The Claytons of Grimsby:
Local Trade and Politics in the Eighteenth
and Early Nineteenth Centuries

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Docks and harbours were an essential ingredient of the social overhead capital that provided the basis for the take off into sustained economic growth in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. They might, like canals, be regarded as of national importance; they handled the imports and exports, foreign and coastal, on which the national prosperity was to grow. Yet the decision to build a dock in one place rather than another or at one time rather than another was taken for local rather than national reasons. In Liverpool the building of docks followed naturally upon the expansion of trade; but in Hull there were local peculiarities that delayed the building of the first dock for a dangerously long period and led the Treasury to talk of their duty to the nation to set up an alternative port elsewhere on the Humber if Hull did not improve its port facilities.\(^1\) At other places, such as Seaham, Cardiff or Goole, ‘artificial’ ports were created \textit{ab initio} to cater for a potential trade, usually in coal. Among the projects for port-building in the later eighteenth century was one that led to the rebirth of Grimsby. It was not immediately successful, but the existence of the dock at Grimsby was a sufficient attraction to bring the Manchester, Sheffield & Great Grimsby Junction Railway across the county, and the modern port was born. The purpose of this article is to identify the motivation underlying the spectacular ‘Haven Scheme’ and, particularly, to consider the role of one family — the Claytons and their successors the Tenisons — in the development of modern Grimsby.\(^2\)

Grimsby is one of the oldest of the major British seaports. Founded by Daneslaw immigrants in the late ninth or early tenth century, she already had a flourishing trade by Domesday and achieved borough status in 1201. There is, however, no history of continuous growth or lasting prosperity. For three centuries or more the port languished — a decayed borough, her trade dead and her politics corrupt.

Grimsby had never been a really great port, though she had her moment of glory in the medieval wool trade, and imported wine from France, fish from Scotland and the Netherlands, and wood from Scandinavia. An occasional vessel arrived from Danzig or Riga, but the majority came from no further than Newcastle, a source of coal as early as the fourteenth century. The wool trade passed away with the Middle Ages, and Grimsby had no share in the cloth trade that replaced it. Even Hull was, for a time, little more than a trans-shipment centre for the clothiers of York. Like her more prosperous - though junior - neighbour, Grimsby experimented for a
THE CLAYTONS OF GRIMSBY

time with that peculiar trade with the mysterious north, when adventurers found their way to Iceland, land of salt-fish, fog and piracy. Then Cabot's explorations uncovered a safer and more reliable source of fish and the Humber lost to the South West that place in the national fish trade that was not to be recovered till the mid-nineteenth century. Hull could look forward to a great future as an intermediary between her extensive hinterland and Europe; but Grimsby had lost her raison d'être. Not all the candles of the Guild of the Ship could save her trade, and with it went the great wool church of St. Mary, a victim of poverty and disillusionment.

The story is familiar enough and could be repeated for any number of decayed ports: medieval trade declined and silt increased. Already in 1483 it had been reported that 'the towne hath bene of grete worshipp, and inhabyte with many notable merchandes maryners and creates mens to the nowmbr of 52 score housalde and mo, . . . there is not left within the said Town 12 men of substance . . . .'5 In the early seventeenth century Gervase Holles was bemoaning the present and encouraging the myth of the great past:6

The Haven hath been heretofore commodious, now decaying, the traffic good, now gone, the place rich and populous, the houses now mean and stragling by reason of the depopulation, and the town very poor. In the days of Edward III Grimsby furnished out to the seige of Calais eleven ships and 171 mariners, where now she hath but one coal ship belonging to it, and scarce mariners in the town to man it, so will we have it venerable for antiquity, and write over the gate Fult Illam.

There were only two or three 'merchants' left at the close of the seventeenth century when one of them, George Clayton, organised, and partly paid for, an optimistic dredging of the slited haven of the river Freshney. The work did not encourage more trade. No ships cleared for foreign parts in 1704, and only two entered.1 One brought three chalders of coal from Dunbar, the other arrived from Rotterdam for Clayton with a ton of madder, a hogshad of brandy, and eleven hundredweight of assorted metals. The coastal trade was more extensive, but hardly more inspiring. Twenty vessels cleared coastwise in 1704: nine for Newcastle, three for London and eight for Hull. Their cargoes were entirely agricultural produce: 147 lasts of barley, 20 of rye and 6 of beans to Newcastle; 41 of malt, 11 of wheat and a ton of tallow to London; and 4 lasts of malt, a ton of tallow, 1,790 tods of wool and a few tons of fullers' earth to Hull. Five men handled the whole of the trade; and of these George Clayton shipped almost all the corn and William Dickinson almost all the wool. Their excursions into shipowning appear to have brought only six diminutive vessels to the port: the Theophila, Newarke, Rose Ann, Margrett and Grimsby. The bulk of the wool was carried, significantly, by ships of Knottingley, which had a long tradition as an inland port.

