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Popular political speech and popular political culture in 1530s England

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis penetrates the surface of popular political culture in 1530s England, a truly turbulent period of political, religious and social change. It argues that by its actions, government acknowledged the threat posed by popular political speech, thus recognising its existence, and something of its force. The thesis establishes that a 'political consciousness' was present across the 1530s, and it most definitely showed its face come the time of rebellion. Criticism of government emanated from all levels of society, driven by the fact that all were impacted. The government applied the full force of the law, if that meant changing the law, introducing new law, or simply attaining without trial. It promulgated its own agenda, be it from the pulpit, the market cross or in print. This action left its detailed mark on the record, and the State Papers collection provides the very evidence that tells of widespread criticism of government actions. The thesis interrogates the footprint left by authority, chiefly through examination of State Papers but not solely so. Secondary sources that interrogate key thesis themes are used, with comparative studies and cross-disciplinary studies drawn on to offer new insights. The study explores the frictions that were being played out in societal relationships, and the space and place in which such friction manifested itself. This very much includes the role of the clergy, a group in society who often found themselves subject to intense pressure from above and below. The clergy do not fit neatly into binary models of politics: whether 'rulers vs. ruled' or 'clergy vs. laity'. It is argued that this extensive focus on the role of the clergy in popular politics represents a departure from existing work, which has tended to overlook the political role of this key group.

A methodological intervention is made through the analysis of information flow, focusing on three essential media: rumour, ballads, and political prophecy. The thesis finds that the three media amplified political voice, enough to trigger government action. The force and precision of government action was suggestive of a need to listen in, thus acknowledging the very existence of popular politics in 1530s England. A general analysis of each of the identified key themes to the thesis is made, followed by a specific, deeply contextualised case study of the same. Adoption of this approach secures a depth and breadth that neither achieves on its own, for seeking to understand a phenomenon more generally is one thing, placing it in a specific context and working to understand how the two rubbed against one another, something different. In addressing this, the thesis takes an in-depth look at the places, Walsingham, Louth, and Sawley Abbey, and the individuals, John Dakyn, priest, John Pickering, friar, and Elizabeth Barton, prophetess. It is argued that this approach offers an interpretation of both government and anti-government activity in the period that was essentially political on both sides, thus making a compelling case for the existence of popular politics in 1530s England. In so doing, the thesis makes an original contribution to the popular politics literature. It does so by offering conclusive proof that popular political speech was a feature of a popular political culture present in 1530s England that was every bit as real as that described in the literature focusing on the later Sixteenth Century, and onwards from that point.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

Engaging in learning, both through formal means, and through self-education, is a long-held habit of mine, formed many decades ago. It owes much to, and was likely ignited by, the weekly visits made to the local library, at a very young age, led by my mother, in the company of my four siblings. It was my mother's mother, my grandmother, who somehow made it possible for her two daughters and two of her sons to attend university at a time when and from a place where such a thing was exceedingly rare, if not unheard of. I thank them both.

The PhD summit has long been in my sight; my Everest. It was a climb I was hugely excited to undertake and one that I have thoroughly enjoyed. I am thankful that it was Durham University I chose to be my base camp; there is no better place in the world to study history. Andy Wood, my supervisor, welcomed me with enthusiasm, and remained a constant source of encouragement. At first, Andy urged me to read widely (something I wholeheartedly embraced), then to start writing, on an identified theme. After that, the serious business of developing the thesis itself. I never once felt under pressure or overburdened. The thesis evolved, over time, and became what it is. I put this down to Andy's generous sharing of his craft. When you talk with Andy, you can hear the cogs turning. Every one of our conversations was regularly interrupted by Andy rising to select a book from his own mini library. I know you will enjoy the work of this historian he would say, as he handed it to me, encouraging me to take it away. 'On the shoulders of giants' is such a truism. Andy will forever remain a giant to me. I thank Andy for sharing his expertise with me but, more than that, I thank him for encouraging me to make this thesis my own, to construct it my way, albeit with a friendly push in a more meaningful and precise direction every now and again. Andy is a world-renowned historian, but I know him, too, to be a truly excellent teacher and mentor.

My second supervisor, Tom Hamilton, has made this thesis so much stronger than it might have been. Equally enthusiastic and encouraging, Tom has been extremely

generous with his time. Tom's feedback has been unfailingly thorough, sharp, and purposeful, with a quite brilliant way of telling you, with sensitivity, that a particular section does not cut the mustard, and needs revising. Quite apart from my need for and receiving of such sound advice, Tom offered so much more, and we had some fascinating conversations along the way.

I approached my viva with some trepidation. I need not have feared. My examiners, Christian Liddy (internal), and Mark Hailwood (external), challenged me and tested my depth of understanding around the thesis and its argument, rigorously so. I thank them for the extraordinary level of preparation and thought they clearly put into the whole process. I walked away from the viva feeling positive and clear in my mind about the suggested revisions. I put this down to the skill of my examiners, and the clarity they afforded their questioning and feedback. Consequently, I thoroughly enjoyed the revisions stage. I thank Christian and Mark for the way they conducted the examination process, their valuable feedback, and, no less important, their goodwill.

Finally, I turn to my wife, Gill: just to say, thank you! And for always being there, whatever.

Abbreviations

- L.P. Letters & Papers
- Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII, ed. by J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, R. H. Brodie and A. C. Wood (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1888).
- Source Archive: The National Archives (Kew, London)
-
- SP The term 'State Papers' is used in Britain and Ireland to refer to government archives and records.
-
- TNA The National Archives

Chapter One: Introduction

Looking for popular politics in the State Papers

Lodged in *State Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII: General, 1509-1547*, Vol. XIII, Part I, [1538], Entry no. 615, the Calendar entry summarises manuscript SP [State Papers] 1/130 f [folio]. 150.¹ Including the title, the entry extends to 265 words. The manuscript itself runs to 777 words. The Calendar entry title marks it as being of interest to this study: 'The Royal Supremacy'. If reduced to approximately one third of its original, the calendar entry includes everything that is of interest to the focus of this study and the argument developed therein. Its identification is important by the fact it reports on a conversation had by a group of men, touching on the King's assumption of Supreme Headship of the Church in England. The conversation was had in an alehouse on market day. Those taking part were ultimately subject to examination by those in authority invested by the King and his government and then passed over to the Lord Privy Seal himself, Thomas Cromwell. The Calendar details the names and occupations of the men involved. Additional information, also pertinent to this study, reveals that one of the men, a minstrel, had performed a ballad at a recent public event, a wedding.

It is argued that use throughout the thesis of such examples as that discussed above (developed further, below) reveal the fact, location, and extent of popular political speech, and demonstrate government concern with it. They are not a direct point of access to popular 'voices', but the focus in the thesis is more on information flow than

¹ TNA SP 1/130, ff. 150 {L.P. XIII(1) 615}.

the precise content and ideology of popular speech. It is argued throughout that such conversation and commentary did in fact constitute popular political speech.

So, once identified, what does the Calendar entry for SP 1/130 f.150 [L.P. XIII(1) 615] offer this study? It states that on Wednesday 27 February 1538, market day in Braintree, Essex, a conversation was held in an alehouse. William Hunt, a minstrel, was exhorting John Tomkins, a saddler, to read and learn the New Testament. Tomkins claimed to be unlearned; such an endeavour was not for him. Another man present, William Smyth, challenged Hunt, suggesting that he was a bad influence on others. Smyth went on to charge Hunt with having sung a song at a wedding, a song against saints, referring to their images as mere idols. Hunt defended himself, saying that, 'they [saints] were set in times past by the bishop of Rome, and the bishop of Rome has nothing to do here'.² Smyth rallied, asking if previous kings had not been as wise as this King, and yet they obeyed the Pope, as do all other kings. What is more, he wanted to know who gave the King leave to put the Pope down. An investigation was carried out, led by Sir Giles Capell. Depositions were taken from Tomkins, and from another man present, John Luke, a ropemaker. Smyth denied the charge, he was sent to Thomas Cromwell in London, for trial by Council. There is nothing on record that tells of the outcome. The case exemplifies - along with so many other cases detailed in the State Papers collection - government vigour in holding officials accountable for finding out what was being said, by whom, and who it was shared with; with a very particular interest in the original source. The incompleteness of many cases in terms of record, start to finish,

² TNA SP 1/130, ff. 150 [L.P. XIII(1) 615].

often frustrates, but it does not necessarily detract from its value in detecting popular political voice in the period.

Henry VIII officially assumed the title of Supreme Head of the Church of England on 3 November 1534, consolidated by the Act of Supremacy, passed by Parliament.³ The head of the Church government, his legal authority removed, the Pope had been supplanted by the King in a *coup d'état*. The King's move was a political act. The conversation held in the Braintree alehouse was political in nature, it was a commentary on the King's action. It demonstrated an awareness of current affairs; a 'political consciousness'. The conversation is recorded in State Papers under the heading, 'The Royal Supremacy'. It was recognised by the government as political and potentially threatening, hence it being passed to the Lord Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell, for resolution. The event involved a minstrel, a gentleman's servant, a ropemaker, and a saddler, at least. It was a popular political conversation on a hot political topic, held in a public place. The song – likely a ballad – was, allegedly, sung at a communal event. It would inevitably have drawn comment and debate. The ballad itself was not seditious, the words spoken by Smyth were, and, worse, might have been construed as treason. Not on record is just how the conversation reached the attention of the authorities in the first place. What is clear is that when it did it was forwarded directly to Cromwell himself.

³ 26 Henry VIII, c. 1. Reproduced in full in *Documents of the Christian Church* ed. by Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 242-3.

The critical body of evidence for the thesis is State Papers, primarily *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*. Currently, the calendars of this collection are made up of 28 volumes, and they summarize the text of original documents held at: The National Archives (TNA); the British Library; and Hatfield House. Although the original manuscripts have been consulted and scrutinized when deemed necessary and possible, this thesis is based largely on the content of Calendar entries. The value of the Calendar summaries themselves is demonstrated by the example discussed above. The original documents are written in Latin or Early Modern English (Chancery Standard). The calendars provide summaries of the documents in English. Many are filed in department code, prefixed SP (State Paper Office). The main body of documents pertinent to this thesis sits within SP1: Letters and Papers Henry VIII, 1509 – 1547, bound volumes of miscellaneous public and private letters.⁴ The completed work was described by the historian A.F. Pollard, in 1911, as ‘one of the greatest monuments of English historical scholarship’.⁵ Pollard was fulsome in his praise for the editorial standard. Commenting on a version that then consisted of twenty-one volumes, Pollard stressed the enormity of the task undertaken to index and identify all the names of persons and places contained in the collection, making example of the final volume whose index extended over seven hundred and thirty-six columns. Notably, Pollard does point out the editors had carried out what he terms the scientific part of the historian’s duty, with the resultant work being ‘the ore from which history must be extracted by the skilled artificer’.⁶ In approaching this study, accepting

⁴ For more on the initial compilation project see Appendix A.

⁵ Albert F. Pollard, ‘The Letters and Papers of Henry VIII’, *The English Historical Review*, 26:102 (1911), pp. 257-266, (p. 257).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

Pollard's point that work still needed to be done beyond simply finding relevant evidence, it was also necessary to pay heed to the fact that official documents record plebeian voices through the filter of elite sources.⁷ Taking note of the communicants named in the title given or names at the foot of entries in *State Papers* signals this. Fox observes that official documents only tend to account for the most extreme and dangerous words uttered by ordinary people.⁸ Voicing of opinion in the study period was indeed a dangerous exercise. However, it is the finding of this study that the level of interest the government took in listening in to plebeian conversation produced, ultimately, an abundance of entries in *State Papers*, often many-layered, offering rich pickings. They speak of a public debate that was very real across the period of focus that is the subject of this thesis.

A boon to the work required in identifying evidence for studies such as this is the existence of the facility known as *State Papers Online*, accessible through institutional subscription or free to view at the National Archives. *Gale Primary Sources* works with the academic community and archives around the world in digitizing physical materials, and applying search technology designed to aid discovery in academic research.⁹ Gale launched *State Papers Online: Part I: The Tudors, 1509-1603* in October 2008. Since then, Gale has published eight more parts. *State Papers Online* was upgraded to an enhanced user interface in December 2022. It is a collection of primarily early modern

⁷ D. Coast and J. Fox, 'Rumours and Politics', *History Compass*, 13/5 (2015), p. 223.

⁸ A. Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Opinion in Early Stuart and Elizabethan England', *The Historical Journal*, 40/3 (1997), pp. 597-620.

⁹ A particularly useful video account of how *Gale* has worked with The National Archives in Kew, to digitize manuscripts held there, can be accessed here:

<<https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources>> [accessed 08 April 2025]

materials, consisting of facsimile images of almost three million State Papers. Direct linking between the facsimile images of the manuscripts and their individual calendar entries offers a valuable safeguard in terms of editorial decision making, for it was down to successive editors to decide which passages to reproduce, which to paraphrase, and which to omit. The scientific work done, accessing the ore from which history might be extracted, has been eased by the very fact that modern technology has made it possible to move, through hyperlink, from calendar to manuscript without sitting in front of the hard copy. This is important because the calendars provide abstracts or summaries of the original documents and vary greatly in detail and consistency. That is not to undervalue the benefit of having access to chronological catalogues in the first instance. As explained above, the Calendar entries offer a rich vein of evidence on the sort of information flow that troubled King Henry VIII's government. The work on the Calendars, carried out in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, available in print editions up until the advent of the online version, must be acknowledged as groundbreaking. This study owes a debt of gratitude to the editorial skills of Brewer, Gairdner and Brodie, and was greatly eased by the accessibility afforded through new technologies and the Gale online facility. It is important to note here that 'State Papers' is a nineteenth-century archivist's concept, not a Tudor one, and so when reference to State Papers is made in this thesis it is done in full acknowledgement of the fact that the government of the day (1530s Tudor England) left the first imprint, which was then collected in its now accessible form, 'State Papers'.

This study began with a complete reading of a paper-based State Papers, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, Volume V (1529-30), through to Volume XIV Part II (1539) Part 2.¹⁰ The aim was to gather a broad and deep understanding of the period as recorded by those in power, with a research journal kept making note of anything that may prove to be relevant. Visits to the National Archives, Kew, and to the Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, were made to engage with pre-identified manuscripts. Extensive and targeted use of *State Papers Online* was made, drawing full benefit from its advanced search facility. This allowed for identification of evidence through searching for key words and terms, among them: ‘treason’, ‘sedition’, ‘seditious’, ‘examination’, ‘confession’, ‘accusation’, ‘accused’, ‘accuser’; also, ‘rumour’, ‘ballad’, ‘prophecy’; and ‘alehouse’, ‘market’, ‘marketplace’. Likewise, topics such as ‘Royal Supremacy’. The latter producing the entry telling of the conversation held in the Braintree alehouse.

How does this thesis work to detect popular political voice in an extraordinary decade?

What is it then about the 1530s that made conversations like the one conducted in the Braintree alehouse of such interest to the government? The primary focus of this thesis is popular political speech in 1530s England. It is particularly interested in speech that challenged government policy, typically viewed by the government as treasonous or seditious. Such speech provoked a reaction from authority, suggesting that the

¹⁰ *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic of the reign of Henry VIII*, ed. by John S. Brewer, Robert H. Brodie (London, HMSO, 1920). Available in Durham University Library.

government felt the need to listen in, thus acknowledging its very existence and something of its force. The 1534 Treasons Act brought the utterance of seditious words under the law. Sedition (discussed in detail below) came to be interpreted as words that fell short of treason and did not directly involve violence, although they could lead to it. Speech challenging government policy and direction was seen to imply sedition and hinted at rebellion. By its actions, the government did, ultimately, put such popular political speech on record. The level of popular discontent evident across the 1530s and its rub against this legislative shift is seen as an opportunity to detect and reconstruct the speech and voice of subordinate group members.

The thesis detects, analyses and interprets popular political speech transmitted and amplified through three distinct media: rumour, ballad, and political prophecy. The thesis contributes to existing historiography by a general analysis of each of the identified key themes to the thesis, followed by a specific, contextualised case study of the same. In addressing this, the thesis takes an in-depth look at the places, Walsingham, Louth, and Sawley Abbey, and the individuals, John Dakyn, priest, John Pickering, friar, and Elizabeth Barton, prophetess. In places, aspects of the same case have been used on more than one occasion because they aid interpretation of that which is the specific focus under discussion. Adoption of this approach secures a depth and breadth that neither achieves on its own, for seeking to understand a phenomenon more generally is one thing, placing it in a specific context and working to understand how the two rubbed against one another, something different. It is argued that this approach offers an interpretation of both government and anti-government

activity in the period that was essentially political on both sides, thus making a compelling case for the existence of popular politics in 1530s England. In so doing, the thesis makes an original contribution to the popular politics literature. It does so by offering conclusive proof that popular political speech was a feature of a popular political culture present in 1530s England that was every bit as real as that described in the literature focusing on the later 16th or early 17th centuries, discussed below.

In looking to detect popular political speech in the period, the study explores the frictions that were being played out in societal relationships, and the space and place in which such friction manifested itself. This very much included the role of the clergy, a group in society who often found themselves subject to intense pressure from above and below. The clergy do not fit neatly into binary models of politics: whether ‘rulers v ruled’ or ‘clergy v laity’. It is argued that this extensive focus on the role of the clergy in ‘popular’ politics represents a departure from existing work, which has tended to overlook the political role of this key group.

It is at parish level that the study focuses much of its attention. Beat Kümin suggested that in religious life the key social unit is the parish.¹¹ He welcomed the emergence of the parish as the main point of reference for the analysis of everyday devotional and social life, it being necessary to understand the complex relationships between clergymen and their communities. Kümin used churchwarden accounts in his reflection

¹¹ Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400-1560* (Taylor & Francis Group, 1996).

on community, the empirical core of his argument consisting of a sample of ten case-studies. He found that the parishioners' experience depended very much on the social context of their community. Generally, Kümin found the 'various Tudor Reformations' to be the best documented changes affecting the parish in the mid-sixteenth century. He argues that the records 'leave no doubt of their disruptive and lasting influence'.¹² This thesis extends Kümin's vision by testing this relationship during a period of tumultuous change, one in which clergymen went about their work under considerable duress. Throughout, the parish priest appears as a central character, something certainly not limited to discussion in Chapter Two. The thesis confirms that the clergy had to negotiate not just with manipulation and strongarming from above but also a certain element from below who were quick to report them to authority should they transgress. Indeed, many clergymen were subject to accusation of wrongdoing - typically through words spoken - by their own parishioners. The thesis considers this patently real phenomenon that saw neighbours, 'friends', fellow priests, willing to report on one another. Reflecting on James C Scott's analysis of power relations, Andy Wood challenges what he calls Scott's assumption that popular animosity toward authority was constant, homogeneous, uniform and maintained at a high level.¹³ Wood argues that accusations of seditious speech emerged from within communities and, further, that state suppression of popular political speech depended on the willingness of subordinates to betray one another.¹⁴ Depositions recorded in State Papers certainly suggest such a willingness. Sheila Fitzpatrick's work on 'Stalin's Peasants' offers some

¹² Ibid., pp. 256-9.

¹³ Andy Wood, "'A lyttull worde ys tresson": Loyalty, Denunciation, and Popular Politics in Tudor England', *Journal of British Studies*, 48:4 (2009), p. 839. See James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990).839.

¹⁴ Ibid.

insight here.¹⁵ Fitzpatrick argues that, whilst accepting that it is difficult to pin down what peasants of her period really thought – what they said when they talked to each other – rumours represent the exception to the rule that most sources are either outsiders’ reports on peasants or peasants’ communications with outsiders. The ‘conversation of rumours’ was recognized by the Soviet authorities and carefully monitored. Indeed, the Soviet police ‘collected rumours as an index of popular mood and of public response to government measures’. This thesis extends such an idea of ‘collection’, through investigation, beyond rumours, through to ballads, and political prophecy. Where appropriate, the thesis harnesses the learning to be taken from other such comparative studies, as it does, identified cross-disciplinary studies.

What was it about government action in 1530s England that provoked discontent and engagement in popular political activity?

In seeking a popular political voice, this thesis identifies four critical government actions that defined the period of focus, 1530s England. Defining the context is essential, for this is the prevailing climate of the period in which popular political speech is sought, and it was not an amenable one. Government actions, particularly the four named below, bred a level of discontent that was strongly articulated and left its imprint firmly on the record.

¹⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance & Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivisation* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

First: Tudor kings extended the concept of treason to embrace the powers, titles and dignities of the sovereign as well as his person.¹⁶ The 1534 Treasons Act brought the utterance of seditious words under the law. Sedition came to be interpreted as words that fell short of treason and did not directly involve violence, although they could lead to it. Words and writings need not suggest a direct intent to harm the king in person, but if they were held to indirectly do so the accused would likely be charged with sedition or, worse, treason. Furthermore, under Henry VIII a number of acts connected with his marriages safeguarded each new wife and succession by treason clauses. The principal act of 1534 provided legal protection around the king's new position as head of the Church in England. The Act determined that it be the 'duty of subjects above all things to prohibit, provide, restrain and extinct all manner of shameful slanders, perils or imminent danger or dangers which might grow, happen or arise to their sovereign lord the King...'¹⁷ The dignity of the King's newly held position was to be protected and woe betide his opponents in this, low or high born. The evolution of the law so far as sedition is concerned was critical and is central to the thesis. Its development is discussed further, below.

Second, The Supremacy Act, 1534, bestowed upon King Henry VIII the title Supreme Head of the Church of England.¹⁸ The Pope (now to be known as the Bishop of Rome) had had his legal authority removed. The Act of Appeals firmed up the Act of

¹⁶ Bellamy, *The Tudor Law of Treason* (Routledge, 1979).

¹⁷ Geoffrey R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 62-4.

¹⁸ 26 Henry VIII, c. 1. Reproduced in full in Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, pp. 242-3.

Supremacy, placing the king at the head of the spiritual jurisdiction. This meant that any use of papal jurisdiction amounted to usurpation.¹⁹ A series of statutes to safeguard and enforce the Royal Supremacy was topped off by the Act Extinguishing the Authority of the Bishop of Rome (1536).²⁰ One of these, the Act of Dispensations (1534), placed the authorization to issue all ecclesiastical licenses and faculties with Canterbury.²¹ The appointment of new bishops was now the sole preserve of the king. As supreme head, the king controlled the Church of England; its laws, its courts, its appointments, its revenues, and its doctrine.²² Declarations or oaths had to be taken by the male population in recognition of the supremacy. Explicit compliance of the clergy was demanded. Their allegiance must be transferred from the Pope to the King. Their influence over the laity made their conformity politically imperative. A very deliberate strategy was employed by the State to safeguard against willful self-interpretation (or misinterpretation) of the new and developing religious and political doctrine, with obedience of the Act of Supremacy at its core. Alert to the power of the pulpit, as well as the printing press, King Henry VIII's vicegerent, Thomas Cromwell, used this in his drive to secure the Supremacy and concomitant ecclesiastical and constitutional reform. With this came the need for more preachers and more control over the content of their sermons. In working to achieve this, with Cromwell, and then without him, the government acted vigorously against those not on message. If the King's subjects were to conform and fall in line then those who had most influence on the majority, parish to

¹⁹ Nicholson, 'The Act of Appeals and the English reformation' in *Law and Government under the Tudors: Essays* ed. by Cross, Loades, Scarisbrick, pp. 19-30.

²⁰ 28 Henry VIII, c. 10. Reproduced in full in Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 365-7.

²¹ 25 Henry VIII, c. 21. Reproduced in full in *Documents of the Christian Church* ed. by Bettenson and Maunder 237-242.

²² Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 338-78.

parish, must be on message and remain so, hence the devotion of a complete chapter in this thesis to the role of the clergy, regular and secular. When discontent spiked in 1536, in the form of the Lincolnshire rebellion, closely followed by the rising further north, the rebels called for a restoration of the papal supremacy, with matters spiritual back in the hands of the clergy. Robert Aske, recognized as the leader of the Pilgrims, made his view clear under examination, when he stated that every man murmured against it and that it would cause division in the Church, and so required revision by parliament. Direct challenge to the King's sense of his own prerogative was a big deal, suggesting revision by parliament was a deeply political act, one taken in the name of the commons. What made it all the more dangerous in the period was the change in Treason law, especially 'treasonable words' (sedition).

Third: The Act for the Dissolution of the Lesser Monasteries became law on 4 April 1536, following on from the royal visitation of the monasteries, begun in July 1535. Visitation commissioners provided Cromwell with a barrage of reports, typically mocking in tone, including inventories of the contents of monastic reliquaries. Interesting for this thesis is the fact that the Act dissolving the lesser monasteries impacted two areas that feature strongly in chapter discussion greater than all others. The two counties with the largest number of houses valued at under £200 a year were Yorkshire, with thirty-nine, and Lincolnshire with thirty-six. Norfolk was next with twenty-one, with other well-populated counties like Essex and Hertfordshire had only ten.²³ Monasteries, by weight

²³ R. B. Smith, *Land and Politics, in the England of Henry VIII: The West Riding of Yorkshire 1530-1546* (Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 180.

of number, played a significant social role in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and gifts to monasteries continued on a generous scale into the 1530s. Under examination, in response to interrogatory 53, Aske expressed the view, so far as the 'north partes' were concerned, that the statute suppressing the lesser monasteries 'was not for the comyn welth of the realme'. This thesis argues that such reasoning was political. The threat to and subsequent suppression of the religious houses was a popular political matter that drew criticism, debate, challenge, and, in certain places, action. This thesis finds that any attempt to downplay the impact of the dissolution of the religious houses is at odds with the opinions voiced by the commons, loudly and clearly so in the latter months of 1536 and early 1537.

Fourth: The discarding of some traditional theology, and the abrogation of the cult of some saints. In late medieval England it was a universally held belief that religious benefits could be bought. Through the doctrine of purgatory, it was held that the suffering of the dead could be relieved through prayers and good works, even after death. The northern rebels' terms called for a restoration of the saints to their former place. This would justify intercessory practices (pilgrimages, masses, prayers, offerings) and institutions (monasteries, chantries, religious guilds, private altars). The popular mind of the period this thesis is interested in marked the passage of time in terms of saints' days and made sense of the calendar in terms of their feasts.²⁴ The physical remains of saints rested in the shrines developed around them. They and their power rested in a specific physical place. A successful shrine could be extremely

²⁴ Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

lucrative for the religious foundation involved, with the local neighbourhood benefitting. It was such deeply embedded quotidian matters that most forcibly impacted the sorts of people that are the chief focus of this study. Relevant to this, the fourth of the government actions identified as being critical is the case of Walsingham, explored in Chapter Four. The chapter addresses the general case that is the significance of space and place, extending this into a deeply contextualized case study, Walsingham, the site of popular politics.

Did politics matter in 1530s England?

Published in 1985, focusing on seventeenth century England, David Underdown's *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* gave the historiographical pot a vigorous stir.²⁵ It was a contribution that still drew attention thirty years on.²⁶ Underdown sought to connect high politics to local cultural worlds. He argued strongly that ordinary people had their own opinions, independent of gentry and even clergy opinion. He did not accept that those opinions could be reduced to any of the frameworks available. Absolutely conceptually relevant to this thesis, Underdown's work was set contextually in the first half of the seventeenth century. John Walter's work, notably *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England*, reflected on the complexity of economic, societal,

²⁵ David Underdown, *Revel, riot, and rebellion: popular politics and culture in England 1603-1660* (Clarendon Press, 1985).

²⁶ See, *Cultural & Social History*, 12:3 (2015): Sarah M. S. Pearsall and Mark R. F. Williams, 'David Underdown's *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660*', pp. 289-293; John Morrill, 'Revel, Riot and Rebellion Revisited', pp. 301-308; Susan D. Amussen, 'Could it Just Possibly Be': *Revel, Riot and Rebellion at Thirty*', pp. 295-300; Llyod Bowen, 'Revel, Riot and Rebellion: A Sense of Scale', pp. 309-314; Phil Wothington, 'Revel, Riot and Rebellion and The Social History of Politics', pp. 331-335; Donald Spaeth, 'Culture Wars: Religious and Cultural Conflict in *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*', pp. 337-342.

political and religious change in the early modern period. For Walter, it was the significant level of poverty and discontent these changes often caused that triggered major rebellion and frequent riots.²⁷ His work built upon his joint article with Keith Wrightson on 'Dearth and Social Order'.²⁸ Walter's engagement in and analysis of popular politics, outside of the national picture, primarily found its focus in the seventeenth century. Steve Hindle's work spans the period 1550 – 1750.²⁹ All seminal works. All dealing with matters very relevant to this thesis. And yet, all situating themselves post 1550, after the very specific focus of this thesis, 1530s England.

Underdown's attempt, some forty years ago now, to connect high politics with local cultural worlds is something that resonates with this thesis, for, essentially, *it* focuses on popular engagement with central politics. In 1995, Mark Ormrod posed the question: Did politics matter in late medieval England? He declared that the answer depends on how we define our terms. 'If politics means participation in public life and direct involvement in the making and implementation of policy, then probably not. If, however, emphasis is placed on 'political consciousness', that is, an awareness of the personalities, events, institutions and policies that determined the way the kingdom was run, then perception of the parameters of politics is transformed.'³⁰ In what he terms the 'politicisation' of popular culture, Peter Burke made a strong argument for

²⁷ John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

²⁸ John Walter and Keith Wrightson, 'Dearth and Social Order in Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 71:1 (1976), pp. 22-42.

²⁹ Steve Hindle, *The state and social change in early modern England, c. 1550 -1640* (Macmillan, 2000); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550-1750* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Steve Hindle, *The Social Topography of a Rural Community: Scenes of Labouring Life in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

³⁰ Mark Ormrod, *Political Life in medieval England, 1300-1450* (New York, 1995), p. 1.

discerning between ‘affairs of state’, not local issues but the concerns of rulers, and, that term again, ‘political consciousness’. Burke defined this as ‘awareness of these problems and their possible solutions, involving a ‘public opinion’, and a critical (though not necessarily a hostile) attitude to the government’.³¹ This thesis favours the view that a ‘political consciousness’ was present across the 1530s and it most definitely showed its face come the time of rebellion. It embraces the shift in parameters suggested by Ormrod, and Burke, before him. It exposes a level of political consciousness, in a decade where the nature of change was all pervasive. The latter point is significant because criticism of government emanated from all levels of society, driven by the fact that all were impacted.

So, if ‘political consciousness’ was present in the period, what was it that permitted politics to be ‘popular’? The thesis finds that this form of politics and the discussions that took place were accessible to all. They were had in the marketplace, the church precinct, the alehouse, the bakehouse, and other public domains. They were in a form recognisable and accessible to all: gossip, rumour, ballad, political prophecy. This form of popular politics was engaged in by women; it was not restricted to men. It was something that bonded discrete groups of artisans. The thesis expands on all these themes through a series of discrete chapters: gender, participation and collective identity; place and space; rumour; ballads; political prophecy. The two media that did come in written form, ballads and prophecies, were read aloud and disseminated through speech, hence the centrality of speech to this thesis.

³¹ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 1978), p. 259.

This thesis, then, makes the point that plebeian society was politically conscious and *not* excluded from the pervasive flow of political commentary that marked the decade. This makes a reread of the literature examining the ‘politics of the excluded’ even more interesting and informative: notably, the Tim Harris edited volume, *Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850*. The time period covered is extensive and incorporates the specific period of this study, although there is scant mention of the 1530s in Harris’s opening, introductory chapter. Andy Wood touches on the rebellion of 1536 in his essay on ‘plebeian languages of deference and defiance’.³² He begins his essay with a case study of an event at Lavenham in May 1525. The essay concerns itself with the identification of ‘broad, generic similarities in plebeian speech’ between the Reformation and the English Revolution. Wood argues that a historiography that ‘has seen early modern society as ideologically homogeneous and rebellion as a functional mechanism for the presentation of limited, defensive grievances’, may, reflecting on the case of Lavenham, be offered an alternative reading. The alternative reading is one in which the defining features of the confrontation in Lavenham become fear and hatred rather than deference and subordination. Wood argues for a viewpoint that sees deference and class as in constant, trans-historical friction, rather than at opposite ends of a long historical process. Unequal societies typically produce social conflicts over resources, power and space. In such conflict, subordinates will endeavour to develop a public voice within which grievances can be aired. By the same token, elites

³² Andy Wood, ‘Poore Men Woll Speke One Daye’: Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance, c. 1520-1640’, in *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850*, ed. by Tim Harris (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 67-98.

will work to deny subordinates developing such a collective voice. The authorities, Wood argues, 'sought simultaneously to investigate, codify and crush popular politics'.³³ To develop a richer appreciation of early modern social relations, Wood advocates an approach that places the politics of speech at the core of our scholarly endeavours. This is something that this thesis does, making an in-depth overall case of the 1530s, a decade that, to date, has not received enough attention in the historiography, for politics *did* matter in 1530s England.

Ethan Shagan's essay on 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', in the same volume, offers some very useful insights.³⁴ Shagan argues that the uncontrolled and uncontrollable passage of rumour offered it a freedom of movement that made rumours 'political'. This is because 'every person spreading them was implicated in the creation of their meaning'.³⁵ They spread everywhere, mechanisms through which ordinary people could make comment on their everyday circumstances; rumours were the 'stuff of popular politics'.³⁶ This thesis recognises the insightful observations made by Shagan. It uses them to interrogate social relationships in the period the thesis is interested in and then expands upon the scope of Shagan's study by illuminating the impact the freedom of rumour flow had on the range and content of popular political speech; that including who was involved, and where such interactions commonly occurred, the site of politics. Further, the thesis argues that Shagan's

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁴ E. Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII' in T. Harris (ed) *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 30-59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32. E. Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII' in T. Harris (ed) *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 30-59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

observation on rumour can just as readily be applied to ballads and political prophecy, for their uncontrolled and uncontrollable passage, too, made them political. All three media were very much part of the popular political conversation. Shagan's contribution to the field is revisited, below, in discussion of the wider historiography. The Louth case study in Chapter Five traces the proliferation of rumour, it being very much part of the popular political conversation, triggering an uprising. When things ignited in October 1536, with rebellion spreading up from Lincolnshire into and across the northern parts, the rebels spoke of misgovernment and justice; there was indeed a *politics* to rebellion.³⁷ If 'political consciousness' drew criticism of government action, then an understanding of the transformation that took place in the underlying principles of treason law is critical to this thesis.

How did treason law develop in a way that made those inclined to government criticism increasingly liable to a charge of sedition?

A search of State Papers for the period of this study will readily throw up cases of 'treasonous' or 'seditious' speech, often as a result of information provided by the 'accuser', with the 'accused' issuing such speech in a public space such as the 'marketplace' or an 'alehouse'; and those words were often relayed in the form of 'rumour', 'ballad' or 'political prophecy'. The thesis does not accept it as simply axiomatic that such fundamental and rapid change would naturally cause such

³⁷ John Walter, *Crowds and popular politics in early modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2006).

criticism of government action. It explores the nature of this criticism, who made it, where, and what motivated so many to be so outspoken. The thesis recognizes the need to establish why certain words became so dangerous, for government response to criticism was quite remarkable. It is notable that the government very much adapted to reality, a reality brought about by their own reformatory actions, and this is demonstrated throughout the thesis, for, indeed, 'concepts of treason never flourish in a vacuum'... rather they depend greatly upon the prevailing thesis of government'.³⁸

The sort of opposition and difficulty posed by the early stages of the Reformation meant, according to Elton, that 'no conscientious minister could hold that the law of treason, as it stood in 1530, would serve'.³⁹ This was recognized and a new treason statute, the first comprehensive statement since 1352, was issued in 1534. The principal act of 1534 provided legal protection around the king's new position as head of the Church in England. The Act determined that it be the:

... duty of subjects above all things to prohibit, provide, restrain and extinct all manner of shameful slanders, perils or imminent danger or dangers which might grow, happen or arise to their sovereign lord the King... if any person or persons, after the first day of February next coming, do maliciously wish, will or desire by words or writing, or by craft imagine, invent, practise or attempt any bodily harm to be done or committed to the King's most royal person, the Queen's or their heir's apparent, or to deprive them or any of them of the dignity, title or name of their royal estates, or slanderously and maliciously publish and pronounce, by express writing or words, that the

³⁸ John. G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1970).

³⁹ Elton, 'The Law of Treason in the Early Reformation', p. 212.

King our sovereign lord should be heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper of the crown.’⁴⁰

Elton made the point that although the 1534 Act was a good deal shorter in length than that of 1352, what it lost in length, it made up for in ‘precision and directness’.⁴¹ The key shift was *it* being treason to attempt the death of the king, queen or heir by some overt act *to* include any desire or attempt, even if expressed (maliciously) in words or writing, to cause bodily harm to those persons or attempt to deprive them of their dignities and title. Also, it was to be treason to call the king, in express writing or words, slanderously and maliciously, a heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel, or usurper of the crown. The threat posed by this shift did not go unnoticed. At least not by Robert Fisher, brother of the condemned Bishop John Fisher. On visiting his brother in February 1535, in the Tower, Robert was heard to have said:

... speaking is made high treason, which was never heard of before, that words should be high treason. But there was never such a sticking at the passing of any Act in the Lower House as was at the passing of the same... and that they stuck at the last to have one word in the same and that was the [word] *maliciously*, which, when it was put, was not worth... for they would expound the same statute themselves at their pleasure’.⁴²

Evidently, there was contention and kick back grounded in concern around the Act’s scope and potential use. In effect, the notion of treason by words openly regulated speech. It had precedents in common law and constructive treason rulings, but the

⁴⁰ Geoffrey R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 62-4.

⁴¹ Elton, ‘The Law of Treason in the Early Reformation’, p. 230.

⁴² TNA, SP 1/92, f. 53 (L.P. VIII 856).

1534 statute proved especially threatening. For Elton, despite all the precedents, the definition of such treason in the act of 1534 'gave a powerful and mainly new weapon to the Crown'. As a result, 'some men [and women] were to die for speaking rash words without plotting anything'. For it was then that 'the need emerged for the law to serve as an instrument of state in enforcing the Reformation'.⁴³

It is here that Christopher Duggan made an important intervention, something that is both wholly relevant to the main thrust of this thesis *and* borne out by its findings.⁴⁴ For Duggan, 'the legal foundation of illicit words changed from breach of the peace to breach of political unity'.⁴⁵ Off the back of this shift, the Crown moved to punish anything said that might 'provoke division, discontent or ill-will towards the government'.⁴⁶ Thus, treason lost its customary meaning, becoming 'a vague crime of enormous scope easily manipulated for political purposes'.⁴⁷ As will be seen throughout the chapters of the thesis, this expansion in scope caught out many of Henry VIII's government's objectors, from frustrated critics, sounding off, to those that did indeed plot something.

Prior to the 1530s, almost every case of treasonous words involved conspiracy against the king's life or overt incitement to rebellion. Duggan found that the evidence from his

⁴³ D. Alan Orr, *Treason and the State: Law, Politics and Ideology in the English Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 16. Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 289.

⁴⁴ Christopher R. Duggan, 'The advent of political thought control in England: seditious and treasonable speech, 1485-1547', PhD thesis, Northwestern University, Chicago, 1993.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

examination of all surviving treason trials in King's Bench from 1485 to 1530 suggests that late medieval treason was a precise offence which involved criminal violence against the king rather than peaceful political opposition. At the beginning of the Tudor era the law of treason stood largely on an act of 1352, often called the Great Statute of Treasons. In January of 1352, the Commons had once again petitioned the crown for a definition of treason and a statute that would stand throughout the realm. The Great Statute codified the central points of treason law. It declared that it was treason to 'compass or imagine the death of our lord the king, or our lady his queen, or of their eldest son and heir'; equally, 'to violate the king's companion, or the king's eldest unmarried daughter, or the wife of the king's eldest son and heir'. It was treason to levy war against the king within the realm, or adhere to the king's enemies within the realm, giving those enemies aid and comfort within the realm or elsewhere. This was to be proven against defendants by open deed 'by people of their condition'.⁴⁸ 'High treason was regarded as the final denial of the divine order of things as established in the body politic and defined in the oath of allegiance.'⁴⁹ The Great Statute of Treasons did not define the mode of trial or what courts or bodies could try treason. Neither did it set the penalty for treason.⁵⁰ The 1352 statute served its purpose in dealing with those active in levying war against the king in his realm and the compassing or imagining of his death in the period 1381 to 1485, a time marked by civil disturbance and insurrection.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Allen Boyer and Mark Nicolls, *The rise and fall of treason in English history* (Routledge, 2024), p. 88.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 59.

⁵⁰ Boyer and Nicholls, *The rise and fall of treason*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 103.

Securing a discrete definition of 'sedition' as understood in the period of study this thesis works to is a slippery task. Sedition is a political crime and so was unknown to the common law of fifteenth-century England. What came to be known as sedition in the sixteenth century went under the heading of treasonable words in the fifteenth century. It did not acquire precise definition in case law until early in the seventeenth century, with Coke's doctrine of seditious libel issued in 1605.⁵² Prior to that, Roger Manning suggested that the actual punishment of seditious words tended to run ahead of precise statutory definitions, with officers of the crown afforded wide discretion, especially when a rebellion was in progress.⁵³

Duggan's examination of the prosecution of seditious words between 1485 and 1530 focuses upon the nature and scope of the offence. It seeks to establish the government's definition of the crime, the principles of enforcement, and whether the crime prohibited simple political criticism. Duggan finds that late medieval authorities defined and treated seditious speech as an offence against public order rather than political orthodoxy. Though the crime involved political speech, the critical factor when it came to prosecution was disruption of the peace and orderly administration of the government, rather than ideological dissent. Seditious words never received a comprehensive statutory definition. This meant that the principles which determined both the definition and limitation of the crime derived from unwritten precedent rather than statutory language. Whatever, surviving cases prove the point that actual

⁵² Roger B. Manning, 'The Origins of the Doctrine of Sedition', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 12:2 (1980), pp. 99-121, doi: doi.org/10.2307/4048812

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

prosecutions reveal that the government rarely prosecuted simple criticism of government principles or their policy.

Duggan argues that by the decade that is the focus of this study - the 1530s - the crime of sedition had evolved into a very different kind of offence.

With little warning, the Crown launched a full-scale war against political dissent. Shedding its old focus on rabble-rousing, the government vigorously pursued all forms of “contradiction”, “murmuring” and “grudging” against the king’s policies.⁵⁴

Duggan confirms the broadly held view among historians that the Crown greatly increased its activity against political critics between 1530 and 1547. However, he is vehement in his contradiction of those, Elton among them, who limited their argument to one of speech laws expanding and becoming more precise, but with the basis upon which the crime of sedition rested, remaining unchanged. On the contrary, Duggan argues, the new laws introduced critically redefined the range of illicit speech.

‘Seditious speech now encompassed any negative political remark which the Crown, in its subjective opinion, viewed as a provocation to discontent.’⁵⁵ The expansive wording of the acts allowed for significant judicial construction and extension. It made no distinction between public and private speech, outlawing political dissent in all its forms, thus imposing a regime of political censorship on the realm. This shift began in

⁵⁴ Duggan, ‘The advent of political thought control in England: seditious and treasonable speech, 1485-1547, p. 156.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

earnest in 1533, with papal power challenged head on, and the King's marriage to Anne. To secure the new order, the Crown issued a range of proclamations against seditious words and rumours. The proclamation against seditious rumours introduced something quite new. Yes, it condemned traditional forms of the crime, such as slandering the king, but it also added a new offence: tales which stirred "murmer", "grudge" or "division" within the realm.⁵⁶ And so, when applied to the case of Elizabeth Barton and her adherents (the subject of a case study in Chapter 7), the attainder does not refer to direct disruption of the peace, rather, it maintains that the defendants provoked the people 'to murmur, grudge and be of evil opinion against the majesty of our said Sovereign Lord'.⁵⁷ Duggan holds the Barton case to be significant, for 'it hammered home to the realm that any remark which provoked political disaffection constituted seditious speech. It will be seen throughout the thesis that this proved to be the case for many a remark made in the period, whether made in public or private, and by those of a profile far less than that of Elizabeth Barton. If we accept the scope suggested by Duggan, it will also be seen how the criticism of government issued by the many actors featuring in this thesis would land them in trouble with a vigilant and proactive government. What is more, Duggan extends his argument further, suggesting that, as the decade progressed, the government began to use the word to describe ideas and concepts as well as speech-acts, thus laying the legal groundwork for a policy of political censorship. This thesis does not venture so far as the territory of political censorship.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 170.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 172.

What does the existing historiography have to say and what does this thesis make in terms of intervention?

