

The Duke of Newcastle's Letters on the Fall of Walpole in 1742

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I

The fall from power of Sir Robert Walpole in February 1742 was triggered by the loss of the vote in the House of Commons on 28 January by his ministry over the disputed election of the MPs for Chippenham. Other defeats had preceded that on the 28th, and seven others were to follow in the Commons before Walpole resigned on 11 February. However, his decision to go was taken on 31 January,¹ the Chippenham vote having convinced the Prime Minister that the game was up and that he had to resign if there was a chance to save the ministry of the 'old whigs', which he had led for close on two decades.² One of the chief ministers in Walpole's administration was the Duke of Newcastle, who had been a secretary of state since 1724, but had been in the Lords since 1715 and thus was a figure of some consequence. Despite his personal inadequacies, his organizational abilities made Newcastle a force to be reckoned with in the government. He dominated foreign affairs, an area in which Walpole felt ill at ease. He also was the effective leader of the House of Lords, ably helped by the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Hardwicke, though the Earl of Harrington, as the other secretary of state, may have nominally held the position of 'leader' of the upper House.³

It has long been thought that the Duke of Newcastle, and his friend Lord Hardwicke, who were considered the leading ministers in the House of Lords, had deserted Walpole in his hour of need and were a major reason for his fall. After Walpole had taken his decision to resign in late January 1742 after his defeat in the Commons over the Chippenham election petition, Dudley Ryder, MP, recorded in an interview with the Prime Minister that Walpole thought 'those friends of his, particularly the lord chancellor and the Duke of Newcastle, not standing by him, he has agreed to quit [...]. He complained of lord chancellor and the Duke of Newcastle, especially the former, whose obligations to him he said were very great [...]. He spoke as if he pretty much resented the usage his friends of the Cabinet had given him, and that the lord chancellor and the Duke of Newcastle had made up the matter with Lord Carteret [Walpole's adversary for the leadership of the whigs in the early 1720s] quarter of a year ago.'⁴ The letters quoted below will show that this judgment was harsh, especially concerning Newcastle, who anguished over the events that led to Walpole's departure from government.

¹ See Clyve Jones, 'The House of Lords and the Fall of Walpole', in *Hanoverian Britain and Empire. Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson*, ed. Stephen Taylor, Richard Connors and Clyve Jones (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 102.

² There has been some dispute as to when Walpole's premiership began. Traditionally it has been seen as starting in 1722, confirmed by the death of the 3rd Earl of Sunderland (though some have questionably placed it in 1721 and even in 1720). But if one defines Prime Minister as sole head of an administration, then 1730, when Lord Townshend resigned, is a more likely date for the beginning of Walpole's leadership. Before that date the ministry was lead by the duumvirate of the brothers-in-law.

³ See J. C. Sainty, 'The Origin of the Leadership of the House of Lords', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xlvii (1974), pp. 53-73, esp. 67-8.

⁴ Harrowby MSS. 10: 2 Feb. 1742 (transcripts in Lincoln's Inn Library), quoted in *History of Parliament. House of Commons, 1715-1754*, ed. Romney Sedgwick, 2 vols (1970) [hereafter cited as *HPC 1715-54*], vol. i, p. 50.

II

Newcastle's letters written in early 1742 throw light on the fall of Walpole, as well as illustrating the fraught relationship between the Duke and the Prime Minister. Robert Walpole's ministry was not, and never had been, under the total dominance of one man. Even after Lord Townshend's resignation in 1730 Walpole was in many ways only *primus inter pares*, and not the dominating Prime Minister that tradition has portrayed. The premier had to take into account the personal interests of his cabinet, as well as the whig party at large in Parliament, both in the Commons and the Lords, and last but not least those of the King. The loss of confidence in the Prime Minister by any of these elements could lead to Walpole's political demise. Newcastle's letters (which have not been quoted by other historians) clearly show his loss of confidence in the Prime Minister, as well as charting Walpole's loss of control of the House of Commons.

