

*Speaker's House
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA.
20 October 1992*

Dear Mr Bailey,

When I was elected Speaker of the House of Commons in late April of this year, one of my first and most important duties was to lay claim on behalf of the Commons to its undoubted rights and privileges, particularly to freedom of speech in debate, freedom from arrest, freedom of access to Her Majesty whenever occasion shall require and that the most favourable construction should be placed upon all our proceedings. That I should do so with the assurance of receiving a favourable reply from the Monarch is due in no small measure to the activities of John Hampden and others of his generation.

As members of the public wishing to watch our debates in the House of Commons or to lobby their Member of Parliament enter the Palace of Westminster, they pass through St. Stephen's Hall, site of the Commons Chamber until the nineteenth century. At the entrance to the central lobby stand two statues, representing two alternative visions of our Parliamentary development. On one side stands the Earl of Clarendon, in his Lord Chancellor's robes, symbol of the respect for law. On the other side is the splendid figure of John Hampden, dressed for battle, sword at his side, ready to defend Parliament's rights and privileges by any means necessary. Now that the struggles which divided these two great men lie in the distant past, we can cherish both visions.

John Hampden is, of course, most famous not so much for his activities in Parliament but for his steadfast refusal to pay a tax levied without Parliamentary approval - Ship Money. Yet throughout his political career he was dedicated to the idea that a free Parliament was essential to the defence of the King's subjects. In the Parliament of 1628 he was one of the first to argue that the policies pursued by Charles I amounted to "no less than the subversion of the whole state".

By the time Parliament finally met again in 1640 John Hampden was one of the most famous men in England. Throughout the Short Parliament he reminded Members that the freedom of speech in debate was the most important issue before them. The principle he asserted - that Members of Parliament should not be held to account in the courts for their activities in the House - is one that is now universally accepted, enshrined as it is in the Bill of Rights, and which is integral to the effective functioning of Parliament to this day. Nor is this essential democratic rule confined to the United Kingdom: the freedom of speech of Parliamentarians in the conduct of their duties is now accepted as one of the most significant benchmarks for assessing the democratic credentials of parliaments and international assemblies throughout the world.

John Hampden's virtues as a Parliamentarian are such as to commend him to a Speaker in any age. He did not favour long set-piece speeches but short well-timed interventions designed to influence the outcome of debate. He was obviously loyal to and well liked by his constituents. Five thousand inhabitants of Buckinghamshire came to London in his support after the King attempted his arrest.

His defence of Parliament led him, in Clarendon's phrase, to draw his sword and throw away his scabbard. After his mortal wound on the field at Chalgrove, he was buried at Great Hampden, a ceremony conducted by the Rector Robert Lenthall, brother of one of my most illustrious predecessors. Thus, his link to Parliament remained until the very end.

As Hampden had foreseen, his place in history was soon eclipsed by his cousin, Oliver Cromwell, whose statue has pride of place outside the Palace of Westminster. However, John Hampden's lasting contribution to the securing of modern Parliamentary freedoms should not be forgotten and I welcome the contribution your new Society will make to keeping his memory alive.

I am sorry that I cannot be with you on the Inauguration Day of your Society, but my first and paramount duty is my attendance upon the House of Commons. I am sure that is something John Hampden would have understood.

Yours sincerely

Betty Boothroyd

Speaker.

LETTERS

A large number of letters have been received by the Society since its inauguration last October, but the very encouraging one on the left arrived a few days beforehand.

The one below was the result of discovering that there are towns called Hampden in Newfoundland, New Zealand, N. Dakota and Massachusetts; Hamdens in Connecticut, New York and Ohio; and Hampden Highland in Maine - and writing to the respective Mayors.

**8 Short Wharf Rd.,
Hampden, Maine 04444,
U.S.A.**

29 December 1992

Dear Mr Bailey,

Your letter to "The Mayor, Hampden Highlands, ME." was turned over to me as a member of the Bicentennial Committee of the town of Hampden, ME. Within the last few years Hampden Highlands has been combined with other parts of this community into the U.S. Postal zone - Hampden 04444 - and exists now as a section of the Town of Hampden, Maine.

A Bicentennial Committee was formed earlier in 1992 to begin preparations for a celebration in 1994 of the incorporation of the town in February 1794. Previous to 1794 the town was called Wheelersboro. Then when settlers sought incorporation through petition of the General Court of Massachusetts (Maine was a part of Mass. until 1820) the name Hampden was suggested in honour of your Society's John Hampden. As a teacher in our local schools I suggested to the committee that a meaningful project for students might be finding out more about John Hampden, possibly through a John Hampden Society. We wrote an address in England but received no reply. (Most likely it was incorrect) Therefore the receipt of your letter is quite exciting for us as potential for research on our town's namesake as well as learning: about your society and its many activities.

I shall present your letter to the Bicentennial Committee at its next meeting on January 20. Also I shall inform the Hampden Historical Society of the John Hampden Society. I expect there will be a great deal of interest in this connection.

Sincerely yours,

Alice M. Hawes.