Geoffrey Elton's *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of The Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (1972) provided a central point of reference for this thesis.⁵⁸ Elton set out to discover how the government led by Thomas Cromwell operated in practice, and how it secured compliance with the ecclesiastical changes of the fourth decade of the sixteenth century in England. Elton spoke of the 'enforcement' of the Reformation, limiting his work to the 'Age of Thomas Cromwell', with the limits of his study set by the evidence available, archival evidence. Ultimately, Elton produced a work that speaks of significant opposition to government policy, voiced by people of little or no social or political bearing. At the risk of causing the venerable historian to spin in his resting place, it could be said that Elton was responsible for a first-rate piece of social history.

In surveying the 'ordinary processes of government', Elton made a conscious decision to omit from his study the northern rebellions of 1536-7. Elton made no apology for his chosen method, producing many and varied cases, telling the story from what is on record, something that may be viewed, at times, he said, as 'painfully anecdotal'. This thesis adopts a similar approach in the way it sifts through, shares and interrogates detail, building a strong evidence base for interpretations made. Where it differs from Elton is in the decision to factor in rebellion. Investigating why subordinate groups felt moved to rebel is seen as necessary, for it is here where the voices of the ordinary can

⁵⁸ Geoffrey. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of The Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 1.

be heard the loudest. It was through petitioning and protest that ordinary concerns were amplified. It was at this point, especially, that the government, feeling threatened, took interest in plebeian speech. Ultimately, Elton concluded that although regime action was limited by rules that acted against imposition of ‘mere power’, it was ‘intensive and precise’, and ‘police’ activity in actioning this was ‘energetic and continuous’.⁵⁹ The thesis finds that the thoroughness of government action described by Elton left its footprint on the record, thus offering up a distinctly audible echo, voicing popular political speech, that is captured and examined, in all its forms, throughout the body of the study.

Another point of departure from Elton’s impressive work also needs to be stated. The embracing of comparative studies and cross-disciplinary exercises such as those involved in understanding rumour flow (Chapter Five) is something of which he was intolerant. It is argued here that such work adds significant value to any interpretation of events across the decade of study common to Elton’s named work and this thesis. Georges Lefebvre’s *The Great Fear of 1789* explored rumours that engendered fearful panic in the rural areas of revolutionary France.⁶⁰ Clay Ramsey investigated ‘the ideology of the Great Fear’.⁶¹ He suggested that the Great Fear inspired a moment – if only a moment – of social cohesion. ‘The credibility of the Fear’s messengers came not from themselves but from the social currency of the language of the rumour they

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 383.

⁶⁰ Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: rural panic in revolutionary France* (London: NLB, 1973).

⁶¹ Clay Ramsay, *The Ideology of the Great Fear: The Soissonnais in 1789* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1991).

disseminated: a currency that can be documented and analysed'.⁶² In this thesis, too, such analysis and discussion is attempted, thus recognizing the currency invested in it. Ramsey analysed the political vocabulary of 1789, verbal messages, including 'the clanging of the tocsin that summoned the parish to hear and act upon the Fear's news'.⁶³ He carried out a useful examination of the usage of the words *bruit* and *rumeur*. The words, owing to the fact they both had a secondary meaning of 'noise', lay on a spectrum that included *murmures*, a favourite old-regime euphemism for popular unrest.⁶⁴ This thesis recognises such a reading, rumour did trigger social cohesion, and this is explored. The government of 1530s England did associate 'rumour' and 'bruit' with 'murmur'. The sounding of the tocsin did have its antecedent in the ringing of the church bells in places such as Louth and Lavenham. The passage and sharing of ballads and political prophecy had its own currency, too, one that also spoke of popular political opinion.

Ethan Shagan's work on popular politics and the English Reformation is probably the closest thing to what is attempted in this thesis. Shagan proposed that an analysis of popular politics helps to better understand the English Reformation and *mutatis mutandis* the European Reformation more generally.⁶⁵ Shagan's work focuses on those he terms as being 'the majority', who neither wholly accepted nor wholly opposed the Reformation: that element of society rather than the few who experienced the Reformation as a coherent battle between two incommensurate worldviews. Shagan

⁶² Ibid., p.20.

⁶³ Ibid., p.123.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.134.

⁶⁵ Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

problematized an interpretative framework that is defined by questions of national conversion, popular piety and resistance, and suggested that a new approach is needed. Once the assumption is made that, for the most part, English people did not embrace evangelical Protestantism, then an approach involving popular politics helps us understand what English people did do and why. Interestingly, Shagan insists that rather than ‘popular politics’ and ‘elite politics’ being antithetical, the two were irrevocably intertwined and in constant dialogue with one another. ‘Popular politics’ simply refers to ‘the presence of ordinary, non-elite subjects as the audience for or interlocutors with a political action’.⁶⁶ Shagan argues that no amount of study of radical reformers and radical resisters to the Reformation can help us understand the majority who were neither.

The timescale to which Shagan applied his thinking extended through to what he terms the Edwardian Reformation, and his conclusion draws on reflections made by contemporary writers of the Marian period, when Roman Catholicism was restored. All in all, it is a mightily impressive attempt to make sense of just how the English Reformation played out, through the political responses of the many, insisting that it was not done *to* but *with* the English people. This thesis limits itself to the 1530s and it does *not* seek to interpret the Reformation. Rather, it focuses on the identification of popular political speech, what form it took and how it flowed. It finds that the government’s agenda drew a response. The government’s reaction to this response served to highlight its very existence, leaving its mark on the record; a mark readily

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

identifiable, using the described methodology. The fact that such a rich body of evidence exists owes much to Thomas Cromwell, who evidently was a quite remarkable administrator. Acceptance of Hugh Trevor-Roper's laudatory view that, 'In six hundred years of history he [Cromwell] stands out as the most radical of modernizers', and that 'Modern history, if it begins anywhere, begins, in England, with him', is not obligatory.⁶⁷ The fact is that Cromwell's correspondence, seized on his fall in 1540, offers a level of completeness that does not come anywhere near being matched until the Elizabethan era. Cromwell and his correspondence feature strongly in this thesis, as does the acrimony directed his way, vehemently so by the rebels of 1536-7.

Popular political commentary went significantly beyond disagreement with the passing of the Act of Supremacy, as voiced in the case discussed at the beginning of this introductory chapter. It will be seen in the thesis that this period of remarkable change kicked up political debate across all levels of society and that popular political debate was a very real thing, expressed through a number of media, and those media carried strongly held political opinions across the length and breadth of 1530s England.

Debates such as that had in the Braintree alehouse in 1538 were perceived by the government as of interest, potentially a threat, and dealt with accordingly. Such events were every bit as much an aspect of popular political culture of the time as was the debate held at the Pilgrims' Council in Pontefract during open rebellion in 1536 (discussed in Chapter Two). The thesis identifies and interprets many such instances

⁶⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'England's Moderniser: Thomas Cromwell' in Roper, *Historical Essays* (Macmillan, 1957), pp. 74-8.

across the fourth decade of sixteenth-century England, speaking of a popular political culture that requires more attention in the historiography of the period. This thesis aims to go some way to addressing that need.

John Walter insisted that rebellion needed to be understood in the context of a political culture.⁶⁸ He warned against the 'unintended consequences' of simply focussing on individual examples of rebellion, something he called a 'stepping-stone history'. The period of focus of this study spans a full decade, and it will be seen that certain political matters were contentious and debated both before and after the point of rebellion; 'the spasmodic episode', in Walter's terms. The overriding 'spasmodic episode' that punctuated the decade covered by this study was the Pilgrimage of Grace.

So far as large-scale studies are concerned, the historiography addressing 1530s England is limited to specific rebellions, or 'flashpoints' of popular politics. This literature is dominated by the Lincolnshire Rising, and, more so, the significantly more threatening Pilgrimage of Grace. The narrative account of the Pilgrimage of Grace compiled by the sisters Madeleine Dodds and Ruth Dodds and published in 1915 remains standing in terms of completeness, having received many plaudits from historians across the ages.⁶⁹ Michael Bush lauded the Dodds' study as the only authority in terms of 'detailed story', 'quite remarkable and probably without equal for

⁶⁸ John Walter, *Crowd and popular politics in early modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3.

⁶⁹ Madeleine H. Dodds and Ruth Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace., 1536-1537, And the Exeter Conspiracy, 1538 v1* (Cambridge University Press, 1915)..

an historical work'.⁷⁰ In his work on the Pilgrimage, Bush sought to reveal the complexity of what, he argues, was a series of regional revolts, driven by varying key motives, although, notably, strong religious grievances featured in the case of all hosts. Bush claimed that he was addressing the need for a new narrative, one which accounted for the uprising's development. This required a comparative analysis of its pre-conditions, aims, leadership, organisation and impact.⁷¹ Bush's study does indeed offer something unique in going further than other studies to understand the complexities inherent to the rebellion. It is not a general narrative of the Pilgrimage, rather it focuses on the formation and action of nine separate military 'hosts', each of which had its own dynamic and its own agenda. It culminates in the meeting of the armies at Doncaster, facing down an inferior royal force. Bush analysed the behaviour, geographical range and social compositions of the 'hosts'. In what Bush termed 'a society of orders', the hosts were formed by the commons, but most opted to seek local gentry leadership.

Geoffrey Elton's interpretation of the Pilgrimage saw it as the consequence of the unexpected overthrow of Anne Boleyn and the consolidation of power at court and in government of Thomas Cromwell. There was nothing spontaneous about the revolt, it was led and incited by the northern gentry. Elton insisted that the idea that the commons took up arms to defend the Church or be rid of Cromwell will not stand up to the evidence. Rather, they rose because, already perturbed by what had happened to traditional practices of daily piety, they were open to believe rumours of further actions

⁷⁰ Michael L. Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of October 1536* (Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

which would affect their pockets. The people rose for economic reasons, and the government showed itself aware of this truth in its constant efforts to kill the rumours and to point out that the recent tax touched hardly anyone among the protesters.⁷²

Richard Hoyle's thorough, detailed and comprehensive study of the Pilgrimage of Grace covers the whole series of revolts, unlike Bush, who worked across a shorter timescale.⁷³ Directly opposing Elton's interpretation, Hoyle sought to show how the rebellions originated with the commons; how, after the gentry had been dragged into the movement, they remained ambivalent about its aims; and how deeply divided the gentry and the commons remained throughout the insurrections. Hoyle's work focuses exclusively on the 1530s. Other contributions, such as that by Clifford Davies, have also argued that the rebels themselves were divided, not least in their attitude towards the king, and that support for Henry was substantial.⁷⁴

Both Hoyle and Bush recognize the commons as being the driving force but differ in their representation of gentry involvement. For Bush, some shared the same concerns as the commons and so allowed themselves to be seized before taking up their 'natural' role in the hierarchy of orders and assumed leadership. Hoyle's expressed intent was to tell the story of how the gentry tamed – and ultimately defeated – a popular movement of the commons. Bush and Bownes produced a useful examination of the uprisings that

⁷² Geoffrey R. Elton, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace' in G. R. Elton, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*, Vol III (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 183-215.

⁷³ Richard Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: And the Politics of the 1530s*, (Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁴ C. S. L. Davies, "Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace," in: A. Fletcher, J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, London 1986, pp. 58–91.

broke out in response to the suspicion that the government would not honour the pledges forced upon it by the Pilgrims in December 1536 and carefully considers the government's counter action that brought the Pilgrimage of Grace to an end.⁷⁵

Bush contends that the Pilgrimage of Grace offers a unique insight into how the people of the north, on the eve of the reformation, thought about religion, social relations and politics.⁷⁶ Why? Because it offers a better way of analysing the popular mentality of the time than relying upon the social, political and religious views promulgated by the government. Such an angle, Bush argues, offers a view on what people actually believed and felt, rather than what government defined and advocated ideals, standards and duties that good Christians should adhere to. Bush's work on 'popular thought' in the early Tudor north is something that this thesis helps to reveal still further, through the angle of popular politics.

The historiographical discussion of the 'spasmodic episode' that saw the government under some considerable threat in 1530s England offers insight into a moment in time when things came to a head. Elton's work on the period offers insight into the machinations of government and its enforcement of the Reformation. Shagan's work on popular politics and his putting of it to use in interpreting the Reformation more broadly is equally valuable. It is argued that this thesis makes a significant contribution to the

⁷⁵ Michael L. Bush & David Bownes, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Postpardon Revolts of December 1536 to March 1537 and their Effect* (University of Hull Press, 1999).

⁷⁶ Michael L. Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint: A Study of Popular Thought in the Early Tudor North* (Ashgate, 2009).

field by fixing on one decade (1530s), drawing out popular political speech by its chosen methodology, interrogating key relationships, and focusing on information flow via the media identified. It establishes that a political consciousness existed in plebeian society and that government action shone a light on its very existence by its prosecution of its critics. The evidence rests in State Papers.

Synopsis and thesis structure

A very deliberate strategy was employed by the government to safeguard against wilful self-interpretation (or misrepresentation) of the new and developing religious and political doctrine, with the obedience of the Act of Supremacy at its core. If the King's subjects were to conform and fall in line then those who had most influence on the majority, parish to parish, must be on message and remain so. When 'talk' was in the air, be it the words of a sermon, words in the confessional, words in the alehouse, or conversation held in a church precinct, they were often charged with meaning, found their way to the ears of authority and, subsequently, were placed on record. Chapter Two looks at the part played by the religious, both regular and secular. In bringing together the topics of early Reformation, and rebellion, the role of the clergy in popular politics is extracted and interpreted. The clergy often found themselves subject to intense pressure from above and below. It is argued that this extensive focus on the role of the clergy in popular politics represents a departure from existing work, which has tended to overlook the political role of this key group. The first part of the chapter begins with a general analysis, it considers happenings across the period, with a particular view on how legislation, its selling and enforcing played out. The second part of the

chapter is a specific case study featuring two instances of rupture, the Lincolnshire rebellion, and the Pilgrimage of Grace, focusing on the role played by John Dakyn, priest, and John Pickering, friar, respectively. Spiritual and material grievances prompted a significant number of clerics to become actively involved in rebellion. Among them, Dakyn and Pickering used their literacy and their authority to further a rising.

Chapter Three considers the question of gender, participation, and collective identity. If popular speech was political in 1530s England, then was such speech limited to men? The thesis finds this not to be the case. Whether it be gossip, hearsay, rumour, ballad or political prophecy, information coming from a public and common voice or a voice that spread throughout the people, often proved enough to initiate an investigation by a concerned government. In theory, women and young people took their place in the social order from either their husbands, or their fathers or their masters. Their social identities were subsumed into the social identities of the adult male heads of the households within which they lived. The church had been mobilized in the promotion of patriarchal 'truths' from the beginning, with many proverbs passed into popular circulation via the pulpit. The government of the 1530s recognized the power of the pulpit and used it to press home its agenda. Focusing on the ways in which hierarchy and subordination were negotiated opens up possibilities when considering the unit of the 'household'. It was essential that all members of the household contributed to the household economy. The work of wives often took place outside the home, separate from that of the household head. This helped create networks which opened up the

world of informal politics of local society to women, one in which they often played an important role, and this did extend to involvement in collective action. The second part of the chapter explores the question of collective identity by looking at those involved in political activity and rebellion and what trade(s) they belonged to. For Keith Thomas, men looked to their work as the source of their sense of identity.⁷⁷ Men were what they did, ‘occupation shaped the individual’s self-consciousness’.

Chapter Four explores the significance of place and space, the role of the settings in which communication took place, with a particular focus on the marketplace, and the alehouse. Such places hosted space where political discussion was possible. Of sixteenth-century Venice, Filippo de Vivo asked the question, ‘Was communication, in fact, itself a form of political action?’⁷⁸ In so doing, he considered the role of the settings in which communication took place, public places of sociability, where conversation and arguments easily moved between private gossip and public affairs’.⁷⁹ De Vivo posits that, ‘From gossip in squares, to whispered news in the Rialto marketplaces, to disputes in the city’s countless barbershops, the city acted as a vast resonating box, attracting news and multiplying it into a thousand rumours’.⁸⁰ In short, he argues, sixteenth-century Venice ‘hosted numerous spaces where public political discussion was possible’.⁸¹ It is the purpose of this chapter, in considering 1530s England, to seek

⁷⁷ Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 106.

⁷⁸ Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

advantage in studying location of communication, for that, as was the case for de Vivo, helps to identify the actual people who took part in political communication. It is argued that by directing attention to the site of politics, a novel contribution to existing historiography is made. In looking to illuminate the significance of communication in public spaces, where and what those spaces were, and the types of communication that took place, a case study of Walsingham forms the second part of the chapter. Walsingham was a place of pilgrimage, and a place benefiting from a vibrant economy fuelled by the steady and significant flow of pilgrims. It was something of a melting pot. The case study considers the Walsingham conspiracy and its significance. It expands upon Charles Moreton's interpretation of the conspiracy by asking what it reveals for the wider interpretation of popular political voice. Why was it so significant that it happened in Walsingham, the place, and what were the implications of that? Again, by directing attention to the site of politics (Walsingham), it is argued that a novel contribution to existing historiography is made.

Chapter Five looks at the part played by rumour and its circulation. A close analysis of rumours afloat in the period, moving beyond content to their very transmission, and then the reactions they produced, serves to deepen understanding of popular politics in 1530s England. If rumours were credible because they matched existing perceptions or expectations, they initiated strong feeling because they corresponded with people's hopes and fears, whether long- or short-term. The chapter adds to the existing historiography through expanding upon the scope of Ethan Shagan's study of rumour in the period by illuminating the impact the freedom of rumour flow had on the range and content of popular political speech; both more generally and, more specifically, in the

place, Louth. Being found guilty of speech misconduct came at a high price, the gravity of the crime was reflected in the severity of the punishment meted out. There existed a stark contradiction between what ordinary people said during the period, having no existence or status, while at the same time being tracked and repressed by a government that denied its existence. Transcripts of offensive speech allegedly made against the King and/or state, along with depositions taken from witnesses in judicial proceedings, were recorded in detail. The first part of the chapter explores all of this through a general analysis. The second part of the chapter makes a specific case study of Louth, Lincolnshire, and its part in the inception of the Lincolnshire rising. It focuses on a particularly pervasive rumour that spoke of the stripping of church assets.

Chapter Six looks at ballads and the part played by their circulation. The chapter adds to the existing historiography through an examination of how ballads worked to amplify political voice. It does so by illuminating the impact the freedom of ballad flow had on the range and content of popular political speech; both more generally and, more specifically, through the Sawley ballad, produced by the brothers of Sawley Abbey. Men, women, and children at all social levels experienced ballads as part of their everyday life. They dealt with every aspect of life, ranging from good living to rebellion and treason. There exists a good deal of evidence in the State Papers and court records to suggest that ballads passed through the country, informing, and triggering political debate. It was news. It was an effective medium for the flow of news. The first part of the chapter explores all of this through a general analysis. The second part of the chapter looks at the ballad produced in the West Riding, believed to have been

produced by the monks of Sawley. Background is offered into why and how this ballad became so well known, widely circulated and, consequently, why its originators were and had to be so harshly dealt with. It is remarkable for the fact that it is presented as the voice of 'us commons'. The government recognised the threat level, thus recognising the voice of those behind such communication. They tracked the passage of ballads, calling in all relevant people for interrogation. When under threat in the turbulent days of the 1530s the brothers of the house of Sawley actively cultivated commons protest and did so on a scale that belied the relative size of the house compared to their more illustrious sister houses.

Chapter Seven looks at the part played by political prophecy and its circulation. The events of the period - widespread theological, ecclesiastical, social, and political controversies - saw political prophecy rise once again to prominence in English life. It is how the language was used and audience interpretation that is the interest of this chapter of the thesis, along with how this living language travelled through communities and further afield, serving to amplify popular political voice. The chapter adds to the existing historiography through an examination of how political prophecy worked to amplify political voice. It does so by illuminating the impact the freedom of flow of political prophecy had on the range and content of popular political speech; both more generally and, more specifically, through the case of the prophetess, Elizabeth Barton. The chapter also adds to the existing historiography by the way it interprets the Barton affair through the lens of political prophecy, and how it was used to challenge government action. The first part of the chapter explores how political prophecy

functioned as a political language and how it was weaponized for political purposes by both government and its critics. The second part, the case of Elizabeth Barton, exemplifies how this dynamic played out in what became a very public affair, which meant there could only ever be one outcome. Government action in the face of circulating political prophecies was fourfold. First, they marshalled and applied the necessary resources to understand the nature of the prophecy, the intent of its usage, its implications, and threat level. Second, they traced its passage as far back as possible, calling in all relevant people for interrogation. Third, they often pushed back in kind, through counter-prophecy. Fourthly, if deemed necessary, they applied the full force of the law – if that meant changing the law, introducing new law, or simply cutting to the quick and, as in the case of Elizabeth Barton and her adherents, attainting without trial. This action left its detailed mark on the record, and the State Papers collection provides the very evidence that tells of widespread resistance to government authority.

The closing, concluding chapter, serves to ‘knit up this tragedy’. The phrase is borrowed from one of the chief protagonists in the historiography of the period, Richard Hoyle, who used it as the sub-title for the epilogue to his work, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: And the Politics of the 1530s*. Hoyle, in turn, borrowed the phrase from King Henry VIII, himself, who used it in communication with the Duke of Norfolk, 12 June 1537, when seeking a ghastly end for the chief rebels involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace.⁸² It is

⁸² The National Archives, State Papers: Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII, 1509-1547 (hereafter referred to as: TNA SP, L.P.), TNA, SP 1/121, f. 95 (L.P. XII(2) 77).

noteworthy that another of the historiographical heavyweights considered here, Eamon Duffy, uses the key word in the phrase for the title of his work, *A People's Tragedy: Studies in Reformation*, published two decades after Hoyle's contribution. For many – many of whose voices will be detected and heard through the course of this thesis – the events of the 1530s culminated in personal tragedy. This was a result of them voicing political opinion in a time when it became increasingly difficult to do so without being drawn to the attention of the government; a government that worked hard to suppress popular political voice.

Chapter Two: The Role of the Clergy

Have such an eye, diligent oversight, and inquirye in these premysses that I maye with spede be certified by you the names as well as such as hath transgressed the said ordre and commaundment, as of them that dothe preache any contencyous doobtefull matters or without authoryte.¹

Bishop John Longland of Lincoln

The supremacy of the Church touching 'cura animarum' to be reserved to the See of Rome as before. The consecration of the bishops to be from him, without any first fruits or pensions to be paid to him, or else a reasonable pension for the outward defence for the Faith.²

The Pilgrims Council: Article 2 (1536)

Using their literacy: on message, or not - a general analysis

In January 1538, the parson of Woodborough, Wiltshire, Nicholas Staunton, was brought to the attention of Thomas Cromwell, accused by his neighbours of words spoken against the King.³ Sir John Briggs and William Button advised Cromwell that Staunton was in custody, and forwarded on to him the examinations taken of Staunton's neighbours. Briggs and Button informed Cromwell that there had been malice between the two parties for six or seven years, and that, by their confession, 'he [the parson] was drunk when he spoke the words, as he will be oftentimes'. Staunton had been approached by one John Stone, accompanied by two other men, with a view

¹ Lincoln Archives Office Register 26, fo. 266v quoted in Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln Under John Longland*, p. 144.

² TNA SP 1/112, f. 118 [L.P. XI 1246].

³ TNA SP 1/128, (L.P. XIII(1) 94).

to him serving the parson. Stone balked at Staunton's offer of 8 marks a year, thinking it too little. To which the parson responded 'I am so beggared I can give no more. My trees be cut down, and I have been indicted and the King is my patron, and I am his headman, and if he will not uphold me in my right, I pray God little while may he reign among us'. Other locals weighed in, accusing Staunton of having uttered words against the King on other occasions. One John Miles claimed to have heard him say to poor men that he had no money to give them for the King had robbed him, and that it was unhappy that the Northern men had not had their way, for if they had it would have been better for us all'. The case of Nicholas Staunton, parson of Woodborough is indicative of the climate in which words spoken in the period might find their way to authority - in this case, Thomas Cromwell himself - be investigated, recorded, and subsequently made available for historians across the ages to analyse and interpret. The case of Nicholas Staunton, parson, exemplifies many that were captured and placed on record. If the King's subjects were to conform and fall in line, then those who had most influence on the majority, parish to parish, must toe that party line. The actions of the State bred resentment, and this led to a puncturing of the opaque surface of the past, thus allowing subordinate groups to be heard, with parish priests being one of those groups.⁴

This chapter of the thesis examines the role of the clergy (regular and secular) who were absolutely caught up in the maelstrom of change and its aftermath that hit 1530s England. It adopts the same approach as the other core chapters that follow, examining the themes key to the thesis. It makes the general case, exploring significant moments

⁴ Walter, *Crowd and popular politics*, p.8.

and happening across the period that help inform the larger picture, and then makes a case study of two significant individuals and their role in the rebellions of 1536-7. The case studies offer depth and specific context around the chapter theme, thus helping secure an interpretation of events that is underpinned by an evidence base that is both broad and deep. The thesis makes the case that this approach offers something new to the historiography of the period. In bringing together the topics of early Reformation and rebellion the role of the clergy in popular politics is extracted and interpreted. The clergy often found themselves subject to intense pressure from above and below. It is argued that this extensive focus on the role of the clergy in popular politics represents a departure from existing work, which has tended to overlook the political role of this key group.

Those resident (at least until the latter part of the decade) in the religious houses featured strongly in the story of change that unfolded, consequently they leave their mark in the argument developed throughout the thesis. Key to the specific focus of this chapter is the part played by the secular clergy. The first part of the chapter, the general analysis, considers happenings across the decade, with a particular view on how legislation, its selling and enforcing, played out. The second part of the chapter considers two instances of rupture, the Lincolnshire rebellion and the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the role played by the religious in those two critical events. It makes a case study of John Dakyn, priest, and John Pickering, friar, respectively. Spiritual and material grievances prompted a significant number of clerics to become actively involved in rebellion. Among them, Dakyn and Pickering used their literacy and their authority to further a rising.

A very deliberate strategy was employed by the government to safeguard against willful self-interpretation (or misrepresentation) of the new and developing religious and political doctrine, with the obedience of the Act of Supremacy at its core. If the King's subjects were to conform and fall in line then those who had most influence on the majority, parish to parish, must be on message and remain so. When 'talk' was in the air, be it the words of a sermon, words in the confessional, words in the alehouse, or conversation held in a church precinct, they were often charged with meaning, found their way to the ears of authority and, subsequently, were placed on record. Nicholas Staunton being a case in point.

Important for consideration in this chapter is the fact that words and writings need not suggest a direct intent to harm the king in person; if they were held to indirectly do so the accused would likely be charged with sedition or, worse, treason. As detailed in Chapter One, changes applied to the law of Treason made this so. Equally critical to this chapter is the fact King Henry VIII had assumed the title Supreme Head of the Church of England, consolidated by The Supremacy Act, 1534.⁵ An act of state, Shagan argues, that was 'the centrepiece and actualizing principle of the English Reformation'.⁶ The Act of Appeals firmed up the Act of Supremacy, placing the king at the head of the spiritual jurisdiction. This meant that any use of papal jurisdiction amounted to

⁵ 26 Henry VIII, c. 1. Reproduced in full in *Documents of the Christian Church* ed. by Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 242-3.

⁶ Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, p. 29.

usurpation.⁷ A series of statutes to safeguard and enforce the Royal Supremacy was topped off by the Act Extinguishing the Authority of the Bishop of Rome (1536).⁸ One of these, the Act of Dispensations (1534), placed the authorization to issue all ecclesiastical licenses and faculties with Canterbury.⁹ The appointment of new bishops was now the sole preserve of the king. As supreme head, the king controlled the Church of England; its laws, its courts, its appointments, its revenues, and its doctrine.¹⁰ Declarations or oaths had to be taken by the male population in recognition of the supremacy. Explicit compliance of the clergy was demanded. Their allegiance must be transferred from the Pope to the King. Their influence over the laity, for whom they had ‘*cura animarum*’, made their conformity politically imperative.¹¹

The king’s propagandists were put to work. Thomas Swinnerton argued:

no man ought to marueile & mutturre in corners, as though we shulde nowe attempt a thinge in Englande, whiche our fore fathers had neuer attempted in tymes paste’. What is more, ‘that the miserie, nede, pouertie, and scacitie, that we be in, cometh all together by the pope and his meanes’.¹²

Richard Morison put forward the proposal that the King forbid Robin Hood plays because they celebrated disobedience to royal issues. In their place, Morison

⁷ Graham Nicholson, ‘The Act of Appeals and the English reformation’ in *Law and Government under the Tudors: Essays presented to Sir Geoffrey Elton on his retirement* ed. by Claire Cross, David Loades, Jack J. Scarisbrick (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 19-30.

⁸ 28 Henry VIII, c. 10. Reproduced in full in Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 365-7.

⁹ 25 Henry VIII, c. 21. Reproduced in full in *Documents of the Christian Church* ed. by Bettenson and Maunder, pp. 237-242.

¹⁰ Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 338-78.

¹¹ Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Faber and Faber, 2014), p. 132.

¹² T. Swinnerton, *Little treatise against the muttering of some papists in corners* (1534) University of Oxford < [\[TCP\] A litel treatise ageynste the mutterynge of some papistis in corners](#) > [accessed 09 April 2025].

suggested, should be issued texts of others targeting the Pope.¹³ Stephen Gardiner's tract, *De Vera Obedientia*, was no less damning; the Act of Supremacy ensured that 'the false pretended supremacy of the Bishop of Rome' ceased, and so 'he could no longer exercise his tyranny in the King's Majesty's realm'.¹⁴ Sharp and meaningful words, not to be questioned.

For all that King Henry VIII's vicegerent, Thomas Cromwell, recognised and invested in the power of the printing press and the written word as a powerful propaganda tool in securing the Supremacy and concomitant ecclesiastical and constitutional reform, so too was he alert to the power of the pulpit.¹⁵ With this came the need for more preachers and more control over the content of their sermons. In working to achieve this, with Cromwell, and then without him, the government acted vigorously against those not on message.

Evidence indicates that Cromwell had a keen interest in the humanist thinking of Erasmus.¹⁶ He was among the first to study Erasmus' Latin translation of the New Testament, having obtained a copy for himself as early as 1517.¹⁷ Erasmus'

¹³ Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 78.

¹⁴ Stephen Gardiner, *De Vera Obedientia* (1536)

<<https://ezphost.dur.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/de-vera-obedientia-oration-made-latine-right/docview/2240869649/se-2>> [accessed 09 April 2025].

¹⁵ Joseph Block, 'Thomas Cromwell's Patronage of Preaching', *Sixteenth Century Journal* VIII, 1 (1977), pp. 37-50.

¹⁶ Michael Everett, *The Rise of Thomas Cromwell: Power and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII, 1485-1534* (Yale University Press, 2015), p. 135.

¹⁷ Susan Brigden, 'Cromwell and the 'brethren' in *Law and Government under the Tudors: Essays presented to Sir Geoffrey Elton on his retirement* ed. by Claire Cross, David Loades and Jack J. Scarisbrick, (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 31-50.

Ecclesiastes was the first comprehensive manual on Christian rhetoric.¹⁸ His infusion of classical rhetoric in the sermon suggested political possibilities for sermon preaching.¹⁹ On 3 June 1535, Cromwell issued a circular letter to the bishops. They were directed to preach in support of the Supremacy. Further, they were to ensure that ‘all manner abbots, priors, deans, archdeacons, priests, parsons, vicars, curates, and all other ecclesiastical persons’ do the same.²⁰ Schoolmasters were to teach the same doctrine.

The following day, 4 June 1535, Cranmer acknowledged receipt of the King’s letter ‘concerning the diligent declaration of the King’s title and stile of Supreme Head in Earth, immediately under God, of the Church of England’, and he vowed to do everything in his power to satisfy the King’s command.²¹ Seeking surety, Cromwell followed up the circular to bishops with one to the lay officers, sheriffs, and justices of the peace, directing them to report any bishop or other ecclesiastical person in their diocese to the King’s Council should they in their administration act in any way ‘colourably or coldly’ in their interpretation of their directives. This came with a warning that if they ‘who have been chosen justices for their wisdom and truth, be found to halt, stumble or wink at any part of the same they shall be so corrected that others shall beware to frustrate the commands of their sovereign’.²² Such exhortation was clearly still necessary and real in the latter years of Henry’s reign, as evident in a letter from the King himself to Cranmer dated June 1544. Cranmer was charged with being the ‘great

¹⁸ D. Nowakowski “Bodies can be compelled; minds must be turned, since they cannot be compelled”: *Preaching as an “Introduction” to Law in the Ecclesiastes of Erasmus of Rotterdam*. *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis Folia philosophica*. 2021;101–113. doi: 10.18778/0208-6107.38.05.

¹⁹ Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 10.

²⁰ Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 231-2.

²¹ TNA (L. P. VIII 820).

²² TNA SP 1/239 f.193 [L.P. Addenda Vol.1 Part 1 990].

instrument' in ensuring that all services were made more intelligible for the people by the use of prayer in the 'native English tongue'. The said injunctions were to be 'set forth by preaching, good exhortation, and otherways by the people'. Cranmer would be answerable to the King should he not achieve and maintain this in all towns, churches, villages, and parishes of his diocese. He was to report directly to the Crown anyone working to the contrary.²³ Such responsibility was recognized by others in a position of responsibility. The abbot of Whitby, for example, who wrote to Cromwell directly, seeking dispensation for himself and qualified brothers to deliver the desired sermons in the surrounding area. The abbot doubled down on this, making sure to mention his nurturing of learned brothers. The letter included a request for assistance in meeting the requirement. Where violation of injunctions was discovered, word would swiftly be passed back to the abbot, with those finding cause for complaint to be brought before the abbot himself and 4 or 6 of his seniors.²⁴

Cranmer zealously pushed home the new agenda. We see this initiative in the tone and detail of Cranmer's supplementary directive to the injunction that curates and parishioners between them were to provide and make accessible one copy of the Bible in every parish. He charged all curates with the reading of a warning to their parishioners against 'gevyng to moche to your own minds, fantazies and opinions' in interpreting scripture, and forbidding 'any open reasoning in your open tavernes or alehowses'.²⁵ There was clearly an awareness that talk considered unfit for the

²³ John E. Cox (ed.), *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1556* (The Parker Society, Cambridge, 1847), pp. 494-5.

²⁴ TNA SP 1/101, f. 193. (L.P. X. 239).

²⁵ Quoted in E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* p. 406.

unqualified was a feature of local conversation, and this was to be curbed. The clergy were charged with this task, while simultaneously being policed themselves. In May 1536 Bishop Longland of Lincoln pointed the finger at one Swynnerton, whose preaching had been offensive to the people 'for he lacks learning, knowledge of his doctors and discretion'.²⁶ 'His sermons are not fruitful, but rather seditious, and he preaches on those doubtful matters which were forbidden to be touched till the determinations were published.' And then, telling of his influence, 'Wherever this priest preaches they have monition one from another, though it be six or eight miles off, to be with him'. Clearly, this was not to be tolerated.

In the West Country, in the summer of 1537, Dr Simon Heynes, a court-trusted anti-papal preacher, was appointed the new Dean of Exeter Cathedral. Heynes wasted no time in reporting to Cromwell that for as much as he liked the people of Exeter he had quickly formed a low opinion of the local clergy; 'very few of them well-persuaded or anything learned'.²⁷ The Bishop of Exeter himself, John Veysey, remained more of a conservative than a reformist until he too caught up in May 1538, issuing a set of injunctions for the diocese of Exeter. Veysey directed his clergy to preach in favour of the Royal Supremacy and 'to utterly abolish and extirpe the usurped power of the bishop of Rome'.

Paul Ayris's work on episcopal registers confirmed their place as fundamental primary source documents. Essentially, episcopal registers are a record of a bishop's, or

²⁶ TNA SP 1/103, f. 331 (L.P. X. 804).

²⁷ TNA SP 1/124, f.83 [L.P. XII(2) 557].

archbishop's, formal administration during their term of office. Ayris's study of Thomas Cranmer's register (a large manuscript collection kept in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth Palace) underscores Cranmer's part in the enforcement of the new order in Church and State.²⁸ Ayris argues that the profundity of the King's assumption of the role of Supreme Head of the Church is embedded in the registers. The royal visitation of 1535-7 served to enforce the king's supremacy in the Church. Further, it established the place of *all* churchmen in the new order in Church and State, with the issue of licences to all ecclesiastical officials, such as Cranmer, to exercise jurisdiction in the king's name, effectively making them royal civil servants.²⁹

This is important because if we see the higher echelons of the church as designated Crown agents then we might balance the effectiveness of such agency against the receiving of it by the laity. Extant records allow for this equation, at least to a useful extent. Where protest manifested itself through open rebellion, we have access to clearly expressed grievances and blame lying in the petitions of the Lincolnshire men in October 1536, and of those expressed under the umbrella, Pilgrimage of Grace. In the former, the Lincolnshire rebels declared themselves to be grieved by the late promotion of several bishops of England, namely, the bishop of Canterbury (Cranmer), the bishop of Rochester (Hilsey), the bishop of Worcester (Latimer), the bishop of Salisbury (Shaxton), the bishop of St Davids (Barlowe), and the bishop of Dublin (Browne) – with the blame for beginning all of the trouble and the 'vexation that hath been taken of your

²⁸ Paul Ayris, 'Thomas Cranmer's Register: Little Understood and Unpublished', *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 6:3 (2004), pp. 271-93, doi: 10.1558/rarr.2004.6.3.271.

²⁹ Paul Ayris, 'Reformation in Action: The Implementation of Reform in the Dioceses of England' *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 5:1 (2003), pp. 27-53, 10.1558/rarr.5.1.27.38365.

[the King's] subjects' being the bishop of Lincoln (Longland).³⁰ Note Bishop John Longland of Lincoln's directive to his archdeacons, highlighting the requirement of a licence, instructing them to make sure they:

have such an eye, diligent oversight, and inquirye in these premysses that I maye with spede be certified by you the names as well as such as hath transgressed the said ordre and commaundment, as of them that dothe preache any contencyous doobtefull matters or without authoryte.³¹

The Pilgrim petition submitted to the King in the same month (October 1536) called for reversion to the laws of the realm as they were at the beginning of Henry's reign. 'That subverters of the laws of God and the realm may be corrected'. The petition names the subverters as being Cromwell, Cranmer, Latimer, and 'other maintainers of the same sect'.³² Elsewhere, Pickering's Song (an exhortation to the nobles and commons of the north) names the 'authors of all ill' as being Cromwell, his chancellors, and the 'heretical bishops'.³³ Likewise, the Sawley Ballad, where Cranmer is named in the final verse:

Crim, Cram and Riche
With three ell [that is Ls – Latimer, Leigh and Layton] and the like
As some men teach,
God them amend!
And that Aske may,
Without delay,
Here make a stay
And well to end.³⁴

³⁰ TNA SP 1/108, f. 45 (L.P. XI. 705 (1)).

³¹ Lincoln Archives Office Register 26, fo. 266v quoted in Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln Under John Longland*, p. 144.

³² TNA SP 1/109, f. 249 (L.P. XI. 902).

³³ TNA SP 1/118, f. 292-293b (L.P. XII(1) 1021).

³⁴ The Sawley Ballad is reproduced in full in Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 263-6.

The place of ballads as a medium is explored further in Chapter Six, with a case study focusing on the monks of Sawley, authors of the Sawley ballad. Friar John Pickering, author of 'Pickering's Song', is the subject of a case study in the second part of this chapter.

Towards the end of the decade, December 1538, evidence of the government's ongoing concern for robust defence of the supremacy is laid bare in a Circular to the justices of the peace issued in December 1538.³⁵ The directive called for condign punishment of those who maintained the 'bishop of Rome's usurped authority'. Such punishment was to be extended to spreaders of seditious rumours, for, despite the King's subjects having not been disquieted for some time, cause for fresh concern was apparent. Among these 'ungracious persons... parsons, vicars, and curates are chief'. They were said to 'read so confusely, hemming, and hacking the Word of God, and such our injunctions as we have lately set forth that almost no man can understand the true meaning of the said injunctions'. Beyond the charge of misinterpretation of the issued injunctions, those responsible were also said to be responsible for rumours spread abroad, including those that claimed new taxes were to be introduced, with charges levied at christenings, weddings, and burials. The Circular warned that 'these miserable and papistical wretches' were spreading old rumours to stoke a new commotion. The Justices were ordered therefore to exercise their utmost diligence in rooting out these 'cankered parsons, vicars, and curates, who do not substantially declare our injunctions'. Determined to ensure that everybody got his orders, Cromwell added the

³⁵ TNA SP 1/140, f. 209 (L.P. XIII(2) 1171).

rider that all those receiving a first copy were to provide all other justices in the shire with two copies.³⁶

The injunctions that were required to be substantially declared were those of 1536 and 1538. The former, issued directly by the King functioning as ‘supreme head’, published by Cromwell, as Vicar-General, were notable for not having been submitted to Convocation. The first injunctions (1536) charged that all within respective deaneries with the responsibility for cure of souls shall both observe and cause to be observed and kept ‘all and singular laws and statutes of this realm made for the abolishing and extirpation of the Bishop of Rome’s pretended and usurped power’, whilst establishing and confirming the King’s authority and jurisdiction as the supreme head of the Church of England.³⁷ The message was to be declared in sermons and other collations every Sunday for the ensuing first quarter, and after that at least twice every quarter.

As such, condemnation of the Supremacy from the pulpit constituted an act of bravery. And yet, as this thesis argues, there existed many clergymen, often lowly parish priests, who did object to the Act of Supremacy and other changes being introduced, and this caused them to enter the world of popular politics. More commonly, those who spoke out did so in private, or in the alehouse, having let their guard down.³⁸ There were those willing to inform, whether from loyalty to the King, fear of complicity or hope of reward.³⁹

The evidence from accusations and reports reflects the Crown’s fear of the clergy’s

³⁶ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 260.

³⁷ Cranmer’s Register, fo. 97b. [G. and H. lxii]. Reproduced in *Documents of the Christian Church* ed. by Bettenson, pp. 255-7.

³⁸ Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society*, p. 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 143.

influential role within the parish community.⁴⁰ If their role was to support and oversee the will of the Crown so far as theological and ecclesiastical reform was concerned, then those exercising their position to do the opposite were always likely to draw attention to themselves. In March 1537, one such case featured Robert Tanner of Stockbridge, priest, who scorned fellow drinkers, calling them knaves, and ‘the more fools’ for paying their duties to the King. The men turned the priest in, and he was indicted for his seditious behaviour. Tanner’s words fell within the evolving scope of ‘treasonable words’, now sedition; as described in the opening chapter of the thesis. He was despatched to Cromwell, along with the incriminating depositions and an inventory of his possessions.⁴¹ In January 1538, a similar case involved John Lestok, ‘a lewd priest’, charged with speaking seditious words in an alehouse. The depositions of two witnesses were sent on to Cromwell for his attention.⁴² Likewise, John Fuller, priest, accused, in September 1538, of ‘seditious words against the King and his ordinances’. Not only was Cromwell sent the depositions damning Fuller, but two of the accusers and the priest himself.⁴³ Evidence collected off the back of what became known as the Prebendaries’ Plot in Canterbury, 1543, is comprehensively recorded in State Papers. This investigation into the work of the ‘evil preachers’ in the diocese of Canterbury covered many proscribed behaviours. The depositions collected and recorded are damning. Amongst them is the charge that the parson of Westbere ‘is a common diceplayer, and a common haunter and resorter to taverns and alehouses’.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Anthony N. Shaw, ‘Papal loyalism in 1530s England’, *The Downside Review* 117:406 (1999), pp. 17-40.

⁴¹ TNA SP 1/116, f. 246 (L.P. XII(1) 627).

⁴² TNA SP 1/128, f. 132 (L.P. XIII(1) 161).

⁴³ TNA SP 1/242, f. 78 (Addenda Vol. I, Part II, 1353).

⁴⁴ TNA (L.P. XVIII(2) 546).

Words heard within the walls of the church to which priests were resident were not beyond reporting. Take one William Wood of Bransdale in the parish of Kirby Moorside who overheard a conversation between the parish priest and his clerk, one he reported to the authorities in June 1538. The two had talked of how the King and Cromwell had ‘put so many men wrongfully to death’. The clerk wished for the death of Cromwell. The priest, Robert Kirby, then reportedly said ‘If any of the great men had had a switch at the King’s neck a twelvemonth since, before this business began, he should have had small peril for it’.⁴⁵ Dangerous words indeed! Allegations made against priests for words spoken, both within the church and without, commonly the local alehouse, are plentiful in State Papers. The question of Space and Place, including the alehouse setting, is the focus of Chapter Four in this thesis.

Towards the end of his reign, addressing parliament on Christmas Eve 1545, King Henry spoke of his despair at the level of dissension and discord in his kingdom. Noteworthy, is what he said of the accessibility of the Scriptures:

I am very sorry to know and hear how unreverently that most precious jewel, the Word of God, is disputed, rhymed, and sung, and jangled in every alehouse and tavern, contrary to the true meaning and doctrine of the same.⁴⁶

The injunctions of 1538 included a particularly interesting directive. Charged with teaching both the ‘Pater noster’ and Creed, incrementally, to parishioners, those hearing confession were to examine parishioners on their ability to recite the Articles of

⁴⁵ TNA SP 1/133, f.233 (L.P. XIII(1) 1282).

