons who possess freeholds of 40s. a year: the freehold must have been possessed by the elector a whole year, at least, before the time of election, except it has devolved on him by inheritance, by marriage, or by promotion to an

Q. Who elect the deputies from the cities and

THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION. 15

A. The citizens and burgesses sent to par-liament, are elected by the freemen,* or householders of cities or boroughs.

C. Irving, A Catechism of the British

Constitution (London, c.1821)

Aimed at children, this small

JN/17 barcode 1003679713

Briggs Collection, Pamphlet LT210.

booklet simplified the bewildering

array of rules about who could vote

before 1832. The county franchise

was quite straightforward, but

own qualifications for voting, so

be able to vote, but an equivalent

person in York might not be able to.

It is thought that around one in ten

Interestingly, although the booklet

states that it was illegal to "give

exhibition that provision of food

of electioneering into the 1830s.

and drink was a common element

entertainments" to voters, it is

clear from other items in this

someone in Nottingham might

men could vote before 1832.

the boroughs each had their

Q. By whose order are the members elected? A. When the king has determined to assemble a parliament, he sends an order for that purpose to the lord chancellor, who addresses a writ, under the great seal of England, to the sheriff of every county, directing him to take for the county, and the cities and boroughs which

Q. How does the sheriff of the county then

A. Three days after the reception of the writ, the sheriff must, in his turn, send his precept to the magistrates of the cities and boroughs, to order them to make their election within eight days after the receipt of the precept, giving four days notice of the same.

Q. What are the precantions against bribery

secure the freedom of elections, are, that if any candidate shall, after the issuing of the writ; give entertainments to the electors of a place, he shall be incapable of serving for it in parliament; or, order to influence his vote, he shall pay a fine of 500/, and for ever be disqualified to vote, and hold any office in a corporation.

Q. What are the other precautions?

* Freemen: a word which now signifies certain qualifications expressed in the particular charters.

Electioneering

The artist William Hogarth (1697-1764) satirised an election campaign in Oxfordshire in 1754 in a series of four paintings entitled 'Humours of an Election'.

An important part of the election was the initial public nomination, at which the candidates would be nominated and seconded by well-known and respected members of the constituency. They would also make speeches outlining the reasons why they deserved the support of the electors. Most constituencies elected two MPs.

If there was clear agreement at the meeting about who should represent the constituency, there would be no need for an election. If there was no agreement, hustings would take place at which candidates would make speeches. Polling would begin a few days later, and would extend over a number of days. Even in uncontested elections, the usual rituals of printing handbills and composing songs would take place. Elections were expensive, and sometimes candidates ran out of funds and retired from the contest before the end of the poll.

If the poll was disputed, the votes cast would be scrutinised and the right of the person to cast that vote would be judged. This was also a timeconsuming and costly process.



CANVASSING FOR VOTES.

Canvassing for Votes, part of the Humours of an Election series, from The Genuine Works of William Hogarth -Plates (London, 1808-1817) Special Collection, ND 497.H6 barcode 6002144410

This picture shows the Tory and Whig agents both trying to bribe an innkeeper. Anothe agent is giving jewels and ribbons to the wives of other voters



POLLING AT THE HUSTINGS.

Polling at the Hustings, part of the Humours of an Election series, from The Genuine Works of William Hogarth - Plates (London, 1808-1817) Special Collection, ND 497.H6 barcode 6002144410

Here, voters approach the Whig or Tory tables, distinguished by different flags. There was no secret ballot; instead the votes were publicly noted and recorded. The agents are busy increasing their votes by helping sick people to attend, but they are also challenging the votes of people who they believe are not qualified. Voters had to swear an oath, with their hand on the Bible, that they were qualified. The agents find it amusing, and possibly illegal, that one elector is making his oath with the hook that he has in place of a hand.