Luttrell, Henry Lawes

Luttrell, Henry Lawes (1737–1821), 2nd earl of Carhampton, soldier, and politician, was born 7 August 1737, first son of Simon Luttrell (1713–87), 1st earl of Carhampton, and his wife Judith Maria, daughter of Sir Nicholas Lawes, governor of Jamaica. Educated at Westminster and Christ Church Oxford, he began a military career as an ensign in the 48th Foot in 1757, becoming a captain of dragoons in 1759. Deciding on a career in politics, he entered the British house of commons as MP for Bossiney (1768). The following year he became MP for Middlesex (1769–74), and received much popular abuse – but royal approval – for standing against John Wilkes; he lost the election but Wilkes's candidacy was invalidated and Luttrell secured the seat. As a reward, he was appointed adjutant-general of the land forces in Ireland in 1770. The political commentator ‘Junius’ was vicious in his condemnation and accused him of degrading ‘even the name of Luttrell’ (quoted in Bourke, 67). He sat for Bossiney for a second time (1774–84), but lost his seat after supporting Charles James Fox's East India bill. By this time he was MP for Old Leighlin, Co. Kilkenny (1783–7), styled Lord Luttrell (1785–7). After the death of his father (14 January 1787) he entered the Irish house of lords, having succeeded as 2nd earl of Carhampton in the peerage of Ireland. He also secured a colonelcy of dragoons and the lieutenant-generalship of the ordnance of Ireland. After winning the support of the prime minister, William Pitt, he was returned as MP for Plympton Erle, a British constituency, in 1790. The owner of a Jamaican plantation, he opposed the abolition of slavery and declared in the British commons in 1792 that slaves only wanted ‘to murder their masters, ravish their women, and drink all their rum’ (Hist. parl.).

Living in Ireland in the late 1790s he was involved in the ruthless suppression of dissent in Connacht in 1795, and was appointed commander-in-chief of the army (1796–7). An uncompromising opponent of radicalism, he was an unpopular figure in the country and the subject of numerous assassination plots; a bill of indemnity eventually had to be passed for his protection. Blamed with committing numerous atrocities, he press-ganged suspected rebels to serve in the British navy. Lord Camden (qv), the viceroy, admitted that Luttrell ‘did not confine himself to the strict rules of law’ (Lecky, iii, 419), and warned Pitt of the danger to Luttrell’s life. Carhampton became a hate-figure for radicals, and featured prominently in the propaganda of the United Irishmen, and escaped a number of assassination attempts. Despite Camden’s recommending him for a British peerage, this never materialised, although he was made Irish master-general of the ordnance (August 1797). Returning to England at the end of 1797, he was made full general in 1798, but became disillusioned with the government and threatened loudly to oppose the act of union in early 1799. By July he was reconciled to the administration and sold his Irish property, becoming a moderate supporter of the union, but worried about
the possibility of Ireland being run by the catholics. He abandoned Ireland, he said, because ‘the conduct of a cowardly government exposed my life to assassination, wounded my feelings, robbed me of the weight and influence I had in it’ (Hist. parl.). His resigning his position at the ordnance (August 1800) was partly to allow his illegitimate son, Henry Luttrell (c.1765–1851), to become clerk of the pipe. He retired from all public activities for over a decade, and it was not till 1813 that he made attempts to return to the British commons, although he really wanted a peerage in the new United Kingdom. No deal was forthcoming, however, and it was only in 1817 that he secured a seat, returning as MP for Ludgershall (1817–21). His treatment had left him angry and bitter and he opposed the government on most issues, except on parliamentary reform and radical issues.

He died at his home at Bruton St., London, 25 April 1821. He married (25 June 1776) Jane, daughter of George Boyd of Dublin; they had no children. Described by John Henry Petty, MP, as ‘very comical and profligate’ (Hist. parl.), he was both witty and courageous: apparently he once declined to fight a duel with his father because the challenger was not a gentleman.