⁴⁶ Cited in Ethan Shagan, ‘Open disputation was in alehouse: religious debate in the diocese of Canterbury, c. 1543’, in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* ed. by Ethan Shagan, Anthony Fletcher, and John Guy (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 197-232.

faith, and the 'Paternoster', in English.⁴⁷ The Six Articles, issued in 1539, cemented the place of confession as an obligation: 'Sixthly, that auricular confession is expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the Church of God'.⁴⁸

When Reynolds of Syon Abbey was examined in the Tower in April 1535, challenged with giving counsel against the King, he claimed to be holding the common view:

I have all the rest of Christendom in my favour. I dare even say all this kingdom, although the smaller part holds with you, for I am sure the larger part is at heart of our opinion, although outwardly, partly from fear and partly from hope, they profess to be of yours.⁴⁹

Interestingly, Reynolds claimed never to have expressed this view in public. Rather, he claimed:

I would never declare my opinion for malice against the King, or any other person, unless it was asked me in confession, when I could not refuse for discharge of my conscience.⁵⁰

Sir John Bulmer, a prominent protagonist in the reboot of rebellion in the north in early 1537, confessed to the fact he had sent his chaplain to a priest named Thomas Franke of Lofthouse, also one Robert Hugill to the vicar of Kirby in Cleveland to inquire if the commons would rise again, 'which they should know by men's confessions'.⁵¹ In August 1536, Cromwell was informed by one Borthwyk that 'certain curates and religious men',

⁴⁷ Cranmer's Register, f. 215b. [G. and H. lxiii]. Reproduced in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. by Bettenson and Maunder, pp. 257-9.

⁴⁸ The Six Articles Act, 31 Henry VIII, cap. 14: Statutes of the Realm, iii. 739. [G. and H. lxx]. Reproduced in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. by Bettenson and Maunder, pp. 259-60.

⁴⁹ TNA (L.P. VIII 661).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ TNA SP 1/119, f. 73. (L.P. XII(1) 1087).

under the cover of confession, 'command them to obey the bishop of Rome', for the King, the Queen, and all who hold the Gospel shall be put to death in two years' time.⁵²

When 'talk' was in the air, be it the words of a sermon, words in the confessional, words in the alehouse, or conversation held in a church, they were often charged with meaning, found their way to the ears of authority and, subsequently, placed on record. One such conversation took place at the Kidderminster church gate. A group of men were talking of the fact that a sermon was to be preached that day. One Miles Denyson, of Kidderminster, tailor, said, 'There is a foolish knave priest come to preach of the New Learning, which I set not by'. John Cownde - whose deposition it is that is placed on record - replied, 'beware what ye say, for if some men did hear you, ye should sit by the heels'. Denyson railed:

The Bishop sent one yesterday for to preach at the gallows at Whoobroke, and there stood upon the vicar's colt (which was a bier), and made a foolish sermon of the New Learning, looking over the gallows; I would the colt had winced and cast him down.

The record shows that others lined up to corroborate Cownde's words. Henry More, clothworker, added that Denyson said, 'My lord hath sent a puppy and a boy to make a sermon of the New Law'. The State record describes Denyson as 'a seditious person, drunkard, and despiser of the preachers and doctrines of Christ'. He was committed to ward, awaiting Cromwell's pleasure.⁵³ Denyson was by no means the only priest dismissed as being a drunkard.

⁵² London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV, f.127 (L.P. XI 355).

⁵³ TNA SP 1/134, f.297 (LP XIII(1) 1509).

Beyond the question of approved sermon material, its preaching, and State-deemed appropriate receiving of that, it is worthwhile exploring the response to some of the finer details of the injunctions issued in 1536 and 1538. The 1538 Injunctions decreed that one copy of ‘the whole Bible of the largest volume’ should be made available in every parish church, the cost being borne in equal part by the parish priest and the parishioners, so that ‘parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and read it’.⁵⁴ This directive was not always faithfully followed, as exemplified by the case of John Divale of Wincanton, Somerset. When his parishioners turned to the neighbouring parish priest of Castle Cary, John Ward, for instruction on the New Testament, Divale rebuked them, railing against ‘these new-fangled fellows which read these new books, for they be heretics and knaves and Pharisees’. Similar language was employed by the priest Thomas Cowley, vicar of Ticehurst, when Cowley reproached those who possessed the new Bible. Rather, he ordered, ‘you botchers, bunglers, and cobblers which have the Testament in their keeping, ye shall deliver it to us gentlemen which have studied therefor’.⁵⁵ Those who had the New Testament were ‘of the new trick’. ‘It is but trick and go. Lightly it came and lightly it will be gone again’.⁵⁶ The same Cowley was also described as a fool, for though he possessed the King’s book to guide him on what he should teach the people, he disobeyed ‘this commandment’, preaching the contrary. For so doing, the Bishop of Chichester ruled, he should return to the places where he ‘so lewdly preached and acknowledge his fault before the people’. He was

⁵⁴ 1538 Cranmer’s Register, f. 215b. Reproduced in full in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. by Bettenson and Maunder, pp. 247-9.

⁵⁵ TNA SP 1/151, f.155 (L.P. XIV(1) 897).

⁵⁶ TNA SP 1/133, f.50 (L.P. XIII(1) 1199).

charged with disobeying the King's injunctions by 'setting forth images and miracles openly in the pulpit'. This was very much counter to that set out in the 1536 Injunctions intending that 'all superstition and hypocrisy may vanish away', consolidated in the 1538 Injunctions, thus:

... that such feigned images as you know in any of your cures to be so abused with pilgrimages or offerings or anything made thereunto, you shall for avoiding that most detestable offence of idolatry forthwith take down and delay, and shall suffer henceforth no candles, tapers, or images of wax to be set afore any image or picture...⁵⁷

The case for micro-history (and case study, indeed) in assessing the local impact of such radical reform is well put by Eamon Duffy in his study of reformation and rebellion in Morebath, situated within the diocese of Exeter. Duffy argues that the most radical aspect of the injunctions issued by Cromwell in September 1538 was 'the heightened ferocity of the language against the cult of images'.⁵⁸ The clergy were to exhort their parishioners to the works of charity, mercy and faith prescribed and commanded in Scripture, and 'not to repose their trust of affiance in any other works devised by men's phantasies beside scripture; as in wandering to pilgrimages, offering of money, candles, or tapers to images or relics, or kissing or licking the same, saying over a number of beads, not understood or minded on, or in such-like superstition'.⁵⁹ John Veysey, bishop of Exeter, had preempted this in his claim that 'many of the unlearned people of my diocese have been much blinded, following many times their own superstitious fantasies'.⁶⁰ For Duffy, 'these directives against images were so many

⁵⁷ Reproduced in full in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. by Bettenson and Maunder, pp. 257-9.

⁵⁸ Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath*, p. 95.

⁵⁹ *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. by Bettenson and Maunder, pp. 247-9.

⁶⁰ Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath*, p. 94.

arrows aimed at the heart of Sir Christopher Trychay' [the parish priest of Morebath]. Since his arrival some twenty years earlier, Trychay had nurtured such expressions of devotion in his parishioners; expressions which were now expressly declared unchristian and placed outside the law.⁶¹ There was little a lowly parish priest and his parishioners could do against the might of their bishop in Exeter, who had become effectively, now, a government representative, but it takes little imagination to feel the political tensions wrought by this injunction.

One law, passed on 11 August 1536, proved to be as significant as those discussed above. Cromwell, having been appointed 'Vicegerent in spirituals' by the King, steered through an act of Convocation abrogating all the holy days which fell in the Westminster law terms or during the harvest period from the beginning of July to the end of September, excepting the feasts of the Virgin and the Apostles, St George's Day, the nativity of St John the Baptist and All Saints Day. The rationale for this was primarily economic. Services may be held but people were to go to work as usual. The Act challenged the expanding number of feast days, growing 'dayly more and more by mens devocyon, yea rather supersticyon'. What is more, it was suggested, such liberty encouraged wrongful behaviour, with men 'entysed by the lycencyous vacacyon and lybertye of those holydayes'.⁶² Duffy's study illuminates the seismic impact this had on one village, Morebath, in terms of social events, religious celebrations of the year, also noting in his wider study, *Stripping of the Altars*, just how widespread discontent was throughout England.⁶³ The findings of this thesis supports such an argument.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 96.

⁶² Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 394.

⁶³ Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath*, p.91.

The issue of holydays featured strongly in statements recorded that now rest in State Papers. Sir Henry Parker announced to Cromwell that in accordance with the King's letters he had committed to ward a number of parsons who 'contrary to the King's injunctions for the abrogation of superstitious holydays' had 'kept high and solemn, with ringing and singing, Holy Rood day last, in so much as there was like to have been much dissension between them and those who went to their bodily labour'.⁶⁴ In October 1536, Constable and Tyrwhyte recounted to Cromwell how the Lincolnshire rebels' petition was 'for pardon and that they keep holydays as before...'⁶⁵ Thomas Kendall, the vicar of Louth, under interrogation, stated that one of the prime causes of the rebellion was the 'putting down of holydays'.⁶⁶ The parson of Byrchforde, Nicholas Leche, pleaded that he had strived to persuade his parishioners that they may work on the days abrogated by the King, but added that for doing so he feared he might be slain by the commons.⁶⁷ John Halom, yeoman, examined in Kingston upon Hull, told of his having witnessed in his parish church the priest omitting the calling out of St. Wilfred's day as a holyday. On being challenged, the priest said that that and other feasts were put down by the King's authority and the consent of the whole clergy in Convocation. After the mass was over, Halom stated, the whole parish resolved to have their holydays bid and kept as before, 'and so they had ever since'.⁶⁸ Like St. Wilfred's Day, St. Luke's Day fell within the Michaelmas Term and so had been abrogated. As had happened in Halom's parish church, so did it in Kirby Stephen church, when the curate

⁶⁴ TNA SP 1/106, f. 228 (L.P. XI. 514).

⁶⁵ TNA SP 1/106, f. 270 (L.P. XI. 553).

⁶⁶ TNA SP 1/110, f.141 (L.P. XI 970).

⁶⁷ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 70(xi)).

⁶⁸ TNA L.P. XII(1) 201(iv).

failed to announce the forthcoming St. Luke's Day. When this caused 'a great murmur' among the congregation, the curate bowed to pressure, rang the sacring bell and bade it.⁶⁹ Again, all of these instances speak of the difficult if not impossible position the typical parish priest found himself in.

Away from the northern areas of rebellion, in the county of Cornwall in the spring of 1537, two fishermen named Carpisack and Treglosack made a bid to emulate the 'Northern men' responsible for the Pilgrimage of Grace. They secured the services of a local craftsman who produced a banner portraying Christ, Our Lady and St John, together with Henry and his queen, 'and all the commonalty kneeling, with scripture above their heads, making petition to the picture of Christ that it would please the king's grace that they might have their holy days'. The craftsman reported Carpisack and Treglosack to Sir William Godolphin, they were arrested and Carpisack, at least, is believed to have been hanged in chains at Helston.⁷⁰ Challenging government edicts all too often bore a heavy price.

State Papers record many instances of clergymen being challenged on their words and actions. They appear at regular intervals across the decade. In August 1533, two priests accused of seditious words against the King were placed in ward.⁷¹ In Rye, in October of the same year, a friar and a priest were 'put in safe-keeping', accused of speaking seditious words against the King and the Queen.⁷² In May 1534, Robert Oldeham, parish

⁶⁹ TNA SP1/117, f. 53. in Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies*, pp. 292-3.

⁷⁰ Robert W. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 71

⁷¹ TNA SP 1/178, f. 83 (L.P. VI 945).

⁷² TNA SP 1/180, f. 10 (L.P. VI 1329).

priest of Pluckeley was apprehended for seditious words.⁷³ Recorded incidents also include those of priest accusing fellow priest. In April 1535, in York, a quarrel arose between two priests. One, Hew Halle, accused the other, John Smethson, of having said, 'I will not pray for the King, for he is about to beggar us'. The accuser's confession, signed with his own hand, and the defendant's answer were despatched to Cromwell, with *both* priests detained, awaiting Cromwell's pleasure.⁷⁴ In January 1537, in Rutland, Thomas Anderson, priest, deposed that William Smyth, priest, had said that 'the King was a poller and a shaver of the realm'. Typically, nothing on record remains of punishment meted out for such words and acts. Bowker suggests that the treatment handed out for papal sympathy or non-conformity, so far as the injunctions was concerned, reflected not the gravity of the offence as the power of the offender to influence others. 'Treasonable words spoken in private, or in his cups, by a priest of little consequence were better ignored than advertised by prosecution.'⁷⁵ Prosecuted or not, this thesis argues that the very existence of so many accusations and charges on record of wrong-doing and wrong-saying by the clergy made the issue a very public matter. This would have made it newsworthy, it would have been talked about and passed on, and its content was essentially political.

It is easier to detect a sense of leniency offered in some cases. Take Richard Fleming, curate of Tangmere in Sussex. The Mayor of Chichester, reporting to Cromwell, in February 1537, declared that he had imprisoned a drunken priest [Fleming], 'a very

⁷³ TNA SP 1/83, f. 235 (L.P. VII 630).

⁷⁴ TNA SP 1/192, f. 106 [L.P. VIII 620].

⁷⁵ Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln Under John Longland*, p. 140.

simple person who has spoken seditious words'.⁷⁶ Also, in April 1538, Sir John Markham, wrote to Cromwell that he was sending him the depositions of certain persons who lately had accused a priest of seditious words. Markham reported, 'The priest is aged and his wit and memory simple'. Nevertheless, he was held in ward 'till Cromwell's further pleasure'.⁷⁷ In May 1538, Sir John Hercy reported to Cromwell that he had been informed that a certain man of the cloth, Edward Eland, of Wakefield 'has been teaching young folks seditious songs against your Lordship and others'. Hercy enclosed Eland's confession, along with 'a song learned by heart by boys and others'.⁷⁸ Alas, no record exists of Cromwell's response to this particular misdemeanor.

Any reading of State Papers for the period of study that is the focus of this thesis will feature countless cases in which people of low birth have been accused by others. For the great part, it was a member of the clergy who was denounced, typically the parish priest. Denunciations have been a feature of many historical periods across time. They were made by those known as *delatores* in ancient Rome, both the Republic and the Empire. It was there that Judas Iscariot is said to have featured as arguably the most famous denouncer in history.⁷⁹ Patrick Bergemann makes the point that denunciations do not happen in a vacuum, that they take place in a broader context of social control. But also, that this requires more than just the law and authority, it requires information, and one of the primary means of meeting this requirement is encouraging people to

⁷⁶ TNA SP 1/116, f. 125 [L.P. XII(1) 511].

⁷⁷ TNA SP 1/131, f. 187 [L.P. XII(1) 871].

⁷⁸ TNA SP 1/132, f. 130 (L.P. XIII(1) 1054).

⁷⁹ Patrick Bergemann, *Judge thy Neighbour: Denunciations in the Spanish Inquisition, Romanov Russia, and Nazi Germany* (Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 2.

denounce others.⁸⁰ Although, as Robert Gellately in his work on the Gestapo and social cooperation found, this could tip over into a free for all – to a degree that led Hitler, of all people, to comment on the level of spitefulness and self-interest that motivated such acts: ‘We are living at present in a sea of denunciations and human meanness’.⁸¹ John Arnold describes his work on the depositions taken from the Cathars, a religious sect that opposed the Catholic church during the twelfth century in southern France, as ‘an attempt to engage with the voices of the deponents who were bound into the discourses of heresy and its repression’.⁸² The question of exactly what constituted heresy in 1530s England is messy and, arguably, not as clear cut as it was in twelfth-century France according to the Catholic church in their relentless pursuit of the Cathars. Arnold describes inquisition in the realm of religion in his period, as part of a new way of looking at lay people, where the Church ‘began to regard the subaltern masses as individuals, with interiors, with agency and autonomy’.⁸³ It is the finding of this thesis that heresy was not paramount in the minds of government, it was challenge, and threat to government direction. It was a political matter, and individuals, with interiors, did seek to exercise agency. In late sixteenth-century Italy, Carlo Ginzburg’s miller of Friuli, Menocchio, embodied the encounter between printed page and oral culture. This, the miller pleaded before his interrogators, led to the formulation - first for himself, later for his fellow villagers, and finally for the judges – of the ‘opinions that came out of *his* head’.⁸⁴ The inquisitors were simply not having it, they found it

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁸¹ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, p. 139.

⁸² John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 13.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 227.

⁸⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (John Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 33.

impossible that Menocchio should have come up with such ideas uninfluenced. They asked witnesses if Menocchio ‘had spoken sincerely or in mockery, or whether he was repeating what he heard other people saying’.⁸⁵ However formulated, such ideas being a topic of conversation was clearly a serious cause for concern. Likewise, in 1530s England, opinions and ideas were aired and shared in plebeian society. Members of plebeian society were capable of formulating their own ideas and they voiced them; conversations on political matters were had. Here, in the same way as the rest of this thesis maps ‘silent voices’ through the study of the three identified media, examinations recorded in State Papers to do with denunciations of individuals in the period prove to be useful in challenging the government held view on an ignorant commonalty.

How did the act of denunciation play out in the period that is the object of this thesis? Who, typically, was the subject of denunciation? Who did the denouncing and what were the perils of sticking your neck out and doing so? As stated, more commonly, the target of denunciation was a clergyman. A typical case (dated 1536) is that of William Cockes, curate, who stood accused of encouraging three parishioners to withstand the changes being made around religious practice, saying that they would only ‘endure for a while’, recommending obedience to the bishop of Rome.⁸⁶ In his plea to the masters and churchwardens of St. Olave’s, Southwark, Cockes challenged the suggestion that he would have any interest in ‘so persuading persons of such small repute as these are?’ They ‘by exaggeration and by their “ruffying” manner, may make men think the

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

⁸⁶ TNA SP 1/106, f.3 (L.P. XI 302).

matter of more weight than it is'. In the same year, George Heron pleaded his innocence with Cromwell himself.⁸⁷ Imploring mercy after being incarcerated for some 19 weeks, Heron protested that he 'Was never so great a fool, or rather devil, as to speak or think what is imputed to him against the King'. He 'Is sorry to think such evil even of his accuser who hungers for his death. Has vehement suspicions of some persons who have prompted this man to accuse him, although he knows his malice by experience.' Reasoning as to why the accuser would be so malicious, Heron stated that he discharged him from his house for idle and riotous living. After this, the man had taken to beating his wife, and when challenged by an honest man he accused him of robbing him, but the charge broke down on examination. In the following year, 1537, Cromwell received another petition for help, this one from a member of the clergy, Nicholas Whelock, vicar of Biddulph, Staffordshire. Whelock found himself in the same predicament as George Heron before him, imprisoned. In Whelock's case, 26 weeks without trial, in Stafford Castle. Accused of seditious words by two men, John Thorley and Hugh Walklate, he contested that the two had done so 'at the procurement of certain persons who have obtained the advowson of his benefice'. At the last assizes, the two had left town to avoid having to give evidence, so Whelock claimed.⁸⁸ The three cases described read as rather petty instances of an indignant clergyman subject to rather spurious claims made by parishioners with an axe to grind. However, they should not be overlooked, for they stand out as remarkable examples of how easy it was for a clergyman to find himself subject to a very serious charge. What is more, certainly in the case of the second two, relieved of their liberty, and desperate enough to petition

⁸⁷ TNA SP 1/113, f.169 (L.P. XI 1472).

⁸⁸ TNA SP 1/103, f.139 (L.P. X 693).

Cromwell himself. It is worth noting, here, that clergymen not actually participating in popular politics may well find themselves victim to and targets of popular politics.

In August 1537, the mayor and jurats of Rye, Sussex, were moved to write to Cromwell in favour of their curate, William Inold, who had been subject to accusation by ‘those of small substance’ who wished him removed from the town.⁸⁹ The appeal was signed by the mayor and jurats, and seventy-five ‘honest men and others’. Inold had received a Council summons from Robert Coke, charging him with having ‘solemnly sung high mass of the feast of Jesu in the presence of Thomas Foulger, John Young, and other’.⁹⁰ More details of summons’ content were included in the communication. Inold was charged with having stirred up much trouble in Rye by ‘railing upon many honest men there, calling them heretics’.⁹¹ Also, that he had encouraged his supporters, ‘drunkards and papists’, to turn on these men. Inold had based his words on the premise ‘that their old fashions should still flourish’, that they should be keeping ‘high and holy in the Church certain idell holy days lately abrogated, as St. Anne, the Transfiguration of our Lord, and the feast of the Name of Jesu; some of them as though they had been the highest days in the year, with solemn ringing, singing, procession, decking of the church’. Further detail was provided by an accusation made by John and Alexander Colyn that they had witnessed Inold deliver a sermon in which he invited the people of nearby Burwash ‘to remain as of old time they had done’. This was the same William Inold who some four years earlier in September 1533 had been brought to the attention

⁸⁹ TNA SP 1/124, f.21 (L.P. XII(2) 505).

⁹⁰ TNA SP 1/124, f.21 (L.P. XII(2) 505(2)).

⁹¹ TNA SP 1/124, f.21 (L.P. XII(2) 505(1)).

of Cromwell for displaying similarly motivated tendencies.⁹² Clearly, whatever the nature of reprimand received in 1533, Inold remained unabashed, for in May 1535 a dispute between one John Young and himself was afforded enough significance for the mayor and jurats of Rye to refer the matter to Cromwell.⁹³ In November of the same year, Inold expressed his opinions openly once more; an utterance that was recorded in State Papers under a single word heading, 'Treason'.⁹⁴ Inold's accuser this time was one John Maydwell, friar. Maydwell's denouncement of Inold was based on Inold having shown him a copy of Johann Eck's *Enchiridion*, a theological defence of the papacy.

For Sheila Fitzpatrick, there was an advantage to the practice of denunciation in Stalin's Russia in that there was a good chance of getting results. This was because the authorities attended to citizens' submissions, making them one of the few forms of political participation open to ordinary citizens.⁹⁵ If attention was paid by Cromwell and his ministers to accusations laid down by ordinary folk in 1530s England, then the case of William Inold demonstrates that this did not necessarily equate to success if the downfall of the accused was the hoped for result. Inold was brought to the attention of the authorities and Cromwell himself on a number of occasions across a number of years and yet he survived, turning up in the diocese of Canterbury in December 1539.⁹⁶ Elton attached significance to Inold having the backing of the mayor and jurats of Rye but also, tellingly, the weight of counter-denunciation for which he placed the

⁹² TNA SP 1/79, f.17 [L.P. VI 1077].

⁹³ TNA SP 1/92, f.183 (L.P. VIII 776).

⁹⁴ TNA SP 1/99, f.58 (L.P. IX 846).

⁹⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance & Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivisation* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁹⁶ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 21.

ownership with Inold.⁹⁷ Elton's evidence for this rests in a document within State Papers headed 'Accusations of Heresy'.⁹⁸ This document certainly does signify the jeopardy that some of Inold's most significant accusers found themselves in. Thomas Wymand, denouncer of Inold in 1533, is charged with saying that 'any man may swear by the mass, for it is not of God's making'. Likewise, Thomas Bispin, Wymand's co-denouncer in 1533. John Young, accuser of Inold in 1535, was charged with saying that 'the mass was of a jugglers' making and a juggling cast it was'. Also named was Robert Coke who delivered the summons to Inold in 1537. All this does indeed highlight the fact that words spoken - denouncements made - could indeed come back to bite you and sometimes did.

Justice of the peace, Rowland Morton, issued a lengthy report to Cromwell in April 1536.⁹⁹ It featured the case of priest Thomas Sowlle of Penrith, Cumbria, who was in the sights of James Tomkins, painter, of Tewkesbury. Again the site of infringement was an alehouse, where, Tomkins claimed, Sowlle said, 'he had brought the King's money, and we be kept bare and smete under, yet we shall once rise again, and 40,000 of us will rise upon a day'.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, one other witness, one David Williams, denied hearing the said words, rather that the priest had spoken positively of the King. Another, one Roger Carpenter, deposed that as he was hard of hearing and sat by the fireside in the said alehouse, he heard nothing. This is suggestive of a recognition that being involved in cases of denunciation was an uncertain business. This remained the case, for in August

⁹⁷ Ibid. pp. 87-8.

⁹⁸ TNA SP 1/113, f.89 (L.P. XI 1424).

⁹⁹ TNA SP 1/103, f.139 (L.P. X 693).

¹⁰⁰ TNA SP 1/103, f.139 (L.P. X 693 ii).

1537, one Humphrey Shokborowe of Broughton, Oxfordshire found himself out on a limb after accusing Richard Crowley, priest, of certain words spoken.¹⁰¹ The case was heard at the court of assize, William Fermour reported to Cromwell that Crowley's parishioners had rallied around him, saying that they had never heard such words spoken by the accused, in the pulpit or elsewhere. It is noteworthy that Fermour felt it significant that 'his [Crowley's] accuser has been at variance with him about tithes and other matters, and the charge is thought to be merely from malice'.

All this speaks of some considerable friction that was being played out in, arguably, the most significant societal relationship in the period, that between clergymen and the common people. Although, one case featured the denunciation of one priest by another, with a twist. In a letter from York on 30 April 1535, Sir George Lawson informed Cromwell of action taken when 'strife arose between two priests'.¹⁰² One, Sir Hugh Hall, accused the other, Sir John Smithson, of seditious words spoken when they were saying matins together. Hall claimed that Smithson had said 'I will not pray for the King, for he is about to beggar us'. The mayor of York, no less, was dealing with the matter and was charged with holding both priests until Cromwell's pleasure was known. Both priests because, as revealed in the communication, 'Sir Hugh is well known to be a naughty fellow, and the other of good conversation'.

In April 1537, another priest found himself before justice of the peace, Sir Thomas Nevell, for words spoken in a gaming house in West Malling, Kent - an entry in State

¹⁰¹ TNA SP 1/124, f.40 (L.P. XII(2) 518).

¹⁰² TNA SP 1/92, f.106 (L.P. VIII 620).

Papers headed, 'Dangerous Conversations'.¹⁰³ Priest, James Fredewell, was denounced by fellow game player, Adam Lewes, schoolmaster. Lewes had asked someone present, who was journeying to London, to buy a book for him, the New Testament. Lewes alleged that Fredewell intervened at this point, saying that he would rather all the New Testaments in England be burned. Lewes went on to report other words spoken by the priest after they had moved on to another place hosting 'unlawful games', the house of one John Domeright. In response to Domeright saying that 'his Grace hath overcome his enemies of the North, for they hang at their own doors', Lewes alleged that Fredewell's riposte (couched in language made familiar by that discussed in Chapter Seven) was, 'there is another bird a breeding that came not forth yet which will come forth before Midsummer, that the King had never such since he was king of England'. Challenged as to meaning of this, the priest suggested that if the King involved himself further in conflicts abroad 'it would be well to cut off many priests' heads first for they would betray the King in his absence... it would be sooner said than done'. Domeright confirmed the content of Lewes' deposition (completed in his own handwriting).¹⁰⁴ Now this was a serious matter, happening in the wake of the northern rebellions. The matter was recorded under the banner 'Dangerous Conversations', the threat was recognised. However likely the scenario of a body of priests rising in rebellion, the probability was almost irrelevant. The government had recognised from the very beginning that the allegiance of the clergy was critical. The period this thesis addresses was marked by significant upheaval and challenge to existing social relationships and networks, not the least being those revolving around the religious -

¹⁰³ TNA SP 1/118, f.231 (L.P. XII(1) 990).

¹⁰⁴ TNA SP 1/118, f.231 (L.P. XII(1) 990(ii)).

regular and secular. Nowhere was this more evident than in the tensions - wrought by the impositions placed on the clergy by government - that played out between the clergy and their parishioners. And those parishioners included both those in support of reform and those against it, not forgetting those using the situation to damage their priest, mischievous or otherwise. It was a complex situation indeed, and the first part of this chapter speaks to such a situation. The first part of this chapter has offered multiple examples in evidence of the clergy being subject to intense pressure from above and below, throughout the period of this study.

A priest and a friar in open rebellion - two case studies

The second part of the chapter considers two instances of rupture, the Lincolnshire rebellion and the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the role played by the religious in those two critical events. It moves on from the more general case of the clergy, their role, and the increased complexity of the priest-parishioner relationship to a case study approach that offers further depth and specific context around the chapter theme. They are case studies of clergymen who were very much *involved* in, as opposed to being the subject or object of popular politics. The case studies are of John Dakyn, priest, and John Pickering, friar, respectively, and how they used their literacy to further political protest. The case studies consider their input and influence, and the repercussion for their involvement; all this fueling popular political debate and activism at the time.

The priest: John Dakyn

John Dakyn was a Cambridge graduate (LL.B. 1525; LL.D. 1529) and it is believed he was a monk of St. Mary's, York. He received the benefice of Kirby Ravensworth, Richmondshire, from the abbot of St. Mary's, and served as rector there.¹⁰⁵ In his role as vice-general of York, Dakyn wrote to Sir William Tristram, chantry priest at Lyrtington, in Romalldkirk parish berating him for behaviour unbefitting of a priest. He advised Tristram 'to show himself in his conversation like a priest, and not like a man of war; and to execute his duty, which is prayer, study, and virtuous living'.¹⁰⁶ Dakyn had heard that Tristram was 'in harness at York, and heard that he and the parish priest of Romalldkirk, were at Doncaster, "the first time " in harness'.¹⁰⁷ Dakyn's opprobrium does not level with the doings reported of him through the course of the rebellion, the Pilgrimage of Grace, despite his own attempts at mitigation. On his own admission, Dakyn was stationed at Jervaulx Abbey for 10 days, where he played a critical role in the transmission of letters between rebel leaders. He confessed to having sent on all letters to respective addressees, having first transcribed them and passed those copies to the abbot of Jervaulx. He admits to having written to the abbot of Fountains for post horses, all indicating that Dakyn played a critical role in the sort of communication that tied the localized northern risings together.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Charles H. Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge, Deighton Bell & Co., 1858), I, 181-2 <<https://archive.org/details/athenaecantabri05graygoog/page/180/mode/2up> > [accessed 09 April 2025] and John A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge University Press, 1922-54) <<https://archive.org/details/alumnicantabrigipt1vol2univiala/page/2/mode/2up> > [accessed 09 April 2025]

¹⁰⁶ TNA SP 1/112, f. 169 (L.P. XI 1284).

¹⁰⁷ TNA SP 1/117, f. 189 (L.P. XII(1) 786).

¹⁰⁸ TNA SP 1/117, f. 189 (L.P. XII(1)).

In the first week of December 1536, two parallel conferences were held in Pontefract. The Pilgrims held their Pontefract council in Pontefract Castle, their Pontefract convocation in Pontefract Priory. In their comprehensive narrative of the Pilgrimage of Grace, the Dodds sisters made the point that in the sixteenth century obedience to the government was not 'merely a theory or a convenience, it was a fundamental duty'. To resist the government meant civil war and social anarchy. The Pilgrims were now faced with having to justify their position.¹⁰⁹ The situation was especially tense as the rebels had been challenged directly by the King to clarify their position. In response to the Hampole Articles (so called because they were drawn up at Hampole Nunnery, before being presented to Norfolk), the King stated, 'As *Tovchyng*e the mayntenance of the faythe, the termes be so generall, that it wolde be very harde to make certaine answere to the same'.¹¹⁰ It had been agreed at the Council of York, held 21-24 November, that there should be an assembly of spiritual men at Pontefract, charged with defining the rebels' spiritual standpoint. Those present, according to the Dodds sisters, were all Doctor of Law or of divinity, bar two.¹¹¹ John Dakyn was one of the fourteen present at the priory. In his work on the Pilgrimage of Grace and the politics of the 1530s, Hoyle suggests that the events held at Pontefract had the Pilgrims engaged in that which the

¹⁰⁹ Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 340.

¹¹⁰ Answere made by the kynges hyghnes to the petitions of the rebelles in Yorkeshire <[\[TCP\] Answere made by the kynges hyghnes to the petitions of the rebelles in Yorkeshire \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)> [accessed 09 April 2025].

¹¹¹ Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 382. John Ripley (Abbot of Kirkstall); his chaplain; Dr Sherwood (chancellor of Beverley minster); Dr Cliff; Dr Langrege (Archdeacon of Cleveland); Dr Geoffrey Downes (Chancellor of York); Dr John Brandsby (the Archbishop's chaplain and master of the collegiate church of Sutton); Dr Cuthbert Marshall (Archdeacon of Nottingham); James Thwaites (Prior of Pontefract); Dr Waldby (rector of Kirk Deighton and prebendary of Carlisle); Dr Pickering (the Friar Preacher); Dr Rokeby (a friar); Dr George Palmes (rector of Sutton upon Derwent); and Dr Dakyn (rector of Kirby Ravensworth and vicar-general of York).

King feared most, the construction of a political programme to be placed before the Duke of Norfolk.¹¹²

Dakyn's version on just how the Pontefract convocation was run is detailed and, again, it could be read as an attempt to play down his role in proceedings. He offered the names of those leading council activity. He claimed that he was 'desired to sit in the midst and write' but knew not who conceived the articles. Richard Bowier, who appears, from his statement, to have acted as a spy for the Crown, offered his services as a scribe but that was rejected. Bowier named those present, including the name of Dakyn.¹¹³ Dakyn's lengthy statements, as recorded in State Papers, offer some insight into what transpired across the course of the convocation. The final agreement that 'the King might be called Caput Ecclesie, but might exercise no jurisdiction, such as visitation or the like', was related by Dakyn. It reads as something of a commentary alongside his insistence that he was 'urged to write and did so'. However, Dakyn did offer an opinion on the question of suppression of religious houses, saying, 'And truly my affection at that time was *'i quod res semmel Deo consecrate non deberet prophanari* (that a thing once consecrated to God should not be profaned)'.¹¹⁴ This sentiment certainly ties in with Dakyn appearing to have written to the priors of Cartmell and Conishead on the second Sunday of Advent, 1536. If, as recorded in State Papers, Dakyn did indeed issue the instruction, 'All religious persons, by the King's consent, shall enter their suppressed houses again, till further direction be taken by Parliament. Exhorts them to do so, and trusts their monasteries shall stand for ever', it was an

¹¹² Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 342.

¹¹³ TNA SP 1/115, f. 162 (L.P. XII(1) 306).

¹¹⁴ TNA SP 1/117, f. 189 (L.P. XII(1) 786).

extremely bold act.¹¹⁵ He did confess to having sent a letter to the prior of Cartmell, urging him to return to his house and join his brothers. Dakyn justified this by saying that it was his belief that all religious persons in the North had re-entered their houses by the commons' order. He begged the King's forgiveness for 'his simplicity'.¹¹⁶

Dakyn petitioned Cromwell, excusing his conduct in the insurrection. In Richmondshire, a stranger, in fear of death, he claimed, he was forced to do as the rebels said, as were the gentlemen of the country. Accused of 'putting down holidays' (in line with the abrogation of holidays), Dakyn claimed that he had to give a man 5 marks, to stop the report and save his life. He claimed that 'he was sent by his parishioners to a council at York preparatory to a further meeting at Doncaster'. He also claimed that 'he was in danger of death as a traitor to the commons'.¹¹⁷ Dakyn sought credit for stilling the people of Richmondshire when a new insurrection was talked of after Christmas 1536. He pleaded that, despite the danger to himself, and thankful for the protection of 'honest men', 'he exhorted the parishioners of Richmond, where he was parson four years ago, saying their belief in the bishop of Rome was *nihil ad salutem*'.¹¹⁸

Dakyn survived the post-rebellion crackdown and, indeed, prospered. His kinship to George Dakyn may have been a factor. George was a servant to Cromwell's nephew, Richard. The same George Dakyn who, in a notorious case involving the murder of

¹¹⁵ TNA SP 1/112, f. 165 (L.P. XI 1279).

¹¹⁶ TNA SP 1/117, f. 201 (L.P. XII(1) 788).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Ralph Eure's servant, was saved due to the direct intervention of Cromwell.¹¹⁹ His cause would have suffered no harm by Norfolk's words in communication with Cromwell, 22 March 1537. Norfolk was set on discovering 'the principle [*sic*] devisers of the acts concerning the spirituality' (drawn up at the Pontefract convention). 'The doctor wrote all with his own hand. And howsoever he ordered himself in that cause, at the first insurrection no priest stood more firmly to the King. He was divers times in danger of his life and was once fain to give money to save it. This I have learnt by Robert Bowes and others'.¹²⁰ All this speaks to the argument forwarded by C.S.L. Davies that 'The end result of the Pilgrimage may have been to sow such distrust between clergy and commons, and between gentry and commons, as to prevent any repetition for a generation'.¹²¹ Dakyn became chancellor of the church of Wells in 1542, and then treasurer of that church in 1543. He was instituted to the archdeaconry of York, 13 April 1551. In 1556, in compliance with the will of his patron, bishop Knight, of which he was one of the executors, he founded the school of St. John the Baptist at Kirby Ravensworth.¹²² It is believed that Dakyn was responsible for the drawing up of the headmasters' oath for the said school:

I shall not read to them [to the pupils] any corrupt or reprobate books set forth at any time contrary to the determination of the universal catholique church, whereby they may be infected in their youth in any kind of heresie or corrupt doctrine, or else be induced to an insolent manner of living.¹²³

¹¹⁹ TNA SP 1/105, f. 251 (L.P. XI 237).

¹²⁰ TNA SP 1/117, f. 75 (L.P. XII(1) 698).

¹²¹ Clifford S.L. Davies, 'Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace' in *Order and disorder in early modern England*, ed. by Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 85.

¹²² Charles H. Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge, Deighton Bell & Co., 1858), I, 181-2 < <https://archive.org/details/athenaecantabri05graygoog/page/180/mode/2up> > [accessed 09 April 2025]

¹²³ James, *Society, Politics and Culture*, p. 137.

This hints at his true leanings, and then, in an ironic twist of fate, it is noted that Dakyn found his way into Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' as the judge of Yorkshire's sole Marian martyr, Richard Snell, condemned by Dakyn and burned at Richmond in September 1558.¹²⁴

Dakyn's words and actions represent an interesting case. He embodies precisely the kind of complexity explored in the first half of this chapter, in the sense that he is both protagonist, active in the Pilgrimage of Grace, yet also in some senses a victim of popular politics, if his version of events is believed. The latter point is borne out by his plea to the Crown for forgiveness. The second case study is that of the friar, John Pickering, who, ultimately, left himself with nothing to offer by way of mitigation. Nor was he offered the opportunity to present anything by way of a plea bargain.

The friar: John Pickering

John Pickering is believed to have been born in or near Bridlington, Yorkshire in 1495. He entered the Dominican house at York on 21 September 1510 and was ordained into the priesthood on 20 September 1516.¹²⁵ Pickering was awarded Bachelor of Divinity at Cambridge in 1525, at which time he was prior of the house of his order in Cambridge.¹²⁶ The above mentioned communication from Norfolk to Cromwell, discussing 'the principle devisers of the Acts concerning the spirituality', included

¹²⁴ Arthur G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558* (Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 221-2.

¹²⁵ Susan E. James, 'Pickering, John (1495-1537), Dominican Friar', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004 rev. 2008), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22209>

¹²⁶ Charles H. Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigiensis* (1858-61), III, p. 62
<<https://archive.org/details/athenaecantabri05graygoog/page/62/mode/2up?q=pickering>> [accessed 09 April 2025]

reference to Pickering: ‘As to the friar, Dr. Pickering, if you handle him with fair words you will get much of him’.¹²⁷ Pickering was known to the authorities, well connected and not afraid to voice his opinion, which makes him another useful conduit in looking for evidence of political speech in the period.

Under examination, post-rebellion, William Wood, prior of Bridlington deposed that Pickering ‘used to say the insurrection was well done for the wealth of the church’. Also, that ‘he made a rhyme, to encourage the commons’.¹²⁸ The rhyme is referred to as ‘Pickering’s Song’, it is discussed more fully in the chapter on ballads, Chapter Six. Both Wood and Pickering were indicted along with several others, for, despite the King’s pardon for offences committed before 10 December 1536, ‘persevering in their treasons’, having ‘falsely conspired... to annul divers wholesome laws made for the common weal, and to depose the King’, ‘and to that end sent divers letters and messengers to each other’.¹²⁹ They were recognized by the government as key actors during the rebellion. Prior Wood as ‘a principal procurer of the first insurrection and a great mover in the second’, and Pickering as ‘a principle inciter thereunto’.¹³⁰ Pickering himself was a key player in the second rising, having carried messages between Bigod and Hallam, the leaders of the insurrection.¹³¹ If damning of his own part in the rebellion, providing men and financial aid, Wood was equally damning of Pickering, not forgetting to include in his confession that ‘Dr Pickering made a rhyme of treasons’, and

¹²⁷ TNA SP 1/117, f. 75 (L.P. XII(1) 698).

¹²⁸ TNA SP 1/118, f. 271 (L.P. XII(1) 1019).

¹²⁹ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 1207).

¹³⁰ TNA SP 1/118, f. 275 (L.P. XII(1) 1020).

¹³¹ Claire Cross, ‘Friars, the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the Dissolution of the Dominican and Franciscan Priors in Sixteenth-century Beverley’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 90:1 (2018), pp. 96-110, doi: 10.1080/00844276.2018.1465681

that he had sent him on his way to York with 3 crowns in his pocket.¹³² On 22 February 1537, the King wrote to commend Norfolk on his work in quelling the second rising. He left Norfolk in no doubt as to the nature of punishment to be meted out.¹³³ Martial law was to be declared, with Norfolk charged to ‘cause such dreadful execution on a good number of the inhabitants, hanging them on trees, quartering them, and setting their heads and quarters in every town’.¹³⁴ Pickering was one of those named. It is notable that within the said missive, the King expressed his pleasure at the news of ‘how you [Norfolk] advance the truth, declaring the usurpation of the bishop of Rome, and how discretely you paint those persons that call themselves religious in the colours of their hypocrisy’.¹³⁵ The wording in the indictment that includes the name of Pickering is equally notable. The men were charged with conspiring to deprive the King of his title of ‘Supreme Head of the English Church’. Found guilty of treason, Pickering was executed alongside Prior Wood of Bridlington at Tyburn on 25 May 1537.

The Pilgrims’ Council, as opposed to the Convention, discussed and then drew up a set of articles that may be divided into four groups of grievances: religious, constitutional, legal, and economic. The standout article, certainly in terms of the developing discussion in this chapter was, Article 2:

The supremacy of the Church touching ‘cura animarum’ to be reserved to the See of Rome as before. The consecration of the bishops to be from him, without any first fruits or pensions to be paid to him, or else a reasonable pension for the outward defence for the Faith.¹³⁶

¹³² TNA SP 1/118, f. 275 (L.P. XII(1) 1020).

¹³³ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 1207).

¹³⁴ TNA SP 1/116, f.92 (L.P. XII(1) 479).

¹³⁵ TNA SP 1/116, f.92 (L.P. XII(1) 479).

¹³⁶ TNA SP 1/112, f. 118 (L.P. XI 1246).

The question of the Supremacy aroused strong emotion and debate. Robert Aske, recognized as the leader of the Pilgrims, made his view clear under examination, when he stated that every man murmured against it and that it would cause division in the Church, and so required revision by parliament.¹³⁷ Over at the convocation of divines the same debate was had, and proved equally divisive. Dakyn's account names four members as defenders of the papal cause, one of these being Pickering. Dakyn recalls Pickering talking, saying that he had 'been at that Convocation when that superiority was granted to the King', and that Pickering and two others produced from their purses copies of protestations made at that Convocation.¹³⁸ In his deposition, Pickering claimed that he had never had a conversation about the Supremacy since the making of the Act, except at the convocation in Pontefract. He stated that his position then was that 'the King might not be Supreme head but am now altered and do confess it according to my oath before my lord of Norfolk'.¹³⁹

Pickering appears to have been examined under the same set of interrogatories as Dakyn. Dakyn survived and thrived, as detailed above. The bill of indictment, on which John Pickering was named, charged the named with treason or conspiracy to treason. He was condemned and executed. Michael Bush argues that those who were executed suffered because of their prominence in the rebellion, especially the leaders of the rebel armies. As for Pickering, he suffered as composer of the pilgrims' marching

¹³⁷ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 901).

¹³⁸ TNA SP 1/117, f. 189 (L.P. XII(1) 786).