III

Divisions between Newcastle and Walpole had begun to be important in the late 1730s when the latter insisted that Lord Hervey be promoted to the position of Lord Privy Seal against Newcastle's wishes. In the autumn of 1739, Newcastle even considered 'withdrawing from the administration' if Hervey gained office. Among other things, Newcastle feared that his leadership in the Lords might be undercut by Hervey, whose promotion finally occurred in April 1740.⁵ Consequently, when the war with Spain (the 'War of Jenkins's Ear') broke out in October 1739 (to be succeeded by the War of the Austrian Succession in 1740), a war which Walpole opposed but which Newcastle promoted, a serious rift appeared between the two politicians which had consequences for the conduct of the ministry. Newcastle's relations with the Prime Minister deteriorated so badly that by mid-January 1742 the King obliged both of them to make up, at least 'in appearance'. I have written elsewhere that this was probably no more than a public reconciliation and that privately the relationship remained unchanged.⁶ Evidence of Newcastle's private thoughts on the deteriorating position of the ministry in Parliament, his relationship with Walpole, and on Walpole's decision to resign can be found in letters written to his wife (who was in Bath for most of the period) from early December 1741 to early February 1742, and in one revealing letter to Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, Newcastle's closest colleague in government.⁷

On 5 December 1741, four days after Parliament had opened, Newcastle wrote that 'I am just going to St James's with our Address,⁸ and from thence to Clarem[on]t.⁹ We had a prodigious testing[?] yesterday in the H[ouse] of Lords upon the Question of our address,

⁵ Jones, 'The House of Lords and the Fall of Walpole', pp. 106-7. In terms of precedence (something which mattered to the Duke), Hervey, as Lord Privy Seal, outranked Newcastle, as Secretary of State.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷ BL, Add. 33073, ff. 185-207. The fact that the Duchess of Newcastle was in Bath comes from ff. 186, 187, 196. The Duchess, Harriet, was the daughter of the second Earl of Godolphin, and granddaughter of the first Duke of Marlborough. That these letters have not been used before is odd. Newcastle's most authoritative biographer only makes use of the one undated letter in the group (f. 207) and makes no comment on its significance, and only quotes a very short section from the letter to Hardwicke (BL, Add. 32699, f. 24): Reed Browning, *The Duke of Newcastle* (New Haven, 1975), pp. 110-11. Also an earlier work on Newcastle, though it stresses the Duchess's role of private confidant, does not use these letters: Basil Williams, *Carteret and Newcastle. A Contrast in Contemporaries* (Cambridge, 1943).

⁸ The Lords' address in response to the King's speech.

⁹ Newcastle's Surrey home, near Esher, where he often spent weekends. It was just over 17 miles from Newcastle House, Lincoln's Inn Fields: Phyllis M. Cooper, *The Story of Claremont*, 7th edn (Mitcham, 1979), p. 12.

for us 88, against 43. We are very happy, and much elated upon it.¹⁰ Five days later the Duke hinted at the first problems in the Commons:

I could not send you any news of the H[ouse] of Commons till yesterday. I am sorry to tell you now, our affairs there are not very promising. They divided about Lyddels Election, and we carried it by seven only 222 to 215¹¹ but we are told Things will certainly mend and that it was occasioned by the Absence of friends.¹²

Problems with the government's voting strength continued and on 12 December Newcastle reported that 'The House of Commons sat 'till after two o'clock this morning upon Lyddel's Election. There were four Divisions, we carried them all, but the first only by 6. The others by a few more.'¹³ The Duke went to Claremont for the weekend, where he was unwell with a stomach upset. On Tuesday, having returned to London, he wrote:

Our publick affairs go very disagreeably, which occasions, as you know sometimes, disagreeable *private* Conversations. We lost a Question yesterday by nine votes, about Watkin Williams's Election,¹⁴ but tomorrow is the trying Day about the Chairman of the Committee of Elections, which They say, we shall carry. [...] This Day, I had another charming little party My Friend, L[or]d Lincoln, and Carpenter.¹⁵ We drank your Health most Sincerely. We have so much parliamentary Business that I doubt, if I shall have time to go to Sussex before the day or two before our Election, on the 14th of Jan[uar]y.¹⁶ I have however some thoughts of going there next Thursday sennight [i.e., 24 December], but hardly believe I shall: [...] In short I am in a million of difficulties, A disagreeable Session, a Sussex Election [etc].¹⁷