Local merchants played no part whatever in the coastwise import trade. The cargoes of all the forty vessels entering in 1704 were on master's account: 29 from Sunderland, 8 from Newcastle, 2 from Blyth Nook and 1 from Hull. The cargoes from the north amounted to 448 chalders of coal, 129 tons of salt and a small quantity of glass and glass bottles. That from Hull consisted of 80 pieces of linen, 3 trusses of linen drapery, a hoghead of haberdashery, a box of mercury, a cask of empty bottles, 6 hundredweight of leather, 2½ hundreds of deals and 60 cant spars. Clearly there was nothing here that one would not expect to find going through any waterside hamlet in the days before good roads, and it is, perhaps, an exaggeration to talk of the 'trade' of Grimsby at this time.

What little trade there was did not increase appreciably as the century progressed. The Grimsby Foreign Port Books invariably contain a single folio, more often than not blank, unless used, incorrectly, for coastal trade. Occasionally a ship or two arrived from Scandinavia with unimportant cargoes of timber, which was the only commodity sufficiently cheap and widely used to be imported in bulk at Grimsby. Foreign trade was completely dominated by the Clayton family, but even they were not always happy about it. 'I don't know what answer to give to the Fredrickshald People', Christopher Clayton told his brother in 1754,7 'till I see how
I have been used by Mrs. Plades, as honour in Trade without punctual bargain is risquing a good deal, but if you think you can sell another Cargo if the Zebulon comes home safe we may possibly take her on for another Voyage if we can raise money'. Foreign trade was never easy to organise, and by the eighties it had ceased altogether.8 There remained only the distribution trade based on the packet boats that plied across the Humber from Hull and which were not counted in Customs statistics. This was the way Christopher Clayton obtained his small quantities of iron and steel in the middle of the century,9 and this was the way he disposed of his malt.10 Even the coastal trade had ceased to be direct; goods from London now came to Hull for redirection to Grimsby,11 and goods shipped from Grimsby were automatically sent to Hull to be forwarded to London or the north.12 It is true that coasters from Grimsby continued to be entered in the Hull Port Books in increasing numbers, and that by the eighties Grimsby was shipping more wool to Hull than any other port, but a closer examination reveals that the wool was in fact shipped from Louth to Hull via the Louth-Tetney Navigation, and that Grimsby was credited with the trade only because Tetney Haven happened to be within the limits of that port. The Customs realistically paid their man at Louth more than their man at Grimsby.13 Practically every creek in the country supported small inshore fishing boats, and we might, perhaps, expect Grimsby to have had its share. Fish was certainly landed there — there is a fine Rowlandson cartoon of it being sold on the mud-flats — but Grimsby had no fishing boats. They were owned and operated from Cleethorpes, 'a Fishing Village near the entrance into the sea on the Bank of the Humber'.14 There were fifteen of them in 1787, but they were 'miserable patched up Things owing to the Poverty of the Owners'. They formed, nonetheless, the bulk of the vessels registered from the Grimsby area, a sad commentary on Grimsby's trade.

The most obvious brake on trade, as conceived by contemporaries, was, of course, the all-pervading silt. Despite occasional dredging and other attempts to increase the flow of water, only the smallest of vessels could enter the Haven in safety. The rest were unloaded into keels (which required reasonable weather) or were beached and their cargoes humped over the mud. The old Orkneyinger Saga had spoken of Viking merchants in Grimsby 'wading through the mud',15 and it was still the same in 1813 when a local M.P. attacked those who opposed his plan for a pier: 'should they wade through the mud for the rest of their lives I think it but a just punishment for their selfish injustice'.16 Nor were the roads safe for shipping. Defoe thought Grimsby 'a good town', 'but I think 'tis but an indifferent road for shipping; and in the great storm (ann. 1703), it was proved to be so, for almost all the ships that lay in Grimsby road were driven from their anchors, and many of them lost.17 A century later a local retired naval officer was optimistically asserting 'that ships may run aground on the mud shore between Grimsby and Clea, and lie there in perfect safety till the return of the tide; so that if they have neither cable nor anchor they have nothing to fear'.18 His enthusiasm was not shared by his mercantile brethren. 'No vessel has come into Grimsby all this winter for shelter', it was noted in 1801; 'they would chose rather to either run down to Hull or take shelter in White Booth Road.'19