¹³⁹ TNA SP 1/118, f. 277 (L.P. XII(1) 1021).

song.¹⁴⁰ Interrogated as to the content of ‘a certain song or rhyme’, Pickering confessed that it be of his own making but that it was composed at the suggestion of the second insurrection’s leader, John Hallom, who supplied him with several rhymes currently doing the rounds, sung by minstrels. Probably damning himself in doing so, Pickering shared details of how the rhyme was copied and distributed throughout his locality and further afield. And if a final nail was needed, Pickering added that he ‘made the said rhyme by rhyme that the hearers might better bear it away’.¹⁴¹

It is difficult to read the opening verse of ‘Pickering’s Song’ and not see it as a rousing call for action, a justifiable and worthy cause, at that.

O faithful people of the boreal region
Chief bellicose champions by divine providence,
Of God his elect, to make reformation
Of great mischief and horrible offense
Go ye forward valiantly in your perergrination,
It is Christ’s pleasure and to your salvation.

In his confession, it is recorded that Pickering said he called the rebels faithful people because ‘he then thought that they were going to amend those that were against the Faith’, adding, ‘but now he thinks otherwise’.¹⁴² By then, Pickering was very much fighting a losing battle. Joseph Taylor’s summation tells of the real significance of ‘Pickering’s Song’: it ‘illustrates the religious fervour, regional fears, and economic discontent of the rebellion’, and it informs the list of grievances drawn up at the rebel

¹⁴⁰ Bush, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 390.

¹⁴¹ TNA SP 1/118, f. 277 (L.P. XII(1) 1021).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

meetings of which Pickering was a part in December 1536.¹⁴³ It was a political commentary, a challenge to government action. Bush suggests that the offence taken around spiritual and material grievances by a significant number of clerics, regular and secular, to the point that they became actively involved in rebellion, is not surprising.¹⁴⁴ And so, they used their literacy and their authority to further a rising. John Pickering offers a prime example of how this played out. His input was politically motivated and not simply driven by religious fervour.

The actions of John Dakyn and John Pickering in furthering the cause of the two rebellions occasioned north of the Trent were significant and impactful. The actions of other clergymen were varied and, as detailed above, significant because of the position and profile they held within their communities. It was indeed a complicated picture and to a very great measure clergymen were stuck plum in the middle of the government and the people they ministered to. This dynamic certainly proved useful in one regard, its rub threw up a vast catalogue of interactions that left typically unheard voices audible and then recorded for historians across the ages, finding their way into State Papers.

The case that opened this chapter, telling of Nicholas Staunton, parson of Woodborough, is indicative of the climate in which words spoken in the period might find their way to authority. Staunton was accused of speaking words against the King,

¹⁴³ Joseph Taylor, 'The Towneley Plays, the Pilgrimage of Grace, and Northern Messianism' chapter in Joseph Taylor, *Writing the North of England in the Middle Ages: Regionalism and Nationalism in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 137-172.

¹⁴⁴ Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel*, pp. 59-60.

blaming him for his poor state, suggesting that it be better if he did not reign for much longer. Staunton was accused by his own neighbours, who reported him having grudged in such fashion on more than one occasion. The fact that Staunton was said to have expressed regret that 'the Northern men had not had their way' also placed him in dangerous territory. It did so because of the significant changes in the law of treason, over the preceding four years, where spoken words were concerned. Woodborough, Wiltshire, was over two hundred miles away from the northern regions where the biggest and most threatening rebellion occurred. And yet it featured in the gamut of criticisms that were said to have been voiced by Staunton. Staunton and his accusers were aware of happenings further north. They were politically conscious. He was described as a drunkard, which raises the likelihood that his political views were expressed in the local alehouse. Staunton was not active in the rebellion; he was not a John Dakyn or a John Pickering. He was aware of the rebellion; likely not the two protagonists who were the subject of case studies in the second half of this chapter. He held a political opinion, he expressed it, was accused of doing so, and he was duly dispatched to the Chief Minister, Thomas Cromwell.

It might be said that Staunton had indeed murmured and grudged, with the potential for a stirring of division in the parish. The evidence speaks clearly of a government that acted vigorously against those not on message. Some five years before the reporting of Staunton, Cromwell, on 3 June 1535, had issued a circular letter to the bishops. They were directed to preach in support of the Supremacy. Further, they were to ensure that 'all manner abbots, priors, deans, archdeacons, priests, parsons, vicars, curates, and

all other ecclesiastical persons' do the same.¹⁴⁵ If Staunton's reported words did not touch on the Supremacy, his words fell far short of the four-square level of support now expected from all clergymen, with bishops serving as chief whips. The parish of Woodbridge was within the Diocese of Salisbury, part of the jurisdiction held by the Bishop of Salisbury, Nicholas Shaxton. Shaxton was one of the bishops named in the list of grievances submitted by the Lincolnshire rebels. For as much as Staunton appeared conscious of recent activity in the northern parts, so, clearly, were the rebels in Lincolnshire aware of the activities of Shaxton and his fellow bishops. The case of Nicholas Staunton offers so much more than what, at first, presents as little more than a discontented clergyman grumbling in his cups. It is suggestive of a political consciousness that motivated comment, and then its reporting, in the knowledge that the authorities were interested in its content. The zealotry of the government in keeping clergymen on message meant that it was highly unlikely that the likes of Staunton would get away with such politically charged discourse.

The injunctions released in 1536, and then a second set in 1538, were issued directly by the King functioning as 'supreme head', and published by Cromwell, as Vicar-General, not having been submitted to Convocation. They were followed by the Six Articles, issued in 1539. Such directives were non-ambiguous, as were the expectations placed on those responsible for their selling and maintaining. The church hierarchy may have been directly in the firing line but, ultimately, it was those responsible at parish level, at the coal face, who were caught in the middle. And, as has been seen throughout this

¹⁴⁵ Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 231-2.

chapter, the middle ground varied significantly in nature from place to place throughout England. In one scenario, this meant that clergymen often found themselves in the invidious position of stoically toeing the party line in the presence of discontented, sometimes aggressive, parishioners, such as those unhappy at the abrogation of saints' days, something that touched on local pride. The other side of the coin being the many clergymen who kicked against reform yet found themselves subject to animosity and accusation from their own parishioners. John Dakyn, John Pickering and their like chose to engage in popular politics, but the picture was not so clear cut where the majority of clergymen, across the land, were concerned. As has been seen, some chose to engage in popular politics, others were subject to it.

Chapter Three: Gender, participation, and collective identity

... wherever he went accompanied by the lady, the people on the road so earnestly requested him to recall the queen, his wife, and the women especially so insulted the royal mistress, hooting and hissing on her passage, that he was actually obliged to retrace his steps.¹

Imperial Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys

Despite the simplicity of their tastes, the makers of new and old shoes are always distinguished by a restless, sometimes aggressive spirit and by an enormous tendency to loquacity. Is there a riot? Does an orator emerge from the crowd? It is without doubt a cobbler who has come to make a speech to the people.²

In July 1532, King Henry VIII was on his way to hold a hunt, escorted by Anne Boleyn (not yet Henry's wife), when, due to the nature and level of insults hurled at Anne by women at the roadside, he felt compelled to turn back. This event was noted by Imperial Ambassador, Chapuys, reporting on the same incident:

... wherever he went accompanied by the lady, the people on the road so earnestly requested him to recall the queen, his wife, and the women especially so insulted the royal mistress, hooting and hissing on her passage, that he was actually obliged to retrace his steps.³

¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, IV. 2, 980. Cited in Sharon L. Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII* (St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 85.

² M. Sensfelder, *Histoire de la cordonnerie* (Paris, 1856), quoted in Joseph Barberet, *Le travail en France: monographies professionnelles*, 7 vols. (Paris, 886-90), v, pp. 63-4.

³ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, IV. 2, 980. Cited in Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour*, p. 85.

This sort of abuse was to become a common refrain, and it is discussed in more detail below. What is of interest, here, is any notion, as expressed by Alice Raw, for one, that the episode, and its like, had been ignored in histories of political protest in Tudor England.⁴ Raw goes so far as to argue that its omission epitomizes the systemic oversight of female dissent in late medieval and early Tudor England. She calls for yet more gendered perspectives, ones that do not simply explain away the presence of women at civil unrest. For Raw, the abandoned hunt event in July 1532 represented yet another reporting in the historiography grounded in an interpretation that placed discontent as being directed at the ‘private sphere’ – the royal household, in this case – without wider significance. In short, Raw argues, ‘historians have boxed themselves into explaining peculiarly female protest, rather than viewing women as being part of the common voice’.⁵ This chapter of the thesis seeks to add to the historiography that speaks of female participation in popular politics. It argues that women were conscious of and engaged with issues outside of the domestic sphere; arguing that this was the case in 1530s England.

Bernard Capp suggests that there existed a significant disparity between patriarchal ideal and social practice, both inside and outside the household.⁶ Capp stresses that women were far more than passive onlookers in a male culture, rather they negotiated patriarchy and created their own networks and spaces. The first part of the chapter

⁴ Alice Raw, ‘Gender and Protest in Late Medieval England, c. 1400 – c. 1532’, *The English Historical Review* 136:582 (2021), pp. 1148-1163.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1151.

⁶ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet : Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

tests that thesis by analysing State Papers for evidence of women operating within their own networks, engaging in political speech, and, going one step further, engaging in political activism themselves. The second part of the chapter identifies a hole in the historiography of the period, focusing on the male role in popular politics of the period, through the concept of collective identity.

Women and participation: far more than passive onlookers

In the aftermath of the 'Walsingham conspiracy' in 1537 (subject of a case study in Chapter Four), Sir John Heydon wrote from Baconsthorpe, Norfolk, to Richard Gresham in London, enclosing 'a bill of traitorous words spoken by a woman, now in Norwich gaol'.⁷ Heydon was seeking direction on what to do with the woman, Elizabeth Wood. Elizabeth, referred to as wife of Robert Wood, Aylsham, had been reported by two constables from Aylsham: John Bettes, a worsted weaver, and Thomas Oakes. They had informed Heydon, the previous day, of words spoken by Elizabeth Wood on 12 May at the shop of John Dix, tailor of Aylsham, with William Jeckes of Olton also in attendance. According to those two, Wood had said:

It was pity that these Walsingham men were discovered, for we shall have never good world till we fall together by the ears; and with clubs and clouted shone shall the deed be done, for we had never good world since this King reigned. It is pity that he filed any clouts more than one.⁸

Dix claimed that the words had unsettled him and so he consulted with one Thomas Clampe, also of Aylsham, who advised him to report the matter to authority. It is

⁷ TNA SP 1/120, f.224 (L.P. XII(1) 1301).

⁸ TNA SP 1/120, f.224 (L.P. XII(1) 1301(3)).

noteworthy that all involved, once in possession of this information, passed it on promptly. No record of Cromwell's response survives but Elizabeth Wood's words were certainly taken very seriously for she was executed on 26 July.⁹

Elizabeth Wood's choice of language is important here. 'Clouted shone' was a dialect term for the patched clogs worn by country labourers, and so a synonym of their class.¹⁰ It was a term often utilised in sixteenth-century rebellions, also used by Shakespeare, having Jack Cade refer to his followers as 'clouted shoon'. In short, as posited by Andy Wood, it was the language of popular rebellion.¹¹ In the heightened climate surrounding the Walsingham conspiracy, Wood paid the ultimate price for her words. There are, however, many other reports of women's words that did not carry such a tariff. A few years earlier, as the King and his counsellors wrestled with the thorny issue of displacing Queen Katherine with Anne Boleyn, views of women were forthrightly expressed, often very publicly.

In June 1534, Sir Walter Stoner wrote to Cromwell, informing him of words spoken by an Oxfordshire midwife, Joan Hammulden.¹² It was reported that one John Dawson, a constable of Watlington, Oxfordshire, had presented himself to Stoner to tell of words spoken by Joan. Joan, named as wife of John Hammulden, had been sent for by one Burgyn's wife when she was with child. Joan claimed that, impressed by her care,

⁹ KB 9/538/13

¹⁰ Andy Wood, 'Brave Minds and Hard Hands: Work, Drama, and Social Relations in the Hungry 1590s' in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History* ed. by Chris Fitter (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 84-101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹² TNA SP 1/84, f.177 (L.P. VII 840).

Burgyn's wife said to her that 'for her honesty and her cunning she might be midwife unto the queen of England, if it were queen Katharine; and if it were queen Anne, she was too good to be her midwife, for she was a whore and a harlot of her living'.¹³

Strangely, after waiting one full year – the event having occurred 'about Whitsuntide twelvemonth' – Joan Hammulden had reported Burgyn's words to constable Dawson. On examination Burgyn denied having said the reported words, issuing a counterclaim. Burgyn claimed that the midwife, Joan, had said 'that it was never merry in England since there was three queens in it, and then the said Joan said there would be fewer shortly'.¹⁴ This, Joan denied.

Later in the same year, on 6 December, Sir John Markham wrote to Cromwell reporting what appeared to be little more than a row between man and wife.¹⁵ Markham stated that one Aleyn Hey, in response to his wife leaving him - not for the first time - spoke against her, 'saying she was a tratrix and had railed against the Queen, uttering many unseemly words'. Hey wrote a letter to those sheltering her, threatening that if they did not send her home, he would lay charges against her. Markham reported that 'the expressions in his letters were so rude and evil that I cannot make up my mind to write them'. Markham appeared to doubt the veracity of the matter, questioning whether they were indeed the words of Hey's wife, although he had summoned the justices to examine the matter.

¹³ TNA SP 1/84, f.177 (L.P. VII 840(2i)).

¹⁴ TNA SP 1/84, f.177 (L.P. VII 840(2ii)).

¹⁵ TNA SP 1/87, f.75 (L.P. VII 1510).

Early the following year, 19 January 1535, Edward Ashe wrote to Ralph Fane reporting ‘traitorous words spoken against the King’ by Margaret West of Sevenoaks, Kent.¹⁶ West’s accusers were two men of Sevenoaks who had spent time in the care of Margaret, who ‘has been a keeper of them that have been visited with the pestilence, from which also her accusers have suffered, of which his Lordship must be informed’. Ashe made a point of saying that if it was at all possible he would have taken West to Fane, himself, but he had sent others in his stead.

The three cases detailed above featured two women making claim and counterclaim, a disgruntled husband intent on seeing his wife punished, and a carer for the sick accused by two of those for whom she had cared. Common to the three is the accuser’s obvious awareness of the fact that words spoken such as those reported were a serious matter, and something the authorities were apt to act on. A further case, reported in February 1535, detailed a ‘confession’ made by spinster Margaret Chancellor of Bradfield, Suffolk, before Sir Robert Drury.¹⁷ Chancellor confessed to have said:

That the Queen had one child by the King, which was dead-born, and she prayed she might never have other. That the Queen was "a noughtty hoore," and the King ought not to marry within the realm.

In her defence, Margaret claimed that she was drunk at the time and the evil spirit caused her to speak the words, for which she was penitent. Her accusers deposed that she said that ‘the Queen was "a goggyll yed hoore," and said "God save queen

¹⁶ TNA SP 1/89, f.33 (L.P. VIII 61).

¹⁷ TNA SP 1/89, f.136 (L.P. VIII 196).

Katharine," for she was righteous Queen, and she trusted to see her Queen again'. Margaret Chancellor was certainly not alone in denouncing Anne Boleyn as a 'whore'. To her we might add the wife of John Burgyn – that is if we are to believe the wife of John Hammulden – and then: the abbot of Whitby¹⁸; Warwickshire priest Ralph Wendon¹⁹; priest, James Hamilton²⁰; Robert Boret²¹; Margaret Copeland²²; and Dominican friar, John MacDowell²³; and likely many more. George Bernard makes the valid point that it was likely the case that none of those who denounced Anne in this way had any first-hand knowledge of her private life, though they are likely to have heard gossip, and gossip is not necessarily false.²⁴

Opinion on the falsity and legitimacy of works of historical fiction will forever rage but it is worth considering how the narrative drawn from archival records might be said to inform narrative of the more creative sort. In Suzannah Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties*, Anne, in speaking of Ambassador Eustace Chapuys, says: 'if he had to mention me to Henry, I was "the lady"; to everyone else, I was "the whore."²⁵ Laura Saxton points out that Dunn is incorrect in attributing the term 'goggle-eyed whore' to Chapuys, crediting Margret Chancellor with ownership.²⁶ Saxton argues, though, for the 'accuracy' of the insult's use throughout the rest of Dunn's novel, it being associated not with Chapuys but used as example of 'public opinion'. So, after Jane's arrest 'the people of London

¹⁸ TNA SP 1/69, f.202 (L.P. V 907).

¹⁹ TNA SP 6/7, f.10 (L.P. VI 733).

²⁰ TNA SP 1/78, f.102 (L.P. VI 964).

²¹ TNA SP 1/79, f.160 (L.P. VI 1254).

²² TNA SP 1/88, f.20 (L.P. VII 1609).

²³ TNA SP 1/99, f.58 (L.P. IX 846).

²⁴ George W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 184.

²⁵ Suzannah Dunn, *The Queen of Subtelties: A Novel of Anne Boleyn* (William Morrow, 2005), p. 105.

²⁶ Laura Saxton, L, 'Writing the concubine: Anne Boleyn, Eustace Chapuys and popular historiography in Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy' *Rethinking History*, 28:1 (2023), pp. 50–69.

thronged both banks of the Thames . . . jeering “The Goggle-Eyed Whore” on her way’ to the Tower of London.²⁷ Hilary Mantel’s Anne Boleyn of the *Wolf Hall* trilogy is called ‘a woman whom the people on the streets call a goggle-eyed whore’.²⁸ In her insightful review of Dunn’s, Mantel’s, and others’, literature, Saxton, in what she terms ‘popular historiography’, makes Chapuys a point of focus. More to the point, the attention is on his role as Imperial Ambassador, and the tensions this brought with it. Significant, here, for Saxton, is Mantel’s Cromwell and his perception of Chapuys. Cromwell, the central figure in Mantel’s trilogy, reflects at one point, ‘luckily for Chapuys, gossip is not a capital crime’, reasoning: he is ‘never stuck for something to put in dispatches’, because ‘if news is scant, he sends the gossip’.²⁹ For Stephanie Russo, this gossip was fed by Chapuys’ belief that Anne was the ‘Concubine’, ‘the whore who had displaced the saintly Katherine of Aragon from her rightful position as Queen’.³⁰ If the talk of an imperial ambassador on such matters is to be accepted as deeply political then is there a point at which such political talk morphs into mere gossip? This thesis argues against such a simplistic argument. Rather, there existed a political consciousness that drew comment and criticism; that including views on who was fit to be at the King’s side.

Across the ages, portrayals of Anne Boleyn at the very least hint at her unpopularity with the commonalty, some make it patently apparent. This extends to play script and its

²⁷ Dunn, *The Queen of Subtleties*, p. 260.

²⁸ Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (Henry Holt & Co., 2012), p. 9.

²⁹ Hilary Mantel, *The Mirror and the Light* (4th Estate, 2020), p. 295; Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (4th Estate, 2009), p. 368.

³⁰ Stephanie Russo, *The Afterlife of Anne Boleyn : Representations of Anne Boleyn in Fiction and on the Screen* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 21.

enactment on stage. Howard Brenton's *Anne Boleyn* was first performed at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London, on 24 July 2010. Take, Act 2, Scene 5:

Then, seeming to have appeared from nowhere, Tyndale [William Tyndale], the two Country Women and two Country Men are there.

Anne: Oh, then let's pray and make anything true! We're cutting free of the Pope in England, because of me. Me! Don't you understand that? Because I'm Queen.

Tyndale turns away, distressed.

Second Country Woman: You're no Queen of England.

Anne: How dare you!

Second Country Woman: Ooh ooh, Your Majesty. (*Mocking bow.*) Going to have me hauled to Tyburn for treason, have me hanged and cut down, my innards burnt at front of me, have me cut into quarters?

First Country Woman: That's what they should do to you, strumpet.

First Country Man: Concubine of Babylon.

Second Country Man: You're a whore.

Second Country Woman: Witch.

One of them picks up a stone to throw at Anne.

Tyndale: Stop this, stop it!

Such reference accords with the surviving evidence put on official record. In April 1533, priest, Ralph Wendon (referred to above), was accused by fellow priest, Thomas Gebons, of saying that 'the Queen [Anne] was a whore and a harlot, and that there was a prophecy that a many should be burned in Smithfield, and he trusted it would be the end of queen Anne'.³¹ In 1533, an interesting character by the name of Mrs Amadas

³¹ TNA SP 6/7, f.10 (L.P. VI 733).

came to the attention of the authorities. Amadas claimed to have been involved in prophecy for twenty years, and that this would be the year [1533] that a certain matter would come to pass. Amadas claimed that ‘the King's grace is called in her book of prophecies the Mouldwarp, and is cursed with God's own mouth’, and he was to be banished, along with other happenings and consequences.³² What is of interest here is what Amadas had to say about Queen Anne:

... my lady Anne should be burned, for she is a harlot; that Master Nores was bawd between the King and her; that the King had kept both the mother and the daughter, and that my lord of Wiltshire was bawd both to his wife and his two daughters.³³

What all the cases above - that on historical record or that drawn from the record and expressed through ‘historical fiction’ - have in common, is that it is all ‘talk’. In their introduction to their edited work, *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in Medieval Europe*, Thelma Fenster and Daniel Smail stress that talk, not gossip, is the true subject of their collection of essays.³⁴ They propose a reevaluation of the term *gossip*, given its ‘fundamentally pejorative nature’, or even ‘a shunting aside of the term in favour of a larger appreciation of *talk*’.³⁵ Whilst appreciating this argument goes beyond semantics, what is critical for consideration in this chapter and the wider thesis discussion is the place of *gossip* in politically contentious times. Elizabeth Horodowich argues that gossip has a long history in Western law.³⁶ In her study of *fama* and Venetian law,

³² London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f.99 (L.P. VI 923).

³³ London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f.99 (L.P. VI 923(8)).

³⁴ *Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Thelma Fenster and Daniel L. Smail (Cornell University Press, 2003).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁶ Elizabeth Horodowich, ‘The gossiping tongue: oral networks, public life and political culture in early modern Venice’, *Renaissance Studies* 19:1 (2005), pp. 22-45.

Horodowich argues that though *fama* did not prove guilt, it offered strength to the argument that the accused was guilty and so was ‘a means of gathering information’. ‘Gossip or hearsay – information coming from a ‘public and common voice’ or ‘a voice that spread throughout the people’ – proved enough to initiate an investigation and courtroom proceedings.’³⁷ Robert Gellately’s work on looking at just how the Gestapo were integral in the regime’s acquisition and use of its power is useful here in adding another dimension to the matter of talk.³⁸ Gellately argues that attaching labels such as ‘gossip and twaddle’ (‘Klatsch und Tratsch’) to the information passed to authority is beside the point. Regardless of whether it originated as ‘harmless’ neighbourhood gossip, was self-serving, or however motivated, *it* functioned as system supportive.³⁹ Gellately makes the point that police effectiveness is dependent upon cooperation from the society of which it is a part, and the level of that cooperation will vary on a regional basis. German citizens found reasons for supporting the regime and ‘were less regimented, cajoled, or forced than we often assume’.⁴⁰ Evidence in State Papers points to there being a similar dynamic, variable in strength, region to region, in 1530s England. However, something equally important can be detected: female networks aided women in confronting their enemies, in the street and in the courtroom, and to actively engage in the public and political life of their neighbourhood, and sometimes beyond it.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁸ Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 257.

⁴⁰ Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, p. 257.

⁴¹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 382.

The historical record – chiefly State Papers, where this thesis is concerned - suggests that women were indeed far more than passive onlookers. Elizabeth's Wood's expression of regret at the failure of the men of Walsingham was, given the climate, highly likely to draw attention to her. The Oxfordshire midwife, Joan Hammulden's, disparaging view of Queen Anne Boleyn was clearly a commonly held and, worse, openly shared view. George Bernard's point that such an opinion flowed through communities by way of gossip is an important one. This dynamic is something that has been stirred and fortified through works of historical fiction, as described. Once identified, it was not tolerated. It was a serious matter. Hence, Margaret Copeland, despite being drunk at the time – that, apparently being her usual state of being – was charged with using 'seditious language', for calling the King 'an extortioner, knave and traitor', and Queen Anne 'a strong harlot.' What is more she was charged with having done so on 'various occasions'.⁴²

In *Hall's Chronicle* - written by lawyer and historian, Edward Hall (1497 - 1547)⁴³ - attitudes were explained thus:

... the common people beyng ignorante of the truth and in especial women and other that favored the quene talked largely, and said that the king would for his owne pleasure have another wife'.⁴⁴

Note the suggestion that such talk was widespread, especially amongst women.

Equally notable is the fact that the chronicler was dismissive of the importance of

⁴² TNA SP 1/88, f.20 (L.P. VII 1609).

⁴³ Peter C. Herman, 'Hall, Edward (1497-1547), Lawyer, and Historian', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2018), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/11954

⁴⁴ Edward Hall, *Henry VIII* v.2, < <https://archive.org/details/hall-henry-viii-v-2/page/142/mode/2up> > April 2025].

gossip, such talk was a sign of the ignorance of the ‘common people’. The question of truth misses the point.

Spinning has long been held as a metaphor for gossiping, for it was said that women span webs with words like threads of yarn. To accuse a man of doing so was considered a great insult.⁴⁵ In theory, women and young people took their place in the social order from either their husbands, or their fathers or their masters. Their social identities were subsumed into the social identities of the adult male heads of the households within which they lived. Although some women might be distinguished by social rank, they were also collectively identified by gender; the social roles deemed proper for the different sexes. In general, women’s place was seen as being ‘dutiful adjunct to men’, as daughters, as wives, as mothers, or as sisters.⁴⁶

That subordination was justified by the authority of scripture, and it was also justified in English Law, especially the law of property. According to English Common Law, property was vested in male household heads. An unmarried woman, described in the law as *femme sole*, could hold property, could make a contract, and could engage independently in economic life. But a married woman was subject to the legal doctrine of *coverture*, she was described in the law as a *femme covert*; after marriage, her legal

⁴⁵ Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ Credit is given here for a lucid and highly useful introduction to household dynamics presented in a series of lectures by Keith Wrightson. See Yale Lectures online, Early Modern England: Politics, Religion, and Society under the Tudors and Stuarts (HIST 251, Recorded 2009) <<https://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-251>> [accessed 09 April 2025] Lecture 2 “‘The Tree of Commonwealth’: The Social Order in the Sixteenth Century”. <https://youtu.be/fVErdGUN_Jk> [accessed 09 April 2025] and Lecture 3 ‘Households: Structures, Priorities, Strategies, Roles’ <<https://youtu.be/YxjKJ3JgXvc>> [accessed 09 April 2025].

identity subsumed under her husband, the wife lost most of her property rights to her husband.⁴⁷ Contemporary teachings spoke of the family as being something of a smaller scale commonwealth in which the father was king, and therefore obedience on the part of women was an expectation, for subjects have no right to resist.⁴⁸ Domestic advice promoted the stereotype of the male householder as the 'Chief Governour' of his 'little commonwealth'.⁴⁹ Alex Shepard highlights the preoccupation of moralists with the relationship between man and wife, this despite the male householder's governorship involving three sorts of subordinate: wife, servants and children. Domestic conduct writers allocated specific roles to man and wife, with a wife expected to know her place; a husband expected to keep her in it.⁵⁰ In soliciting a pardon from the King owing to her close association with the discredited and dispatched Maid of Kent, the Marchioness of Exeter, regardless of her high status, resorted to the familiar trope:

Reminds the King that she is a woman, whose fragility and brittleness is easily seduced and brought to abusion and light belief. Is now the most sorrowful and heavy creature alive, that she has been so unfortunate as to offend the King and his laws, or be in danger of his indignation or displeasure... Protests that she never acted from any "male opinion," malice, or grudge against the King, the Queen, or their posterity. Begs the King to require her husband, who is much displeased, to forgive her.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2014), p. 45.

⁴⁸ Bernard Capp, 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England' in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* ed. by Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (Bloomsbury, 1996) pp. 89-116.

⁴⁹ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵¹ London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f.94 (L.P. VI 1464).

The first book of homilies (1547), composed of twelve sermons, laid out a doctrinal standard designed to help ignorant priests carry out their duties in preaching to those for whom they had cure of souls. The better known editions of these, *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547)*, and *An Homilie against Disobedience and Wylfull Rebellion (1570)*, inherited features from those messages from the pulpit promoted by Cromwell and Cranmer during the campaign to enforce the royal supremacy (1535-7).⁵² Homily 10, 'An Exhortacion concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates', articulates the place of 'every degree of people' according to God's appointment in 'most excellent and perfect order'.

Some are in high degre, some in lowe, some kynges and princes, some inferiors and subjectes, priestes and laimen, masters and servauntes, fathers and chyldren, husbandes and wives, riche and poore, and every one have nede of other; so that in all thinges is to be lauded and prayed the goodly ordre of God, without the whiche, no house, no citie, no common wealth can continue and endure.

Absence of such order would lead to 'babilonically confusion', a state in which 'no man shall kepe his wife, children and possessions in quietnes.'⁵³

For all that King Henry VIII's vicegerent, Thomas Cromwell, recognised and invested in the power of the printing press and the written word as a powerful propaganda tool in securing the Supremacy and concomitant ecclesiastical and constitutional reform, so too was he alert to the power of the pulpit.⁵⁴ With this came the need for more

⁵² Ronald Bond, *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and a Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570): A Critical Edition* (University of Toronto Press, 2014). Chapter 1. A Two-edged Sword: The History of the Tudor Homilies, pp. 3-25.

⁵³ Homily 10: An Exhortacion concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates reproduced in full in Bond, *Certain Sermons or Homilies*, pp. 161-173.

⁵⁴ Block, 'Thomas Cromwell's Patronage of Preaching', pp. 37-50.

preachers and more control over the content of their sermons. The Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Howard, in correspondence with Cromwell in May 1537, lauded the efforts of two named preachers. Norfolk, charged with dealing with the aftermath of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the north, continued, making the grand claim that 'If three or four such preachers had been continually in these parts instructing the unlearned no such follies would have been attempted'.⁵⁵ As far-fetched as Norfolk's notion might be, it could be seen as indicative of the value placed on having the word of government heard in every parish. Cromwell's oversight of this was recognised and aided by Archbishop Cranmer.⁵⁶ This was not something new, the church had been mobilised in the promotion of patriarchal 'truths' from the beginning, with many proverbs passed into popular circulation via the pulpit. The English sermons of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries decreed, for example, that 'a mayde schulde be seen not herd', or the proverbial phrase that women are 'ever jangelynge as a pye, other a jay'.⁵⁷ Similarly, in sixteenth-century Venice, women were thought to embody endless gossip, as reflected in the popular proverb 'Words are female, and facts male'.⁵⁸ Evident male consternation over and the framing of the concept of 'gossiping women' itself continued to feature over the Tudor and Stuart era. How much leeway was permissible seemed to be a troublesome equation for contemporaries. Robert Cawdrey warned wives to avoid gossiping 'further than the law of good neighbourhood doth require'. And then Daniel Rogers, in an attempt to square the circle, advocated that men should allow their wives some freedom to spend 'to bestow upon the meetings and lawfull

⁵⁵ TNA SP 1/120, f. 8 (LP XII (1) 1537).

⁵⁶ As an example see Cranmer's sending of a prepared sermon for Cromwell to 'peruse, and add or take away as he thinks convenient'. SP 1/142 f. 182 LP XIV (1) 173.

⁵⁷ Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, pp. 114-5.

⁵⁸ de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, p. 117.

merriments of their kind, which it were a poore thing for an husband curiously to enquire after'.⁵⁹ It could be argued that this sort of tension manifests itself in the case of Aleyn Hey and his wife, discussed above. Hey appears to be reining his wife in, making it clear to the authorities that he is all too aware of her transgressions – that happen to be the denigration of Queen Anne – but does so in such a vitriolic fashion that the authenticity of his claim is questioned in itself. At least in the first instance, as it was sent for further investigation.

Another case, that of Margaret Cheyne, someone who had married her way up the social scale, demonstrates no mercy on the part of government.⁶⁰ On 8 April, Cheyne, named as Sir John Bulmer's 'pretended wife', was sent from Newcastle, where she had been arrested, to London by the Duke of Norfolk, along with a 'confession' appertaining to her part in the northern rebellion.⁶¹ On 14 May 1537, Cheyne was indicted along with several others (all men) for their leadership role in the northern rebellion.⁶² On 16 May, she was brought to trial and pleaded guilty.⁶³ On 25 May, Margaret Cheyne was taken from the Tower of London and dragged on a hurdle to Smithfield, London, where she was burned alive at the stake.⁶⁴ At the time, the penalty for any woman convicted of

⁵⁹ R. Cawdrey, *A godlie forme of householde government: for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of God's word* (London, 1600), 95; D. Rogers, *Matrimoniall honour: or the mutuall crowne and comfort of godly, loyall and chaste marriage* (London, 1642), pp. 250-1, pp. 277-8, cited in R. A. Houlbrooke, 'Women's social life and common action in England from the fifteenth century to the eve of the civil war', *Continuity and Change* 1 (2), 1986, pp. 171-189.

⁶⁰ Sharon Jansen gives a detailed account of the case of Margaret Cheyne in the opening two chapters to her work, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII* (New York, 1996). Chapter 1, 'A Woman's Treason: The Case of Margaret Cheyne', pp. 5-18, and Chapter 2, 'A Woman's Treason: Why Margaret Cheyne?', pp. 18-39.

⁶¹ TNA SP 1/118, f.84 (L.P. XII(1) 870).

⁶² TNA SP 1/120, f.78 (L.P. XII(1) 1199).

⁶³ TNA SP 1/120 f.138 [L.P. XII(1) 1227(13)].

⁶⁴ Jansen, 'A Woman's Treason', p. 5.

high treason was just that, burning at the stake. The reference in State Papers to Margaret as being Sir John Bulmer's 'pretended wife' was typical, in that their being married was not at first recognised by the government. Bulmer had been married to Sir Ralph Bigod's daughter, Anne. It is believed that Margaret had been married to a William Cheyne of London. The evidence against Margaret Cheyne is fragmentary but is pieced skillfully together by Sharon Jansen. The most damning evidence is that given by Sir William Stainous, the Bulmers' chaplain. Stainous claimed that Margaret had quizzed him on the mood of the commons, looking to ascertain whether or not they would rise again, post-pardon. Further, that 'She said divers times that if the Duke's head were off, Sir Ralph Ivers' and Sir Ralph Ellercar's men might go where they would. She enticed Sir John Bulmer to raise the commons again'.⁶⁵ In her review of the case, Jansen concludes that Margaret Cheyne's 'treason' was quite different from the active and public treasons of her husband and other men such as Robert Aske and Francis Bigod. The only evidence stacked against Margaret was that she incited her husband to rise with Aske and others in October 1536, and then again under Bigod in early 1537. What is of interest here is Jansen's curiosity as to why Margaret Cheyne has been either overlooked or included as an aside by historians of the northern rising. That is except for, Jansen highlights, Madeleine Hope Dodds and Ruth Dodds, although she finds fault with the Dodds sisters' assessment that Margaret Cheyne's execution was 'a politic example to husbands and wives'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ TNA SP 1/119, f.73 (L.P. XII(1) 1087).

⁶⁶ Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*.

Focussing on the ways in which hierarchy and subordination were negotiated opens up possibilities when considering the unit of the 'household'. The tensions between the workings of patriarchy and the reality of the everyday running of the household is a case in point. For all that contemporary conduct books suggested that it was the role of husbands to go abroad and conduct business, while a wife stayed at home to look after goods procured by the man, in reality the relationship was more one of interdependency. Indeed, it was essential that all members of the household contributed to the household economy.⁶⁷ The work of wives often took place outside the home, separate from that of the household head. This helped create networks which opened up the world of informal politics of local society to woman, one in which they often played an important role.⁶⁸ David Pennington argues that women were important distributors of information and rumours about neighbours. Using female gossip networks, they 'constructed their neighbours' "common fame".⁶⁹ Food protests took forms other than riot, with women, again, just as involved as men, helping draw up formal written petitions to be presented to local authorities. Pennington contends that they also used their networks to spread gossip and uttered threats against middlemen and lax officials.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Linda Pollock, 'Little Commonwealths I: The Household and Family Relationships' in *A Social History of England, 1500-1750*, ed. by Keith Wrightson (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 60-83.

⁶⁸ Michael Braddick and John Walter, 'Grids of Power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society' in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Michael Braddick and John Walter (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 18-19.

⁶⁹ David Pennington, *Going to Market: Women, Trade and Social Relations in Early Modern English Towns, c. 1550-1650* (Routledge, 2015), p. 127.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

In June 1535 trouble between landlord and tenant peaked in the Craven area. A large group of people assembled intent on removing enclosures erected by the Earl of Cumberland at Giggleswick. At Rathmell, tenants of the Earl of Northumberland and of the Abbott of Furness pulled down enclosures erected by one John Catterall. At Airton in Craven villagers removed enclosures, along with a house situated within one of those newly erected enclosures.⁷¹ 82 people were indicted, with 18 committed to various prisons.⁷² What is interesting is the way in which the events were reported and recorded; tone and content. Sir Richard Tempest, chief magistrate charged with dealing with the trouble, reported to Cromwell that those involved were mostly women and children, there being no man of substance present with them.⁷³ Likely a disingenuous claim.⁷⁴ This speaks to Tim Harris's contention that contemporaries were more likely to highlight the presence of women if they wanted to belittle the importance of the protest. Other than that, Harris suggests, the apparent absence of women from political riots and protests 'seems to be an optical illusion produced by the sources', with crowds generally described in gender neutral terms, such as 'the rabble', 'the multitude', or 'the mob'.⁷⁵ Whatever, the Craven riots were played down. Take the placatory tone adopted by the sender of this communication with the King, as recorded in the Calendar: 'The offenders are meek, and acknowledge their offences, and are well content with their punishment, thinking they have deserved it. Had to remain in these

⁷¹ TNA SP 1/93, f. 69 (L.P. VIII. 863) For further detail on the extent of anti-enclosure protest in the build up to the Pilgrimage of Grace see Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 207-17. Also, Harrison, *The Pilgrimage of Grace in the Lake Counties*, pp. 60-66.

⁷² TNA SP 1/93, f. 198 (L.P. VIII. 992); TNA SP 1/93, f. 157 (L.P. VIII 946); TNA SP 1/93, f. 179 (L.P. VIII. 970); TNA SP 1/93, f. 196 (L.P. VIII 991); TNA SP 1/93, f. 198 (L.P. VIII 992); TNA SP 1/93, f. 202 (L.P. VIII 995).

⁷³ TNA SP 1/93, f. 198 (L.P. VIII 992).

⁷⁴ Manning, *Village Revolts*, p. 49.

⁷⁵ Tim Harris, 'Introduction' in *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* ed. by Tim Harris (Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 19.

parts five days before we could bring the premises to frame. Your subjects here are as loyal as any other.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, across the border in Cleator, a body of men, women and children pulled down a newly erected enclosure on a moor between Cleator and Frizington, they claimed ‘the rightful inheritance to have entry and commons and pasture there’.⁷⁷ The Pontefract articles drawn up by the northern rebels in the Pilgrimage of Grace made it clear that this particular grievance had not gone away, note item 13: ‘The statute for enclosures and intakes to be put in execution, and all enclosures and intakes since 4 Hen. VII., to be pulled down except mountains, forests, and parks’.⁷⁸ This was a continuation of the line of protest evident in 1535, one in which women, accompanied by children, played a significant role.

Threat to family subsistence and their ability to carry out their role prompted women’s participation in protest over enclosure and customary rights, indeed offered them licence to protest.⁷⁹ The role provided a rationale for such participation, for, when questioned, women protesters articulated a claim to protest for themselves, their families and their communities.⁸⁰ For as much as the magistrate, Tempest, felt compelled to downplay the significance of the Craven riots, witness the tack promoted

⁷⁶ TNA SP 1/93, f. 179 (L.P. VIII 970).

⁷⁷ Bush, *The Pilgrims’ Complaint*, p.210.

⁷⁸ TNA SP 1/112, f. 119-21 (L.P. XI. 1246 (1)).

⁷⁹ John Walter, ‘Faces in the crowd: Gender and age in the early modern English crowd’, in *The Family in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Helen Berry, Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 96-125 (p. 112).

⁸⁰ L. Gowing, *Gender Relations*, pp. 73-5.

by the author of the standard textbook of early modern magistracy, several decades later:

And if a number of women or infants (under the age of discretion) do assemble themselves for their own cause, this is no unlawful assembly punishable by these Statutes: But if a man of discretion cause them to assemble to commit an unlawful act, then it is otherwise saith Mar.⁸¹

The author, William Lambarde, was referring to Thomas Morowe and a statement made by him in 1503, prior to his becoming serjeant in law: 'If several women or children below years of discretion assemble of themselves for their own cause, this is not a riot. But if any other person causes such persons to assemble to make such a riot, in this case it will be said to be a riot'.⁸²

All this considered, it is no great leap to find accord with Andy Wood's suggestion that plebeian women were 'just as capable of manipulating patriarchal categories as were men'.⁸³ Wood finds that when placed in the difficult context of the courtroom, women held up domestic justifications for their actions in defence of common land, thus taking advantage of 'their rulers' blind spots' and so, 'exploiting the elite male inability to think of women as effective political actors in their own right'. It is interesting, then, that King Henry VIII, when advised of women's participation in an event post-Pilgrimage of Grace, declared that the conspiracy 'could not have come only of women's heads'; he clearly

⁸¹ William Lambard, *EIRENARCHA: Or of the Office of the Justices of Peace, in two Bookes*, 1581, p. 179, cited in L. Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Abingdon, 2012), p. 149. A passage from William Lambard's handbook for magistrates, outlining the rationale for treating women as unaccountable for riot. 'Mar' refers to Marowe's *De Pace*, one of Lambard's main sources.

⁸² Houlbrooke, 'Women's social life and common action in England...', pp. 171-189.

⁸³ Andy Wood, "Poore Men Woll Speke One Daye: Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance, c. 1520-1640" in *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850*, ed. by Tim Harris), p. 77.

being of the view that men had to be behind a political act like rebellion.⁸⁴ To queer the pitch somewhat further, state records offer up examples of events where men acted dressed up as women.⁸⁵ Conversely, further inconsistency is evident in one reported incident of women punished in the Star Chamber, because ‘having put off their seemingly shamefastness, and apparelling themselves in the attire of men’ several had then pulled down an enclosure.⁸⁶ Such shape-shifting absolutely speaks to the argument forwarded in this thesis, that women were often active participants in popular political culture of the time. They negotiated patriarchy, created their own networks and spaces, and found a way of acting in their own interests, on occasion, it would seem, in the guise of men. Explaining the latter remains difficult, for presenting as men would deny women the claim that they were not responsible for what they did; something, indeed, embodied, at least to some degree, in English law. Maybe it is the case that, as Natalie Davis suggested, sexual inversion gave a more positive licence to unruly women.⁸⁷

Rumour was rife at the start of both the Lincolnshire uprising and the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. Not the least among them was rumour of new taxes, all of them indirect and particularly threatening in terms of household economy for the poor. They included rumour of a tax on sacraments. Rumour surfaced in typical fashion. Take one Lewis Herbert of Abergavenny, Wales, journeying home from London, making a stop at an inn 5 miles from Bristol on the evening of 17 September 1538. Asked ‘What news at London?’ Herbert spoke of what he had heard at the Cross, Cheapside, that all burials,

⁸⁴ TNA SP 1/120, f. 165 (L.P. XII (I) 1257).

⁸⁵ TNA SP 1/102, f. 27 (L.P. X 296).

⁸⁶ Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (UCL, 1998), p.96.

⁸⁷ Natalie. Z. Davis, ‘Women on top’, in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford University Press, 1975).

christenings, marriages, and ordinations of priests should henceforth be registered, with a tribute paid to the King. Although witnesses claimed the contrary, Herbert denied a further charge that he had shared news that no pig, goose or capon should be eaten without tribute paid to the King.⁸⁸ Richard Birch, of Southwark, a glover, when travelling on a boat from London to Greenwich claimed knowledge of the King and his Council having sent proclamations to the north that no children should be christened without a tribute being paid to the King. Birch elaborated on this, saying that many children were not christened for a fortnight or three weeks because their fathers and mothers were unable to pay.⁸⁹

Other rumours of a similar nature, foretelling indirect taxes that would hit the poor, in particular, included, word of a tax on bread consumption, and that charges would be made on any cattle and on ploughs.⁹⁰ Wriothesley reporting to Cromwell from the ‘North Country’ in October 1536, commented on the rumours, concluding, ‘These things slanderously reported through the country make every man think they shall be undone forever’.⁹¹ The fear and no little desperation felt by, for example, the petitioners of Lincolnshire, justifying their rising in October 1536, might be viewed as typical, in their claim that they ‘be put of new to enhancements and other importunate charges which they were not able to bear for reason of extreme poverty’.⁹² Rumours were

⁸⁸ TNA SP 1/136, f. 174 (L.P. XIII (2) 413).