In the next letter dated 17 December 1741, the Duke recorded another defeat for the ministry in the Commons:

¹⁰ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 185. All correspondence given here was written from Newcastle House, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. 4 Dec. 1741 was the second day Parliament sat, with 142 lords attending: *L.J.*, xxvi, pp. 5-6. The majority of 45 was up on the 28 majority (with 104 voting) on the same occasion in November 1740, so Newcastle's elation was understandable.

¹¹ On 9 December: *C.J.*, xxiv, p. 14. Richard Liddell, an opposition whig, was unseated on petition on 1 December as MP for Bossiney by seven votes. He was re-seated on a further petition after Walpole's fall on 18 Mar. 1742. All information on MPs in this article comes from *HPC 1715-54*. On 3 Dec. 1741, Horace Walpole was forecasting that the court would have a majority of 40, 'a vast number at the outset': *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols (New Haven, 1937-83), vol. xvii, p. 220: to Mann.

¹² BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 186: 10 Dec. 1741. The absence of former supporters counted as much as, or perhaps more than, the defections to the opposition as a cause of Walpole's fall in the Commons. Cf. Horace Walpole's comments on absenteeism later in the session, see below n. 32.

¹³ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 187. The divisions record in *C.J.*, vol. xxiv, p. 118 were 224-218, 205-17, 206-191, 201-165.

¹⁴ Watkins Williams Wynn was elected for Denbighshire on 26 May 1741, but had nearly 600 of his votes disallowed by the sheriff. On 28 May he was returned unopposed for Montgomeryshire. His petition over the Denbighshire election was rejected on 14 Dec. 1741 by 202 votes to 193 (*C.J.*, vol. xiv, p. 19). The Commons reversed this vote on 23 Feb. 1742, and Williams Wynn gave up his seat for Montgomeryshire.

¹⁵ Henry Fiennes Clinton, 9th Earl of Lincoln, Newcastle's nephew and eventual heir. George, 2nd Baron Carpenter [I], MP for Weobley 1741-7, was to desert Walpole on the Westminster election petition on 22 Dec. 1741.

¹⁶ This was a by-election to replace James Butler, MP Sussex 1715-22, 1728-41, who had died on 17 May 1741 of smallpox ten days after his re-election.

¹⁷ BL, Add. MS. 33037, ff. 188-9: 15 Dec. 1741.

I wish I could give you a good account of our House of Commons affairs, We lost it last night Mr Earle 238 Dr Lee 242.¹⁸ We hope we shall yett be able to have a Majority upon other Points, that there can be no Certainty. In the House of Lords, we are all triumphant.¹⁹ I had this Day a Lott of young Lords with L[or]d Lincoln to dinner, Mr Lesley²⁰ dined with us yesterday at the D[uke] of Leeds²¹ [...] I am just going to S[i]r Rob[ert] Walpoles who is [in] a stew indeed [...]²²

Two days later, however, Newcastle was able to report an upturn in the ministry's fortunes: 'The H[ouse] of Commons sat 'till Eleven last Night, upon calling for papers. We had three Divisions, and carried Them all by, a Majority, of 10, 21, and 23.²³ So we are in better Spirits. [...] I now propose to go to Haland this day Sennight [i.e., 26 December], to entertain for three or four days there.'²⁴ On 22 December, the Duke was again upbeat:

I am just going to the H[ouse] of Lords, where We shall have a long, tho' Successful Day.²⁵ You are mighty good My Dearest, in being so concerned for our affairs in the H[ouse] of Commons. They go better, and we had, as you will know, the Majority upon four Questions on Fryday.²⁶ Don't be Concerned. Every thing, I really think, will go well. [...] I should think you might drink them [the waters at Bath] 3 weeks more afterwards, which will just bring My Dearest to town, as I return from our Election, which begins the 14 of Jan[uar]y. I propose to go to Haland next Fryday