There were other obstacles, besides the unfortunate water site. Grimsby was a 'member' of the port of Hull, and therefore had no independent Customs House or permanent staff authorised to clear ships in foreign trade. Grimsby people were given to blaming the decline of the port onto the hostility of the Hull Customs officers who in some mysterious way stifled Grimsby to please their friends in Hull. Nor was civic pride eased when officers were sent round from Hull to deal with ships arriving off Grimsby. When timber was imported in the sixties for work on the Louth Navigation, Christopher Clayton and Gabriel Neve (a Louth merchant) went so far as to object officially to the Hull men on the emotional ground that 'Grimsby was an older port than Hull'.20 In fact Grimsby did have a deputy Customer residing in the port, but he had little to do and spent his time practised as a common brewer until he was reported in 1806,21 when he chose to leave the service and continue brewing. It was argued in 1800, in a
THE CLAYTONS OF GRIMSBY

Petition for an independent Custom House, that since 1792 the Deputy Customer had been 'restricted by the Principal Officers of his Majesty's Customs at Hull (and without any other or greater authority it is presumed), from entering and clearing any ship arriving off the said Haven.' The truth of this allegation is irrelevant. No goods at all had been landed in Grimsby between 1789 and 1792, and with the death of the last Christopher Clayton in 1792 there was no merchant of any stature left in Grimsby.

Far less obvious to contemporaries was the real cause of Grimsby's failure to develop: she had no established trade, and no hinterland on which a flourishing trade might be based. The immediate hinterland was largely a region of bounding economic activity, and there was no adequate connexion with a populous industrial — or even agricultural — area. Such reasoning, simple as it may seem today, was beyond the grasp of the unsophisticated shop-keepers of Grimsby and the landowners of Lindsey. As they watched the ships sailing up the Humber to the overcrowded dock and haven of Hull, nothing seemed simpler than diverting them into a fine new dock at Grimsby. They agreed, almost to a man, with Philip Skipworth (a landowner, not a merchant!), that 'to foreign trade there is no bounds, it entirely depends upon the accommodation you make for it.' Few listened to the pessimists who told Dr. Parkinson that 'One objection to Grimsby is that there is no back carriage as from Hull. There is likewise no communication as of Hull with the country behind.' The pessimists were right. There could be no worth-while trade through Grimsby till the railways linked the port with Yorkshire and the Midlands. But this did not stop men from hoping and scheming, and eventually, in 1796, the Grimsby Haven Company was formed. Its object was to recreate the port of Grimsby and steal the trade of Hull.

The Grimsby Haven scheme was clearly an unusual example of social overhead investment in that it was not encouraged by existing trade — as at Liverpool or Hull — or by potential trade — as at Seaburn or Goole. It was financed overwhelmingly by landowners and large farmers on the Lincolnshire Wolds and Marshes, who expected that a new local port would increase the value of their property, which was being rapidly transformed as the Agrarian Revolution swept across the county. There is no evidence, however, that any of them had ever thought of building a port. They were persuaded to invest by George Tennyson, nephew and heir of the last Christopher Clayton, and by the misguided — or dishonest — arguments of George Babb, Town Clerk of Grimsby, who took up the scheme with immense enthusiasm. Since Clayton and Tennyson were indisputably the initiators of the Haven scheme, their motivation might reasonably be regarded as the prime-mover in the rebirth of Grimsby. Why, after a century of petty trading, did they propose to build the biggest dock in Britain? The answer is simple: the vital decision to experiment with port-building sprang from their political rather than their economic ambition. It is not too great an exaggeration to say that Grimsby was recreated as a port only because she was a Parliamentary Borough. It is therefore to the Clayton's and their political interest in Grimsby that we must now turn to trace the origin of the Grimsby Haven Company.

The Claytons were undoubtedly the most important family in the town, benefitting both socially and politically from the absence of immediate rivals. Since the middle of the seventeenth century they had been buying property in the old commercial centre nearest the Haven, including warehouses, raff-yards, many cottages, a brick-kilns, a brew-house, and several shops in the Market Place 'over against the sign of the Author, formerly the Ship.' Much of the pasture leased to freemen in the early part of the century also found its way into their hands, and they were certainly the most influential landowners in the first half of the eighteenth century. George Clayton was the only gentleman among the twenty-four Grimsby men voting in the 1723 County election; he occupied the only gentleman's residence in the town; and he and the rest of the family behaved in a suitably lordly fashion, their relations with lesser breeds and peers alike marred occasionally by an irascibility, bordering on madness, that beset them for almost two centuries. Their social superiority was readily acknowledged, and
Christopher Clayton must have cut an impressive figure in the drab of Grimsby as he rang the changes on his many gold-buttoned suits of green, grey, scarlet and blue, with their waistcoats of silver tissue, gold lace, white satin and crimson silk.  

