

The importance of patrons was first expressed when writs were issued for a new parliament and elections to the Commons were held. Clients sought to be returned for a variety of reasons and applied to their patrons for assistance. In many boroughs, especially the smaller ones, patrons (who in some cases had secured their parliamentary enfranchisement) were able to introduce 'carpet-bagging' clients who were acceptable because they were willing to serve without wages.¹⁷ The results of this activity are manifest in the recently-published volumes of the History of Parliament Trust. Great patrons, most of them noble, nominated or influenced the election of almost 30 per cent of the Commons in Elizabeth's reign.¹⁸ Such clients were not the whipped members of a disciplined, organised political party. We must not assume that they danced to the political tune of their patron, or that they were expected to. On the other hand many of them were voluntary watchdogs of his interests, just as he was willing to promote theirs. It was no more than a parliamentary expression of patron-client relationships.

A classic case concerns the Scottish marches (borderlands). For centuries this quasi-feudal, military and turbulent area had been dominated by the Cliffords and Nevilles in the west, the Dacres in the centre, and the Percys in the east. Their economic power, social influence and military manpower were greater than those of the Crown, which gave them a relatively free hand because they defended the frontier against the Scots. However, they were an unknown factor, turbulent, often at war with each other, and liable to pursue their own interests to the detriment of the Crown. The centralising state of Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell moved to alter this state of affairs. One device was to elevate 'new men' to counterbalance the old great families. Most prominent and successful was Thomas Wharton, created a baron in 1544.¹⁹ His family had been clients and estate stewards of the Cliffords and Percys for centuries and now he was a rival. Constant feuding continued from the forties through the sixties. When the Earl of Cumberland and Wharton came south to parliament in 1554 the Council imposed upon them a public reconciliation. They clasped hands and swore everlasting love and devotion, whilst councillors watched and wept copiously. A similar ceremony was imposed on Wharton and the equally hostile Lord Dacre in 1552 'considering how perilous a thing [their quarrels] were, as well for this troublesome season as in this time of Parliament and assembly of the nobles of the realm'. The practice was repeated in 1554. However, all official attempts at reconciliation were to no avail—the affrays and tumults continued unabated.²⁰

Wharton did not let the matter rest there. In 1549 his client,