¹⁸ This vote, of 16 Dec. 1741, was taken in the committee of privileges and elections and is thus not recorded in the Commons Journals. Giles Earle, MP for Malmesbury 1722–47, chairman of the committee of privileges and elections 1727–41, supported by the ministry, was unpopular, and lost to the opposition candidate, George Lee, MP for Brackley 1733–42 and Devizes 1742–7, who remained chairman until 1747. This defeat for the government signalled the beginning of the end for Walpole. Horace Walpole thought that on this vote 'we are metamorphosed into the minority', and that the division showed 'the greatest number I believe that ever lost a question': *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xvii, pp. 242–3; to Mann, 16 Dec. 1741 (original emphasis).

¹⁹ The last vote in the Lords had been on the state of the nation on 9 December, with a government majority of 14 (74 voting). This was the first sign of a severe fall in government majorities, which Newcastle at this stage, no doubt, would dismiss as due to the smaller attendance in the House. But a falling attendance rate, particularly of ministerial supporters, was mirroring the decline of the administration's position in the Commons (see Jones, 'The House of Lords and the Fall of Walpole', pp. 102–36). As yet, this may have been hidden from Newcastle; or he was in denial, or putting a brave face on for the benefit of the Duchess.

²⁰ Possibly Thomas Leslie, MP for Dysart Burghs 1734–41, and Perth Burghs 1743–61, who was a younger son of the Earl of Rothes, one of the leaders of the *Squadronne Volante* (the pro-whig Scottish faction) and the cousin of another (Tweeddale). Usually voting with the opposition in the 1730s, he was to support the government in the 1740s and in 1747 joined Henry Pelham.

²¹ Thomas Osborne, 4th Duke of Leeds, was Newcastle's brother-in-law, having married Mary Godolphin.

²² BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 191: original emphasis. Horace Walpole reported that 'Sir R[obert] is in great spirits, and still sanguine': *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xvii, p. 245; to Mann, 16 Dec. 1741.

²³ On 18 December the voting figures were 237 to 227, and 232 to 208 on the question of papers on the Austrian war, and 218 to 197 on the Westminster election: *C.J.*, vol. xxiv, pp. 33–4. For details, see *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xvii, p. 250; to Mann, 24 Dec. 1741.

²⁴ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 192: 19 Dec. 1741. Haland, near Lewes, was the ancestral home of the Pelham family, and one of Newcastle's three houses in Sussex, where he planned to base his campaign for the upcoming Sussex election.

²⁵ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 193. This was the last sitting day for the Lords before the Christmas recess. (Until 1739, Parliament had usually not sat before Christmas. In 1739 the recess began on 20 December, in 1740 on the 18th: *L.J.*, vol. xxv, pp. 444, 558. Sitting as late as the 22nd in 1741 betokened a crisis.) There were two divisions on 22 Dec. 1741 on foreign affairs, and the government won by 27 and 30 in a larger attendance than on 4 December. This would have temporarily boosted Newcastle's confidence, but these majorities would never be reached again in a House which saw, after the Christmas recess, increasingly larger attendances.

²⁶ 18 December, see above n. 23.

[i.e., 25 December], hunt on Saturday, return to Haland on Sunday, have the Neighbours there, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, Hunt on Thursday, have one day at Bishopstone on Fryday,²⁷ and then return to London, next Saturday or Sunday Sennight [i.e., 2 or 3 January 1742], and not go down again to Sussex till the 13th, the day before the Election.²⁸

On Christmas Eve he reported further defeats in the Commons, but was bucked by good news from Sussex:

Mr Sergisen²⁹ has given up, at a meeting at Lewes, and has wrote a very civil letter to the Duke of Dorset³⁰ to inform Him of it, so now we have no opposition, and every thing is quiet, which you may imagine, I am much rejoiced at. I have putt of my Journey to Haland next week. I shall only go down for a day at the Election, as the County was invited to Haland for three Days, Jemmy, Tom etc.³¹ go down to entertain them.

