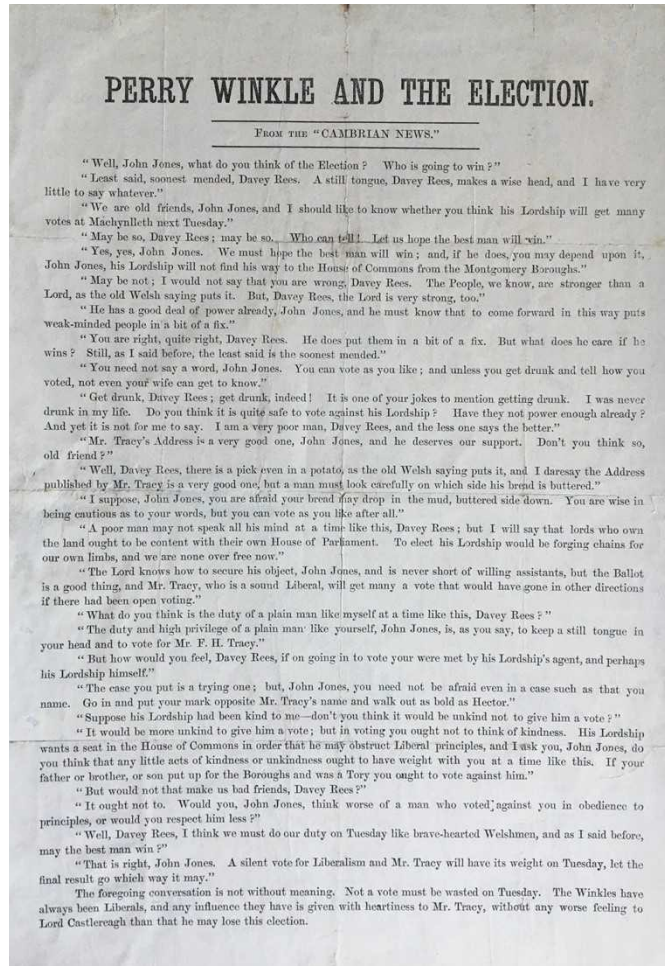


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Election poster entitled 'Perry Winkle and the Election. From the 'Cambrian News'. Undated original 36cm x 25.5cm. Paper. Accession number: N.1994.24.1



*A Victorian election poster provides a glimpse of electioneering practice 150 years ago.*

Over the past 30 years, there has been constant change in our electoral system - devolution, constituency reorganisation and local government reform. 2026 saw a further and quite dramatic change, when all seats in the Senedd were elected by proportional representation. It's true to say change often breeds confusion, and sometimes resentment. But such change is nothing new and it was certainly no different in the nineteenth century, when elections were greeted not only with confusion, but also dread.

At that time the number of people eligible to vote was tiny - a mere 222 in Newtown in 1832, rising to 989 after the extension of voting rights in 1867.

All male, of course! Bribery and intimidation was rife. Tenants could easily find themselves evicted from their property if they dared vote against their landlord's wishes. Voters could be beaten up or plied with alcohol to induce the 'correct' result. For these reasons, the government introduced the secret ballot in 1872 , but even so scepticism that this would improve the situation remained.

This election poster, produced by the Liberal party, was an attempt not only to persuade voters to chose the Liberals in the election, but also to urge them to vote according to their conscience. The election address takes the form of an imaginary conversation between John Jones and Davey Rees on the outcome of the forthcoming election. References to the novelty of the secret ballot suggests this is a new phenomenon in elections in Montgomeryshire. The Liberal candidate is referred to as 'Mr F.H. Tracy' (Frederick Hanbury-Tracy of Gregynog) and the final line refers to the Tory candidate as Lord Castlereagh. This is clearly a reference to Henry Vane-Tempest, Lord Castlereagh of Plas Machynlleth. The poster, therefore can be dated to the by-election of 15 May 1877.

It's probable that Davey's attempts to persuade John to vote Liberal was successful as when the result was announced it was Hanbury-Tracy who was declared the winner with 1,447 votes to Catlereagh's 1,118.

As well as its historical interest, this poster offers an interesting comparison between the methods used by political parties one hundred and fifty years ago and now. I wonder which is the more effective?