More important was the number of times the family wore the crimson and coney of the mayoral robes; for the mayor was the returning officer for the Borough and, with his court, had the power to admit freemen. The first Clayton mayor took office in 1667, and they served twenty-one times before the last, Christopher, took office in 1769. Eventually their influence with the freemen — and the bulk of their wealth — devolved on Christopher's nephew, George Tennyson, who followed his father as a county attorney and preferred to send his directives to Grimsby from his residence in the Close at Lincoln, just as the Pelhams, their only important rivals, sent theirs from Brocklesby. The net result was a gradual slackening of the family's influence in Grimsby after 1800.

The Claytons obviously did not derive their wealth or position from their Grimsby trade, or, indeed, from their Grimsby property.  

Their origin is unfortunately obscure, but they appear to have been merchants in London in the late seventeenth century. Both George Clayton, thrice mayor of Grimsby, and his brother Christopher, are described as 'of London' in legal documents in the first two decades of the century; scattered references in the family papers imply an interest in London trade by the next Christopher and his brother Jonathan; and Jonathan was to be found trading in Amsterdam as late as the sixties. There seems to have been a fairly substantial interest in the East Indies trade, and private tea trade is referred to on a number of occasions. Someone was sufficiently involved with the East India Company for one of its gold-stamped ledgers to have found its way into their private papers. Like many other families, they also saw India as the Eldorado for black sheep — a place to which relations could be banished with a reasonably clear conscience. David, brother of Christopher and Jonathan (and of George Tennyson's mother), having got himself into a scrape, was packed off to India in 1748 as a Lieutenant of a Company of Foot. Before he left he characteristically ran up a bill for uniforms and covered it by bond and a will in the tailor's favour — a will made, it was later alleged, simply because he was 'scarce worth anything at the time he set out from England'. But again, as so often happened, fortune smiled on him. Within eighteen months 'he married one Mrs. Lucy Glen of Calcutta . . . widow with whom he had a good fortune by means of which he entered into Trade and thereby acquired a considerable property . . . .' By 1755 he was Deputy Commander of Calcutta and had no doubt of becoming Commander 'if any of my Friends would speak in my favour to any of the Directors'. Alas, things did not go as planned. With his fellows, he was 'much alarmed by Hearing of the great Armiments fitting out in England being fearfull it will bring a Warr in this Country . . . .' A few months later David Clayton, well on his way to being Grimsby's only 'nabob', died in the Black Hole of Calcutta. The family mourned his passing all the more because they had to set about recovering his 'considerable fortune' (his wife had died) and his share of the family's Grimsby property from a fortunate military tailor.

The Black Hole was not the only or the most significant historical episode in which the Claytons figured. A good deal of their money probably came from their efforts in blowing up the South Sea Bubble. The Grand scheme to hand over the National Debt to the South Sea Company in return for trading privileges owed much to the twisted financial genius of Robert Knight, the Cashier of the Company, and to his confidential clerk and adviser, Christopher Clayton.  

When the time came, in May 1720, for Debtholders to exchange their stock for South Sea Company Stock, it was Clayton who became secretary to the managers appointed by the Treasury; and when things began to go wrong it was Clayton who entered fictitious names in the Company's books. Loyal to the end, it was Clayton who, quite typically, tried to silence witnesses and incurred the wrath of the House of Commons by 'laying his hands violently on this examinant face, squeezing his jaws very hard, and saying that if this examinant discovered anything he would be the death of him'. He went to prison for a time, but was not pursued
THE CLAYTONS OF GRIMSBY

with the vengeance that drove Knight into exile. In August 1721 he returned to Grimsby to lick his wounds, improve his fortune, and teach his nephew and name-sake the noble art of merchanting and money-lending. He was also intent upon strengthening the family's hold upon the Parliamentary Borough.