Then comes the bad news from the House of Commons:

We are much taken up in Scheming about publick affairs, but Nothing seems to secure us a certain Majority in the H[ouse] of Commons, We lost the Westminster Election, and 3 or 4 other Divisions that day by four or five,³² however, as some Friends were absent upon particular reasons, We hope for better Success upon all publick Questions. We continue still Triumphant in the H[ouse] of Lords, where every thing goes to our Mind, w[hi]ch is pleasant to us there, tho' not sufficient to carry our affairs thro'.³³ Both Houses are adjourned till the 14 and 18th of Jan[uar]y, So we shall have the Holy days to work in, and secure, if possible a Majority.³⁴ [...] I propose to be Wednesday the 13th of Jan[uar]y at Haland, go to the Election on the 14th and be in London Monday the 17th. Which Day I suppose you will be setting out from Bath. Lord Chancellor, and my Brother³⁵ dined here on Business [...]³⁶

²⁷ Bishopstone was another of Newcastle's Sussex homes, chiefly used as a hunting lodge (Williams, *Carteret and Newcastle*, p. 18), and conveniently located just north of Seaford, one of the constituencies the Duke controlled.

²⁸ BL, Add. MS. 33073, ff. 193-4: 22 Dec. 1741.

²⁹ Thomas Sergison (1701-66), of Cuckfield Place, Sussex, later MP for Lewes 1747-66. He had finished third in the election in 1741. The fact that he had stood for this election and his withdrawal are not noted in the *History of Parliament*.

³⁰ Dorset was the father of Charles Sackville, Earl of Middlesex, who was standing at the by-election for Sussex. He was returned unopposed.

³¹ James Pelham, of Crowhurst, Sussex, MP for Hastings 1741-61, a second cousin of Newcastle's, and his elder brother Thomas Pelham, of Lewes, MP for Lewes 1705-41.

³² Two votes on the Westminster election lost by 216 to 220 and 215 to 220; and two votes that the House adjourn lost by 215 to 217 and 200 to 206: *C.J.*, vol. xxiv, p. 37. According to Horace Walpole, '[w]e had 41 more members in town, who would not, or could not come down [to the Commons]. The time is a touchstone for wavering conscience': *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xvii, p. 251: to Mann, 24 Dec. 1741.

³³ This may mean that though the ministry had a majority in the Lords it was not sufficient to counteract the increasing loss of control in the Commons, or it may be Newcastle's first admission that it was beginning to look as if the government were also losing control of the upper House as well.

³⁴ Cf. Horace Walpole's comment: '[a]ll depends upon the practices of both sides in securing or getting new votes during the recess. Sir Robert is very sanguine: [...] but the moment he has the majority secure, I shall be very earnest with him to resign': *ibid.*, p. 253: 24 Dec. 1741.

³⁵ Henry Pelham (1695-1754), MP for Sussex 1722-54, 'Prime Minister' 1743-54.

³⁶ BL, Add. MS. 33073, ff. 195-6: 24 Dec. 1741.

By Boxing Day, Newcastle was on the whole in a good mood: 'I am thank God, [illegible] well, and just going to Claremont [...] The ease of our Sussex Election, and the Recess from the Hurry of Parliament for three Weeks or more, is much comfort to me. They talk of an opposition for Westminster, and of setting up, L[or]d Harrington's Youngest Son and S[i]r Tho[mas] Clarges, against L[or]d Perceval and Edwins³⁷ but I am afraid it won't do.'³⁸

Newcastle's hopes of redeeming the situation in the Commons over the Christmas adjournment did not come to fruition:

[Lord Lincoln] goes with the D[uke] of Richmond³⁹ to Lewes, thinking to meet Me there. My Brother setts out tomorrow for Haland, and returns to London on Saturday [i.e., 16 January 1742]. My Business would not permit me to go [...] I was in hopes This long vacation, might have produced Some Alteration for the better, and so I am perswaded, it might, if right use had been made of it, and *some people*, had not been too positive, or too Confident.⁴⁰ There has been an attempt towards the *first Reconciliation*⁴¹ tho' unknown to Me, 'till it was over. But made in such a manner, that had I known it, I should have dispaired of any Success, and consequently should not have ordered[?] it in that Shape, but this is only for yourself. Foreign affairs don't grow worse, and That is all I can say of Them.⁴²