⁸⁹ TNA SP 1/114, f. 73 (L.P. XII (1) 62).

⁹⁰ TNA SP 1/107, f. 141 (L.P. XI 650); TNA SP 1/108, f. 162 (L.P. XI 769); TNA SP 1/115, f. 209 (L.P. XII (1) 369); TNA (L.P. XII (1) 70); TNA (L.P. XII (1) 393).

⁹¹ TNA SP 1/108, f. 159 (L.P. XI 768).

⁹² TNA SP 1/106, f. (L.P. XI 534) For more on the issue of tax reform — real or rumoured — as motive for rebellion see Michael L. Bush, ‘Up for the Commonweal’: The Significance of Tax Grievances in the English Rebellions of 1536’, *The English Historical Review* 106:419 (1991), pp. 299-318.

uncontrollable and unofficial. They spread everywhere, and they served as mechanisms through which ordinary people could make comment on their everyday circumstances. It was, Shagan argues, this dynamic that made rumours 'political', rumours were the 'stuff of popular politics'.⁹³ It is difficult to imagine that such rumours were received in any other way than as a threat to household welfare. Wherever received, whichever space, gendered or otherwise, content was hot political topic and newsworthy.⁹⁴ The rumour phenomenon is discussed in great depth in Chapter Five.

When rumour of the King's death circulated freely, far and wide in the winter of 1537-8, its mode of circulation was typical and features much in State Papers. One such record reports on a Warwickshire woman, called Phelypps, who claimed to have heard the rumour 'of another woman as she came from the market, whom she had not seen before'.⁹⁵ In another case, dealing with an equally virulent rumour, the confiscation of church valuables, the passage of rumour was investigated. The rumour was that the jewels of Aylesbury church 'should be fetched away'. The investigator, Sir John Baldwin, reported to Cromwell that a 'barber's boy' had heard the rumour from 'his dame', who had heard it said at the common bakehouse. Although, she claimed not to have believed it as the wife of the parish clerk, also present in the bakehouse, had scoffed at the rumour, as her husband had said nothing of such a thing. Here we have an example of female networks not only helping it along its way but something of a rebuttal, for the wife of a man who felt she was in a position to confirm its truthfulness, or otherwise,

⁹³ Ethan Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII' in *The politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* ed. by Tim Harris, pp. 30-66. Also, Ethan Shagan, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace revisited' in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 89-128.

⁹⁴ TNA SP 1/108, f. 162 (L.P. XI 769).

⁹⁵ TNA SP 1/130, f. 82 (L.P. XIII(1) 543).

denied it. In itself, this, too, was shared news. All was suggestive of a debate had in places women gather, which spoke of a political consciousness that was not gendered. The fact that the wife of the parish clerk claimed a level of insight that qualified her to comment on its veracity makes such an argument all the stronger.

An orderly set of relationships, set according to the natural order of things, was underwritten by scripture, enshrined in law. So it was for the sovereign-subject relationship, and so should it be for the mini-commonwealth of the household, with the household head (usually male) as sovereign, his wife, children and servants, subject to his authority. Household conduct books and pulpit missives promoted the ideal. Officials of state and local magistrates worked to uphold the model. Extant records and texts speak to all of this. And yet, the reality of everyday existence, and the necessarily interdependent nature of the husband-wife relationship served to erode the very notion of deferential obedience according to prescribed order. This fracture opened up, for women, access to networks and knowledge that made them very much part of popular politics; a definition not simply restricted to affairs of state. Indeed, their very role in the household gave them licence to engage.

There exists on record ample evidence to support the argument made by John Walter, for one. Walter pointed to the frequency with which women participated in protest, suggesting that this captured the reality of gendered space in which work and worship saw women frequent the public sphere where they accessed networks and knowledge they drew on when it came to articulating collective action. Further, it was not uncommon for women to be accompanied by their younger children, lending 'symbolic

force' to the women's appeals.⁹⁶ This, typified by the instances of enclosure riot detailed above, puts the case that reality belied familiar prescriptions of public (male) and private (female) worlds.⁹⁷ Rather, household duties opened up space for subordinate household members to engage in the public sphere where they accessed networks and knowledge they drew on when it came to articulating collective action. This all speaks to Leftwich's argument that politics consists of all the activities of cooperation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby the human species goes about obtaining, using, producing and distributing resources in the course of the production and reproduction of its social and biological life. These activities are not isolated from other features of social life. They everywhere influence, and are influenced by, the distribution of power and decision-making, the systems of social organisation, culture and ideology in a society, as well as its relations with the natural environment and other societies.⁹⁸ As Leftwich suggests, 'politics' is 'central to the life of the human species and always has been'.⁹⁹

This participation in collective action evidently included the protection of customary rights such as those under threat by the enclosure movement. This was articulated in the pilgrim oath attaching the commonalty to the large-scale insurrection in the north. Those in Kendal swore to 'be true to God, the King, and their ancient laudable customs'.¹⁰⁰ In Cumberland, the rebels condemned landlords for the taking of

⁹⁶ Walter, 'Faces in the Crowd', p. 112.

⁹⁷ Ibid. pp. 96-125.

⁹⁸ Leftwich, *Redefining Politics*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁰ TNA S.P. 1/118, 138 (L.P. XII(1) 914).

gressums, increasing rents, and in ‘pulling out poor men from their tenant rights’.¹⁰¹

Ultimately, this particular grievance found its way to the rebels’ petition to the King of December 1536 under article 13: ‘The statute for inclosures and intacks to be put in execution, and all inclosures and intacks since 4 Hen. VII, to be pulled down “except mountains, forests, and parks.”’¹⁰² As has been seen, when it came to defending such rights, actively so, women played their part.

Men: good fellowship and collective identity

This part of the chapter turns to the role of men and, specifically, men acting together, with a question raised as to the existence of a collective identity.

Despite the simplicity of their tastes, the makers of new and old shoes are always distinguished by a restless, sometimes aggressive spirit and by an enormous tendency to loquacity. Is there a riot? Does an orator emerge from the crowd? It is without doubt a cobbler who has come to make a speech to the people.¹⁰³

On 21 July 1538, 21 shoemakers assembled on a hill outside the market town of Wisbech, Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire. Thomas, Bishop of Ely, wrote to Cromwell, informing him of the event, saying that six of them had been apprehended.¹⁰⁴ The shoemakers had assembled ‘on pretence to get more wages of their masters for a dozen shoes’ sewing’. The missive included the depositions of two of the men. One

¹⁰¹ Michael L. Bush, ‘The Tudor polity and the pilgrimage of grace’, *Historical Research* 80:207 (2007), pp. 47-72, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2281.2006.00351.x

¹⁰² TNA SP 1/112, 118 (L.P. XI 1246).

¹⁰³ M. Sensfelder, *Histoire de la cordonnerie* (Paris, 1856), quoted in Joseph Barberet, *Le travail en France: monographies professionnelles*, 7 vols. (Paris, 886-90), v, pp. 63-4.

¹⁰⁴ TNA SP 1/134, f.236 (L.P. XIII(1) 1454).

Henry Leverett of Wisbech, shoemaker, explained that it was ‘for the purpose of raising their wages’, and that ‘none should work unless their masters gave them 18d. for sewing ever dozen pair of shoes, instead of 15d. as before’. Further, that he was administered an oath to that effect by Wisbech, shoemaker. One Drabbe confessed that after the assembly 17 of the persons met at his house. Three of their number were sent to all their masters with the request that they journey to Drabbe’s house to speak with them. Drabbe spoke of Leverett, deposing that he described the situation as ‘a scorn’, and that he would give his own servants their old wages, and if they did not stay he knew where to find others. This, along with the warning:

And if they so do and depart the town there shall none come into the town to serve for that wages within a twelvemonth and a day, but we woll have an harme or a legge of hym, except they woll take an othe as we have doon.¹⁰⁵

Bishop Thomas followed this up on 13 August, with an update to Cromwell.¹⁰⁶ Thomas informed Cromwell that eight more of the group that had assembled had been tracked down and apprehended. In addition, two remained in the town, described as ‘old, sick, and feeble’. Another was a boy who ‘disclosed the matter’. Another man was under arrest in Lynn, the officers there not prepared to deliver him without special orders, although he had been examined by them. This second despatch included the confession of the man taken in Lynn, one Edward Clarke, cordwainer of Wisbech. Clarke confessed to being present, induced, he claimed, by a man named John who came to him on the feast of St. James urging him to come on the following Sunday to join with others on the hill by Wisbech. Clarke told of arriving there to be met by five or

¹⁰⁵ TNA SP 1/134, f.236 (L.P. XIII(1) 1454(2)).

¹⁰⁶ TNA SP 1/135, f.82 (L.P. XIII(2) 91).

six persons, increasing within the hour to a total of 16. He named three: Harry Leverett, George Kelsey, and Bernard Melton. Also, that George Kelsey ‘took a book out of his bosom and said they must all be sworn not to work for less than 18d. a dozen pair of shoes, where before they took but 15d.’

Bernard Melton was the brother of Nicholas Melton, ‘Captain Cobbler’ of the Lincolnshire rebellion (see Chapter Five, on rumour). The part played by Nicholas Melton is discussed in detail in that part of this thesis. What is notable, here, is the number of shoemakers/cobblers involved in instigating the rebellion. Richard Hoyle reports that of the twenty-three known rioters at Louth on Monday, 2 October, four were shoemakers.¹⁰⁷ According to Mervyn James, the band of activists led by Melton, seventeen strong, included five cobblers or shoemakers, likely Melton’s workmates.¹⁰⁸ Hoyle reports that of those indicted for rebellion at Lincoln on 6 March 1537, twenty-seven hailed from Louth, five of which were shoemakers.¹⁰⁹ For the other hotspot of insurrection, nearby Horncastle, Hoyle reports four of the ten indicted as being shoemakers. All in all, a significant proportion of the most active insurrectionaries. Amongst those involved on reignition of the Pilgrimage in early 1537 was Henry Coke, Durham shoemaker, who had been one of the men on the most wanted list since November of the previous year.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 136. Hoyle’s named source: 19 names with occupations taken from the deposition of Nicholas Melton, SP 1 / 109 , fos. 1 r– 2 r (LP XI, no. 828 (i), supplemented by 4 additional names with occupations (including Melton’s) from the deposition of John Brown, TNA SP 1/109, f. 76 r– v (L.P. XI. 854).

¹⁰⁸ Mervyn James, ‘Obedience and dissent in Henrician England: the Lincolnshire rebellion, 1536’ in *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 188-269.

¹⁰⁹ Hoyle, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 137

¹¹⁰ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Last Office: 1539 and the Dissolution of a Monastery* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008), p. 52.

The Pilgrim's Tale, an English anti-monastic verse of contested authorship, remains in fragmented form only, within the anthology *Court of Venus*, first printed between 1535 and 1539.¹¹¹ *The Pilgrim's Tale* itself is dated between the years 1536 and 1540. The process that determined this date factored in the verse's lines:

Perkin werkek and Jak Straw
And now of late our cobler the dawe.¹¹²

This reference places Nicholas Melton in the hallowed if notorious company of Perkin Warbeck, pretender to the throne, executed 1499, and Jack Straw, one of the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Melton was known publicly, and the chosen reference, here, is that of his trade, cobbler. For Keith Thomas, men looked to their work as the source of their sense of identity.¹¹³ Men were what they did, 'occupation shaped the individual's self-consciousness'. Thomas goes so far as to argue that 'The possibility that individuals pursuing the same trade might differ radically from each other in personality and outlook was seldom articulated'.¹¹⁴

Angela McShane makes the point that the figure of the cobbler had intrigued writers such as William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Thomas Dekker (1572-1632), and Thomas Deloney (1543-1600). She puts their fascination down to the identity of the cobbler, in the learned tradition, 'being central to a Stoic enquiry into political wisdom and

¹¹¹ R. A. Fraser (ed.), *The Court of Venus* (Durham N. C., 1955)

<<https://archive.org/details/courtofvenus01unse/page/98/mode/2up>> [accessed: 09 April 2025].

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 99. See also, T. Tyrwhitt, *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer* (London, 1822) [The Canterbury Tales \(googleusercontent.com\)](https://www.googleusercontent.com) (accessed 2 June 2024).

¹¹³ Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, p. 106.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

freedom'. Hence Cicero's argument that 'the wise man achieves such virtue that he is at once King, rich man and a cobbler', and so is truly free.¹¹⁵ McShane's essay makes a case study, set in late seventeenth-century England, of Richard Rigby, 'a poor London shoemaker reduced to cobbling and a balladeer'. The body of work attributed to Rigby included six 'political' titles.¹¹⁶ Each ballad featured a Rigby 'signature' woodcut, a distinctive shoemaker image. McShane concludes that if Rigby's work was mediated by printers and publishers, using all the 'typical contours of the ballad form', he was the inspiration behind the ballads.¹¹⁷ Chapter Six of this thesis examines the place of ballads in popular political culture of the period. It is accepted that men, women, and children at all social levels experienced ballads as part of their everyday life. They dealt with every aspect of life, ranging from good living to rebellion and treason. Mark Hailwood argues that Broadside ballads constitute a useful entry point for the development of insight into how occupational identities were constructed in the early modern period.¹¹⁸ Hailwood suggests that they contributed to identity formation: the ways in which occupational groups were understood by others. The characterization of workers is something that those in such occupations would readily identify with, especially when they were celebrated. Elsewhere, Hailwood analyses the ballad *The Shoemakers Holy Day*.¹¹⁹ The ballad described the trade as 'the gentle craft' and that 'shoemaker's sons were princes born'. Hailwood contends that sociability was central

¹¹⁵ Angela McShane, "'Ne sutor ultra crepidam": Political Cobblers and Broadside Ballads in Late Seventeenth-Century England' in *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800* ed. by Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini, Kris McAbee (Ashgate, 2010), pp. 207-228.

¹¹⁶ McShane uses the term 'political ballads' for the broadside ballads that dealt in some way with 'state affairs' or high politics' (p. 208).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹¹⁸ Mark Hailwood, 'Broadside Ballads and Occupational Identity in Early Modern England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 79:2 (2016), pp. 187-200.

¹¹⁹ Mark Hailwood, 'Sociability, Work and Labouring Identity in Seventeenth-Century England', *Cultural and Social History*, 8:1 (2011), pp. 9-29, doi:10.2752/147800411X12858412044311

to their identity: 'We get our livings by our hands, / then fill us beer at our commands'. For Hailwood, this combination of the qualities of hard work and 'good fellowship' defined an occupational identity that 'could also inform, or even encourage, a degree of political activity'.¹²⁰ Hailwood suggests that participation in alehouse 'company' for cobblers and others such as porters, shoemakers, and blacksmiths, offered a gateway to 'a positive and collective sense of labouring identity'.¹²¹ He names shoemakers as being a special case by the fact that despite their identification as the 'gentle craft', this did not blunt their sense of comradeship, as suggested in the ballad *Round boyes indeed*:

The gentle craft doth beare good will,
to all kindhearted tradesmen still,
that keep the proverb to fulfill,
a penny to serve their need.

What is of particular interest to this thesis is a ballad, albeit of a later period, published to celebrate the *petitioning* of Queen and Parliament by members of the 'gentle craft' raising grievances held by leather workers. The ballad announced that:

The case will soon be alter'd quite, each in his labour may delight,
Then toss a jug or two each night, for the Honour of Shoe-makers.¹²²

Equally pertinent to the thrust of this thesis is Martin Parker's *The Three Merry Cobblers* and its conveyance of how the alehouse could be the place and space for the expression of occupational pride.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Come follow, follow me!
To th' alehouse weele march all three;
Leave aule, last, threed and lether,
And let's goe altogether;
Our trade excells most trades i' th' land.¹²³

Critically, for Hailwood, this suggests 'a pre-history of the strong association between shoemakers and political activism that has been identified in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'. Should it be of surprise, then, that of those most politically active in the period of this study, a significant proportion hailed from the cobbling trade?

Two centuries on, this would appear to have been no more remarkable, as highlighted by Eric Hobsbawm and Joan Wallach Scott.¹²⁴ In attempting to 'account for the remarkable reputation of shoemakers as political radicals', they found that shoemakers in the nineteenth century were militant both in trade matters and in wider movements of social protest. Their role as spokesmen and organisers of country people is apparent in any study of the "Swing" riots of 1830 or of rural popular radicalism. Indeed, Hobsbawm and Rudé posit that in 1830 the average riotous parish had from two to four times as many shoemakers as the average tranquil one.¹²⁵ Hobsbawm and Scott contended that the described political radicalism of shoemakers is proverbial, squaring their argument by suggesting that proverbs that have existed 'from antiquity to the Industrial Revolution', such as 'Let the cobbler stick to his last and let the learned men write the books', indicate precisely the tendency of shoemakers to step forward and challenge the status quo. If we accept Hailwood's argument for their being a pre-

¹²³ Ibid., p. 17.

¹²⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm and Joan W. Scott, 'Political Shoemakers', *Past & Present* 89 (1980), pp. 86-114.

¹²⁵ Eric J. Hobsbawm and George F. E. Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)

history to shoemakers' involvement in political activism then it would seem legitimate to argue the case for that pre-history being tracked further back to July 1538, and then October 1536, to those events of which the brothers Melton were a part.

Of another trade, Diarmaid MacCulloch observed that if butchers' businesses were on a large enough scale they would travel over long distances, leaving them ideally placed to spread ideas and contribute plans going forward.¹²⁶ MacCulloch was reflecting on the significant part played by butchers in the rebellion that came to be known as Kett's rebellion.¹²⁷ The rebellion was led by brothers, Robert and William Kett, whose father, Thomas, was a butcher of Forncett, Norfolk.¹²⁸ S. T. Bindoff, using Norwich records, identified the occupations of forty-seven rebels.¹²⁹ Butchers, numbering seven, made up fifteen per cent of Bindoff's total. Tracking back a couple of decades earlier to the events of 1536, a communication between Wriothesley and Cromwell is of interest here. Item 4 of the communication, referring to the Lincolnshire rebellion, names the rebels, concluding, 'Most of the above names have the designation "butcher," "shoemaker," "tailor," or the like added'.¹³⁰ As word spread of the events at Louth and unrest in surrounding areas multiplied, Thomas Moigne of North Willingham, found both himself and his property under threat. In his deposition, Moigne spoke of the ringing of bells in nearby Market Rasen and other local towns. He claimed that his intention was to flee the area, but threat made to his property by the rebels made him

¹²⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors* (Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 301.

¹²⁷ See also, Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Kett's Rebellion in Context', *Past & Present* 84 (1979), pp. 36-59.

¹²⁸ John Walter, 'Kett, Robert (1492-1549), Rebel', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/15485

¹²⁹ Stanley T. Bindoff, *Kett's Rebellion, 1549* (1949), p. 20.

¹³⁰ TNA SP 1/109, f.50 (L.P. XI 842).

stay. As was common with several men of his rank, Moigne was compelled to swear an oath and take part in the rising. Among the 'great number' of men from Market Rasen was a butcher, who, Moigne reported, took a book out of his own chapel and administered an oath.¹³¹ Wriothesley's comment on the Lincolnshire rebels being butchers, shoemakers, tailors, and the like, can also be said to be borne out in some of the accounts placed on record. In October 1536, William Goring, sheriff of Sussex, submitted a report telling of heated conversations had on the subject of the happenings in Lincolnshire. One of the protagonists, George Branthwaite, was reported to have said - something he himself confirmed, under examination - that the rising in Louth was led by 'one Jak Cobbler, two plumbers, a priest, and a tailor'.¹³²

At the beginning of the insurrection in Louth, Nicholas Melton, 'Captain Cobbler', went with an armed company to the church to seize the keys of the treasure house from the church wardens. One present, John Brown of Louth, stated under interrogation that Melton was accompanied by one Jock Unsant, a carpenter.¹³³ Amongst those charged with treason over the Walsingham affair (see Chapter Four) was one Thomas Manne, carpenter. Manne was executed in Norwich on Saturday 25 May 1537.¹³⁴ Post Walsingham conspiracy, one individual was in trouble for rueing the failure of the conspirators. He was presented before Sir Roger Townshend. He was one Thomas Wright, carpenter.¹³⁵ The day after the seizing of the keys by Melton and his men, a large group of men (numbered at 100 by Melton himself in his deposition) gathered. Of the

¹³¹ TNA SP 1/110, f. 148 (L.P. XI 971).

¹³² TNA SP 1/110, f. 21 (L.P. XI 920).

¹³³ TNA SP 1/109, f. 75 (L.P. XI 854).

¹³⁴ TNA SP 1/120, f. 220 (L.P. XII(1) 1300).

¹³⁵ TNA SP 1/121, f. 18 (L.P. XII(2) 13).

seventeen named by Melton, three were given the designation of labourer.¹³⁶ Melton, again, offered some insight into the mode of passage of information, in reporting that John Wilson, sawyer, had passed ‘from man to man’ the suggestion that because of the rumoured confiscation of church goods, ‘they should never follow the crosses again’. Further, that Wilson was paid one penny for his services by Robert Norman, a roper.¹³⁷ When the commons of Horncastle rose on Tuesday 3 October 1536, the ringer of the common bell was a weaver by the name of Davy Benet.¹³⁸ Philip Trotter, mercer, examined at Lincoln on 21 October, speaking of the same deed, offered the same name, Davy, and the same occupational designation, weaver.¹³⁹

To this point the thesis has considered the role of the clergy, key players in a truly turbulent period of political, religious and social change. It has tested the tensions between the workings of patriarchy and the reality of everyday life, finding that women moved within networks that opened up the world of informal politics of local society for them, one in which they often played an important role, and this did extend to involvement in collective action. It has explored the question of collective identity by looking at those involved in political activity and rebellion and what trade(s) they belonged to. Having done this, it is now time to examine the significance of place and space, the role of the settings in which communication took place, space where political discussion was possible; thus helping further in identifying those who engaged in popular political speech, and hearing what they had to say.

¹³⁶ TNA SP 1/109, f.1 (L.P. XI 828).

¹³⁷ TNA SP 1/109, f.1 (L.P. XI 828).

¹³⁸ TNA SP 1/110, f.123 (L.P. XI 967).

¹³⁹ TNA SP 1/109, f.1 (L.P. XI 828).

Chapter Four: Space and Place

This world's a city full of straying streets, and death's the marketplace where each one meets.

William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.¹

Baker: 'God save King Henry, here is good ale.'

Miller: 'God save the cup of good ale, for King Henry shall be hanged.'

Dartford alehouse, 1539.²

I am very sorry to know and hear how unreverently that most precious jewel, the Word of God, is disputed, rhymed, sung, and jangled in every alehouse and tavern, contrary to the true meaning and doctrine of the same.

Henry VIII's final speech in Parliament, 24 December 1545.³

The Tudor scholar, John Leland, travelled throughout England during the 1530s and 1540s. He visited and described the many large towns he visited, along with the smaller places, too.⁴ Typically, Leland would make mention of and describe the marketplace, should the place have one, and comment on its significance to the place. So, when visiting northern parts, where the Pilgrimage of Grace took hold, Leland's accounts commonly feature a marketplace. Pontefract is 'a fine, large market town, with good

¹ William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act IV, Scene 1.

² Mark Hailwood, 'Pubs and Politics in Stuart England', *History Today* 67:1 (January 2017), pp. 3-4.

³ TNA (L.P. XX(2) 1031).

⁴ John Chandler, *John Leland's Itinerary: Travels in Tudor England* (A. Sutton, 1993).

trade'.⁵ Malton has 'a good market'.⁶ Masham is 'a pleasant, bustling market town'.⁷ In describing Ripon, Leland writes: 'the true heart of the town, the place where the market square is'.⁸ Knaresborough 'is not very large, nor very well built, but it has a busy market'.⁹ Further north, 'apart from Durham itself, Darlington is the best market town in the diocese'.¹⁰ Nearby Auckland is an 'inconsiderable town but it has a good market for corn'.¹¹

Further south, in Kent, Leland described Maidstone as 'a market town with one long street of good architecture, and full of inns'.¹² This is an aspect that would have been recognisable to both inhabitants of and visitors to the subject of this chapter's case study, Walsingham, in Norfolk:

On entering Walsingham from the south, near the priory stood an inn, 'Le Beere', once called 'Le Dowe'. In the Friday market were 'The Crowned Lion', the 'White Horse'; nearby the 'Moone and Sterr', and the 'Sarassyn's Hede', both mindful of adventure in the East. There were also the 'Swan and Bull', the 'Ram', and the 'Angel now Wasted', which was absorbed later in the 'Swan and Bull'. In Stonegate were the 'Chekker' and the 'Boult and Tonn'. In the North Town-end, the 'White Hart', and the 'Madynehede'. By Prior's water-mill were the 'Gryffon' and the 'Bell'. In Church Street was 'The Crane', and near the churchyard was the 'George'.¹³

⁵ Ibid., p. 522.

⁶ Ibid., p. 543.

⁷ Ibid., p. 554.

⁸ Ibid., p. 556.

⁹ Ibid., p. 560.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 147.

¹² Ibid., p. 250.

¹³ Harrod, cited in *Walsingham, England's Nazareth: a history of the holy shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham*, Guardians of the Shrine of Walsingham (1998), p. 18 f.n. 1.

The significance of place and space will be explored through the said case study of Walsingham, a place of pilgrimage, and a place benefiting from a vibrant economy fuelled by the steady and significant flow of pilgrims.

Was communication itself a form of political action? Filippo de Vivo investigated the political uses of different forms of communication in Venice in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.¹⁴ De Vivo challenged the belief that ordinary men and women were supposed to suffer the government's decisions in silence, suggesting that, barred from political action, their participation in political communication raised the question as to whether communication itself was indeed a form of political action.¹⁵ In so doing, he considered the role of the settings in which communication took place, 'from secretive council halls to taverns and pharmacies around the Rialto, public places of sociability, conviviality, or competition, where conversation and arguments easily moved between private gossip and public affairs'.¹⁶ De Vivo posits that, 'From gossip in squares, to whispered news in the Rialto marketplaces, to disputes in the city's countless barbershops, the city acted as a vast resonating box, attracting news and multiplying it into a thousand rumours'.¹⁷ In short, he argues, sixteenth-century Venice 'hosted numerous spaces where public political discussion was possible'.¹⁸

¹⁴ Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Christian Liddy's work on town government and urban politics in late Medieval England, covering a period up to the beginning of the period of study of this thesis, tests the question of urban governor power, suggesting that it was less stable than the historiography imagines. Liddy argues that in negotiating the meaning of citizenship, townspeople made demands, asserted rights, and resisted authority. What is of particular interest to this thesis is Liddy's discussion of 'bill-casting' and what he terms 'the logic of communication in the marketplace'. Logic dictated that the marketplace was a space for relaying information, commands, and laws to produce consensus and order. This notion, however, was challenged by the posting of bills in public spaces, typically the marketplace. This, Liddy says, provoked debate and disagreement, and stirred and emboldened ordinary citizens to act. The perturbation this caused is evident in the reaction of the mayor and aldermen of York to the overnight appearance of bills around the city in August 1536 as, not for the first time, 'verey lyke to mayke gret discencon, debate and varyance emongs all the Comminaltie of the seyde Citye'.¹⁹

It is the purpose of this chapter, in considering 1530s England, to seek advantage in studying location of communication, for that, as was the case for de Vivo, helps to identify the actual people who took part in political communication. This exercise also serves to illuminate the significance of communication in public spaces, where and what those spaces were, and the types of communication that took place. Liddy described 'demonstrably public places' such as market crosses, water conduits, and church doors as being areas where 'the ebb and flow of opinion was impossible to

¹⁹ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 163.

moderate'.²⁰ As is the case with the other core chapters in the thesis, this chapter on space and place makes a more general analysis of the chapter theme, focusing on the marketplace and the alehouse, two very public spaces, existing close by or within places across the length and breadth of England. The second part of the chapter makes a case study of Walsingham, a more contextualised study that serves to extract a deeper appreciation of the significance of space and place for the wider aims of the thesis. It is argued that by directing attention to the site of politics, a novel contribution to existing historiography is made.

The marketplace: a vast resonating box

The marketplace in early modern England was not just a central space where people gathered, it was a far more significant place than that. Although it was public, its crowded aspect permitted a measure of private subversion of space. This aspect allowed for the overturning of order and hierarchy, through action obscured from authority.²¹ It was both a place of negotiation and conflict. It was a place of very public humiliation, as directed by courts spiritual and the criminal jurisdiction of quarter sessions. It was also a place where authority was asserted. The idea that the king's business ought to be proclaimed in a public space dates back to the Anglo-Saxon period. Henry VIII's Statute of Proclamations of 1539 ordered sheriffs to make

²⁰ Christian D. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship in English Towns, 1250 – 1530* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 162, doi:10.1093/oso/9780198705208.001.0001

²¹ Dave Postles, 'The market place as space in early modern England', *Social History*, 29:1 (2004), pp. 41-58, doi:10.1080/0307102032000163741

proclamations in 'four several market towns' within their respective counties.²² Indeed, the King made it a condition of his pardon to the rebels in Lincolnshire, in 1536, that mercy would be afforded them if they leave all their harness and weapons in the marketplace of Lincoln, to be received by persons appointed by the Council, and depart home to their occupations.²³ It was at the marketplace of Louth, Lincolnshire, that the Bishop of Lincoln's registers and other books were burned by the rebels at the very beginning of the uprising.²⁴ When example was to be made of those rebels held most responsible, the site of execution would be the same market place. Indeed, Sir William Parr let Cromwell know that he had deferred the execution until all the people were assembled on market day.²⁵ Norfolk's communication with Cromwell, in July 1537, evidences the same thinking where two particularly distinguished rebels were concerned:

On Friday, being market day at Hull, Sir Robert Constable suffered, and doth hang above the highest gate of the town, so trimmed in chains, as this bearer can show you, that I think his bones will hang there this hundred year." And on Thursday, a market day, Norfolk will be at the execution of Aske at York with the neighbouring gentry.²⁶

A further example was made as late as October 1537, in Carlisle, with one Thomas Rowtlage suffering for his part in the 'March treason', the second rising, post-Pilgrimage of Grace. Thomas Wharton reported to Cromwell that Rowtlage has been 'found guilty, and on the morrow, market day, suffered, and his head stands on the tower gate'.²⁷

²² James Masschaele, 'The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England', *Speculum*, 77:2 (2002), pp. 311-706, doi:10.2307/3301326

²³ TNA SP 1/108, f.71 (L.P. XI 718). TNA SP 1/108, f.59 (L.P. XI 717).

²⁴ TNA SP 1/109, f.1 (L.P. XI 828).

²⁵ TNA SP 1/116, f.271 (L.P. XII(1) 639).

²⁶ TNA SP 1/122, f.215 (L.P. XII(2) 229).

²⁷ TNA SP 1/125, f.132 (L.P. XII(2) 865).

Likewise, on 29 January 1538, Cranmer informed Cromwell that a seditious priest was to be punished at Ashforth, next market day.²⁸

After receiving Sir Ralph Ellerker and Robert Bowes with the petitions drawn up by the northern men, the King had a response drafted and issued under the King's seal. It was to 'be sent immediately to every market town in those parts'.²⁹ When the rebellion further north appeared to have abated, the King sent one of his officers of arms, the Lancaster Herald, into the 'North parts' to see if they had 'returned to their accustomed occupations or seem to retain some of their fury'.³⁰ Lancaster was issued clear and detailed instructions. He was given a schedule of towns to visit, a trumpet, and a proclamation devised by the King and Council. On arriving at the towns named, and any other towns where he shall think fit to publish the proclamation, he was to enlist the support and help of the mayor, bailiff, and chief officers of each town. Then, 'in his coat of arms, repairing to the market and most other open and frequented places', Lancaster was to deliver the said proclamation. In essence, the proclamation denounced the 'seditious persons' responsible for the insurrection, suggested 'the multitude' had been deceived, and sought to reassure the King's subjects, denying any truth to the various rumours that had been circulating in the region. They had been deceived by 'the ingratitude of those who would disturb the commonwealth for matters of weddings, christenings, churches, eating white bread and other meats, marking of beasts, bringing in money to be touched at the Tower, &c.' He was to make it clear that 'neither his Highness nor any of his Council thought of any such matter'. Lancaster was

²⁸ TNA SP 1/128, f.135 (L.P. XIII(1) 171).

²⁹ TNA SP 1/113, f.69 (L.P. XI 1410).

³⁰ TNA SP 1/110, f.100 (L.P. XI 956)].

‘to read the proclamation openly, and nail or fix a copy on the market cross’, with the rider, ‘causing good espial to be made whether any man will pull it down’. A case recorded in State Papers, dated 26 November 1535, provides evidence of the need for such ‘good espial’. The event occurred in Coventry. Depositions were heard before the mayor, the recorder and no fewer than eight aldermen, to the effect that one John Robins and three others had pulled down certain Acts of parliament and proclamations from the cross in the marketplace on the night of St. Martin’s Day.³¹ Robins and his companions confessed to having done so when drunk. They had visited Roger’s tavern and were on their way back to their inn when they committed the deed.

Armed with his orders and proclamation from the King, Lancaster found his way to the market cross barred on one occasion. On his way to Pontefract, Lancaster reported having passed ‘companies of common people of husbandry’.³² They saluted and honoured the King’s coat of arms which he wore. On being asked why they were in harness, they answered, ‘to prevent the "comontte" and Church being destroyed; for, they said no man should bury, christen, wed, or have beasts unmarked without paying a tax and forfeiting the beast unmarked to the King's use’. Lancaster dispelled them of this rumour, and he made his way to the market cross to make the proclamation. On his way to the market, Lancaster was accosted and called to Pontefract Castle, where the Captain of the Pilgrims, Robert Aske, was. Aske demanded sight of the proclamation, then standing in the high place of the chamber, he said:

³¹ TNA SP 1/99, f.89 (L.P. IX 883).

³² TNA SP 1/108, f.231 (L.P. XI 826).

Herald, as a messenger you are welcome to me and all my company, intending as I do, and this proclamation sent from the lords shall not be read at the Market Cross nor amongst my people who are all in accordance with our articles, determined to see a reformation or die.

Aske denied Lancaster leave to read the publication, but Lancaster was afforded safe passage and escorted out of town. This was a deeply political act by Aske, on behalf of the pilgrims, denying the government access to the public space it was used to occupying, the point at which it was used to asserting its own authority. The voice of the commons was denying the government its right to be heard.

Despite the King's promise of pardon, some areas remained restless on the turn of the year. Sir Thomas Curwen wrote to Sir Thomas Wharton on 21 January 1537, urging him to inform the King or Council as to the state of the west parts of Cumberland, 'more rebellious than ever, both in words and deeds, nothing regarding the pardon'.³³ The previous week, a servant of Dr Lee, one Robert Wetlay, had been seized and taken to Cockermouth. He was exhibited in the marketplace, where 'some said, "Strike off his head", and some, "Stick him"'. They threatened to put him to death, but he was saved on the promise that he would be 'tried in open market by 24 men, the following Monday. In December 1537, Edward Lyttleworke, fuller, was mercilessly punished for spreading seditious rumour. The site of his very public scourging being the local marketplace on the Friday, with a repeat performance at Reading marketplace, the following day.³⁴

³³ TNA SP 1/114, f.228 (L.P. XII(1) 185).

³⁴ TNA SP 1/127, f.101 (L.P. XII(2) 1256]].

As was the case for de Vivo's Venice, so did, on their own scale, local marketplaces serve as a resonating box for gossip and conversations had by locals and incomers alike. What is more, there is ample evidence on record that, naturally, the incomers took the news and rumours away with them. William Joly, miller, of Sherforth, Norfolk, recounted to various others that he had been in conversation with 'five or six honest men' at Fakenham market, 'who marvelled much what the King meant by polling and pilling the realm, both spiritual and temporal', and the consensus of the men was that the King 'intended to make a great hand by money'.³⁵ An eighty year old husbandman, Edmund Brocke, was reported for his talk, made on the way home from Worcester market, the Saturday before St. Thomas's Day, 1535.³⁶ One Richard Fulke, wheelwright, and the wife of John Danyell, husbandman, 'voluntarily declared' before authority, that 'It is long of the king that this weather is so troublous or unstable, and I wene we shall never have better weather whilst the King reigneth, and therefore it maketh no matter if he were knocked or patted on the head'. Brocke confessed to making such comments. When asked what he meant by it, he claimed to have been 'mad or drunk, and wist not what he said'. The babble of an aged man, described in the report of the incident as 'an aged wretched person', weaving his way drunkenly home from the market, left its mark on the record, headed 'Treason'. The very fact that the government interpreted the talk of such a man in such a way begs the question, Did the government make such talk, such communication, a political act in itself, by its repressive action? Clearly, there exists a surfeit of evidence to back up such an argument, as has been seen. It is the seemingly mundane cases such as that of Edmund Brocke that offer, this thesis

³⁵ TNA SP 1/89, f. 103 (L.P. VIII 146).

³⁶ TNA SP 1/95, f.67 (L.P. IX 74).

argues, just as much weight to the argument, for they suggest the want for a blanket ban on such criticism. Further, it is argued that the repression of Edmund Brocke and his like requires as much attention in the literature as the higher profile cases of those such as Elizabeth Barton, discussed in Chapter Eight. This is something the thesis seeks to redress.

The making of very public statements, be it proclamations or the issuance of warnings by example through punishment, or worse, was not limited to individuals, it also extended to publications that challenged the government message. In March 1539, Miles Coverdale informed Cromwell that he had brought to him several books that ‘the stationers of London, for their lucre and gains are not ashamed to sell still such “primers” as corrupt the King’s subjects’. Coverdale sought Cromwell’s authority for him to proceed to collect more of the same ‘sort of most ungracious Popish books’ and have them burnt at the market cross in Newbury.³⁷

A report made by Henry Lord Clifford to Cromwell in December is interesting by the fact that it centred on happenings both in a churchyard and at the marketplace.³⁸ Several people coming from market had had their purses taken by a local family, ‘the Grames of Esk’. A proclamation was made at the marketplace that every man should have redress. Meanwhile, at the local church, St Mary’s, Sir William Musgrave was threatened at knife point by Richard Dacre, who was in the company of two other men. The trouble escalated when the son of a local Lord joined the fray. The report states that after the

³⁷ TNA SP 1/144, f.35 (L.P. XIV(1) 444).

³⁸ London, British Library, Cotton Caligula B/VIII f.148 (L.P. V 573).

altercation, Dacre 'went to the marketplace, crying, "A Dacre! A Dacre! And raised a great company'. A mustering point, the marketplace was the hub at which every sort of transaction and public event was enacted.

Also in January 1538, Cranmer informed Cromwell of the outcome of seditious activity in his diocese, Canterbury: again, the spreading of rumours about the King. The priest involved was to be punished at Ashforth, next market day.³⁹ In the following month, February 1538, Cromwell, on behalf of the Crown, made sure their claim that the mystical and marvellous Rood of Grace, formerly housed at the late monastery of Boxley, was seen for what it was. That 'which has been had in great veneration, certain engines and old wire, with old rotten sticks in the back of the same, which caused the eyes to move and stir in the head thereof, like unto a lively thing, and also the nether lip in likewise to move as though it should speak, which was not a little strange to him and others present', was to be publicly exposed as a fraud. The site of exposure was Maidstone, on a Thursday, it being market day. Where, it was reported to Cromwell, the people 'had the matter in wondrous detestation and hatred, so that if the monastery had to be defaced again they would pluck it down or burn it'.⁴⁰ It can be seen from such an example how Shagan would draw his argument on popular participation in the dismantling of a religious institution, as discussed with reference to the 'blood of Hailes'.⁴¹ It is worth drawing on Shagan's example here, for it represents a very

³⁹ TNA SP 1/128, f.135 (L.P. XIII(1) 171).

⁴⁰ TNA SP 1/129, f.12 (L.P. XIII(1) 231).

⁴¹ Shagan, 'Selling the sacred: Reformation and dissolution at the Abbey of Hailes', pp. 162-196.

significant instance of how political undercurrents sometimes met and were played out in the marketplace.

Shagan's account of reformation and dissolution at the Abbey of Hailes challenges certain historiographical interpretations, Jack Scarisbrick's for one, that the evidence does not exist for latent violence being affected against religious houses. It counters the 'revisionist' argument that the dissolution happened despite the Reformation. Shagan contends that the records of the spoiling of Hailes Abbey offer insight on popular participation in the dismantling of a religious institution.⁴² He sees it as a 'point of contact' between religious reformers, the Crown and the people. Hailes was famed for one of England's most renowned relics, a vial filled with the holy blood of Christ, making Hailes a major pilgrimage destination. Popular belief had it that the holy blood was only visible to those free from sin, thus making Hailes a pilgrimage destination for those seeking confirmation that their transgressions had been forgiven. The abbey's popularity rested on the reputation of the blood, and the house profited from its rarity. The crisis came in the 1530s when the Crown turned against the religious houses and, just as critically, for Hailes, the worshipping of holy relics. In the vanguard, the radical, evangelical preacher Hugh Latimer poured scorn on Hailes' reputation, making this a feature of his controversial 1533 sermons at Bristol. Shagan argues that the context in which the authenticity of the blood's holiness was in question provided a test case for the reformers attack on the 'merchants' and 'jugglers' of Rome. Hugh Latimer, Bishop

⁴² Ethan Shagan, 'Selling the sacred: Reformation and dissolution at the Abbey of Hailes' in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 162-196.

of Worcester, was commissioned, along with the abbot of Hailes, Stephen Sagar, to investigate the blood. The authenticity of the blood was discredited and was publicly displayed, with Latimer taking the opportunity to preach against idolatry. The blood was transferred to London, where Bishop John Hilsey took up the baton, parading it through the streets, and preaching against it. Such radical performance was, Shagan argues, remarkable by the fact that the ordinary men and women who gathered to watch and witness the desecration of the vial's contents were not only observers but participants. They were not only exposed to new ideas, but they also took part in 'an enormously volatile act of iconoclasm'. Such events were becoming commonplace in London but the fact that such was also played out in a small Gloucestershire village was extraordinary. The abbey of Hailes was mortally wounded. Following the suppression of the house, local people began systematically stripping the ex-monastery of all movable items of worth. Those commissioned to investigate the spoliation left on record a catalogue of what was removed and by whom. Some seventy-five people were mentioned in the depositions, representing the full social spectrum. Ultimately, Shagan's commentary on Hailes as a suggested test case for the Crown and a point of contact between religious reformers, the Crown and the people, is useful. It does, at the very least, warn against the positing of any argument that awards the practitioners of traditional religion with a level of reverence that denies them any impulse to engage in sacrilegious activities. The case of Sawley Abbey, discussed in Chapter Six, however, speaks of wholehearted local support for the brothers of the house.

The alehouse: a place of private subversion where walls had ears

If the marketplace in early modern England permitted a measure of private subversion of space, despite its public and often crowded aspect, then what of the alehouse? The confined space of the alehouse may be obscured from authority but was it a safe place for the discussion and debating of matters that questioned government action or, just as critical, the government saw as threatening? And was it safe to speak when you could not be sure how words spoken might be received or recounted to others thereafter? Much of the evidence would suggest it was not so. Again, this speaks of the government's actions themselves making something that may not previously have been seen as political, now so; it is also a return to the point made about the more mundane cases such as Edmund Brocke, discussed above.

It is important here to offer clarification on what distinguished one drinking establishment from another in the early modern period. Inns were large, purpose-built establishments, mainly located in towns, providing lodging, stabling and refreshments for travellers. The tavern was more of a drinking house, specialising in the retail of wine to the upper and middling ranks of society. They were located mainly in towns, concentrated in London and the large urban centres. The alehouse was something quite different. They retailed low-cost ale on a small scale, commonly from the rooms of a private dwelling rather than purpose-built premises.⁴³ It is also worth noting, as highlighted by Mark Hailwood, that the typology of drinking establishments is not always stated with precision, with most referred to by a name, without specifying

⁴³ Mark Hailwood, *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England* (Boydell Press, 2014).

whether this is an inn, tavern or alehouse.⁴⁴ This part of the chapter focuses on those establishments referred to in the record as being an alehouse or referred to by name. The Walsingham case study, as stated above, recognises that there was likely a full range of drinking establishments in the place, accommodating for the needs of pilgrims from across the social orders.

In March 1537, one Henry Wycliffe found himself in trouble for words reported to have been spoken by him in the town of Grinton, Swaledale.⁴⁵ The talk was said to have taken place in John of Blade's alehouse, where Wycliffe is reported to have said, 'Sirs, what mean ye? Is your hearts done? Let me have 200 men, and I shall give the duke of Norfolk an onset'. The report was written by Richard Layton and is headed in the State Papers entry Calendar: 'Disaffection'. It is interesting in that it speaks of Wycliffe soliciting support from 'divers persons present', with 'seditious words to make a new commotion'. It names people present in the alehouse and refers to and draws links with some of the key protagonists in the lately quelled northern rebellion, such as Robert Bowes and Francis Bigod. In the same month, Robert Tanner, priest of Stockbridge, was locked up for words reported to have been spoken by him in an alehouse. Said to have been 'overcome with drink', Tanner had called the men knaves. When one of them responded by saying that they had paid their duty to the King, Tanner is said to have replied, 'the more fools'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁵ London, British Library, Cotton Caligula B/I f.156 (L.P. XII(1) 775).