There had, in fact, been a close connexion between Grimsby politics and the South Sea Company since its inception. Arthur Moore, a politician and East India merchant, who sat periodically for Grimsby between 1695 and 1722, was one of the early Directors of the Company. In 1713 he was expelled from his Directorship for trying to smuggle private trade goods on the Company's ships, and this is almost certainly why he lost his Grimsby seat at the next election. His place was taken by Robert Chaplin, a more acceptable South Sea Director, although Moore was allowed to return to Grimsby in 1721 when Chaplin was expelled from the Commons and imprisoned for his share in the scandal. For a time South Sea men were out of favour and then, in 1734, a seat was given to Robert Knight, son of Clayton's old master. He sat for Grimsby until 1747, and again from 1761 to 1768. The rehabilitation of the Knights had begun, and Clayton had repaid his debt to them.

The electoral system at Grimsby was relatively simple. All freemen could vote provided they resided and paid scot and lot; and a man could become a freeman by purchase, paternity, apprenticeship, or marriage to a freeman's daughter. There could be no strategic exclusion of men from freedom, though there could, of course, be tactical battles in the days immediately preceding an election. Influence was wielded between elections through tenancies and friendships, rather than by bribery at the election itself, although everyone who voted expected to be paid at a more or less fixed rate. Bribery in this context meant the payment of more than the 'accepted' rate to secure the vote of an 'independent' voter who was in no way obligated to the Claytons. There was, therefore, a permanent battle going on to secure and retain, through tenancies or rent reductions or victualling contracts, the allegiance of the maximum number of freemen, and the real trial of strength came immediately before each election when all those claiming influence counted their supporters and haggled over the two candidates to be returned unopposed. Freemen were thus 'bribed' for promises to vote; and the candidates who secured the most promises were then elected on a token poll to avoid the consequences of the Bribery Acts. For the first sixty years of the century the Claytons were the chief political manipulators in the town, working partly at least through their almost complete domination of the other aldermen, each of whom had a following among the freemen. Christopher Clayton, it was said in a private action following the 1734 election, 'is a Gentleman of Fortune and living in the Borough of Great Grimsby, no one hath a better personal Interest than himself with the Aldermen and Freemen of that Borough And upon any Election of Members of Parliament through his Interest One Member is Constantly chosen. And if he would exert himself its not unlikely but that both might.' On this occasion one candidate was automatically Knight, and the other was to be Sir Robert Sutton, a local landowner who was not opposed by Clayton and who prudently secured the mayor, Alderman Miles Wray, as his agent. Wray, it was said, 'set up to oppose Clayton's Interest and indeed lately so far prevailed against him that by Bribery and Corruption at the last Election for a Mayor of the Borough he procured himself to be elected with a view (no doubt) to the approaching Dissolution of the Parliament then in being in order to establish himself to be the Returning Officer against a New Election hoping by that means in some Degree to repair his decayed Circumstances or Fortune.' Unfortunately for Wray, Knight and Sutton arranged to stand on a joint interest and Clayton 'procured most of the Aldermen and Freemen's hands to a paper signifying their Intention to support the Interest of Sir Robert jointly with Mr. Knight . . . . 'I am in hopes now,' wrote Knight, 'that there will be no opposition, in order to prevent it, you may assure the People that we will act honourably by them . . . . By your prudent Management I doubt not of having a Quiet Election, and you may be assured that your favours to me on this Account will be ever acknowledged as it ought to be.' Wray was left out in the cold, and trouble began when he insisted that his
GORDON JACKSON

‘favour’ should also be acknowledged by Knight. For a ‘Quiet Election’ he must buy Wray’s starch mill for £2,000, at least ten times its market value, and Sutton was prepared to swear that Wray had threatened both him and Knight with a false return if they did not advance him money. Three aldermen swore that Wray had told freemen who would procure two candidates who would give £40 a man for their votes, and in fact two men did arrive in Grimsby a day or two before the election but prudently withdrew when they realised how small was their interest. With no alternative candidates, Wray was compelled to return Sutton and Knight, and then promptly tried to get his money by accusing Clayton of bribery.