Two days before this, on 10 January, Newcastle had written an important letter to the lord chancellor, the Earl of Hardwicke, about his additions and alterations to Hardwicke's draft of 'what may be proper to be proposed by Us, when the State of the Nation is under Consideration'.⁴³ Newcastle went on:

I believe, (as Things are going,) your Lordship and I, shall not be employed very often, for the future, in preparing Business for the House of Lords;⁴⁴ or advising Measures of

³⁷ Lord Harrington was secretary of state for the north. Sir Thomas Clarges, 2nd Bt, MP for Lostwithiel 1713–15, had stood unsuccessfully for Westminster in 1722 (and was to do so again in 1747). His father, Sir Walter, 1st Bt, had been MP for Westminster, 1690–5, 1702–5. John, Viscount Perceval, and Charles Edwin, both MPs for Westminster 31 Dec. 1741–47 were returned unopposed.

³⁸ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 197: 26 Dec. 1741.

³⁹ The Duke of Richmond, also a Sussex magnate, was one of Newcastle's closest friends. For their correspondence see *The Correspondence of the Dukes of Richmond and Newcastle, 1724–1750*, ed. Timothy J. McCann, Sussex Record Society, vol. lxxiii (Lewes, 1984). On 9 Jan. 1742, Newcastle had written to Richmond thanking him for the good news from the Sussex election campaign, 'I am sorry I cannot give you any hopes of the like in London, where I see nothing comfortable, or likely to turn out well. Some amongst us, are very sanguine in their Hopes, and are determined to act upon that foundation, But this is not the general Opinion, which is full of fears, for which, I am afraid, there is but too much Ground. God knows, how this will end; for my own part, I fear and dread the worst. [...] Nothing is yet thought of, or at least, determined for us to do in the House of Lords, on the State of the nation, and as the King has so formally in His Speech, required our advice, His Ministers at least, should have some advice to give, which at present they have not': see *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Horace Walpole on 7 January 1742 thought 'that we shall have a majority of twenty-six: Sir R[obert] says more; but now upon a pinch, he brags like any bridegroom': *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xvii, p. 272: to Mann.

⁴¹ The reconciliation between the King and the Prince of Wales, attempted by Walpole, consisted of an offer by the King to grant Prince Frederick an extra £50,000 a year and to pay his debts. It was rejected by the Prince so long as Walpole remained in office: John. B. Owen, *The Rise of the Pelhams* (London, 1957), p. 29.

⁴² BL, Add. MS. 33073, ff. 202–3: 12 Jan. 1742. Original emphasis.

⁴³ The debate on the state of the nation started in the Lords on 19 January: *L.J.*, vol. xxvi, p. 37.

⁴⁴ This probably refers to Newcastle's personal fear of being dismissed, rather than his understanding that the administration was about to fall and that part of the reason for this was the ministry's increasing loss of control of the Lords, which was both his and Hardwicke's responsibility (cf. Newcastle's comments to Richmond, above n. 39).

Administration. By the best Accounts, I can learn; All might have been Easy, quiet, and *Safe*; had it not been for the fatal Obstenacy of one Single Man⁴⁵; -- “Resolved to ruin, or to rule, the State:[”]

But this is only to your Lordship. -----

I shall attend the King to morrow; and, whenever I have an Opportunity. Lay before Him the State, I apprehend, His affairs will be in; and where They might have been, had other measures been taken. My Representations will have no other Effect, but to ease my own mind: Your strong *Remonstrances* may succeed better; and I most heartily recommend it to you, not to be sparing in them; *Nocuit differre paratis*.⁴⁶