⁴⁶ TNA SP 1/116, f.246 (L.P. XII(1) 627).

Another entry in State Papers offers insight into another such alehouse conversation, this one in Fittleworth, West Sussex. It is in the form of a report made to Cromwell and the Council by Sir Thomas Palmer, in May 1538.⁴⁷ A number of those involved in the conversation were examined, along with other witnesses, over the course of a week. The element of conversation put down on record was certain words said to be spoken by Edward Umfrey before his master, Robert Heynson, bailiff: 'I can tell by two witnesses of a certain person that did say that they had paid as long as they were able,' and "the King will have all our money. I pray God a vengeance take the King and his Council. I would they were all hanged." Umfrey had heard the words spoken by one William Hamlyn of Bognor. Hamlyn was said to be feeling aggrieved by the fact that a hog of his had been distrained by two of the King's tax collectors, for 4d. due to the King. What is of further interest here is that the airing of this particular bit of news by Umfrey in the Fittleworth alehouse triggered a detailed investigation, yes, but it did not end there. Hamlyn was detained in Bognor but attention then turned to his wife. Palmer charged two 'honest men' to resort secretly to Hamlyn's house, at night, 'to perceive whether his wife did convey anything'. Hamlyn's wife returned home with a poor beggar, William Gaston, and the men heard them speak of Cromwell, but could ascertain nothing more. Gaston was examined but he offered little other than to say that he had accompanied her to solicit the help of others on behalf of her husband, fearing that they were to lose everything.

⁴⁷ TNA SP 1/132 ,f.61 (L.P. XIII(1) 966).

In January 1538, John Lestock, priest, was sent to Cromwell himself, along with the depositions of two witnesses who heard him speak ‘seditious words about the King’, again, in an alehouse.⁴⁸ In the same month, the ‘principle inventors and brouters’ at the centre of rumour spreading concerning the death of the King (Chapter Five develops this in more detail), were to be made an example of, with the King himself ordering local officials to keep ‘vigilance in case any more of that sort will spring in those parts, to apprehend and punish them in the same way.’⁴⁹ A communication in which one John Vachell shares the order with one Sergeant Chalcott, detailed just where punishment was to take place:

On Thursday after Twelfth day one is to be punished at Newbury at the sessions, another at Abingdon and Oxford, and Hendeley and others at other market towns. All others in prison to be punished at other market towns, some in Wanttage, Hyssey, &c.

The authorities were listening in, this case offers confirmation of that very fact, by order of the King, indeed. The State Papers provide strong evidence for there having been a concerted effort to monitor what was being said in places such as alehouses, with, it would seem, a good number of people willing to denounce those who did speak out. Accepting that, this thesis argues that such evidence also adds significant weight to the argument that such conversations were being had in the first place, and they were of a political nature. For each case that found its way to authority, how many did not?

⁴⁸ TNA SP 1/128, f.132 (L.P. XIII(1) 161).

⁴⁹ London, British Library, Cotton Titus B/I f.183 (L.P. XIII(1) 7).

The very public nature of the exposition of such acts as those described above, ‘fraud’, ‘sedition’, crime, offence against religious belief of the time, was nothing new. Take the case of Thomas Tailour, fuller, accused of heresy in 1491. Tailour was made to walk barefoot, bareheaded, carrying a stick, with a bundle of faggots on his back, processing to several churches, the monastery at Reading, and the marketplaces of Reading and Wokingham. When he reached Newbury he stood in the marketplace, required to explain his crime. It was the bishop of Salisbury, Thomas Langton, who had sentenced Tailour to this penance. Tailour had been charged with several heresies and confessed that he called those people who went on pilgrimage to the shrine of St James at Compostella ‘fools’, saying that ‘it would be more merit to give a penny to a poor man than to visit him’.⁵⁰ The question of pilgrimage cuts to the very heart of the issues raised by the seismic change affected by government action in the period of this study. Pilgrimage was something that shifted from being an aspiration, if not essential, to something effectively proscribed and openly mocked by authority. It is to Walsingham, a renowned site of pilgrimage that the thesis now turns.

Walsingham: England’s Nazareth - a case study

Levell, levell with the ground The Towres doe lye,
Which with their golden glitt’ring tops Pearsed oute to the skeye.
Where weare gates noe gates are new, The waies unknown,
Where the presse of freares did passe, While her fame far was blowen.
Oules doe scrike where the sweetest himenes Lately wear songe,
Toades and serpents hold their dennes Where the palmers did throng.
Weepe, weepe, O Walsingham, Whose dayes are nightes,
Blessings turned to blasphemies, Holy deeds to dispites.

⁵⁰ Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*, pp. 2-3.

Sinne is where our Lady sate, Heaven turned is to helle;
Sathan sitte where our Lord did swaye, Walsingham, oh, farewell!

‘A Lament for Walsingham’, Elizabethan ballad

This part of the chapter on space and place makes a case study of Walsingham and the conspiracy played out there, described by Elton as having been the most serious plot hatched anywhere south of the Trent in the turbulent 1530s.⁵¹ This case study expands upon Charles Moreton’s valuable contribution to an understanding of the conspiracy plotted by the common people of Little Walsingham and other parishes of north-west Norfolk in 1537.⁵² It does so by incorporating discussion of Walsingham itself, as a place of pilgrimage, with a steady flow of people moving in and out of its confines. It is seen as important that the context of the place is examined and understood in depth if its true significance is to be fully appreciated. Aware of the similarities the conspiracy exhibited to the recent Pilgrimage of Grace, the government acted promptly and decisively. Because of this, the conspiracy did not develop into a fully-fledged rebellion. But what does it offer for the wider interpretation of popular political voice and, important for this chapter of the thesis, why was it so significant that it happened in Walsingham, the place, and what were the implications of that?

A multitude of ‘A’ and ‘B’ roads can be seen to converge on the remote village of modern-day Little Walsingham; a spoke of roads, suggestive of latter-day significance.⁵³

Pilgrims from Scotland and northern England passed through Lincolnshire, crossed the

⁵¹ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 144.

⁵² Charles E. Moreton, ‘The Walsingham Conspiracy of 1537’, *Historical Research*, 63:150 (1990), pp. 29-43, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2281.1990.tb00868.x See also, Charles E. Moreton, *The Townshends and their world : gentry, law, and land in Norfolk c. 1450-1551* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵³ Gary Waller, *Walsingham and the English Imagination* (Ash gate Publishing, 2011).

Wash, assembled at King's Lynn, and then proceeded to Walsingham, passing the Priors of Flitcham, Rudham and Cokesford on the way. Those travelling from the east passed through Norwich and Attlebridge. The 'Walsingham Way', or the 'Palmer's Way', led from London through Newmarket, Brandon, Fakenham, East Barsham and Houghton.⁵⁴ In 1530s England, Walsingham was home to both an Augustinian Priory and a Franciscan Friary.⁵⁵ The Priory was the magnet, the hub at the centre of the still evident converging byways. The Priory housed a shrine to the Virgin Mary, who is said to have appeared in a vision to local aristocratic lady, Richeldis de Faverches. Richeldis was encouraged to build a Holy House in Walsingham, based on Christ's childhood home in Nazareth. Hence the Norfolk village's renown as "England's Nazareth".⁵⁶ It was this that distinguished it from every other Marian shrine in England. It rivalled and, arguably, surpassed in terms of importance, the shrine of Thomas Beckett at Canterbury; being the most important centre for the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Europe.⁵⁷ Walsingham Friary was founded on her manor by Elizabeth de Burgh in 1347. This foundation took place despite the petitioning of the Augustinian canons of the

⁵⁴ *Walsingham, England's Nazareth: a history of the holy shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Guardians of the Shrine of Walsingham* (1998), p. 15.

⁵⁵ For Priory see 'Houses of Austin canons: The priory of Walsingham', in *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London, 1906), pp. 394-401. British History Online <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/norf/vol2/pp394-401>> [accessed 09 April 2025]. For Friary see 'Friaries: Franciscan friars of Walsingham', in *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London, 1906), p. 435. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/norf/vol2/p435>> [accessed 09 April 2025]

⁵⁶ Simon Coleman, 'Pilgrimage to "England's Nazareth": Landscapes of Myth and Memory at Walsingham', in *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*, ed. by Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman (University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 52-67.

⁵⁷ Waller, *Walsingham*, p. 4.

neighbouring priory, concerned about impact on abbey income; namely a redirection of pilgrims' alms away from the priory.⁵⁸

King Henry VIII is known to have visited the shrine on more than one occasion, making generous offerings.⁵⁹ It is said that on one pilgrimage the King himself was one of those pilgrims who walked barefoot to the shrine from the Chapel of St. Catherine in Barsham.⁶⁰ The King's Exchequer Book records many gifts to the shrine. In 1511 he gifted £20 1s. for 'part payment for glazing our Lady's Chapel at Walsingham', with a further £23 11s. 4d., in 1512, for its completion.⁶¹ He also made a twice-yearly payment for the burning of a candle before the shrine, and for the wages of a priest to say mass there. These regular payments, made up to Lady Day, 1538, ceased on 29 September 1538, with a concluding entry in the book: 'For the King's candle before our Lady of Walsingham and to pay the Prior for his salary, nil.'⁶² In a letter to the King - away in France - Queen Katherine acclaimed English victory over the Scots at Flodden (1513). Thankful, Katherine announced her intent to pray for the King's safe return; and for the same is going to Our Lady at Walsingham, "that I promised so long ago to see".⁶³ In her will, Katherine requested that the King permit that one person go to Our Lady of Walsingham on pilgrimage and distribute 20 nobles on the way.⁶⁴ This example, albeit

⁵⁸ *The Franciscan Order in the Medieval English Province and Beyond* ed. by Michael Robson and Patrick N. R. Zutshi (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), pp. 101-2.

⁵⁹ Spelman, *Works II*, p. 149 cited in 'Houses of Austin canons: The priory of Walsingham', in *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London, 1906), pp. 394-401. British History Online <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/norf/vol2/pp394-401>> [accessed 09 April 2025].

⁶⁰ *Englands Nazareth*, Guardians of the Shrine of Walsingham, p. 16.

⁶¹ C. G. Mortimer, *Our Lady of Walsingham* (Catholic Truth Society, London, 1934), p. 11.

⁶² *England's Nazareth*, Guardians of the Shrine of Walsingham, p. 16.

⁶³ TNA LP Henry VIII, Vol. 1(2) 1513-14, 2268.

⁶⁴ London, British Library, Cotton Otho C/X f.216 (L.P. X 40).

one of a lady of the highest standing, is suggestive of continuity in Duffy's theory that practically every fifteenth-century will collection offered up examples of testators disturbed by their non-completion of pilgrimages promised in their lifetimes.⁶⁵ Duffy offered an example of the will made in 1541 of a Suffolk man, Richard Suttone, who left money for a surrogate to make good 'my vows, which I made to divers saints in times of necessity'.⁶⁶ It is notable that Katherine making this provision in her will came at the time the attack on the cult of saints and shrines was evolving. It was just six months later, almost to the day, after the death of Katherine, that Bishop Latimer opened Convocation, on 9 June 1536, with two sermons, one in the morning and one in the afternoon session, attacking pilgrimage and the cult of saints.⁶⁷ Latimer was appointed to deliver a Latin sermon which was nothing short of excoriating. Latimer targeted the cult of the saints, images, and lights:

... while they thus worshipping preached to the people, that dead images (which at the first, as I think, were set up, only to represent things absent) not only ought to be covered with gold, but also ought of all faithful and Christian people, (yea, in this scarceness and penury of all things,) to be clad with silk garments, and those also laden with precious gems and jewels; and that beside all this, they are to be lighted with wax candles, both within the church and without the church...⁶⁸

In his sermon opening the afternoon session, Latimer he made reference to 'our old ancient purgatory pick-purse':

⁶⁵ Eamon Duffy, *A People's Tragedy: Studies in Reformation* (Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁷ G. E. Corrie (ed.) *Sermons by Hugh Latimer, sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555. Edited for the Parker Society.* (Cambridge, 1844), pp. 57-58.

⁶⁸ G. E. Corrie (ed.) *Sermons by Hugh Latimer, sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555. Edited for the Parker Society.* (Cambridge, 1844), pp. 57-58.

It was a pleasant fiction, and from the beginning so profitable to the feigners of it, that almost, I dare boldly say, there hath been no emperor that hath gotten more by taxes and tallages of them that were alive, than these, the very and right-begotten sons of the world, got by dead men's tributes and gifts.⁶⁹

Latimer was charging all bishops and preachers with staying on message.

The Visitation of Walsingham in 1526 found no irregularity in the House and twenty-three canons *omnia bene*, aside from a small issue around the observance of matins concerning two canons, and a shortage of food. The story was quite different after the King assumed supremacy of the Church and religious houses found themselves under the spotlight. Richard Southwell and Sir John Haydon, the commissioners appointed to Walsingham, found that Canons John Lamprey, William Mileham, Richard Garret, Robert Sall, John Clenchwarton and John Watthy were guilty of 'notorious incontinency' and that 'grave superstition and much forgery was found in their feigned, pretended miracles and relics'.⁷⁰ A letter from Richard Southwell to Cromwell, dated 25 July 1536, offers further evidence of intent. Southwell reported that Sir Thomas Lestrangle and Mr. Hoges had been at Walsingham and sequestered all the money, plate, and jewels. They also found a secret place within the house in which were 'pots, bellows, and instruments, for multiplying gold and silver'.⁷¹

Records suggest that pilgrims who made their way to Walsingham had ample choice so far as inns were concerned. One account puts the number at thirteen: 'On entering

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

⁷⁰ Michael Rear, *Walsingham: Pilgrims and Pilgrimage* (St. Pauls, 2011), pp. 151-2.

⁷¹ London, British Library, Cleopatra E/IV f.275 (L.P. XI 165).

Walsingham from the south, near the priory stood an inn, 'Le Beere', once called 'Le Dowe'. In the Friday market were 'The Crowned Lion', the 'White Horse'; nearby the 'Moone and Sterr', and the 'Sarassyn's Hede', both mindful of adventure in the East. There were also the 'Swan and Bull', the 'Ram', and the 'Angel now Wasted', which was absorbed later in the 'Swan and Bull'. In Stonegate were the 'Chekker' and the 'Boult and Tonn'. In the North Town-end, the 'White Hart', and the 'Madynhede'. By Prior's water-mill were the 'Gryffon' and the 'Bell'. In Church Street was 'The Crane', and near the churchyard was the 'George'.⁷² Little Walsingham held a long-established market by charter. It was one of a total number of 140 named medieval markets in Norfolk, giving a higher density than anywhere else in England.⁷³ Journeying to and from Walsingham, on any of the described routes, pilgrims would have passed through many of these markets. If only seeking sustenance, they had ears to hear, and one man's (or woman's) curiosity as to the news of the day would surely match that of the next.

In focussing on the practicalities of devotional travel - in terms of routes, road networks and accommodation possibilities – Martin Locker highlighted the range and number of sites of pilgrimage founded and established by the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁷⁴ Locker's work is built around four case studies, one of which being Walsingham Priory. Research work carried out on the distribution of pilgrim souvenirs relating to the Walsingham shrine evidences a broad distribution pattern. Data from the Portable

⁷² Harrod, cited in *Walsingham, England's Nazareth: a history of the holy shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham*, Guardians of the Shrine of Walsingham (1998), p. 18 f.n. 1.

⁷³ Peter Wade-Martins, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* (Norfolk Museums Service, 1993), pp. 76-7.

⁷⁴ Martin D. Locker, 'Landscapes of Pilgrimage in Medieval Britain' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2012) <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1388786/1/Locker_1388786_thesis_redacted.pdf> [accessed 09 April 2025].

Antiquities Scheme record the unearthing of over 100 ampullae (lead containers for holy water). Finds range from Cumbria and North Yorkshire in the north to Shropshire in the west, Somerset in the southwest, and Kent in the southeast. Similarly, pilgrim badges from Walsingham, in a smaller number; 11.⁷⁵

So, what of concrete evidence that conversations had in and around Walsingham were of interest to authority? Henry Manser, priest, was heard by one Robert Sutton, of Little Walsingham, to say to four men of Lincolnshire, who came on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham, that if Norfolk and Suffolk had risen when Lincolnshire and Yorkshire did then they would have been able to go through the realm.⁷⁶ Manser was the canon in charge of the shrine. The case, heard before Sir Roger Townshend and two others, was dropped because the credibility of the witness was in question, him 'beyng a soore and a diseased person', and having made a nuisance of himself at the shrine, 'askyng alms daily', disturbing the pilgrims. For this, Sutton had been put in the stocks by the constable.

On 6 December 1536, the keeper of the common gaol in Norwich, Richard Fletcher, was examined in the Tower of London. Fletcher reported that he had been carrying out his duties beyond the town of Lynne, recovering a prisoner, when he came upon a group of soldiers who advised him to turnabout as the whole group were returning from their mission northwards with the Duke of Norfolk, sent to quell the disturbances there. One of the group, a clerk by the name of Fermor, son of Sir Harry Fermor, asked Fletcher to

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ TNA SP 1/121, f. 31 (L.P. XII(2) 21).

deliver 'a bill of news' to John Manne of Norwich. Fermor handed the bill to Fletcher at the Bell Inn, Lynne, that evening. The proprietor of the Bell, George Wharton, sat with a group of merchants, asked for the bill to be read out. It was read. Further, Fletcher gave his consent to the innkeeper, Wharton, taking two copies of the bill. At Norwich, Fletcher showed the bill to the Mayor. He delivered it to John Manne. He also showed it to his host in Norwich, one Thetforde, and a merchant by the name of Rogers. Fletcher further deposed that he showed it to one Leonard Stanger, servant to one Willoughby, at London. The Bell innkeeper, Wharton, was also examined. He named who read the bill in The Bell on 6 December, along with the scribes of the two copies taken: Robert Milner and John Parishe. Wharton showed the bill to two others and handed a copy to some Cornish soldiers who were on pilgrimage to Walsingham, returning from the North. The two depositions, Fletcher's and Wharton's, were recorded in state records under the title 'A Seditious Paper'.⁷⁷

Once out, word of the Walsingham conspiracy was taken seriously, with word being passed in short time to Richard Gresham who had direct access to lord Privy Seal Cromwell. Gresham held a reputation for diligence in his public duties, along with compassion where he deemed appropriate. Involved in the dissolution of Walsingham Priory, Gresham had Cromwell agree to the awarding of the office of parson of Walsingham church to the ex-prior, Vowell.⁷⁸ Gresham received his information from Sir John Heydon, who, along with Sir Roger Townshend, had been informed of 'a great

⁷⁷ TNA SP 1/112, f.141 (L.P. X1 1260).

⁷⁸ Ian Blanchard, 'Gresham, Sir Richard (1485-1549) Mercer, Merchant Adventurer, and Mayor of London', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2008), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/11504

insurrection' by one John Galant, Heydon's servant. Galant and others had informed on those said to be the chief instigators, George Gysborough of Walsingham, his son, William, and their associates; with word that the plot leader, one Ralph Rogerson had fled.⁷⁹ Information gathered stated that the intention had been to assemble people in the night, light beacons on the coast, and raise the country, killing all who might resist them. This came with a warning that those disclosing rebel intent would do so on pain of death. The plan, as reported, was to compel head constables of hundreds to command under-constables to raise the people. Further, to station a company at Brandon ferry to prevent passage to and from London, and then 'go to aid the Northern men'.⁸⁰ This is all indicative of a very deliberate strategy, with a significant level of organisation. Brandon Ferry was a crossing point in the fenlands, a very strategic point, and a significant distance from Walsingham. It represented the bigger sense of space amongst the would-be rebels.

George Gysborough's deposition before Townshend and Heydon reported him as saying that 'he thought it very evil done, the suppressing of so many religious houses where God was well served'. Further, he said that the commons were oppressed by gentlemen and this called for insurrection. Both Gysborough and his son's deposition are recorded as being signed by the justices.⁸¹ Gysborough was further examined in Cromwell's house at Stepney, twice.⁸² This would suggest that the unrest in Walsingham was indeed taken very seriously by those in high office. On examination,

⁷⁹ TNA SP 1/119, f.29 (L.P. XII(1) 1045).

⁸⁰ TNA SP 1/119, f.29 (LP XII(1) 1045).

⁸¹ TNA SP 1/119, f.33 (LP XII(1) 1056).

⁸² TNA SP 1/119, f.33 (LP XII(1) 1056(2)).

Gysborough is said to have directly implicated Ralph Rogerson. Rogerson, in soliciting Gysborough's support, challenged, 'You see how these abbeys go down, and our living goeth away with them'. He predicted the putting down of Walsingham Priory, along with others in the area, including Binham Priory. He protested that the gentlemen had all the farms and cattle in their hands, leaving poor men with no means to make a living; that some men 'must step to and resist them'. He proposed to gather a company for that purpose, that they would fire beacons and go to the King to complain. An agreement was made that each of the men present – with some named in the deposition – would speak to others and hope to garner enough support for a muster of men by St. Helen's day. Elton drew attention to the fact that Gysborough's signature on the second document is much more shaky than the first, suggesting that torture was used on him.⁸³ Perhaps he was simply terrified? However extracted, there exists here a clear thread of criticism directed at both state policy (namely the pulling down of religious houses) and the behaviour of local landowners and gentlemen, which impacted on the welfare of the commonalty. This, along with an evident desire to act in its name: its name was politically motivated.

By the end of May, arrangements had been made for all those attainted to be dealt with in a way designed to send out a message to all. Those executed at Norwich met their fate on the day of Trinity Fair, in front of a multitude of fair-goers. On the way from Norwich Castle, laid on hurdles, the attainted confessed their crime. All but for Ralph Rogerson who, Southwell reported to Cromwell, 'according to his cankered stomach,

⁸³ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 145.

began to enter matter, wherein he was stayed, much after the infection of his heart'.⁸⁴ Southwell's report tells of the severity of punishment of all those involved, yes. But it also tells of the risk of knowing and not telling, informing. Of the prisoners held in Norwich gaol, five, including Ralph Rogerson, were executed in Norwich on Saturday 26 May; two were executed in Yarmouth on Monday 28 May; George Gysborough and two others were executed in Walsingham on Wednesday 30 May; with William Gysborough and fellow conspirator, Nicholas Myleham, sub-prior of Walsingham executed in Lynne on Friday 1 June.⁸⁵ The fate of others is equally telling and informative. Those found guilty of misprision were sentenced to 'perpetual prison', with two others remanded to prison without judgement.⁸⁶

In his essay on the Walsingham Conspiracy, Moreton argues that there were too many unnerving similarities between it and the Pilgrimage of Grace for the authorities not to take it seriously.⁸⁷ For Moreton, the agrarian elements in the conspiracy (it never reached the stage of rebellion) were powerful but it stood out by the way it involved religious discontent. For all that the county of Norfolk was, at the time, one of the most economically and culturally prosperous counties, the grip of traditional Catholicism was still present. Defence of the old religion provided a powerful ideological justification. Moreton suggests that the conspirators held to an old convention: not seeing themselves as rebels against the Crown, they were acting on behalf of the 'commonwealth' in forming a company that would take their grievances to the king.

⁸⁴ TNA SP 1/120, f. 220. (L.P. 12(1) 1300).

⁸⁵ TNA SP 1/120, f. 220. (L.P. 12(1) 1300(3)).

⁸⁶ TNA SP 1/120, f. 220. (L.P. 12(1) 1300(2)).

⁸⁷ C. E. Moreton, 'The Walsingham Conspiracy,' *Historical Research* 63:150 (1990), pp. 29-43, doi: [dur.ac.uk/10.1111/j.1468-2281.1990.tb00868.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.1990.tb00868.x)

Gresham and Townshend acted with speed, testimony, says Moreton, to the fact the matter was taken very seriously by the government.

Of added interest to this thesis, and this chapter in particular, is Moreton's observation on the men of Walsingham. He argues that because they were 'neighbours to a shrine that was an epitome of traditional Catholicism' they were not likely to surrender their views easily. This speaks to the contention of this thesis that building on a themed general analysis with a deeply contextualized case study offers a sharper interpretation of just what was going on. Indeed, three years later, in January 1540, Townshend wrote to Cromwell about a woman from Wells who had spread a tale of a miracle attributed to the image of Our Lady of Walsingham after it had been transported to London. Referring to the population of the Walsingham area, he concluded that 'I cannot perceyve but the seyd Image is not yett out of sum of ther heddes'. Hence Moreton's concluding statement:

The central part that the old religion played in the lives of the majority of the population meant that it would be a while before the likes of Sir Roger Townshend could drive out the image of Our Lady of Walsingham from Norfolk heads.⁸⁸

In his work *Policy and Police*, Elton established a clear connection between the evolution of the law of treason in the 1530s, 'due process' and the action of a competent and properly constituted court.⁸⁹ A bill of accusation was presented to the

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁹ Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 263-326.

jury on behalf of the Crown. If the jury approved the bill it was annotated 'vera billa'. If the bill was rejected the person was set free. Due to this process, on May 25, 1537, at Norwich Assizes, eight men were set free, 'delivered by proclamation' and simply bound to good behaviour'.⁹⁰ The outcome of the jury's findings was set on record. Fourteen men were indicted of treason: Nigel Mileham (subprior of Walsingham priory), Ralph Rogerson (singing man at the priory), George Gisborough (singing man, peasant in Walsingham parish), William Gisborough (yeoman and merchant of Wells), Thomas Howes (husbandman), John Semble (mason), John Pecoock (Carmelite friar), Richard Henley (plumber), Andrew Pax (parish clerk of Wells), John Grikby (rector of Langham), Thomas Manne (carpenter of Langham), John Sellers (tailor of Langham), Thomas Pennye (husbandman of Houghton), and John Punte (rector of Waterdon). Charged with misprision for concealment were Robert Hawker (butcher of Walsingham), William Gibson (Carmelite friar) and Richard Maryot (mariner of Wells).⁹¹ It is notable that all the conspirators indicted hailed from an area of Norfolk that, at the time, was both the most populous and benefited from the highest distribution of wealth.⁹² The jury consisted of five knights and seven esquires.

A level of popular unrest did exist at the time, and it was being articulated through popular political speech. The need for such speech to be guarded is evident in the Walsingham case study. Further evidence of this need might be drawn from a case

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 147.

⁹¹ TNA SP 1/120, f. 226. (L.P. 12(1) 1300(2)) given further detail in Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 147-8.

⁹² Wade-Martins, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, pp. 94-7. The conurbations of Wells, Walsingham, Langham and Houghton were situated in a region placed in the upper quartile for recorded population per 1000 acres in the early 16th Century; and, for distribution of wealth in the early 16th Century, in the upper quartile, 51 and above shillings per square mile.

heard by the Privy Council in May 1537, shortly after the alert sounded by Heydon and Townshend where Walsingham is concerned. The evidence detailed a conversation held between one Robert Seyman and Richard Bishop of Bungay (Suffolk). Bishop referred to the happenings in Walsingham, relating this to his view on the prevailing mood of the time:

We are so used now-a-days at Bungay as was never seen afore this, for if two or three good fellows be walking together, the constables come to them and woll know what communication they have or else they shall be stocked.⁹³

Bishop claimed that those certain men of Walsingham were held in Norwich Castle, with some sent to London. And then again, a description of the climate: ‘if two men were together one might say to another what he would, as long as a third was not there’. In the case of Walsingham ‘one false knave’ disclosed the intended rising.⁹⁴ It was also reported that on May Day, just passed, a play was enacted ‘which play was of a king how he should rule his realm’. This prompted an order to the justices of the shire to ‘have regard to light persons, especially at games and plays’.⁹⁵ It was the Duke of Norfolk’s controller, Wharton, who had reported on Bishop’s activities. Bishop was described as being ‘a wretched person’ and ‘for nother by fair means nor fowl I can make him confess’. Bishop’s ‘confession’ speaks of him telling the other man, Seymon, that if he were to resort to Bungay then he would show him a certain prophecy, forecasting a rising ‘this year or never’, with the King spoken of as a mole who should be ‘subdued and put down’.⁹⁶ All this points to there being both stir and conversation of a

⁹³ TNA SP 1/120, f. 100. (L.P. 12(1) 1212).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

political nature that troubled the authorities. This made Townshend's claim, reported back to Cromwell, that the conspirators were less than twelve in number, were all 'very beggars' and so there was 'no likelihood of any commotion,' both dismissive and a significant underestimate of threat level.⁹⁷ The fact that the Duke of Suffolk headed the investigation, at the behest of the King, is further proof of concern. Alerting Lord Privy Seal Cromwell to the conspiracy, Townshend advised that on discovering that the conspirators had met under cover of a shooting match at Binham, he had promptly written to the Duke of Suffolk suggesting that he might station 'secret espials to prevent any enterprises that may be intended'.⁹⁸

A little later, in June, a despatch from Richard Southwell to Cromwell records an examination carried out by the same Townshend. The person examined was one Thomas Wright, a carpenter, of Houghton, near Walsingham. Wright had been carrying out the work of his master in asking one Thomas Westwood to come work for his master. Wright asked of the news at Norwich. Westwood said the wife of one of the Walsingham conspirators to be executed had fallen down in a swoon and remained on the ground for an hour. On Westwood expressing his view that execution was the man's just dessert, Wright retorted, 'they that did for the commonwealth were hanged up'.⁹⁹

On 12 May 1537, Elizabeth Wood, wife of Robert Wood of Aylsham, made known her disappointment at the failure of the abortive rebellion at Walsingham. In the shop of John Dix, tailor of Aylsham, Wood opined:

⁹⁷ TNA SP 1/119, f.51 (L.P. XII(1) 1063).

⁹⁸ TNA SP 1/119, f. 141. (LP XII(1) 1125).

⁹⁹ TNA SP 1/121, f. 18. (L.P. 12(2) 13).

It was pity that these Walsingham men were discovered, for we shall have never good world till we fall together by the ears; and with clubs and clouted shone shall the deed be done, for we had never good world since this King reigned. It is pity that he filed any clouts more than one.¹⁰⁰

Andy Wood, commenting on the words spoken by Elizabeth Wood, contends that Dix would have recognized the danger in the reported speech, ‘couched as it was in seditious prophecy and humorous proverb’.¹⁰¹ This led Dix to seek the counsel of his neighbour, Thomas Clomp. Dix followed Clomp’s advice and reported the matter to the town constable, Thomas Okyen, who referred the matter on to two of the chief men of the town. Ultimately, the matter ended with the magistrate, Sir James Boleyn, who examined the witnesses and sent all details on to Cromwell. The case of Elizabeth Wood is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, when considering the question of gender. What the case does is amply demonstrate that popular political speech was present and audible, and people recognized it when they heard it. Furthermore, such speech did involve women.

Sir Richard Southwell held the office of Justice of the Peace in Norfolk (1531-54).¹⁰² He was appointed receiver to the Court of Augmentations for Norfolk and Suffolk in April 1536 and served through to 1542. He was heavily involved in the surveying and subsequent suppression of religious houses in the period.¹⁰³ Sir Roger Townshend held

¹⁰⁰ TNA SP 1/120, f.224 (L.P. XII(1) 1301).

¹⁰¹ Andy Wood, “‘A lyttull worde ys tresson’: Loyalty, Denunciation, and Popular Politics in Tudor England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48:4 (2009), pp. 837-847.

¹⁰² Charles E. Moreton, *The Townshends and their world : gentry, law, and land in Norfolk c. 1450-1551* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰³ Southwell, Richard (1502/2-1564), *The History of Parliament*, ed. by S. T. Bindoff (Boydell and Brewer, 1982) <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/southwell-richard-15023-64>> [accessed 09 April 2025].

the office of Justice of the Peace in Norfolk for two spells (1501-13 and 1524 to his death in 1551). Townshend was also instrumental in the surveying and suppression of monasteries. Townshend was in regular correspondence with Cromwell.¹⁰⁴ He received a glowing reference from the Duke of Norfolk in 1538, 'Would that the King had three or four such as Mr. Townshend in every shire'.¹⁰⁵ After the Dissolution, Townshend acquired six manors and other land including the assets of several chantries and religious houses.¹⁰⁶ His acquisitions included a valuable cope and vestment offered to him by Prior Vowell at the dissolution of Walsingham.¹⁰⁷ It is clear that those involved in controlling views unfavourable to the government, for suppressing unrest, and for bringing to account the more dangerous agitators were highly connected and in favour with the highest in the land. Plebeian society voicing anti-government sentiment (popular political speech) was not to be tolerated, all devices were marshalled in its suppression, and time afforded to chasing down the main perpetrators. All this adds up to the government recognising its very existence, and the threat it posed.

Walsingham Priory was a thriving religious house. The Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1535 reported the priory having an annual income of £391 11s. 7/8d., with offerings made at the chapel of Our Lady £250 1s. On 18 September 1534, Richard Vowell, the prior, Edmund Warham, the sub-prior, and twenty of the canons signed in accordance with

¹⁰⁴ Townshend, Sir Roger (1478-1551), *The History of Parliament*, ed. by S. T. Bindoff (Boydell and Brewer, 1982) <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/townshend-sir-roger-1478-1551> [accessed 09 April 2025].

¹⁰⁵ TNA SP 1/137, f.129. (L.P. XIII(2) 554).

¹⁰⁶ Townshend, Sir Roger (1478-1551), *The History of Parliament*, ed. by S. T. Bindoff (Boydell and Brewer, 1982) <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/townshend-sir-roger-1478-1551> [accessed 09 April 2025].

¹⁰⁷ TNA SP 1/121, f.9 (L.P. XII(2) 9).

the Act of Supremacy, which defined the right of Henry VIII to be supreme head on earth of the Church of England.¹⁰⁸ As was common with all other religious houses across the land, such compliance ultimately went unrewarded. On 4 August 1538, Prior Vowell surrender the house, along with all possessions, to the royal commissioners.¹⁰⁹ Later that same year, Walsingham Friary was suppressed.¹¹⁰ It is difficult to draw any other conclusion than that the threat of and then the fall of the priory and the friary in Walsingham brought with it severe consequences in terms of trade for all those who benefited from the influx of pilgrims. One source has the population of Little Walsingham as being down by some twenty-five per cent by the end of the sixteenth century, compared to what it was on the eve of the suppression of the priory.¹¹¹

The Walsingham conspiracy was so termed because it never evolved into an actual rebellion. Roger Manning defended the appropriateness of his term ‘village revolts’ because they were contained within the confines of one or several local communities and were typically responses to alterations in land use.¹¹² The Walsingham conspirators resided in a small number of closely situated communities. Evidence points to discontent with local gentlemen, but no direct reference to contention over land usage was made in depositions, as recorded. What is remarkable about the conspiracy is the level of organisation. As discussed, part of the plan was to station a company at

¹⁰⁸ TNA (L.P. VII 1216).

¹⁰⁹ TNA (L.P. XIII(2) 31).

¹¹⁰ London, British Library, Cotton Otho E/X f.45 (L.P. XIII(1) 1453).

¹¹¹ J. Patten, ‘Population distribution in Norfolk and Suffolk during the 16th and 17th centuries’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 65 (1975), pp. 45-65 (p. 49). Cited in Moreton, ‘The Walsingham Conspiracy’, p. 41.

¹¹² Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: social protest and popular disturbances in England, 1509-1640* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.

Brandon ferry to prevent passage to and from London, and then ‘go to aid the Northern men’.¹¹³ Brandon ferry was a crossing point in the fenlands, making it a very strategic point. It was some distance from Walsingham, thus offering insight into the would-be rebels’ sense of space.

Manning highlights the case of the Enslow Hill rebellion of 1596, an ill organised and ‘abortive conspiracy’.¹¹⁴ In common with the Walsingham conspiracy, the Enslow Hill rebellion was marked by spoken threats of violence against the gentry, and it alarmed the government. Disturbance of the old order of things and the failure of Lord Norris, the lord lieutenant of Oxfordshire, to ‘exercise his paternal and magisterial responsibilities’ led to one of his own servants, Bartholomew Steere, planning an uprising.¹¹⁵ Steere, a carpenter, was said to have led a planned rebellion of ‘200 or 300 seditious people, from various towns of that shire’. Steere was imprisoned alongside his co-conspirator, Roger Ibill, a miller. All others involved were bound over to appear at the assizes. Depositions given by various people, along with Steere’s confession, evidenced a recruitment process that was aided by the mobility of the originators: namely, the millers Richard and James Bradshaw; also, weavers and cloth-workers from what was a centre of broadcloth manufacture. Steere played on popular dislike of the gentry, he anticipated the support of other servants of the gentry because he thought ‘they were kept like dogges’, and that the world ‘would never be well until the gentry were knocked down’.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, the conspirators were betrayed by Roger Symonds of Hampton

¹¹³ TNA SP 1/119, f.29 (LP XII(1) 1045).

¹¹⁴ Manning, *Village Revolts*, pp. 221-9.

¹¹⁵ TNA SP 12/261/10. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Elizabeth, 1595-1597* (M. A. E. Green) London, 1867, p. 316.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

Gay, a carpenter.¹¹⁷ Symonds claimed that his refusal to engage was based on him having ‘always lived like an honest man, and this was the way to undo himself and family’. Norris was ordered by the Queen’s Council to send Steere, Ibell and the Bradshaws up to London, under guard, ‘their hands pinioned, and their legs bound under their horses’ bellies’, allowed no conference on the way. There to be examined under torture.¹¹⁸ Ibell and the two Bradshaw brothers were hanged in June 1596. It is suspected that Steere died in prison, possibly from the effects of torture.¹¹⁹ At the trial of the Enslow Hill conspirators, the attorney-general, Sir Edward Coke, adopted a novel strategy in pursuing a charge of treason against the main conspirators. He charged them with taking upon themselves royal authority, usurping royal authority itself, by attempting a general reformation of enclosures, thus drawing a distinction between public and private protest. The defendants were accused of going from place to place and, in general terms and public manner, advocating the destruction of enclosures.¹²⁰ Manning argues that popular disorder in the 1590s led to the described Elizabethan extension of the doctrine of treason, just as the Tudor extension of treason to encompass words as well as actions was used to quell disquiet in securing compliance with the Henrician succession and settlement of religion. What is of interest to the historian is that this extension meant that, as Wood argues, the act of speech is every bit as significant as its content and became a source of suspicion. It was for this reason that Richard Fletcher, the keeper of the common gaol in Norwich, found himself in the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 344-5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 318.

¹¹⁹ Manning, *Village Revolts*, p. 227.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 227-8.

Tower in December 1536, interrogated on how and the extent to which ‘a seditious paper’ and its content was shared.

Once betrayed, the Walsingham conspirators were seized, and the matter was dealt with by high-ranking gentry and holders. Word of the conspiracy passed rapidly through the ranks up to Cromwell himself. The leaders of the conspiracy were interrogated, with Gysborough subject to two further interrogations at the house of Lord Privy Seal Cromwell in Stepney. The Duke of Suffolk headed the investigation into the case involving Richard Bishop of Bungay. The May Day play spoken of by Bishop prompted an alert to local justices of the peace; to ‘have regard to light persons, especially at games and plays’. What was the level and nature of suspicion surrounding this? Commenting on similar enactments at Furness Abbey in the aftermath of the Pilgrimage of Grace, Thornton suggests an alternative interpretation of prophecy: that it represented the language of the excluded and oppressed, incomprehensible to the elite. As such, it represented ‘some radical force as a way of envisioning or resisting change and therefore was treated seriously, even ruthlessly, by the authorities’.¹²¹

The authorities remained on high alert, as evidenced by another action taken by Sir Roger Townshend in January 1540. A woman of Wells, close by Walsingham, ‘had imagined a miracle wrought by the image of Our Lady at Walsingham since it was brought to London’, he reported to Cromwell. Townshend made it clear that he was having none of it:

¹²¹ Tim Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England* (Boydell & Brewer, 2006) p.36.

... set her in the stocks at Walsingham on the market day with a paper about her head, "a reporter of false tales," and then send her round the town in a cart, the young people and boys casting snowballs at her. "This was her penance, for I knew no law otherwise to punish her but by discretion."¹²²

Post-trial and execution, those found to be expressing sympathy for conspirator sentiments were ruthlessly dealt with. The Enslow Hill rebellion bore marked similarities in the way that it was motivated by disturbance of the old order of things and its resentment of and targeting of local gentry. Its prosecution drew on an extension of the doctrine of treason. In the case of the Walsingham conspiracy this extension meant that words spoken could be tracked down, laid out and used to hold the conspirators to account. In the case of Enslow Hill, the defendants were accused of going from place to place and, in general terms and public manner, advocating the destruction of enclosures. It is not difficult to imagine that the Walsingham conspirators possessed the capacity and wherewithal to have operated in just such a way. Walsingham was a hub, with its Priory a magnet at the centre, for all orders of society. It is well evidenced that pilgrims came from all over England. They would no doubt listen and converse on the road, and gather in marketplaces, inns and alehouses. They would return home and have asked of them 'What news?' State response to threat left its mark on the record, offering that privileged point of access for the historian. It offers an insight into popular political culture. The sort of culture that witnessed a band of Cornish soldiers, on pilgrimage to Walsingham, handed one copy of 'a seditious paper' in the Bell Inn, Lynn. This chapter, through consideration of the Walsingham case study, has drawn out a number of aspects that coloured popular political speech and activity in the locality. It

¹²² TNA SP 1/157, f.57 (L.P. XV 86).

has attempted to highlight the conditions under which information flow occurred. It is argued that such flow was just as important as content, plebeian criticism and action. No record exists of the content of the document recorded in State Papers as ‘a seditious paper’. Its passage, however, drew real cause for concern. Post-Pilgrimage of Grace, the government had those responsible for authority in the regions on high alert. They, in their turn, acted promptly and decisively. What was impossible to control was the flow of popular political sentiment that travelled outwards. The significance of Walsingham is that it was a place where people – the highest and the lowest in the land, from all corners of the land – journeyed to, returning home to be asked, ‘What news?’ This chapter – the case of Walsingham, in particular – highlights the need to understand popular political speech in terms of the places within which it was generated. Speech was inflected by a language of place, which is to say that popular political speech was not uniform. Rather, it was local and localized. It is argued that such an interpretation and its development through the chapters that follow - focusing on information flow - serves to make a significant contribution to the existing historiography. It is now time, then, to turn more specifically to the question of information flow, the transition of news, and the media through which it travelled: rumour, ballads, and political prophecy; conduits for the passage of popular political messaging.

Chapter Five: Rumour

Open your ears; for which of you will stop
The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?
I, from the orient to the drooping west,
Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold
The acts commenced on this ball of earth:
Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2, Prologue*.

I'm sailing off to Sparta, sandy Pylos too,
for news of my long-lost father's journey home.
Someone may tell me something
or I might catch a rumour straight from Zeus,
rumour that carries news to men like nothing else.

Telemachus in Homer: *The Odyssey*.¹

What is the nature of the border between truth and lies? It is permeable and blurred because it is planted thick with rumour, confabulation, misunderstandings and twisted tales. Truth can break the gates down, truth can howl in the street; unless truth is pleasing, personable and easy to like, she is condemned to stay whimpering at the back door.

Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*.²

This chapter of the thesis is the first of three chapters dealing with a discrete medium that served to amplify popular political voice in the study period. Try as it might, and it did, employing every tactic at their disposal, the government was simply unable to stop the passage of rumours, false, and not so false. In common with the core chapters of this thesis, a general analysis is undertaken, and then a linked, deeply contextualised

¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Eagles (Penguin, USA, 1997), 2. 238-42, p. 100.

² Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, p. 190.

case study, that of the Lincolnshire town of Louth, is made. The novelty of this approach lies in the discussion of and reflection on applicable insights drawn from a range of comparative studies and cross-disciplinary efforts. Rumour was often the only, or at least the first, source of news available. It drew reactions that speak of a lively popular political culture, commenting on and often protesting government action of the time. A further, significant, contribution is made by illuminating the impact the freedom of rumour flow had on the range and content of popular political speech; both more generally and, more specifically, in the place, Louth.

Uncontrolled and uncontrollable - a general analysis

On 25 June 1536, William Stevens wrote to John Sturgeon sharing with him news of the controversial Bishop of Worcester, Hugh Latimer, and what was alleged of him in a sermon he had preached at St. Paul's Cross on the 17th of the same month.³ It was alleged that the 'author of the rumour' was the parson of Harvelingham, William Blagges. Blagges had claimed that he had heard Latimer recant his proclamations of late.⁴ On being challenged, Blagges is said to have backtracked, confessing that he was stood so far off that he could not even hear what the Bishop said. This 'imp of Antichrist' was told that he was 'a naughty shameless fellow thus to spread abroad such abominable lies, and such as he caused sedition among the people to the hindrance of God's word'. It was suggested that Blagges was but a puppet, and the puppet master

³ TNA SP 1/104, f.202 (L.P. X 1201).