Wray fought the Clayton electoral machine for a quick financial profit, and was no more than an embarrassment. Far more serious was the growing threat from the Pelhams of Brocklesby. Until 1747 the non-Clayton M.P. appears to have been generally a local landowner standing on joint interest with the Clayton candidate and with Clayton approval. But in 1747 he was an outsider nominated by Charles Pelham, though admittedly he was John Gore, another South Sea Director who was not unacceptable to the Claytons. When he was ‘succeeded’ in 1761 by his son-in-law and partner, Joseph Mellish, the two political factions in the borough were quite clearly and openly lined up for battle. In 1768, despite a brief scare when the aldermen were thought to be deserting the Clayton camp, it was decided to run two candidates against Pelham and not to accept Mellish on joint candidature with Robert Knight (now Lord Catherlow, an Irish peer). Instead, Clayton supported Anthony St. Leger of racing fame, a nominee of the Marquis of Granby. Mellish arrived in Grimsby first, and was able to do some influential canvassing before his rivals, but the Clayton agents remained optimistic: ‘If you lose this Game, with all Trumps,’ wrote one of them, ‘Jonas must be against us!’ He was. Catherlow lost his seat and Mellish and St. Leger served together until 1774, when Francis Evelyn Anderson took the second seat on the Pelham interest. In 1780 and again in 1784 both seats fell to the Pelhams, and the Clayton power appeared to be broken. As their star descended, that of Charles Anderson-Pelham rose. His trustees (including the brother of Joseph Mellish) had been assiduously buying property in Grimsby since he inherited the vast Pelham estates from his great uncle in 1763, and he was determined that political influence in Grimsby should be added to that in Beverley and the County of Lincoln to justify the peerage he so desperately wanted.

It was in this period of apparent transition that the tactics of political corruption gave a new impetus to the economy of Grimsby, and set in motion the development that was to lead eventually to the building of a major port. Tired of petty corruption that was swamped by the superior wealth of the Pelhams, Christopher Clayton and George Tennyson — chiefly the latter — began to plot a grand scheme to revive the old loyalty to their house. In place of immediate bribery, they would offer a plan for long-term prosperity; they would appeal to the emotions of those who had trusted in the past and to the self-interest of those who dreamt of a golden future. Not only would the freemen be grateful to their saviours; they would live in a new town that must be built on open fields not owned by Pelham. Moreover, the old trading area had been owned by the Claytons for a century or more. Everyone would stand to gain when commerce replaced corruption. Everyone, that is, except the Pelhams.

Planning the coup began, in the utmost secrecy, sometime in 1786 or 1787, ready for the 1790 election. Alderman Parker, Clayton’s political agent and founder and chairman of their club (the Reds), asked Jonathan Pickernell of Whitby to draw up plans for a dock, which were ready early in November 1787. A year later, on 17 December 1788, they were announced to a Burgess Meeting in the names of Clayton’s candidates for the forthcoming election, William Wesley Pole and Robert Wood. The Burgesses were duly impressed, and passed resolutions praising the candidates and asking for action; but in the end corruption was more powerful than the promise of commerce. All means, fair and foul, were used to bring the Reds to the Polling Booth, but they still exhibited a lamentable tendency to turn Blue under the icy stare
of Pelham's steward. In the end Harrison and North won by five votes each, and Pole and Wood immediately petitioned on the grounds that five of their supporters had been prevented from voting by the Blues, who had kidnapped or otherwise incapacitated them. Harrison and North countered with accusations of corruption and £100 bribes, and a fascinating tale of Clayton and Tennyson locking up a bride on her wedding morning to prevent the groom from acquiring a vote before the election.

The scheme for port building thus failed in its primary object of winning votes, but it was attractive and gained wide support. Indeed, having been introduced in order to secure the victory of one political faction over another, it now became the means for a temporary truce. Pelham, who was now Lord Yarborough, was prepared to support the Haven scheme, and to take Tennyson's nominee, Ayscough Boucherett, prospective chairman of the Haven Company, as one of the candidates for the 1796 election. Tennyson tried to save face. 'While my uncle Clayton was alive,' he said, 'I was obliged in compliance with his wishes to oppose Lord Yarborough but when he died we came to an explanation and I dare say we shall never be at variance more.' He may, perhaps, have been telling the truth, but few people believed him, and both he and Yarborough had constantly to remind their supporters that they were now working together. The Haven Company was indeed established in 1796 as the first fruit of the new-found amity, but not before a major political scuffle had forced the two sides to count their friends. For the first time a third party entered the political arena, supported by a small group of minor landowners and putting forward an alternative Haven scheme. John Henry Loft rallied a good deal of support from freemen who saw in him a chance to build up the town and at the same time rid themselves of the political domination of Yarborough and Tennyson. Tennyson was particularly annoyed because Loft secured the Treasury support that he had always cherished. 'I did not expect that Mr. Pitt would have treated an old steady and suffering connexion in this manner ...', he told Yarborough, and a month later formally proposed their alliance to spite 'Administration'. Despite their efforts, Loft rallied much support, and in 1802 he actually headed the Poll, though his election was declared void on petition. Six years later he annoyed the gentry and delighted the freemen by winning a seat. Grimsby was changing. Loft the adventurer, 'in opposition to the natural interest of the country', had shown that an outsider with a winning way and a deep purse could attract sufficient independent freemen to defeat the older vested interests. A new enthusiasm was abroad, encouraged by the new warehouses building and the new faces appearing. With growing trade and population, Grimsby was changing from sleepy village to bustling town. It was appropriate that the Bench should call the new main highway to the commercial area Loft Street, for the political and commercial changes came together. Just as quickly they died together, and Loft Street is no more. By 1812, when Yarborough's bad management lost both seats to outsiders, commercial growth was over and decline had set in. In 1818, when Yarborough and Tennyson revived their interest in the town, they found their efforts meeting a quick response from a disillusioned electorate. One of the successful candidates was Tennyson's son, Charles, who had already spent twenty years working unofficially on the town's behalf; the other was a close friend of Yarborough. 'The Commerce and general prosperity of your ancient Town and Port ...', Charles Tennyson said in his first address, 'have been too long sacrificed to private objects, or to views merely political.' Yarborough's candidate had a simpler theme: 'Fazakerly and Prosperity'. 'I may boldly pronounce,' said Tennyson, when the election was over, 'that for you a new era has commenced ...'. His optimism was premature. There was merely a return to the state of affairs before 1796. Grimsby was a little bigger, but no bigger than she would have been had the dock never been built. She had slightly more trade, but nothing to justify the huge capital expenditure of the Haven Company. Politically she had returned to the safe nominees of Tennyson and Yarborough. They continued to send their 'advice' to their 'friends'. The last message from old George Tennyson was a cryptic note printed and circulated on the eve of the 1832 election.
GORDON JACKSON