In his next letter to the Duchess, written after Parliament had reassembled, dated 20 January 1741[/42], Newcastle tells his wife: ‘Yesterday we had a very good Day in the H[ouse] of Lords,⁴⁷ and a very bad One in the H[ouse] of Commons, as I am afraid will frequently be the Case. There is a Commission of accounts moved for in the H[ouse] of Commons which is not an agreeable Thing [...].’⁴⁸ By the time of his next letter, three days later, there appeared to be a rallying of the ministry’s fortunes in the Commons:

On Thursday [21 January] the House of Commons sat till near One in the Morning, When we carried the great Question against a *Secret Comittee*⁴⁹ by three Votes only. For 250. Against 253.⁵⁰ above 500 in the House. This raises some peoples Spirits a little too Much,⁵¹ as I am afraid will appear in other Things. Every Thing is perfectly easy in the H[ouse] of Lords.⁵² A Bill for a Commission of accounts in the Commons is order’d without a Division.⁵³ We have an account from Yorkshire w[i]th news of our great Success there. Where Nat Turner has carried it, by a Majority of 950, w[hi]ch is a vast Thing at this time.⁵⁴ Young P. Walter influenced by the Old one, voted against us the other day,⁵⁵ Every Body else (J. Lumley⁵⁶ particularly) [did?] admirably. [...]⁵⁷

⁴⁵ Walpole.

⁴⁶ BL, Add. 32699, ff. 14-15: Newcastle to Hardwicke, Claremont, 10 Jan. 1741[/2]. Original emphasis. *Semper nocuit differre paratis* means ‘to pause when ready is to court defeat’ and is a quotation from M. Annaeus Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, i, 281.

⁴⁷ The majority for the administration in the division on the state of the nation was, however, only 24, with 130 voting. The Lords had first sat after the Christmas recess on 14 January (*L.J.*, vol. xxvi, p. 23).

⁴⁸ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 204. Newcastle ends by telling his Duchess that he is ‘now just going to Claremont’, and that he hopes she will leave Bath on the Friday, 22 January, and will arrive in London on ‘Monday sennight’ [1 February].

⁴⁹ ‘Mr Pultney rose up, and moved for a secret committee of twenty-one. This Inquisition, this Council of Ten, was to sit and examine whatever persons and papers they should please, and to meet when and where they pleased’: *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol. xvii, p. 297: to Mann, 22 Jan. 1742.

⁵⁰ See *C.J.*, vol. xxiv, p. 53.

⁵¹ On 22 January, Horace Walpole reported that his father ‘was all alive and in spirits: he says he is younger than me; and in deed I think so, in spite of his forty years more’: *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol. xvii, p. 294: to Mann.

⁵² According to Horace Walpole, on 20 January in the Lords Argyll libelled the ministry, ‘and of all men, the Duke of Newcastle was the man who rose up and agreed with him – remember what I told you once before of his union with Carteret [a leader of the whigs in opposition]!’: *ibid.*, pp. 300-1: to Mann, 22 Jan. 1742.

⁵³ On 20 Jan. 1742: *C.J.*, vol. xxiv, p. 51.

⁵⁴ Cholmley Turner, MP for Yorkshire 1727-41, 21 Jan. 1742-47, had won a by-election, caused by the death of Lord Morpeth (elected in May 1741) by 8005 votes to 7049.

⁵⁵ On 21 Jan. 1742, Peter Walter (d. 1753), MP for Shaftsbury 1741-47, had voted on a motion to examine all papers relevant to the conduct of the war, which Walpole had won by three votes. ‘Old’ Peter Walter (d. 1746), was his grandfather, who had been MP for Bridport 1715-27, and Winchelsea 1728-34.

⁵⁶ James Lumley, MP for Arundel 1741-47. For his relationship with Newcastle, see *H.P.*, 1715-54, vol. ii, pp. 229-30.

⁵⁷ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 205: 23 Jan. 1741[/42] (original emphasis).

The last letter before Walpole's resignation is undated, but was probably written on 1 February 1741:⁵⁸

You will be surprised to hear, I came to town last night [Sunday],⁵⁹ but it was great Business indeed, which must [be] the greatest Secret from *Every Body*. S[i]r R[obert] is upon the point of taking that wise Resolution *to retire* which will be fixed in two or three days.⁶⁰ Every Thing I hope will then jogg on tolerably. We have a long Day in the H[ouse] of Lords,⁶¹ but I believe I may be able to be home between five and six. I have ordered a little Dinner for My Dearest etc. Sett something by, for L[or]d Lincoln and I.