⁴ For detail on the content of Latimer's sermons, delivered along with a number of other sermons containing challenging messages presented at St Paul's Cross see, Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation*, p. 130-6.

was known, 'for these petty thieves are sent out by the great papistical murderers both of soul and body'. Yet, he must be punished for if not 'the people will believe he spoke the truth'.

On 9th June, Latimer had been appointed by Cranmer to preach before Convocation. His remit was to reassert the royal supremacy. His zealousness made him many enemies.⁵ Latimer was a pioneer of the reform movement and its leading preaching bishop. His sermon condemning traditionalist clergy had been promptly printed in both its original Latin and in English.⁶ Cranmer's two-part sermon articulated Cromwell and Cranmer's reform agenda, exhorting the clergy to make changes to a religious system the most part of them wanted to preserve.⁷ Convocation had been told that the Supreme Head of the English Church should have the chief place in Convocation. Not that the King himself wished to be present, rather that Cromwell, his vicegerent and vicar-general in spiritual causes, should be present in his stead. Cromwell was present on 21 June when Cranmer announced the nullity of Henry's marriage with Anne.⁸ There had been a changing of the guard and anyone contesting the newly dictated course of action was to be balked. More than that, anyone acting in a way that threatened to compromise the truth as understood by 'the people' was to be checked. Blagge's talk was viewed as dangerous as it could lead to 'sedition among the people'. The case of William Blagges

⁵ Sermons by Hugh Latimer, sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555. Edited for the Parker Society., written by Hugh Latimer, 1485-1555; edited by George Elwes Corrie (Cambridge University Press, 1844), p. 12.

⁶ Matthew W. Irvin, "'A Confidence as Bold': The Rhetorical Construction of Evangelical Authority in Hugh Latimer's 'Sermon of the Plough'", *Rhetorica*, 40:3 (2022), pp. 256-296, doi:10.1353/rht.2022.0021

⁷ Michael Pasquarello, *God's ploughman, hugh latimer: A "preaching life" (1490-1555)* (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of North Carolina, 2002) 30, p. 75 <[God's ploughman, Hugh Latimer: A "preaching life" \(1490-1555\) - ProQuest](#)> [accessed 09 April 2025].

⁸ Stanford E. Lehmberg, *The Later Parliaments of Henry VIII, 1536-1547* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 37.

highlights the fact that the government absolutely appreciated the danger inherent in rumour flow, true or false. If it was believed to be true when it reached the ears of the common man, then fear of popular reaction drove government response.

In his essay on popular religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace, Cliff Davies recognised the significance of rumour circulation at the time of the rebellion. He qualified this, making the observation that if rumours are to result in action, they need to be related, ‘in however distorted a form, to the experience of their audience’.⁹ Davies argued that the ‘seed-bed’ of the rumours triggered in 1536 was ‘the sheer state of crisis produced by the action of Tudor government at its most revolutionary’, and then listed a range of causal conditions: economic distress due to recent bad harvest (1535-6); the levy of peacetime taxation (1535-6); the attack on traditional land-owning practices (February – April 1536); the visitation of the monasteries (June 1535 – February 1536); the suppression of the smaller monasteries; the apparent threat to traditional religious practices in the Ten Articles (July 1536); Cromwell’s injunctions (August 1536); and the suppression of most saints’ days (August 1536).¹⁰ The Dodds sisters, authors of the first, and impressively complete, history of the Pilgrimage of Grace, too, made a telling point about rumour circulation. They suggest that in the face of the acts passed, a certain undeniability ‘gave colour to the rest’: ‘When the King was actively engaged in robbing a church, what hope was there that he would spare his subjects?’¹¹ The receivers of rumour (audience) at the time were indeed experiencing much at the hands of the Tudor government that impacted their lived experience.

⁹ Davies, ‘Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace’, pp. 58-91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹ Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp. 76-7.

Carla Roth suggests that because the obtaining of reliable current news in 1530s St Gall, Switzerland, was so difficult, St Gallers - the educated and town officials included - relied upon their personal networks and oral sources of news. This meant that even rumour was not simply a poor alternative to 'official' sources of news, or the 'black market' of news. It was often the only, or at least the first, source of news available.¹² Tim Harris contends that by looking at the reactions that rumours provoked we can 'catch a glimpse of what was indeed a vibrant but also contested popular political culture in England at the time of the Henrician Reformation'.¹³ Andy Wood argues that it was necessary for the government of the time to be 'attuned to the censored speech of the lower orders'.¹⁴ Wood's essay on the politics of speech highlights just how this necessity gives the lie to contemporary commentators who refused to acknowledge the existence of popular politics. Further, and to elite histories that represented the lower orders as being 'not only stupid, barbarous and levelling', but that they were also prone to revolt. These histories recalled the events of 1381 or 1450 in 'auditory terms' as 'The Noise: *rumor, rumor magna, rumor pessima*'.¹⁵ Wood finds that accounts of the events of 1536 and 1549 served to bolster the genre: 'commotion meant rebellion, and rumour implied sedition'. Michael Bush, too, identified continuity in the Wat Tyler led Peasants' Revolt of 1381, Jack Cade's uprising of 1450, through to rebellion in Lincolnshire and the north in 1536, extending this to Norfolk and Cornwall in 1549. Bush referred to a

¹² Carla Roth, *The Talk of the Town: Information and Community in Sixteenth Century Switzerland* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 111.

¹³ Tim Harris, *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500 – 1850*, ed. by Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 10.

¹⁴ Andy Wood, 'Poore men woll speke one daye', pp. 67-98.

¹⁵ Wood cites Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 208.

genre of protest, in which each rebellion took the form of an army acting in the name and interests of the commons. He argued that in each case the aim was to intervene - 'a topsy turvy means of action' – in order to redress the power balance within the body politic as the designated ruling element were falling short and proving unable to do so themselves.¹⁶

As stated in the section of this thesis dealing with the evolution of treason law (see Chapter One), the 1534 Treasons Act brought the utterance of seditious words under the law. Those charged with the spreading of malicious rumours or prophecies were subject to trial by common law under commissions of *oyer* and *terminer*, or, during emergencies, by summary execution under martial law.¹⁷ Potentially, this made 'a mere passing comment punishable by death'.¹⁸ This enactment eased efforts made to suppress political discussion or criticism of the government, it not requiring the more exhaustive burden of proving constructive treason. Seditious words came to be interpreted as words that fell short of treason and did not directly involve violence, although they could lead to it.¹⁹ Despite this, Shagan argues, and regardless of people's individual beliefs, 'rumours were a medium through which communities monitored their own vital signs, canvassing beliefs and reactions and testing the boundaries of the sayable', and these rumours could be seen as evidence of 'a massive undercurrent of antipathy towards government innovations'.²⁰ Through engaging with this flux, thus recognising

¹⁶ Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ Manning, 'The Origins of the Doctrine of Sedition', p. 100.

¹⁸ Everett, *The Rise of Thomas Cromwell*, p. 244.

¹⁹ Manning, 'The Origins of the Doctrine of Sedition', p. 101.

²⁰ Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', p. 31.

the ‘noise’, the King’s men left its traces in the documentary evidence available for the period.

In addressing what they see as a methodological problem that historians typically face in dealing with the study of rumour, Coast and Fox warn that official documents record plebeian voices through the filter of elite sources.²¹ Further, they advise that they only tend to account for the most extreme and dangerous words uttered by ordinary people.²² It is the finding of this study that those accounts that were recorded, often many-layered, do offer rich pickings. Recorded by the elites they may be, but they were recorded because the government felt threatened by the magnitude of rumour flow and by its content. They speak of a public debate that was very real across the period of focus that is the subject of this thesis. As is the case for ballads (Chapter Six) and political prophecy (Chapter Seven), a close analysis of rumours afloat in the period, moving beyond content to their very transmission, and then the reactions they produced, serves to deepen understanding of popular politics in 1530s England.

Given that the 1534 Treason Act included the imagining or desiring *by words* any bodily harm to the king, it was a dangerous thing indeed to speak of his very end. Yet, prophecies of the death of Henry VIII were circulating at least a decade before he died (see Chapter Seven), and rumours of his death appeared at the same time. In the winter of 1537-8 such rumours circulated far and wide. In Northamptonshire, December 1537,

²¹ David Coast and Jo Fox, ‘Rumours and Politics’, *History Compass*, 13:5 (2015), pp. 222-234 (p. 223), doi: 10.1111/hic3.12234

²² Adam Fox, ‘Rumour, News and Popular Opinion in Early Stuart and Elizabethan England’, *The Historical Journal*, 40:3 (1997), pp. 597-620.

a husbandman by the name of John Petyfer was named as the source of a rumour reporting that both the King *and* the Prince were dead.²³ On examination, Petyfer deposed that he and another man had ridden into Leicestershire to seek the advice of a ‘wise man’. After speaking to him they headed home, stopping at Lutterworth, at the house of a wheelwright, where one Harryson, of Lutterworth, harper, asked, ‘What news hear you?’ Petyfer said he had none, at which point Harryson offered the news that it was rumoured the King and Prince were both dead. Petyfer said that he heard the same from one Thomas Payne of Theddingworth who insisted it was true as he had heard it from a clergyman. Petyfer’s deposition closes with him stating that on returning home he told his wife and, two days later, told one Thomas Bryde, ‘who told it to other people’. In the same month of 1537, in Oxfordshire, one John Creke, former servant of a local gentleman, was heard to say the King is dead. He was imprisoned.²⁴ Again, December 1537, John Tregonwell, writing from Oxford, to Cromwell, reported that it was being said there that the King was dead. The source of this rumour was a letter from one of the Court, no less, to the abbot of Reading, who sent it on to the abbot of Abingdon.²⁵ The same month, one William Edmonds, of Reading, was held to have been ‘the beginner of the said seditious tales’: the said tale being of the death of the King. Edmonds was ‘set upon the pillory, his ears cut off from his head, and afterwards whipped naked’.²⁶ Again, in Reading, an investigation carried out, and then reported to Cromwell, ended with three persons committed to Reading gaol.²⁷ What marks this case, as recorded in State Papers, is the thoroughness of the investigators and their

²³ TNA SP 1/127, f. 48 (L.P. XII(2) 1208).

²⁴ TNA SP 1/127, f. 66 (L.P. XII(2) 1220).

²⁵ TNA SP 1/127, f. 99 (L.P. XII(2) 1252).

²⁶ TNA SP 1/127, f. 134 (L.P. XII(2) 1298).

²⁷ TNA SP 1/127, f. 101 (L.P. XII(2) 1256).

chosen methods, making sure to have ‘punished some as the King prescribed, as a warning to others’. On Our Lady Day, 8th December, George Barton, parson, was heard to have shared the rumour that the King was dead. Barton, along with a local weaver and a servant of the abbot of Reading, was examined on 18th December. Two other persons were examined the following day, followed by a further ten at nearby Newbury on 21st December. The investigators, working under the King’s commission, were still not content as they had ‘learned that the matter may be better set forth by one Thomas Baron, as appears by the depositions of Thomas Hynd’, and so had issued orders for his arrest. The communication to Cromwell is then explicit on details of punishment meted upon one individual, Edward Lyttleworke, fuller, for spreading the rumour. He was:

set on the pillory there one ower in the myddest of the market day, his yaers fast nayled, and after to be cut of by the hard hed, and then he to be tyed to a cartys ayrse, and to be strypped naked to the wast of his body, and so to be whypped round aboute the towne; whyche was don on fryday in the myddest of the market then holden at Wallyngford afforeseyd; and from thens the same day the said Edward was delivered to the mayre and officers of Redyng, and ther on Saturday, being market day ther, he was sett on the pyllory by one ower space and then and there whypped round about the same towne, as he was at Wallyngford aforseyd; and at Redyng he remaynyth in gayle styll untyll the Kyng's pleasure be further therein declared.²⁸

This account resonates with Garthine Walker’s comment on the heavy cost of being found guilty of verbal misconduct, that the gravity of such crime was reflected in the punishment meted out:

ears were nailed to the pillory and ripped, cropped, or chopped off, nostrils were slit, the tongue bored through with a hot iron, cheeks or forehead

²⁸ TNA SP 1/127, f. 101 (L.P. XII(2) 1256).

branded with appropriate letters (such as 'F' and 'A' for 'false accuser', 'B' for 'blasphemer').²⁹

The hunting down of 'seditious tales' announcing the death of the King continued into the following year. Headed in State Papers as 'Evil Speaking of the King', one entry evidenced circulation of political prophecy and resultant rumour in June 1538.³⁰ The prophecy was that made by Mabel Brigge, earlier the same year.³¹ Brigge, of Holderness, Yorkshire, had carried out a fast one Friday, through to the Sunday, after mass. She claimed it to be a 'charitable fast', that she 'had never so fasted before but once for a man and he had brake his neck', and so 'she trusted that they should do that had made all this business and that was the King and this false Duke [Norfolk]'. Brigge had been hired to carry out the fast by another woman, Isabel Bukke. The lord President and Council at Newcastle dispatched Sir Ralph Ellerker the younger to investigate. Ellerker examined seven individuals in all. All except one of them were taken to York, kept in separate prisons, and then examined again. In June, William Wood of Bransdale in Kirby Moorside made a deposition in which he recalled a conversation between the parish priest, Robert Keriby and his parish clerk, Robert Lyon. Lyon is reported to have said, 'I can tell you other news. The woman's [Mabel Brigge] prayer that was put to death at York hath light of one of them that we were talking upon the last week, for the King is dead.'³² The priest, Keriby, responded, 'vengeance must needs light upon him because he hath put so many men wrongfully to death'.

²⁹ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 100.

³⁰ TNA SP 1/133, f. 241 (L.P. XIII(1) 1282).

³¹ TNA SP 1/138, f. 24 (L.P. XIII(1) 487).

³² TNA SP 1/133, f. 241 (L.P. XIII(1) 1282).

One rumour reported to Cromwell brought the issue of taxation and the King's death together. The account of its investigation, as recorded in State Papers, is typical in the way it describes a determination 'to find the first author'.³³ It involved Thomas Graunte, a fisherman from Wingham, Kent. George Buck, clerk of Wingham, deposed that he had heard Graunte in front of Thomas King's house announcing that 'the King was departed out of the world'. King's wife, Agnes, had warned him to beware of speaking such words. Graunte replied that 'he durst be bold to speak it, for he heard it of honest men in this country'. On examination, after first denying it, Graunte admitted that on returning from Dover he met a merchant on Barham Down who asked him 'What tidings of the King's money?'. On replying that it [tax] had been paid, the man shared news of the King being dead. In her deposition, Agnes King tied the two together, claiming that Graunte came to her door to sell fish, and told her he thought they should have their money again, for he had heard the King 'should be dead, as God forbid it should.' She had said, 'Take heed what you say, I will advise you, for if it were so all the realm should repent it'. And then he said, 'I fear me it is too true, for I heard honest men say so'. The entry then details a catalogue of exchanges involving passage of the rumour of the king's death, with those involved named, where they had heard it, and from whom. This included one advice, 'Be not too hasty to pay your money, for the King is dead'.

The propensity for rumour to agitate and create a climate that challenged rulers, and left situations open to interpretation by the ruled, was certainly nothing new. John Hunt argues that in early modern Rome the best way of keeping abreast of the pope's health

³³ TNA SP 1/128, f. 65 (L.P. XIII(1) 76).

was by rumour.³⁴ Romans anticipated the freedom of *sede vacante*, the period between the pope's death and the election of his predecessor, for a variety of reasons. The suspension of papal law during the vacancy created a window for unlawful actions. In this context, 'misinformation reigned supreme as rumours, half-truths, and outright lies played on the populace's hopes and fears'.³⁵ Traditionally, this state of flux inspired one particularly irreverent act, the pillaging of the dead pontiff's household possessions by his papal servants. In 1571, Pius V addressed this by enacting the constitution *Contra scribentes, exemplantes et dictantes monita vulgo dicta gli avvisi e ritorni*, which banned writings that defamed pope and other significant officials or that spread rumours or predictions of the pope's death. This led to the arrest and hanging of some, but news continued to spread among the people for the Pope could not stop his people talking, and news was best spread in Rome through oral channels. Hunt concludes that the power of rumour is evident in the fear it triggered in papal authorities, despite their best efforts to stem the spread of reports of the pope's state of health and death. A letter written by Caelius to Cicero in May 51 BC also offers evidence of Ancient Roman recognition of rumour as a force. Journeying to take up the governorship of Cilicia, Caelius had kept his ear to the ground, collecting rumours about setbacks suffered by Caesar in Gaul, 'frequent and not pretty, but only of the whispering sort, and even these uncertain reports are not bandied about in public, but are retailed among a small group (you know who I mean) as an open secret'.³⁶

³⁴ John M. Hunt, 'Rumour, Newsletters, and the Pope's Death in Early Modern Rome' in *News in early modern Europe: currents and connections*, ed. by Simon F. Davies and Puck Fletcher (Brill, 2014), pp. 143-58.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁶ Cited in Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 243.

In Rome, ears pricked up at rumour of the demise of those popes, such as Paul IV, Sixtus V, and Urban VIII, who imposed excessive taxes or ruled severely.³⁷ In early modern England, taxes enacted by parliament were granted only for the use of a given monarch and became void when that monarch died.³⁸ It is the awareness of this fact, economic understanding of the king's death – 'political consciousness' - that helps explain the abundance of a certain turn on rumour in the winter of 1537-8, for oppressive taxation had characterised Henry VIII's reign. Michael Bush highlighted the significance of rumour concerning indirect taxes and how such taxes could incite revolt. The fear of what he termed 'enhancements', such as taxes on livestock, sacraments (on baptisms, burials and marriages) and food, would, he said, have swept away the protection offered by the subsidy's high threshold and low rate of assessment. Such a move, if true, would have enabled the government 'to tax the poorer element, with unprecedented severity'.³⁹

In January 1537, Richard Birch of Southwark, glover, travelling on a boat from London to Greenwich, was reported to have said that 'the King and his Council had sent proclamations to the North that no children should be christened unless there were a tribute paid to the King, and many children were unchristened for a fortnight or three weeks because their fathers and mothers were not able to pay'.⁴⁰ One year on, in January 1538, Brian Woodcock, a Yorkshire husbandman, coming from Malton market,

³⁷ Hunt, 'Rumour, Newsletters, and the Pope's Death', p. 157.

³⁸ Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', pp. 30-66.

³⁹ Michael Bush, 'Tax Reform and Rebellion in Early Tudor England', *History* 76:248 (1991), pp. 379-400.

⁴⁰ TNA SP 1/114, f. 73 (L.P. XII(1) 62).

told two fellow travellers that the earl of Westmoreland had promised the King to gather ‘plough nobles and poll groats’ in all his lands for the King. Woodcock went further, adding that, ‘this would make more business, for where one rose before three would rise now’.⁴¹ Woodcock found himself before the Council at York, where the depositions of the two travellers, Richard Mallome and John Boys, were heard. Clearly, such rumours were causing great concern, the threat of additional tax burdens was a popular political issue. It was being talked about, and anti-government sentiment prevailed.

In August 1538, Norfolk alerted Suffolk to news he had heard of a rumour that had been circulating in their absence, in London.⁴² It was to do with the marking of cattle and it came with a particularly vivid description of ‘one of the raisers of the bruit’: ‘a gentleman wearing a green coat with 2 small gards of green velvet, with a beard more red than yellow, and a horn about his neck’. He rode a ‘fair white gelding’. This account in State Papers is made all the more distinctive for the fact that it finishes: ‘Written upon a molehill in Rysing Chase, 8 Aug., 11 o’clock’! That said, it is the content indicating the transfer of information that is of interest here, that it offered the message import and so triggered its sending. The subject of the ‘bruit’, the exotic gentleman, was moving around the countryside claiming to be the King’s servant, ‘and had commission to take up all cattle that were not marked’. Afterwards he had rode on to Washside, and ‘it is said’, into Lincolnshire. The matter of this rumour reached the ears of Thomas Cromwell. His correspondence with Norfolk is telling of the significance attached to such matters by the state:

⁴¹ TNA SP 1/128, f. 124 (L.P. XIII(2) 413).

⁴² TNA SP 1/144, f. 93 (L.P. XIV(1) 507).

Your Grace [for the King was also aware] knoweth how the spreading of such a bruit in your own country and in your absence from hence might by some suspicious disposition be sinisterly glosed and interpreted.⁴³

Notable, here, is the clearly expressed thinking of Cromwell that the presence of such rumour was one thing, its reception, interpretation, and employment, quite another. What is more, the rumour was running free, Norfolk admits as much, reporting that when he had asked Sir Roger Townshend, his cousin, Edmund Wyndham, and the Sheriff, what they had done, he was told, ‘the words were so universal they could not find the authors’. Norfolk reported that he had received word from Suffolk that one of the rumour spreaders had been taken in Lincolnshire. The man taken claimed that he had heard the rumour from two men in Walsingham. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is no real surprise that such a rumour might have circulated in a place such as Walsingham and found its way elsewhere. The communication between Norfolk and Cromwell is also telling in the way that Norfolk is clearly rattled by knowing the King is aware that this is happening on Norfolk’s patch. He pleads with Cromwell that ‘Then [once he was made aware] and since he has daily found fault with the gentlemen for not trying out the matter’. He felt the need to provide Cromwell with evidence of his expedition of the matter, including a copy of his letter to Suffolk, and ‘Begs him to show the King of it’.

The following month, September 1538, one Lewis Herbert was journeying from London back to his home in Wales. He lodged in Pucklechurch, Gloucestershire, five miles from

⁴³ TNA SP 1/144, f. 135 (L.P. XIV(1) 553).

Bristol, at an inn called the sign of the George.⁴⁴ At supper, in the company of two other men, Herbert was asked, 'What news of London?' He spoke of 'a cry at the Cross in Cheapside on the previous Friday'. He heard that 'no unlawful games should be used, and that angel nobles should go for 8s. and cross groats for 5d. apiece [that is, be devalued]'. Also, 'that all burials, christenings, marriages, and ordinations of priests should henceforth be registered in books and perhaps pay tribute to the King'. Herbert added that he had also been at the sign of the Lambe at Abingdon, Berkshire, where he heard it rumoured that 'tribute should be paid for christening, burying, and wedding'. The matter found its way to Sir Walter Denys who reported his investigation to Cromwell, having drawn confession from Herbert. Herbert's two companions at supper confirmed the content of his confession, adding that he had also said that 'no pig, goose, or capon should be eaten without tribute paid to the King'. The record in State Papers states that this is something Herbert 'utterly denies'.

In March of the following year, 1539, William Hole, blacksmith of Horsham in Sussex, is reported to have rumoured that 'a commission had come down for the King to have 15 d. for every wedding, christening, and burial, and the lord of the franchise as much'. Hole denied it, stating that a man of Okewood, whom he does not know, spoke the words.⁴⁵ The man, Robert Wright, was tracked down, examined, and challenged with having said to Hole that 'the King would have 3s. 2d. of every burial and christening'. The witness was one Margaret Ede, who also reported that she thought she had heard the priest say so from the pulpit at Okeley church on Shrove Sunday.⁴⁶ So many

⁴⁴ TNA SP 1/136, f. 226 (L.P. XIII(2) 413).

⁴⁵ TNA SP 1/144, f. 91 (L.P. XIV(1) 507).

⁴⁶ TNA SP 1/144, f. 135 (L.P. XIV(1) 553).

instances, commonly sketchy, etched with uncertainty as to the originating source, and commonly denied along the line. The government had its work cut out chasing down words that it absolutely saw as threatening. They were viewed as threatening because, as has been seen, rumours often took on a life of their own. Whether or not a rumour was true, it had the potential to stir unrest. Worse, rumours were uncontrolled and uncontrollable. Commenting on the elusiveness of rumour, it being essentially an oral medium, Penny Roberts argues:

The principal difficulty for the historian is that rumour can only ever be approached through a distant echo or a single 'snapshot', written down and interpreted by a member of the elite in his journal or memoirs, or filtered through official reports to higher authorities in order to justify actions taken.⁴⁷

This thesis favours John Arnold's advocacy of the approach of a physicist, in studying a concept: the passage of rumour leaves something of its trace.⁴⁸ This study finds that the accounts on record, often multi-layered, offer a bigger picture, and speak to the argument that the State feared their content. More, it recognised the potential for rumour reception and interpretation leading to action, hence the attention given to transmission and origin. It was a political matter.

For example, a further snapshot, in State Papers, under the heading 'Rumoured Taxation' might indeed be brief (9 lines in State Papers), but it, too, says more. One of the constables of Boston, Lincolnshire, provided two justices of the peace, in Holland, Lincolnshire with information that 'Sir Andrew Hedlay, priest of Boston, told him that

⁴⁷ Penny Roberts, 'Arson, conspiracy and rumour in early modern Europe', *Continuity and Change* 12:1 (1997), pp. 9-29 (p. 10), doi: 10.1017/S0268416097002804

⁴⁸ John H. Arnold, *Belief and unbelief in medieval Europe* (Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 1.

one Nicholas Smyth, weaver of Boston, had told him that one Rabdyke of Boston, mariner, brought news to the town that he heard say at Louth that the King should have the tenth penny of every man's goods within this realm'. Smyth claimed that Rabdyke told him at his shop window, his statement confirmed by his 14-year-old servant, Agnes Whetley.⁴⁹ Smyth was examined by the constable and then further examined by the two justices of the peace, in Holland, Lincolnshire. The conversation that took place was between a weaver and a mariner. The conversation was about taxation. The weaver claimed that it took place at his own shop window. The rumour spreader, the mariner, had heard it himself at Louth. Although no documentary evidence exists to suggest so, it is highly unlikely that the weaver did not share this news (rumour) with other visitors to his place of work. The same probably applied to the mariner as he went about his work. Reporting and then investigation of the case involved a local priest, constable, and then the matter was taken to two justices of the peace, where requisite punishment was likely meted out (not recorded here). A witness was sought and found to corroborate the statement provided.

The danger of speaking freely about such matters, whether at home or no, had to be recognised, and yet, whether through ignorance or defiance Peter Bentley, parson of Colmere, Hampshire, was not having it. Bentley, an 'undiscrete [*sic*] priest' was held in Winchester gaol, accused of 'evil words spoken against the King', with Lord Sandys writing to Cromwell himself, sending depositions taken, seeking his advice on dealing with the matter. Bentley had challenged the authority of the King. Presented with a

⁴⁹ TNA SP 1/159, f. 128 (L.P. XV 592).

document issued under ‘the King’s broad seal’ by one John More, priest, Bentley announced: ‘Hold thy peace man, I set not by this seal nor by him, twysh! not this much (making a fillip with his two fingers) for I trust to see the day that all this shall be turned ups and down. A man may say what he will in his own house.’⁵⁰ Evidently not, for his fellow man of the cloth, More, felt obliged to report his words to authority. In his eagerness, More was moved to report a further exchange that took place when they were ‘drinking at Priorsdenne’. More claimed that when the conversation turned to the matter of ‘obedience to our God and our Prince’, he said, ‘I will prove that he is a spiritual man and Supreme Head of the Church’. At which point Bentley got up and walked away, saying, ‘If ye mell with that matter, God be with you’. This case and many others recorded in State Papers point to the fact that such talk was likely to be reported, triggering an investigation that evidently did not limit itself to first hearing or sayer.

As stated in Chapter One, it is argued by this thesis that comparative studies, telling of different contexts and, where relevant, different periods, may legitimately be used to further understanding of and aid in interpreting happenings in the period of this thesis study. This approach is particularly useful where consideration of rumour is concerned. Penny Roberts, writing on the *Grand Feu* in Troyes of 1524, makes the point that the most prevalent form of rumour in this period in France related to proposed rises in prices or taxation.⁵¹ As a result, for the authorities, the word *rumour* itself came to imply murmurings of discontent. Furthermore, rumour was a powerful medium in a society in which communications were slow, and information was difficult to verify. If rumours

⁵⁰ TNA SP 1/133, f. 1 (L.P. XIII(1) 1141).

⁵¹ Penny Roberts, ‘Arson, conspiracy and rumour in early modern Europe’.

were credible because they matched existing perceptions or expectations, they initiated strong feeling because they corresponded with people's hopes and fears, whether long- or short-term. The philosopher and sociologist of the theory of information, Edgar Morin, carried out an 'on-the-spot investigation' into a rumour of vanishing women that shook the town of Orléans in May 1969. The rumour prevailed even though not one disappearance was reported to the police. Thousands of Orléans' citizens held the belief that a white slave traffic was being run in the town, in the fitting rooms of six dress shops, all Jewish. In a modern town, in the age of mass media, with no word of it in the press, nor did it feature on the radio or television.⁵² Due to the immediacy of their action, Morin and his team were able to 'follow the entire life-cycle of a rumour, from its germination to its ultimate breakdown'.⁵³ Morin highlighted the pertinency of the question: 'Why should one rumour, among so many other similar ones, develop to such an extent at Orléans in particular?'⁵⁴ Moran and his team tracked the rumour from 'incubation' to 'metastasis', the in-between stage being 'propagation'. They found the prime centre of propagation to be the main marketplace in the centre of town, 'a formidable echo chamber'.⁵⁵ It became 'an information centre from which gossip spread to every part of the social and economic horizon'. Morin identified a particular day, Saturday 24 May, the day before Whitsun: 'all the shopping expeditions and encounters that went on at this point must undoubtedly have hastened the diffusion of the virus throughout every level of society'.⁵⁶ As discussed in the previous

⁵² Edgar Morin, *Rumour in Orléans: Jews accused of white slaving: a modern myth examined* (London, 1971).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

chapter, the importance of the marketplace in 1530s England as a place of confluence cannot be understated: a prime centre of rumour propagation, an efficient echo chamber, and an information centre, indeed.

Arlette Farge and Jaques Revel made similar observations in their historical study of the power of rumour, *The Vanishing Children of Paris*.⁵⁷ When, in the spring of 1750, children began to disappear from the streets of Paris, rumours spread that the police were kidnapping the children of poor people to populate the colonies. This atmosphere of fear and suspicion resulted in two days of riots in different parts of the city, and the lynching and murder of an alleged abductor, Labbé. Farge and Revel looked in detail at a particular episode of the uprising, one that took place on 23 May, the chasing down and murder of Labbé. The scene was the Quinze-Vingts market square, where ‘the whisper ran from stall to stall... where it was magnified like an echo chamber’.⁵⁸ The scene switched from the market square to the building where Labbé holed up, one that comprised five storeys and was home for seventy households. ‘The enforced propinquity... meant that every word spoken was swept up in the current of gossip flowing uninterrupted along the stairways’.⁵⁹ Labbé had become ‘a scapegoat on whom to settle old scores against a brutal and corrupt police force’. Farge and Revel conclude ultimately that, ‘It only takes an atmosphere of fear to prevail, or an accidental rupture of surface equanimity and these divisions become patently obvious.’ Arlette Farge’s inquiry into ‘popular public opinion’ in eighteenth-century

⁵⁷ Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

France is built on the premise that there is a gap between the way society functions and reality itself. She stresses the need to construct history with reference to the actors in society, their 'strategies, words, deeds, and under the counter dealings'. Farge highlights the 'flagrant contradiction' between what ordinary people said in her period and place of study, having no existence or status, while at the same time being tracked and repressed by a government that denied its existence.⁶⁰ Such acts of repression in the 1530s opened up opportunities for listening to the voices of ordinary people. Transcripts of offensive speech allegedly made against the King and/or government, along with depositions taken from witnesses in judicial proceedings were recorded in detail. The wealth and detail of materials now preserved in the State Papers owe much to Cromwell's attempts in the 1530s to enforce compliance with the new religion.⁶¹ The outcome was that reported cases and resultant investigations succeeded in capturing popular political thought in the period, as voiced through individuals involved in a myriad of cases. The chapter now turns to a very significant and specific case involving a whole community that reacted in a way that took protest beyond the utterance of words.

Louth: a conspicuous investment - a case study

This part of the chapter on rumour makes a case study of Louth, Lincolnshire, and a particularly pervasive rumour that spoke of the stripping of church assets, one that was potent enough to help trigger an uprising. This case study adds depth to the field of

⁶⁰ Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France* (Polity, 1994).

⁶¹ Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, p. 338.

historiography that places Louth as a key site in the initiation of what came to be known as the Lincolnshire rising. It does so by looking to understand Louth as a place where members of common society played their part in what amounted to considerable investment in the town's spiritual and material wealth. Seen in this way, the impact of rumour speaking of a threat to that wealth might be interpreted in a new light, adding weight to its significance. It is important that the context of the place is examined and understood in depth if a wider interpretation of popular political voice is to be secured. Popular political speech was a language of place and it will be seen that Louth was a place where a number of politically motivated government activities drew a very definite response.

It was at Louth that the first rebel manifesto was composed and dispatched to the King. It was at the market stead of Louth that the Bishop of Lincoln's registers and other books were burned.⁶² It was the rebels of Louth who dared to seize those charged by the King's First Minister with suppressing the nearby Legbourne Priory; putting two of Cromwell's chief officers in the stocks, with 'great violence'.⁶³ It was the people of Louth who declared that 'they would pay no more silver', a direct complaint against royal taxation.⁶⁴ Ultimately, such actions drew a spiky response from the King:

'How presumptions then are ye, the rude commons of one shire, and that one of the most brute and beastly of the whole realm and of least experience, to find fault with your prince... We pray God give you grace to do your duties and rather deliver to our lieutenant 100 persons than by your obstinacy endanger yourselves, your wives, children, lands, goods, and chattels, besides the indignation of God.'⁶⁵

⁶² TNA (L.P. XI. 585).

⁶³ TNA SP 1/109, f. 75 (L.P. XI. 854).

⁶⁴ TNA SP 1/106, f. 248 (L.P. XI. 533).

⁶⁵ TNA (L.P. XI. 780).

The King got his 100 persons. Of the 100 Lincolnshire men indicted, tried, and executed on 6 March 1537 the greater majority were urban tradesmen. Twenty five of the 100 men were from Louth.⁶⁶ The group of executed Louth men was made up of 3 butchers, 1 cooper, 4 labourers, 2 plumbers, 2 sawyers, 5 shoemakers, 1 smith, 1 tailor, 1 thatcher, 1 weaver, 1 yeoman, and 3 clergy.⁶⁷

The townsfolk of Louth invested heavily in their prime site of worship, St James's church. Louth churchwardens' accounts expose the degree of commitment to this. 'The First Churchwarden's Book of Louth' offers an invaluable window into the details. The accounts contained therein form a record of receipts and expenses at the church from 1500-1524. John Caywood (d. 1529), priest, scribe, organist and composer, was paid 3s. 4d. each year for writing the accounts, in addition to his basic salary.⁶⁸ Analysis of the accounts evidence that the project was funded from two main streams. One was through church income, drawn from Sunday collections, legacies, gifts, and fees for burials and for the ringing of the great bells to commemorate the dead. The other, was significant borrowing from three local guilds: £59 2s. 9d. from Our Lady's Guild; £7 12s. 1d. from St. Peter's Guild; £7 9s. 5d. from Trinity Guild – a total loan figure of £74 4s. 4d. Town guilds both funded and served as church bankers when cash-flow problems compromised the particularly ambitious rebuilding of Louth steeple. In 1503 the churchwardens had pledged "the best chalys belongyng to the hy auter" in return for a

⁶⁶ For full analysis and breakdown see Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp. 135-7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-7.

⁶⁸ Julian Flannery, 'The First Churchwarden's Book of Louth, 1500-24' in *Fifty English Steeples: The Finest Medieval Church Towers and Spires in England* (London, 2016), Appendix 2, pp. 481-4.

loan of £6 12s. 0d. from the Lady Guild and St Peter's Guild.⁶⁹ It took 15 years to rebuild the church and complete the spire, an impressive achievement in late Perpendicular church architecture. The cost of stone and its transport made up about half the total cost, which was due to the distance between Louth and the Great Limestone Belt. The townspeople were invited to pay for the stone by the cartload. It is recorded that during 1501, for instance, 72¼ cartloads were transported from the quarry at Ancaster, through Horncastle and on to Louth.⁷⁰ In 1513 a special appeal by the churchwardens was met by many donations, from poor and prosperous alike, with some grouping together in order to afford a cartload.⁷¹ At a final recorded cost of £305 8s. 5d., on Thursday 15 September 1515, the work was completed by the fixing of the weathercock, atop the 300 ft steeple.⁷² The keeper of accounts, one John Cawood, recorded the scene:

Ther being Will Ayleby parich prest with many of his breeder prests ther present haloyng the said wedercock and the stone that itt stands upon and so conveyed upon the said brooch and then the said prests syngyng the deum laudamus with organs. And then the Kirke wardens garte rynges all the bells and caused all the pepull ther being to hafe brede and ayle. And all to the lofyng of God oure lady and all saints.⁷³

The church building itself, its spire in particular, was a focus for civic pride. John Thomson, using the case of Louth as an exemplar, suggests that the individual's attachment to his parish church could be a more positive loyalty than simply something enforced by law. Thomson argues that John Cawood's account of the celebratory event

⁶⁹ Louth CWA, pp. 17, 33. in Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 146, 483.

⁷⁰ Richard Gurnham, *A History of Louth* (Stroud, 2017), p. 51.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

evidences a sense of personal achievement and pride.⁷⁴ Might this then be extended to church valuables? The church owned four silver or gilt crosses, the largest weighing 435 oz. Other treasures included a range of silver goods, service books, vestments, and altar cloths. As recently as 1531-2 a new organ was installed at a cost of £22, at least half of which was paid by a Louth man. Rumour that all was to be confiscated 'produced anxieties which legitimately struck to the very heart of civic and parochial pride'.⁷⁵

Both evidence and instinct would suggest that the people of Louth in 1536 would have been mightily proud and protective of their parish church and all that went with parish life and support. Some 450 plus years later it was still being described as possessing the most perfect Perpendicular steeple in England.⁷⁶ J.M.W. Turner's, 'Louth, Lincolnshire, The Horse Fair', has it in all its majesty, standing proud and tall, dominating the scene's background.⁷⁷ Louth Market Cross represented a central point for all inhabitants and visitors; it was mounted on a high octagonal base of steps. The cross and steps were enveloped in a covered market building, work carried out by Nicholas Upton, mason, in the years 1520-4. The crosshead itself protruded through the roof. The structure was still known as the Market Cross. It was here on Monday 2 October 1536, where a ladder was leant against it, to gain access to the roof for those

⁷⁴ John A. F. Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church & Society, 1485-1529* (Routledge, 1993), p. 265.

⁷⁵ Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 102.

⁷⁶ Simon Jenkins, England's thousand best churches. Louth, Lincolnshire: St James, *Country life* 192:38 (1998), p. 124

⁷⁷ Joseph M. W. Turner, *Louth, Lincolnshire, the Horse Fair* (c. 1827)

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.13707566>> [accessed 10 April 2025]

addressing the gathering.⁷⁸ Louth was an important market and route centre, it was the leading town of a wapentake and rural deanery. It was third only to Lincoln and Boston in terms of urban population in the shire.⁷⁹ For Hoyle:

Louth was a second-rank town of some wealth and a greater than local importance. It was a Banbury or a Stratford-upon-Avon: a populous market centre of some prosperity, a local administrative centre equipped with a range of ecclesiastical institutions which probably attracted devotees from outside the town.⁸⁰

Margaret Bowker described Louth as ‘the town in which the people were conspicuous for backing their devotion to the church with their money’. ‘On a small scale, Louth was a sixteenth-century Chartres.’⁸¹

In 1536, the first Henrician Injunctions, drawn up by Cromwell, were issued alongside the Ten Articles. Gerald Bray argues that injunctions of this kind reflect better than any other document the progress and impact of the Reformation at the local level.⁸² Bray suggests that, from them, it is possible to detect how the Reformation was felt and applied, and what sort of resistance there was. The Injunctions were ‘to be kept and observed of the dean, parsons, vicars, curates and stipendiaries resident or having cure of souls, or any other spiritual administration within this deanery’.⁸³ The first Injunction held them responsible for both the keeping and observing, by themselves *and* by all

⁷⁸ Paul Everson & David Stocker, ‘The Cros in the Markitte Stede’. The Louth Cross, its Monastery and its Town, *Medieval Archaeology*, 61:2 (2017), pp. 330-371, doi:10.1080/00766097.2017.1375127

⁷⁹ James, ‘Obedience and dissent in Henrician England, pp. 188-269.

⁸⁰ Hoyle, *The pilgrimage of grace*, p. 98.

⁸¹ Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln Under John*, p. 149.

⁸² Gerald L. Bray, ‘The First Henrician Injunctions, 1536’ in *Documents of the English Reformation* (James Clarke, 1994), pp. 153-6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 153-4.

others, 'all and singular laws and statutes of this realm made for the abolishing and extirpation of the Bishop of Rome's pretended and usurped power and jurisdiction within this realm, and for the establishment and confirmation of the King's authority and jurisdiction within the same, as of the Supreme Head of the Church of England'. The third Injunction addressed holy days: 'Moreover that they shall declare unto all such as be under their cure the Articles likewise devised, put forth and authorized of late for and concerning the abrogation of certain superfluous holy days.'⁸⁴ The abrogation of saints' days was flagged up in a number of alerts forwarded to Cromwell; indicating that it was a grievance deeply felt by the people of Lincolnshire.⁸⁵ The same sentiment was expressed by the vicar of Louth, Thomas Kendall, in his deposition. Kendall claimed that it was a long held grudge 'that the King should be Head of the Church, and the putting down of holydays and of monasteries, &c., and it was said "if anyone would ryse all would ryse, and that it lacked but a beginning'.'⁸⁶ The King's assumption of supremacy did not feature in the initial plea made to the King, the suppression of monasteries did.

The Abbey of Louth Park, a Cistercian house, having been valued at £147 14s. 6¼d. in 1534, was dissolved under the first Act of Suppression on 8 September 1536. The last abbot, George Walker, received a pension of £26 13s. 4d.; his monks had £4. 6s. 8d. divided among them as 'wages due,' with 20s. each to purchase secular clothing. What is interesting here, given the magnificence of the neighbouring church at Louth is that post-suppression, the bells and lead of the abbey were valued at £598 13s. This is twice

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 154.

⁸⁵ TNA SP 1/106, f. 270 (L.P. XI. 553).

⁸⁶ TNA SP 1/110, f. 141 (L.P. XI. 970).

as much as any of the other houses dissolved at this time. The vestments and other movable property were also valued at a large sum.⁸⁷ All in all, the total effects of the place realised the significant sum of close on £1,000.⁸⁸ The brothers of the Abbey were men with local ties, a group that included Abbot George Walker, and Thomas Lilburne, the last sub-prior. They were members of local families which held interests in the Abbey estates.⁸⁹

The nearby Cistercian priory of Legbourne benefitted from an income considerably less than £200. In 1534, the value of the revenues was given as £38 8s. 4d.⁹⁰ It, too, fell under the Act of Suppression 1536, whereby all religious houses of monks, canons, and nuns were given to the King, his heirs, and successors in perpetuity.⁹¹ Prioress Jane Messyndyne challenged the notion of closure:

Whereas we doo here that a grete nombre of abbyes shalbe punysshid, subprest and put downe, bicause of their myslyvyng . . . yet if it may pleas your goodness we trust in God ye shall here no complayntes agaynst us nother in oure lyvyng.⁹²

The prioress followed this up with a direct plea to the current master of the priory, Cromwell himself.⁹³ If he were to act as suitor, the prioress promised, 'you shalbe a

⁸⁷ 'Houses of Cistercian monks: The abbey of Louth Park', in *A History of the County of Lincoln: Volume 2*, (Victoria County History, London, 1906) pp. 138-141. British History Online <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lincs/vol2/pp138-141>> [accessed 10 April 2025]

⁸⁸ Francis A. Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English monasteries* (G. Bell, London, 1910), p. 201, <<https://archive.org/details/henryviiienglish00gasquoft/page/206/mode/2up>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁸⁹ J. E. Swaby, *A History of Louth* (London, 1951).

⁹⁰ 'Houses of Cistercian nuns: The priory of Legbourne', in *A History of the County of Lincoln: Volume 2*, ed. by William Page (Victoria County History, London, 1906) pp. 153-155, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lincs/vol2/pp153-155> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁹¹ Act 27 Henry VIII, c. 28 reproduced in full in Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, pp. 155-9.

⁹² Cited in J. Clark, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, p. 333.