It is my Interest and yours, that your Borough should sent Two Members to Parliament. It is my Opinion, the probability to effect this Object, will be for you to elect Members in the Ministerial Interest.

Therefore, my Friends and Tenants will oblige me, by Voting for such Members.

The long involvement of the Claytons and Tennysons in the commercial and political life of Grimsby was over. Their leadership of the Haven Company passed to the Yarboroughs by about 1820, and after the death of George Tennyson in 1835 his family withdrew from active participation in Grimsby affairs. His son Charles was an active politician who lost interest in Grimsby in the twenties, when he spent much of his time helping Canning to form his abortive "Third Party". His grandson Frederick, who had been left a good part of the Grimsby property (which was thus separated from the main estate which went to Charles), used the income derived from it to support a dilettante life in Italy. The future lay with the Yarboroughs, who would bring the railway and transform the Haven Company, while the Claytons and Tennysons, to whom Grimsby owes so much, have faded from her history and are long forgotten.

Footnotes:

1 For the situation in Hull, see Gordon Jackson, "The Struggle for the First Hull Dock", Transport History, 1.1 (1968), and Hull in the Eighteenth Century (1971), Chapter X.
2 I should like to thank the staff of the Lincolnshire Archives Office for their assistance during the research work on which this paper is based, and my colleague Baron F. Duckham for his criticism.
3 For the early period in Grimsby, see E. Gillett, A History of Grimsby (1970), chapters II and III.
6 Details of Grimsby's trade in 1704 are taken from the Port Books in the Public Record Office, E 190/338/1, E 190/339/2 and E 190/338/9.
7 Knottinpley was ideally placed on navigable water between the West Riding wool (and later coal) area and the Humber, and had many inland and short-sea trading vessels until late in the nineteenth century.
9 For details of Grimsby trade in the later period, see Gordon Jackson, Grimsby and the Haven Company, 1796-1846 (1971), Appendix iii.
10 LAO, TdE/G/10/1-2.
11 Including Clayton's personal shipments of furniture: 2Td'E/G/1/6.
12 To some extent this was still true after Grimsby developed her own dock. See Grimsby and the Haven Company, p. 41.
13 £22.2s.6d. at Louth, E 38.4s.0d. at Grimsby (including fees); List of Commissioners and Officers of H.M. Customs, 1772-81, King's Beam House, Customs Library CUSTOMS 39/15.
14 According to the Collector at Hull, when the Cleethorpes men bungled their application for Registration of their boats in 1786.
16 A Boucherrit to George Tennyson, 22 May 1813; LAO, TdE/H/1/8; Boucherrit was acting in his capacity as chairman of the Haven Company.
18 Captain Annington of Waltham, recorded in Dr. John Parkinson's English Diary, 24 March 1814; Scunthorpe Museum Library.
19 ibid., 31 December 1801.
20 King's Beam House, Hull Customs Letter Books, Collector to Board, 7 December 1765.