IV

What do these letters to his wife and Hardwicke reveal of Newcastle's views on Walpole and the end of the ministry? They confirm that he was at odds with the Prime Minister and unhappy about Walpole's conduct of the administration, attacking him directly in the letter of 10 January to Hardwicke and the one of 12 January to the Duchess. Indeed his proposal to talk directly to the King over Walpole's conduct, mentioned in his letter to the Lord Chancellor, could be construed as conspiring against Walpole. He appears to have greatly resented being left out of the attempted reconciliation with the prince of Wales.

These letters also reflect on the three areas of his interest and expertise. On foreign affairs they say little, but give the impression that things are ticking over. Newcastle, however, is much distracted by two by-elections for the county seats of Sussex and Yorkshire, and is pleased by the results, though any hope of these elections influencing the situation in the Commons is not mentioned. (The letters do, however, give a glimpse of the personal effort he was prepared to expend on the organization of the social side of elections, despite the fact that the Sussex election was eventually uncontested.)

As regards the House of Lords, which, along with Hardwicke, he effectually ran for the ministry, what he does not say is more significant than what he does. I have written that as the situation in the Commons grew more desperate after the Christmas recess, then the ministry's position in the upper House began to decline.⁶² This growing loss of control manifested itself most clearly in the declining majorities for the government in a well-attended House (where, like the Commons, absenteeism as well as desertion played a part). Newcastle has no mention

⁵⁸ BL, Add. MS. 33073, f. 207: 'Monday Morning' [1 Feb. 1742] (original emphasis). The dating is based on the facts that Walpole decided to resign on Sunday, 31 Jan. 1741, and actually retired on Thursday 11 Feb., and that the Lords did sit on 1 Feb. 1742 (*L.J.*, vol. xxvi, pp. 49-51). The lack of other Monday sittings around this time rules out other possible dates for this letter.

⁵⁹ Newcastle was obviously called back from Claremont to be apprised of Walpole's decision to resign. Horace Walpole wrote on 4 Feb. 1741 that 'last week we heard in the House of Commons the Chippenham election, [...] Both sides made it the decisive question – but our people were not all equally true; and upon the previous question we had but 235 to 236 – so lost it by one. From that time my brothers, my uncle, I and some of his particular friends persuaded Sir R[obert] to resign – He was undetermined till Sunday night [1 February]': *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xvii, pp. 318-19; to Mann.

⁶⁰ As early as 12 Jan. 1742, '[m]any and very confident have been the Reports that Sr R[obert] is to retire, decline, &c, but I can with great Positiveness assure You that He thinks of no such thing, nor dos believe the Case at all desperate; Upon Paper We have undoubtedly a majority as great as that I shew'd You, (exclusive of what We gain by Double Elections and Deaths) from which the most timid Genius can not strike off one, and I hear of some gain'd.' BL, Add. MS. 51417, f. 86: Henry Fox to Lord Ilchester, 12 Jan. 1741[/2].

⁶¹ A debate in the committee of the whole House on the state of the nation (with 124 lords attending that day): *L.J.*, vol. xxvi, p. 51.

⁶² Jones, 'The House of Lords and the Fall of Walpole', pp. 102-36.

of the ministry's increasingly poor showing in the Lords, though there are clear hints to Hardwicke that all was not well. On the contrary, even in his penultimate letter to his wife, of 23 January, he wrote 'Every Thing is perfectly easy in the H[ouse] of Lords.' Why was this? It could be that Newcastle failed to see the writing on the wall, though there is no evidence that his organizational skills were deserting him. Perhaps he wanted to keep the news from his Duchess who was ill, and throw all blame for the fall of Walpole on to the Commons. His position of opposition within the ministry meant that he could not afford to take any of the blame if he were to survive and serve (and perhaps lead) in the successor administration to Walpole's.