The dissolution of the marcher lordships as political units in 1536 drew to a close a long and gruelling period in the history of Wales and the borderland. Power in the new Welsh counties from that time onwards was more firmly controlled by Welsh landed gentry who obtained a dispensation to conduct public affairs and establish law and order in the localities. One prime aspect of the Tudor settlement was the privilege of parliamentary representation, which gave the governing families the opportunity to broaden their interests in the field of politics and administration. Representation was regarded as a significant part of the settlement offered to gentry, who had formally been granted equality in public offices. The honour that accompanied the office was the highest in the cursus honorum of the landed gentry. The franchise was similar to the practise in England, the vote being granted to the 40-shilling freeholder in the shire and the free burgesses in the boroughs. Thomas Cromwell's motive was to extend to the gentry the political rights enjoyed by their counterparts in England. Each county and shire-town obtained one Member of Parliament, except Merioneth, which had no borough member, and Monmouthshire which was given two knights of the shire, making a total of 26 Welsh Members of Parliament. In 1543 the prosperous town of Haverfordwest was created a county borough with its own Member bringing the total to 27. Although this arrangement lacked equality in terms of actual
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representation since in England the custom was to send two knights of the shire and two burgesses for the shire-town, economic considerations restricted the numbers of Members of Parliament in Wales. The principle of representation, however, had been recognised at the time, probably on the recommendation of the king’s private advisers in Wales who were doubtless aware of the capacities of the Welsh counties and boroughs to sustain membership.

Welsh Involvement in Politics

The government was eager to see Welsh participation in the affairs of the realm in the House of Commons, and the period extending between the 1540s and the opening of the Long Parliament in 1640 revealed increased involvement among the most eligible gentry in public affairs in addition to their local government duties. The expansion of Tudor government and the part played by the provinces in matters that engaged the central administration led eventually to a more vigorous approach to parliamentary functions. Doubtless, the most valued of the privileges granted to localities in Wales was parliamentary representation, particularly as knight of the shire, a privilege that enabled the greater gentry to reinforce their mastery over their communities. Not only had the Acts of Union imposed jurisdictional and administrative unity upon Wales, but they had also linked it to the assumption of wider responsibilities in the House of Commons. The creation of new shires enabled the system to operate with relative ease, and representation revealed a degree of autonomy in that the views of Welsh members were largely governed by their own interests, thus creating distinct political principles.

The delegated authority was entrusted to a select group of prominent and homogeneous gentry, a feature that became more conspicuous in the latter half of the sixteenth century. In their capacity as landowners they maintained the fabric of the social order, thereby promoting their own interests and, at the same time, performing their duties to the central