51
THE CLAYTONS OF GRIMSBY

21 KBH, CUST 94/19, Board's Orders, 7 January 1806, enclosing letter from 'An Observer'.
22 Petition of Grimsby Corporation . . . , printed December 1800.
23 Skipworth to G. Tennyson, 18 February 1799; Grimsby Public Library, Tennyson Collection (GPL/T).
24 Parkinson's Diary, 23 September 1800.
25 See Grimsby and the Haven Company, chapter 3.
26 Their enthusiasm waned as the cost was realised, but they still produced a creditable basin and
improved haven.
27 LAO, Td'E/B/xx/18.
28 Td'E/B/1/14.
29 Td'E/B/xxi/4.
31 Td'E/B/x/11-13.
32 His tailor's account for 1771-4 is Td'E/G/10/33. The clothes were not all new; he had 4 new suits and
3 made fashionable in the three years.
33 There is no evidence of the total or annual value of the Clayton property in Grimsby. One of
the Christophers put his property at £559 p.a., in 1739 (Td'E/G/4), but we do not know how much of
the family estate was involved. They had other property - for example, a large estate in Scartho, near
Grimsby.
34 For example, Td'E/B/xv/passim.
35 Td'E/xx/1.
36 In 1753, for instance, Christopher Clayton received an intriguing letter from Thomas Causion (who
obviously was a friend) in London Custom House, asking for an invoice for 'all your Tea and China
wares', soja and mangoes, 'and all the other small things'; Td'E/G/1/5.
37 Td'E/G/1.
38 Td'E/G/s/1.
39 Ibid.
40 D. Clayton, Calcutta, to C. Clayton, 13 December 1755; Td'E/G/2/1.
41 Clayton's part in the South Sea Bubble can be followed in outline in J. Carswell, The South Sea
Bubble (1960), passim.
42 Quoted in Carswell, p. 252.
43 Various contracts for the Earl Fauconberg were used in this way in the early nineteenth century.
44 Defendant's Brief in case of Miles Wray v. Christopher Clayton; Td'E/xxiv/1. Under the Bribery
Laws a plaintiff received £500 for each case of bribery proved. Wray claimed £1,500.
45 Knightley, Clayton, 9 February 1734; Td'E/G/1/41.
46 Hildyard Marshall to C. Clayton, 20 October 1767; Td'E/G/1/21.
47 No Grimsby property appears in the Pelham rentals for 1763 or 1766. In 1773-4 the Grimsby property
was worth £160 p.a., and in 1783-4 it was worth £180 p.a., plus £130 for Nun's farm. The
important thing was not so much the value (which compared unfavourably with that of Clayton) but
the number of tenants with votes. Pelham concentrated on small tenements rather than farm land, and
slowly bought up a good deal of the old town centre.
48 T. Picknemell to S. Parkes, 6 November 1787, GPL/T.
49 Copy of Resolution of General Meeting of Burgess, held at . . . the Queen's Head, 17 December 1788;
copy in GPL/T. The Bill was made out to Pole and Wood, but was eventually paid by George Tennyson.
50 For good measure they challenged the legality of many of their opponents' votes, chiefly on the
grounds that non-resident freemen could not vote until they had resided for a year and a day. One man
lost his vote, which he had through his wife, because she had received poor relief before they were
married, and another because the town boundary ran through his wife's birthplace and the midwife
testified that the girl's mother had been sufficiently negligent to give birth in the wrong room.
Minutes of Evidence, Grimsby Election Petition (1790), heard March 1793; GPL.
51 In the early nineteenth century the 'acceptable' rate of bribery was £10 per vote; £50 to the mayor;
£4 to the wife of each alderman; £2 to the wife of each common councilman; 'besides a tea drinking
to the women in general and a ball to the ladies'. Parkinson, 19 September 1813.
52 The compromise was easier because Yarborough had offered to support the retiring members, but
refused to be put to any further expense. The election cost him, nonetheless, over £9,000.
53 Parkinson, 7 September 1798.
54 Ibid., 18 September 1802.
55 G. Babb to Tennyson, 13 March 1796; GPL/T.
56 Draft, Tennyson to Yarborough, 10 February 1796; GPL/T.
57 Do. to Do., 19 March 1796; GPL/T.
58 Parkinson, 27 April 1802.
59 Loft was reputed to have bribed on an unprecedented scale, using £25,000 of Treasury money; ibid.
60 To the Electors of the Borough of Great Grimsby, 6 December 1817; copy in GPL/T.
61 Address . . . , 22 June 1818; copy in GPL/T.

52