⁹³ Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f.329 [L.P. X. 384].

more higher Founder to us than he that first foundid our howse.⁹⁴ The prioress' solicitation fell on stony ground. She received a pension of £7, and the nine nuns that remained 20s. each to buy secular dress.⁹⁵ Elsewhere in Lincolnshire, the Abbott of Barlings Abbey, Matthew Mackarel, testified that a common rumour had been spread by one Thomas Eskrigge and others that after the commissioners had finished surveying the lesser monasteries and had reported their doings to London they would return and dissolve the greater monasteries, and Barlings would be one of the first to fall.⁹⁶

Three teams of royal commissioners were at work in Lincolnshire at the time of the rising. The commission for dissolving the smaller monasteries was abroad, and both Louth Park and Legbourne were on the agenda. The second commission's remit was to assess and collect the subsidy. The third commission was carrying out an inquiry into the fitness of the clergy for office. This bred uncertainty and helped to create fertile conditions for the breeding of rumours, their spread, and, consequently, popular political debate. Bowker put the immediate causes of the Lincolnshire rising down to there being too much innovatory action taking place in an area of no more than ten square miles.⁹⁷ The King's commissioners, Millicent and Bellow, had the misfortune to be present in the priory carrying out their work as the rising first ignited. Various examinations post-rebellion testified to the strength of feeling held by the people of

⁹⁴ T. Wright, *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries* (Camden Society, 1843) cited in 'Houses of Cistercian nuns: The priory of Legbourne', in *A History of the County of Lincoln: Volume 2*, ed. by William Page (Victoria County History, London, 1906), pp. 153-155 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lincs/vol2/pp153-155>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f.245 [L.P. XII(1) 702].

⁹⁷ Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln Under John Longland*, p. 149.

Louth, with ‘all the country crying to kill Bellowe’.⁹⁸ Neighbouring Louth Park Abbey had been dissolved just three weeks prior. The last abbot departed with his pension, the remaining ten monks received significantly less.⁹⁹ One of these monks, William Moreland, was to tell of the hardship this meant for the disbanded monks of Louth Park; he then went on to take a critical role in the early days of the rising.¹⁰⁰

Imperial Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys’s nephew, gave a full account (dated 15 October 1536) of the rising in a missive to the Queen of Hungary, the Regent of the Netherlands. He reported that on Monday 2 October 1536, there rose against the King’s officers and commissioners, ‘certain peasants under the leading of a shoemaker named William Keing Hardy, a man of persuasive manner’. As the ranks of armed rebels rose to 10,000, by the following day, the emboldened shoemaker took to wearing a cloak of crimson satin, embroidered with the words “I love God, the King, and the Commonwealth”.¹⁰¹ This drew reference from Thomas Wriothesley in his naming of those charged with inciting rebellion in Lincolnshire, thus: ‘Perceives that his Highness would have that traitor in the motley coat well examined’.¹⁰² The man in the coat was ‘Captain Cobbler’; named in the historical record as Nicholas Melton, of Louth. Melton’s deposition (he was examined in Lincoln on 21 October) provided the names and occupations of the men of Louth involved in hatching the rebellion.¹⁰³ This

⁹⁸ TNA SP 1/109, f. 1 (L.P. XI. 828).

⁹⁹ ‘Houses of Cistercian monks: The abbey of Louth Park’, in *A History of the County of Lincoln: Volume 2*, ed. by William Page (Victoria County History, London, 1906), pp. 138-141. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lincs/vol2/pp138-141>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

¹⁰⁰ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 380).

¹⁰¹ TNA (L.P. XI 714).

¹⁰² TNA SP 1/109, f. 50 (L.P. XI. 842).

¹⁰³ TNA SP 1/109, f. 1 (L.P. XI. 828).

information was supplemented by John Brown in his deposition made before Richard Layton and Thomas Lee on 24 October.¹⁰⁴ The Earl of Shrewsbury held the thought that Captain Cobbler may have been the Prior of Barlings Abbey but conceded that 'it may be collected from a contemporary paper, that the name of this leader was Melton'.¹⁰⁵ All existing evidence points to the fact that the rising in Louth was instigated by ordinary townfolk, and was likely led in the first instance by a cobbler, Nicholas Melton. They felt sufficiently aggrieved and motivated to go so far as to seize the King's agents and then to mobilise in significant number.

Record of the examination of Thomas Mawre, monk, hints at underlying passions. Mawre told of an incident in the church at Louth on or about St. Matthew's Day. He reported 'a tall serving man', who he supposed to be one of Cromwell's men, 'said openly that a silver dish with which they went about to beg for their church was more meeter for the King than for them'. At this, a man present 'fashioned to draw his dagger, saying that Lowthe and Lowthesk should make the King and his master such a breakfast as he never had'.¹⁰⁶ Tensions were at fever pitch and conversations were being had. This was popular, and political.

On 1 October, the day before the expected arrival in Louth of the Bishop of Lincoln's commissary, Dr Frankish, the vicar of Louth felt moved to preach a sermon that at least appeared to question the Crown's plans. It is notable that no formal record of the sermon survives, although reference to it does. Sir William Morland, late monk of Louth,

¹⁰⁴ TNA SP 1/109, f. 75 (L.P. XI. 854).

¹⁰⁵ TNA SP 1/108, f. 37 (L.P. XI General).

¹⁰⁶ TNA SP 1/109, f. 1 (L.P. XI. 828).

referred to a 'certain collation to his [vicar Kendall's] parishioners' in which 'he advised them to go together and look well on such things as should be inquired of in the visitation next day'.¹⁰⁷ Melton (Captain Cobbler) claimed to have been actively encouraged by vicar Kendall, on the day.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, Melton's statement in State Papers is headed 'Captain Cobbler's Depositions'. Melton claimed that a fortnight before Michaelmas he had heard two local men, one a cooper, say 'the King's council had ordered all gold coin to be diminished, and every man to "pay the King's touch for it," and say also that all jewels and ornaments of parish churches should be taken away'.¹⁰⁹ Melton claimed that, on the Sunday after Michaelmas, when John Wilson and others came to take the keys to the church jewels, he did not aid them. However, when the common bell was rung, the keys were delivered to him to keep. Melton gave an account of him returning to the church with a Mr John Hennage, who promised to 'hear their grief'. Again, a person present, one Bawnus, declared that 'their jewels and ornaments should be taken away'. Hennage said he would ride to the King to know the truth.

The sociologists Warren Peterson and Noel Gist provided a useful working definition for 'rumour', stating that, 'Rumour, in general usage, refers to an unverified account or explanation of events, circulating from person to person and pertaining to an object, event, or issue of public concern'.¹¹⁰ That said, they problematised the notion that rumours can be treated as a single and separate generic class. They detailed the

¹⁰⁷ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 380).

¹⁰⁸ TNA SP 1/110, f. 132 (L.P. XI. 968).

¹⁰⁹ TNA SP 1/110, f. 132 (L.P. XI. 968).

¹¹⁰ Warren A. Peterson and Noel P. Gist, 'Rumor and Public Opinion', *American Journal of Sociology* 57:2 (1951), pp. 159-167.

various types, outlining the differences between them. What is of interest here is what they find of rumours that appear to arise spontaneously after a 'public' has been formed through common interest in an issue or event. Peterson and Gist argue that when there is general social unrest, rumours pertaining to a wide variety of issues or rumours defining fictitious issues may emerge. In this case the rumour itself serves as the event which produces a public. What is on record describing the series of events that very quickly evolved into insurrection in Louth does fit with such a thesis. The rumour of confiscation, percolating in a testy climate, did serve as an event and did produce a public. Rumour did then become group voice, for, as Jean-Noël Kapferer suggested, 'What the group takes to be true *is* true.'¹¹¹ This truth is expressed in rumours.' Indeed, Kapferer argued, 'certain rumours literally create events'.¹¹²

It would seem incontrovertible that rumours of the imminent confiscation of church assets and the rationalisation of parish church number were abroad in both Lincolnshire and north of there in the late summer of 1536. This triggered a response, regardless of whether such rumour itself was true or false. For, turning again to the work of Jean-Noël Kapferer:

In everyday life, rumours rarely arise out of 'reality'; they spring, rather, from raw, confused facts. A rumour's purpose is precisely that of explaining these raw facts, i.e., to posit a reality.¹¹³

An accumulation of raw, confused facts is evident in state records, as preserved in State Papers. In September 1536, Dr. John Tregonwell, king's commissioner, reported

¹¹¹ Jean Noël Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations, & Images* (Routledge, 1990), p. 11.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

to Cromwell that the local population believed he was there to take away ‘crosses, chalices, and other idols of the church’. Tregonwell claimed the rumour to have been started by a summoner of Bridgewater, and that he will pursue the matter.¹¹⁴ The following month, Wriothesley informed Cromwell of the news as reported from Yorkshire, including: ‘That there shall be no church within five miles, and that all the rest shall be put down, and all the chalices, jewels, &c. taken’.¹¹⁵ It was said elsewhere that church chalices were to be given to the King in exchange for tin ones.¹¹⁶ A proclamation made on behalf of the King denied there was ever any such intent, calling on anyone hearing such ‘slanderous rumours’ to apprehend those responsible.¹¹⁷

On examination in the Tower, those charged with involvement in the Lincolnshire rebellion made much of this rumour. One Longbottom states that he had heard that the chalices were to be taken away but knew not the source of this rumour.¹¹⁸ The Abbot of Barlings Abbey heard the same, and that they were to be replaced by tin ones. This, and that ‘two or three churches should be put into one’.¹¹⁹ Something George Huddyswell confirmed on his examination: ‘that there should be but one parish church within 5 miles’.¹²⁰ The aged and blind parson of Sotby, Thomas Yoell, testified to having heard a monk read a letter at Louth Cross declaring the King would have all parish churches 6 miles apart.¹²¹ Roger New heard the rumour about the chalices when ‘in the field’ with

¹¹⁴ TNA SP 1/106, f. 134 (L.P. XI. 405).

¹¹⁵ TNA SP 1/108, f. 159 (L.P. XI. 768).

¹¹⁶ TNA Add. MS. 8,715, f. 293. B.M. [L.P. XI. 848].

¹¹⁷ TNA Harl. MS. 283, f. 80 B.M. L.P. XI. 782.

¹¹⁸ TNA (L.P. XII(1)70).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ TNA SP 1/110, f. 188 (L.P. XI. 973).

his compatriots.¹²² Philip Trotter deposed that the rumours existed one month before the insurrection.¹²³ Likewise, Sir Nicholas Leche, parson of Byrchforde, who added that the meaning of the chalice and the host as featured on the banner borne by the rebels was rooted in this suggestion that they were to be confiscated. Further north in Richmondshire, rumour had it that the King's commissioners, Layton and Lee, were coming to 'pull down all chapels dependent and many parish churches, leaving but one in every ten miles'. Also to take away all silver chalices, leaving tin ones in their place.¹²⁴ The same is reported in the confession of William Stapleton. Stapleton reported a 'common bruit' that parishes were to be 'thrown into one'; and then gave particulars, naming those parishes said to be subject to rationalisation. Again, here, chalices were to be 'taken to the King's use', replaced with ones of copper.¹²⁵

On examination, Thomas Kendall contended that the 'immediate cause of the insurrection was the saying that men of Hull hath sold their crosses and jewels of their church at York to prevent the King's commissioners'.¹²⁶ The King was convinced of Kendall's activism. So far as he was concerned, Kendall was to be excluded from the pardon offered to others.¹²⁷ He was executed on 29 March 1537.¹²⁸ Whatever stirred passions on the day, one recorded event represented a grave challenge to authority; it manifested itself at Louth market cross where the said commissary, Dr Frankish, was led, with his books taken from him and burnt. On examination, the monk, William

¹²² TNA (L.P. XII(1). 70).

¹²³ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 70).

¹²⁴ TNA SP 1/118, f. 254 (L.P. XII(1) 1011).

¹²⁵ TNA SP 1/115, f. 247 (L.P. XII(1) 392).

¹²⁶ TNA SP 1/110, f. 141 (L.P. XI 970).

¹²⁷ TNA SP 1/112, f. 60 (L.P. XI. 1224).

¹²⁸ London, British Library, Cotton Titus B/I f.384 (L.P. XII(1) 764).

Morland, deposed that this act of burning was suspended in order that the books might be read by six learned men among them so that they might know just what had been recorded by the commissioners.¹²⁹

The Lincolnshire rebels expressed their grievances in a petition directly addressing the King. A first list of articles was composed in Horncastle on 4 October.¹³⁰ It is notable that Thomas Dixon of Horncastle, labourer, deposed that on Monday 2 October, William Leche had come to him and ‘other poor men’ and said he had been at Louth and the King’s commissioners had come there and taken away the church goods, ‘and next day would come to Horncastle to do the like’.¹³¹ This constitutes something beyond passage of rumour of confiscation of church goods, it is the report of a clergyman claiming to have witnessed it himself, true or false. When the Louth rebels joined the Horncastle rebels in Lincoln on 7 and 8 October, the Horncastle set of articles was amended, with a final petition dispatched to the King on 5 October.¹³² The petition was made up of five articles of complaint. Articles 1 and 5 related to spiritual matters. The first regretted the suppression of so many religious houses, ‘whereby the service of God is not only minished but also the poorality of your real be unrelieved’. Article 5 questioned the late promotion of several bishops ‘that hath subverted the faith of Christ’, with the offending bishops named, including the bishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Lincoln.¹³³ Articles 2 and 3 raise the issue of burdensome taxation. Under Article 2 it is claimed that the demands be ‘a great hurt and discomfort to the

¹²⁹ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 380).

¹³⁰ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 70).

¹³¹ TNA SP 1/110, f. 123 (L.P. XI 967).

¹³² TNA SP 1/110, f. 148 (L.P. XI. 971).

¹³³ TNA (L.P. XI. 705). reproduced in full in Bush, *The Pilgrims*, pp. 251-2.

commonwealth. Under Article 3 the levies are said to be ‘an importunate charge to them considering the poverty that they be in already and loss they have sustained these two years bypassed’.¹³⁴ Article 4 laid the blame for all, not at the King’s door but at those from whom he sought council. Especially those persons deemed to be ‘of low birth and small reputation which hath procured the premises most especially for their own advantage’; with Lord Cromwell and Sir Richard Rich named.¹³⁵

Thomas Kendall, of Louth, examined in the Tower of London on 12 January 1537, attested that rumour had it in Louth that the men of Hull had pre-empted confiscation of their church goods by selling them in York, using the proceeds to pave their streets.¹³⁶ Sir William Moreland, priest, late monk of Louth Park Abbey, claimed to have heard this from a shipman of Hull, in Grimsby: ‘we have taken all our church plate and jewels and sold them and paved our town withal, and so if ye be wise will ye do too and mend your town that is very foul withal’.¹³⁷ This was further compounded by the incident that took place in Louth church the Monday after Michaelmas Day. As stated above, a man, supposed to be a servant of Cromwell, proclaimed that ‘a silver dish with which they went to beg for their church was more meeter for the King than for them’.¹³⁸ On examination, William Morland was quizzed on the origins of the rumour of taking away of chalices and of leaving one church within six or seven miles. Morland suggested that its origin lay with words spoken by one Peter, scribe to the Bishop of Lincoln’s commissary Dr. Prynne. Morland claimed the words were spoken in his hearing at

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 70).

¹³⁷ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 481).

¹³⁸ TNA SP 1/109, f. 1 (L.P. XI. 828 (vii)).

Louth, at the Commissary's court. The said scribe told the priests present 'that his master bade them look on their books, for they should have strait examination taken of them shortly after, and if they did not look well on their books it should be worse for them'. As a result, Morland claimed, that certain 'lewd' priests of the area, fearful of losing their benefices, spread the rumours to impress upon the common people that they too would be subject to ill treatment.¹³⁹

Morland also related a conversation had in Grimsby when he dined with a man and his wife who he was unable to name, nor where he lived. He reported that:

After dinner three or four men came in, one of whom, a shipman of Hull, asked the goodman of the house, "What news is here with you, sirs?" The good man said again to him, "What news with you?" "Marry," said the shipman, "we hear at Hull that ye should have a, visitation here shortly, and therefore we have taken all our church plate and jewels and sold them and paved our town withal, and so if ye be wise will ye do too and mend your town that is very foul withal." The goodman said, "We hear say that the Chancellor will be here upon Tuesday next, and we are minded not to receive him."¹⁴⁰

The rising in Louth coincided with one in nearby Horncastle. On examination, Philip Trotter, of Horncastle, told of the same rumours on confiscation of church goods and reduction in church number, and more. Trotter went on to declare that:

Moreover, it was bruited a month before the insurrection that there was no remedy for these things, i.e., for taking away the church goods, &c., but only by insurrection and to beat them down to the ground that would attempt any such things.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 481).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 70).

Challenged on where he heard this, Trotter declared that he heard this in travelling from market to market, he being a mercer. Again, the impression that this was a hot topic of conversation, spreading far and wide, is firmly entrenched in the evidence. Those that the government dismissed as having no say, or want of it, were having just those conversations, and they were of a political nature, demonstrating political consciousness.

The rumour related to the seizing of church assets had legs, and it travelled beyond the areas of rebellion. One John Strebilhill reported that walking home from evensong, one Sunday, three weeks before Whitsuntide 1537, in the Oxfordshire town of Thame, he heard it spoken by one Robert Jons that ‘he feared the King would have the crosses and jewels of their church, and proposed to sell the jewels as the church was in decay’.¹⁴² It was further deposed that on another occasion Jons had said ‘the King would suppress all abbeys and take half of all parish church jewels; and proposed selling their crosses and candlesticks’. Similarly, in March 1537, at Shrewsbury, one Nicholas Holte heard his host John Barber, at the sign of the Lion, and one Thomas Cowper, say ‘they were informed the King intended to send down commissioners shortly to view the goods and jewels of all churches’.¹⁴³ Holte claimed that when the two asked for his counsel, saying the church held 9 chalices, he told them not to credit such stories as the King had no such intention. Holte then moved on to a tavern called the Sceptre, there to be joined again by Thomas Cowper. Cowper persisted in seeking Holte’s advice on the treasure of the church. Holte said that he repeated his advice to give such tales no credence, and

¹⁴² TNA SP 1/123, f. 121 (L.P. XII(2) 357).

¹⁴³ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 808).

asked Cowper to call to mind who first spread such tales. Cowper replied that one Thomas Llyod of Shrewsbury, then at London, sent a letter to the town 'reciting the said matters'. Cowper also said, 'the King would have but one church where now were two, and in every parish church but one chalice'. Holte again advised him to 'beware of giving credit to such light tales, for such tales had been the cause of much displeasure'. Evidence that there was an awareness that such conversation was being had, and it was on the government radar.

The rising of ordinary folk in Lincolnshire is well documented and its course has been well tracked and detailed in the historiography of the period. Rumour transmission proved to be rapid and incendiary at the time. This was very much the case in Louth. The fire was to spread further. Take a single deposition, that of Robert Ledes and his saying that the articles [Lincolnshire articles] were sent into Yorkshire where they were 'strewed about the market towns'.¹⁴⁴ Robert Aske, Captain of the pilgrims, deposed that such rumours were unknown to him before, on his way to London for the law term, he had met with one Huddiswell, accompanied by fourteen others, at Feryby. Aske was told that the commons of that quarter as far as Louth were up and had taken the bishop of Lincoln's chancellor who, he said, came to view their chalices and other church goods and ornaments, which it was 'bruided' were 'to be taken away'. Aske claimed that he did not hear such rumours in Yorkshire 'till the articles came thither from Lincolnshire by Guy Kyme'.¹⁴⁵ Such rumour flow influenced the course of rebellion beyond Lincolnshire. It was the voice of the common people.

¹⁴⁴ TNA (L.P. XII(1). 70).

¹⁴⁵ TNA (L.P. XII(1) 901).

A cautionary note needs to be added. The case of Louth has been examined, finding that the local community invested heavily in their church and its assets. The timing of threat to those assets brought the reaction so described. On the other hand, the case of Lavenham, Suffolk, proves the point that generalisations must be made, if at all, with the greatest caution. Extant wills make it clear that bequests to guilds were generous and commonplace. Lavenham guilds were established not so much as a regulatory body for trades but rather with a social and religious purpose. In 1469, William Schedde of Lavenham bequeathed:

to the fraternity of the Gild of the Holy Trinity in Lavenham to buy lands tenements or rents for a priest to celebrate divine service for ever in the church for the souls of the brothers and sisters of the fraternity £20. The Alderman of the Gild... to have the gift and disposition of six houses for the poor of Lavenham time without end.¹⁴⁶

Those unable to be quite so generous did likewise, anyway. John Rysby, a Lavenham clothier, bequeathed on his death bed in 1493, half a mark to the Gild of SS Peter and Paul in Lavenham, with the condition that he ‘become a brother and partaker of their prayers’. Salvation from purgatory was the overriding motive, it would seem, but investment was made nonetheless.¹⁴⁷

Julian Flannery describes Lavenham as ‘a tower of colossal ambition frustrated at the eleventh hour’.¹⁴⁸ Based on original intentions, evidenced in the drawings, Flannery suggests that Lavenham church would have been topped by a steeple of the highest

¹⁴⁶ Alec Betterton, ‘The Guildhall, Lavenham’, *History Today* 45:1(1995), pp. 22-6.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Julian Flannery, *Fifty English Steeples*, pp. 412-19.

rank. Ambition was unmet but may well have been if the prosperity of the cloth trade had lasted one decade longer, or ‘if Thomas Spring’s pockets had been a little deeper’. So, it is not the tallest of Suffolk towers, but its bulk made it, ‘construction on a gargantuan scale’. The late Perpendicular nave, tower, porch, and side chapels all date from the forty years after 1485. There was a succession of Thomas Springs. Thomas Spring I was the first of three associated with the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century East Anglian cloth trade.¹⁴⁹ In 1486, Thomas Spring II bequeathed 300 marks (£200) for the building of the Tower, ‘*ad edificationem campanil in stepyll ecclie p’och de Lauenh’m*’. In 1523, Thomas Spring III, clothier, ‘geve and bequeth to the fynysshing of the Stepul of Lauenh’m two hundred pounds’.¹⁵⁰ An additional £480 was left for the completion of the works on the belfry of the church tower, and other works.¹⁵¹ The tower was raised in celebration of the Tudor victory on the field of Bosworth in 1485. Its doing was initiated by the lord of the manor of Lavenham, John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford, along with the wealthiest cloth merchants of the town.¹⁵²

In 1525 – a decade earlier than the Lincolnshire rising – trouble flared in Lavenham. It was triggered by Cardinal Wolsey’s demands for an ‘Amicable Grant’, intended for the sustaining of the King’s conflicts abroad. When word got out that a deal had been done between the Duke of Suffolk and the Lavenham clothiers, gifting a favourable tolerance

¹⁴⁹ Phillipp R. Schofield, ‘Spring family (*per. c.* 1400-1550), Clothiers’, (*Dictionary of National Biography*, entry dated 2004, rev. 2008), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/55402

¹⁵⁰ E. M. Dewing, ‘Notes on Lavenham and its church’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History*, 6 (1885–8), pp. 105–30.

¹⁵¹ Charles Tracy, Hugh Harrison and Lucy Wrapson, ‘Thomas Spring’s Chantry and Parclose at Lavenham, Suffolk’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 164:1 (2011), 221–259, doi:10.1179/174767011X13184281108207

¹⁵² S. J. Gunn, ‘Vere, John de (1442-1513), thirteenth earl of Oxford’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2023), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/28214

on that to be paid to the Crown, the commons of Lavenham rose in protest. It threatened to turn into a wider uprising. The Duke of Suffolk's intention to face down the gathered mass in Lavenham was compromised by doubt as to the loyalty of his own gathered force, they potentially being equally aggrieved local men. The rebels threatened those who were willing to pay the grant that 'they shuld be hewen yn peces'.¹⁵³ The Lavenham men and their allies had intended to march on London to present their grievances to the king. In the event, 525 people were indicted for riot, a significantly lesser charge than that of treason, it being headed off by the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk at Star Chamber.¹⁵⁴ Wolsey's attempt to levy the Amicable Grant was met with stiff resistance. The Lord Mayor and aldermen of London reported that Londoners were adamant in their refusal to pay. Further, that they feared their own lives would be in danger if they paid themselves, for the Common Council of the City would grant nothing.¹⁵⁵ In May 1525, in Kent, Archbishop Warham and those charged with assessing the levy wrote to the King, advising him that of the many men who had been before him 'they seem well minded to accomplish his demands, and would make no demur if their goods were sufficient; but there is great poverty, especially of money, here in Kent'.¹⁵⁶ Another letter to Wolsey from the same men warned against levying a tax on those men of a lower worth that had not been so charged before, 'They have never been assembled before, and are likely to cause much trouble for very little profit'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Cited in Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 168

¹⁵⁴ Wood, 'Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance...', pp. 67-98.

¹⁵⁵ Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 314-16.

¹⁵⁶ Cotton Vespasian F/XIII f.239 [L.P. IV(1) 1305].

¹⁵⁷ SP 1/34 f.156 [L.P. IV(1) 306].

The instructions for the levying of the Amicable Grant do not allow for tax exemptions based on wealth. This lack of exemptions could at least help explain the anger of those in Lavenham and the surrounding area worth less than one pound. Those worth less than one pound had been exempted from payment of the subsidy granted by parliament in 1523.¹⁵⁸

In his analysis of the rising in Lavenham, Andy Wood argues for an alternative reading of events, an alternative to that historiography which has seen early modern society as 'ideologically homogeneous and rebellion as a functional mechanism for the presentation of limited, defensive grievances'.¹⁵⁹ Traditional 'hierarchical' order was indeed restored in Lavenham, with rebel representatives prostrating themselves before nobility. The alternative reading Wood suggests is one that 'looks beyond the stylised exchange' between the Dukes and rebel representatives. Rather, he says, the rising might bear alternative defining features, fear and hatred rather than deference and subordination. It is argued here that fear and hatred was a feature of rebellion in Louth. So much potentially repressive activity, by three sets of the King's commissioners, in such a small area, bred fear and stoked hatred. This fire was fanned by a set of believable, fast travelling rumours. The rumours were uncontrollable and unofficial, mechanisms through which ordinary people could make comment on their everyday circumstances. It was, as Shagan argues, this dynamic that made rumours 'political',

¹⁵⁸ George W. Bernard and Richard W. Hoyle, 'The Instructions for the Levying of the Amicable Grant, March 1525', *Historical Research*, 67:163 (1994), pp. 190-202, doi: 10.1111/j.1468- 2281.1994.tb01824.x

¹⁵⁹ Wood, 'Poore men woll speke one daye', p.69.

rumours were the 'stuff of popular politics'.¹⁶⁰ What is more, such rumours were a direct threat to the spiritual and material wealth accumulated and treasured by the commons of Louth. Rumour content was hot political topic and newsworthy. It was being talked about and political action was being debated, shaped, and, ultimately, political action was taken in the form of a rising, likely led by a common cobbler, Nicholas Melton. In Louth, the flow of rumour not only influenced the range and content of popular political speech; it inspired revolt. Rumour was a speech act.

¹⁶⁰ Ethan Shagan, 'Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII' in *The politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* ed. by Tim Harris, pp. 30-66. Also, Ethan Shagan, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace revisited' in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 89-128.

Chapter Six: Ballads

Therof no force, than sayde Robyn;
We shall do well inowe;
But loke ye do no husbonde harme,
That tilleth with his ploughe.

These bisshoppes and these archebishoppes,
Ye shall them bete and bynde;
The hyë sherif of Notyngham,
Hym holde ye in your mynde.

A Gest of Robyn Hode¹

Right so as bees out swarmen from an hyve,
Out of the develes ers ther gonne dryve
Twenty thousand freres on a route,
And thurghout helle swarmed al aboute,
And comen agayn as faste as they may gon,
And in his ers they crepten everychon.
He clapte his tayl agayn and lay ful stille.²

The Summoner's Tale, *Tales of Canterbury*

That the hearers may better it away: a general analysis

This chapter of the thesis is the second of three chapters dealing with a discrete medium that served to amplify popular political voice in the study period, ballads. As was the case with rumour (Chapter Five) the government was always going to find it

¹ Anon., 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. by Francis J. Child (New York, 1882-1898), p. 57 < <https://www.proquest.com/books/gest-robyn-hode/docview/2147655306/se-2> > [accessed 10 April 2025]. This is Robin's response to his men asking of him who their target should be when on expedition. According to C. H. Firth the ballad was printed by Wynken de Worde about 1534, 'The Ballad History of the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, read 21 November 1907, doi: 10.2307/3678372

² In the prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Summoner's Tale*, the summoner described in graphic detail the special place in hell reserved for friars! See <<https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/summoners-prologue-and-tale>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

difficult to stem the flow of ballads in the period. Men, women and children at all social levels experienced ballads as part of their everyday life. They dealt with every aspect of life, ranging from good living to rebellion and treason. Ballads reflected the politics that ‘reasserted, extended or challenged’ the distribution of power in society.³ In common with the core chapters of this thesis, a general analysis is undertaken, and then a linked, specific case, that of Sawley Abbey, is examined. The significance of Sawley rests in the belief that it was the brothers of Sawley who composed the Sawley ballad, the Pilgrims’ marching song. Again, it is argued that this approach adds something to the existing historiography of the period, through a broad and deep interpretation of another of the three media of information flow that coloured popular political culture of the time, ballads. The general analysis offers breadth, with depth sought through directing attention to the site of politics, the place, Sawley Abbey, and the actions of the brothers of the house. Popular political speech was a language of place.

In a letter to his son at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1536, the Knutsford schoolmaster, Richard Oldfelden, referred to a collection of ballads. Oldfelden wrote that he was including in the package one hundred verses written by one Roger Vernon, ‘concerning this insurrection in the north’. He instructed his son that he may let his master see them. Also included were ‘other English rhymes and news’.⁴ Oldfelden then had second thoughts, ‘Dare not send the verses lest the poor man [the carrier] should let anyone see them or lest any man searched him’. Oldfelden was clearly aware of the inherent danger in both their content and possession. The carrier was William Rede of Oxford, a

³ Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Palgrave, 2002), p. 16.

⁴ TNA SP 1/113, f. 58 (L.P. XI 1403).

baker. Recorded in government papers, now resting in State Papers, is Rede's journey. Rede had been at Whalley Abbey in Lancashire where he received a letter from the abbot to be delivered to the abbey's scholar at Oxford, also a letter for the abbot of Hayles Abbey. Rede passed through Blackburn, receiving a letter from the proctor, also for the said scholar at Oxford. His next stopping off point was Knutsford and schoolmaster Oldfelden's house, 'where he was wont to have refreshing when he travelled between Oxford and Lancashire'. All the letters ended up in the hands of a constable in Wotton, on Rede being taken ill, their content disclosed and investigated. The matter ended up in the hands of the Privy Council.

Ballads and satires of the late medieval period mercilessly attacked the perceived discrepancy between the ideal of strict observance signed up to by monks, nuns, and friars – namely poverty, chastity, and obedience - and the reality of monastic existence. However, come the 1530s, Sophie Murray argues, anti-clerical jests could no longer be enjoyed innocently. Humour employed as a device to urge reform had become politically and religiously charged due to the government's assault on monastic life.⁵ An anonymous popular ballad composed around 1534 was every bit as excoriating as Chaucer's summoner, turning its fire on 'the whole crew', clergy and religious orders, all under them, or connected with them, from the Pope to the summoner (indeed!), and

⁵ S. Murray, 'Dissolving into Laughter: Anti-Monastic Satire in the Reign of Henry VIII' in *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain: Political and Religious Culture, 1500-1820* ed. by Mark Knights and Adam Morton (Boydell & Brewer, 2017), pp. 27-47.

the bell ringer.⁶ Elizabeth Barton is named, alongside Thomas More, ‘With his poetry,
And his sophistry, To mocke and make a ly (lines 1634-6).⁷

Brought out of *utopia*
unto the *mayde of kent*,
nowe from the devil sent,
A virgyne ffayre and gent,
That hath our yees blent...

With his poetry,
And her iugglery,
By conspiracy
To help our prelacy,
She by ypocresye,
And he by Tyranny.⁸

Jenni Hyde defines ‘ballad’ as narrative verse in a popular style, with music in strophic or binary form.⁹ They were more memorable than prose and could be distributed easily in places of common resort, including church doors, alehouse walls, and posted on the market cross on market day. Even those written verses which were not written to be chanted or sung were framed in an ‘oral’ style which suggested that they were intended for vocal delivery. This made them a highly effective means of spreading news or, indeed, seditious material.¹⁰ As such, Hyde contends, ballads ‘allow us to investigate high politics from a low perspective through the voice of popular song’.¹¹ Important for the consideration of this chapter is Hyde’s highlighting of that fact that sixteenth-century balladeers left little or no definitive record of what they actually meant by their

⁶ *Ballads from Manuscripts: Ballads on the Condition of England in Henry VIII’s and Edward VI’s Reigns*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall (The Ballad Society, London, 1868-72), p. 167.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 233 (lines 1684-7) and p. 234 (lines 1698-1703).

⁹ Jenni Hyde, *Singing the News: Ballads in Mid-Tudor England* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 10-13. In strophic songs, all the songs are sung in the same melody which repeats throughout. Songs in binary form alternate different music for the verse and chorus (*Ibid.* p.12).

¹⁰ See Chapter: Ballads and Libels, Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, pp. 299-334.

¹¹ Hyde, *Singing the News*, p. 14.

lyrics. This made it necessary to understand the political context surrounding its advent and distribution, for, typically, ballads of the time emerged from a culture of anonymity, implicitly placing authorship with the people. Hyde argues the case that ballads can be seen to play a part in ‘popular politics’ in all its forms, social authority, riot, rebellion, and parish government, in examining social relations between the ‘ruler’ and the ‘ruled’ in early modern England.¹²

There exists a good deal of evidence in the State Papers and court records to suggest that ballads passed through the country, informing, and triggering political debate. It was news. It was an effective medium for the flow of political news. If the Knutsford schoolmaster, above, offers up a glimpse of how ballad sheets travelled the country, another example in State Papers tells of their usage, in very public places, detailed under the heading ‘Seditious Songs’.¹³ One John Hogon, balladeer, was charged with ‘going about the country with a crowde or a fiddle’. Hogon was found to have sung the ‘seditious song’, ‘The Hunt is Up’, at the house of Edmund Brown, butcher, in Diss, Norfolk.

The hunt is up, the hunt is up.
The masters of art and doctors of divinity
Have brought this realm out of a good unity.
Three noblemen have taken this to stay:
My lord of Norfolk, Lord Surrey, and my lord of Shrewsbury.
The duke of Suffolk might a made England merry.

¹² Ibid., p. 19.

¹³ TNA SP 1/116, f. 30 (L.P. XII(i) 424).

Issue was taken with the ballad adaptation and Hogon, on being questioned as to meaning, professed that if the Duke of Suffolk, Charles Brandon, had allowed the Lincolnshire men to join with the northern men then they would have brought England to 'a better stay than it is now'. Unfazed by one John James' warning 'Beware how thou singest this song in Suffolk', Hogon shared with those present that he had sung the ballad in several other houses, locally. Unfortunately for Hogon, this group of listeners were loyal to the King. His misfortune ultimately meant good fortune for the social historian on the hunt for such glimpses of the public airing and debating of patently political issues.

The cases of both Hogon and Oldfelden went straight to the top, heard by Cromwell and the Privy Council. Another ballad, printed in 1540, expressed, too, the feelings of the moment, only this time Cromwell was on the receiving end, again. The original copy was entitled 'A newe ballade made of Thomas Crumwel, called Trolle on away'. It is prefixed, 'Trolle on away, trolle on awaye. Synge heave and howe rombellowe trolle on awaye'.¹⁴ This was a popular refrain in sea songs.¹⁵ Both man and child, it says, is glad to hear tell of that false traitor Cromwell.

Both man and chylde is glad to here tell
Of that false traytoure Thomas Crumwell,
Now that he is set to learne to spell.
Synge trolle on away.

It laid the blame for reappropriation of church riches at Cromwell's door.

¹⁴ Percy's reliques of ancient English poetry (London, 1910), pp. 327-9
<<https://archive.org/details/percysreliquesof01percuoft/page/326/mode/2up>> [accessed 10 April 2025]

¹⁵ Charles H. Firth, 'The Ballad History of the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII'

Both plate and chalys came to thy fyst.
Thou lockydst them vp where no man wyst,
Tyll in the kynges treasoure such things were myst.
Synge, &c.

No pity felt, and pain wished upon him, for he had served it on others.

Yet saue that soule, that God hath bought,
And for thy carcas care thou nought,
Let it suffre payne, as it hath wrought.
Synge, &c.

Blame did not extend to the King, however, for the ballad's final verse concludes:

God saue King Henry with all his power,
And Prynce Edward that goodly flowre.
With al hys lordes of great honoure.
Synge trolle on awaye, syng trolle on away.
Hevye and how rombelowe trolle on awaye.

Cromwell had featured, too, along with other of the king's counsellors, in a ballad that circulated in the north prior to the 1536 uprising. Emanating in the East Riding, 'Pickering's Song' (the case of John Pickering is discussed in Chapter Two) was grounded in two biblical stories. One told of how military force against the government could be justified as willed by God, the other how it was possible to remove an evil minister by petitioning the king.¹⁶ The song laid blame for the move against religious houses at the feet of those heretics advising the king, with Cromwell heretic in chief.

And so, the call to arms, to the people of the north, with all justification:

O faithfull people of the boreal region,
Chief bellicose champions, by divine providence,
Of God *hic electo* to make reformation
Of great mischief and horrible offence,

¹⁶ For more detail see Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 12-13.

Go ye forward valiantly in your peregrination,
It is Christ's pleasure and to your salvation.¹⁷

The ballad identified Cromwell with Haman, the chief minister of the Persian King Ahasuerus, a story from the book of Esther in the Bible. Esther successfully pleaded with Ahasuerus to get rid of his minister. The ballad condemned Cromwell and presented his overthrow as the duty of 'the northern people'. In so doing they would safeguard the true faith, the constitution, and the commonwealth.

If this Haman were hanged, then dare I well say
This realm then redressed full so should be,
And the bishops reformed in a new array,
Then established should be our true Christianity.
But until this is done, we may be well sure
These grievous offences we cannot recure [remedy].

Again, though, blame did not extend to the King, the ballad's final verse concluding:

In all our distress let us not refrain
Diligently for to pray our king for to save,
And his undoubted wife queen lady Jane;
And if we do offend, pardon we do crave,
God send him long time to reign with equity,
That virtue may abound with gracious plenty,
God save our king!

Under interrogation, Pickering attested that he was indeed the author of the rhyme 'O faithful people', and that he had composed it at Bridlington on the suggestion of the rebel leader John Hallom. He claimed that Hallom had handed him several rhymes that were being sung locally by minstrels. This was not unusual for ballads were indeed

¹⁷ Pickering's Song: an exhortation to the nobles and commons of the north, reproduced in full in Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 257-262. TNA SP1/118, f. 292-293b (L.P. XII(i) 1021 (5)).

‘slippery things, moving in and out of oral, scribal and print cultures’.¹⁸ Hence, Pickering and his saying that he composed it in such a form so ‘that the hearers may better bear it away’.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that Pickering himself also gave details on onward dissemination of his work, that a canon of Bridlington had made a copy, that Pickering delivered to one Robert Lutton of Scarborough. Also, that the bailiff of Bridlington had another copy. He went on to detail who else he had shared the rhyme with, including the convent and to one Roland Hardyng, friar, of Scarborough.²⁰ One can only imagine how its content flowed outwards from this point. Indeed, the prior of Bridlington, William Wood, claimed that the rhyme was ‘in every man’s mouth about Bridlington and Pomfret’.²¹ Returning to the testament given by George Shyttlworth, servant to the abbot of Sawley, it is equally notable that after the conversation had with the men of Ripon he travelled immediately on to Durham and then to Newcastle the following day.

Post-rebellion, evidence of the ballad form still being a favoured method of expressing political discontent was reported to Cromwell by Lord Norfolk in February 1537, when in the north; ‘Some lewd persons do not yet cease to speak ill of you, as you shall perceive by a prophecy framed of late’:

Much ill cometh of a small note,
As Crumwell set in a man’s throat,

¹⁸ Andy Wood, ‘When this old hat was new’: Ballads, Nostalgia and Social Change in Early Modern England’ in *Nostalgia in the Early Modern World: Memory, Temporality, and Emotion*, ed. by Harriet Lyon and Alexandra Walsham (Boydell & Brewer, 2023), pp. 228-48.

¹⁹ TNA SP 1/118, f. 277 (L.P. XII(i) 1021).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ TNA SP 1/118, f. 271 (L.P. XII(i) 1019).

That shall put many other to pain, God wote;
But when Crumwell is brought a-low,
And we rede out the Christ Cross rowe,
To K. L. and M. then shall we know news.²²

It is interesting for this thesis that this is something of a prophecy in the Sibyllic form, yet in the form of a rhyming ballad. Political prophecy is examined in Chapter Seven.

The point here is that 'K', 'L' and 'M' reference Katherine (Aragon) and Lady Mary; a nod to the King's first wife and their daughter.²³

In another case of 'seditious songs' reported in State Papers, a minstrel of Cartmel's deposition tells of an incident in July 1538 that occurred in a Westmorland alehouse. The minstrel, Master Alexander, was performing when one reveller present, Isaac Dixon, asked him to sing a ballad against the king's minister, which he had performed previously 'in the time of the rebellion'. Dixon 'smote him on the head with the pommel of a dagger and dashed a cup of ale in his face'. Dixon drew a dagger, wounding the alehouse keeper who stepped in to save the minstrel.²⁴ Ironically, given that he was the target of this and other ballads circulating at the time, Cromwell was the subject of the ballad the minstrel refused to sing. There is nothing recorded as to the minstrel's reason for refusing to perform the ballad, although it is highly likely that his refusal says more about a lingering fear in the region as a result of the government's savage suppression of the post-pardon revolts that followed the Pilgrimage of Grace than the possibility of any loyalty to the chief minister. The ballad was called 'Crummok'.²⁵

²² TNA SP 1/115, f. 173 (L.P. XII(1) 318).

²³ Madeleine H Dodds, 'Political Prophecies in the Reign of Henry VIII' in *The Modern Language Review* 11:3 (1916), pp. 276-84, doi: 10.2307/3713525

²⁴ Charles H. Firth, 'The Ballad History of the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII'.

²⁵ TNA SP 1/134, f. 130 (L.P. XIII(1) 1346).

Again, the scene described here is recognizable, political discontent being expressed in a favoured form (ballad), targeting not the King but his minister, triggering disagreement – likely debate, prior to violence – and in a public forum (alehouse).

The two ballads discussed above allude to a better world, one that existed before the rise to power of Cromwell, their target. Andy Wood makes the argument for reading nostalgia as a *political voice*, one that gave the lower ranks in society a way of analysing their world. Wood uses the ballad *When This Old Hat Was New* to articulate how it spoke to a range of social conflicts organised around the same concept: how the matter described in the ballads differed from the good old days ‘when this old hat was new’.²⁶ In such an instance we have the vicar of Tycehurst, Thomas Coveley, in June 1538, supplementing the raft of grievances he had expressed from the pulpit by declaring a ballad of Our Lady at the chancel door: "Law, law, Masters, I said we should have the old fashion again, ye may see it comes a little and a little."²⁷ The world Coveley grieved for was a world of holy shrines such as the Marian shrine at Walsingham (see Chapter Four), celebrated by the Pynson ballad. The ballad was printed in 1496 by the London printer Richard Pynson and uniquely survives in a four-page pamphlet.²⁸ Coincidentally, Pynson published Chaucer’s works in 1526, one of six printing runs by publishers in the sixteenth century.²⁹ The ballad tells of the shrine’s foundation story,

²⁶ Wood, “When this old hat was new”, in *Nostalgia in the Early Modern World: Memory, Temporality, and Emotion* ed. by Harriet Lyon and Alexandra Walsham, p. 229

²⁷ TNA SP 1/133, f. 50 (L.P. XIII(1) 1199).

²⁸ TC 25001; see C.S. Knighton, ed., *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge*: vol. 1, *Census of printed books* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 124, item 1254(6), cited in Laura Saetveit-Miles, ‘Inhabiting the Annunciation: The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham and the Pynson Ballad’ in Laura Saetveit-Miles, *The Virgin Mary’s Book at the Annunciation: Reading, Interpretation, and Devotion in Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 225-50.

²⁹ Anna Baldwin, ‘From the Clerk’s Tale to the Winter’s Tale’ in Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 199-212.

miracles witnessed, and of its importance to the Marian tradition, all in twenty stanzas of seven lines each.

Therefore euery pylgryme gyue your attendaunce
Our Lady here to serue with humble affeccyon,
Your sylfe ye applye to do hir plesaunce,
Remembrynge the great ioye of hir Annunciacion,
Therwyth conceyunge this bryef compylacyon,
Though it halte in meter and eloquence,
It is here wryten to do hyr reuerence.³⁰

It is important to note that ballads were not simply a voice of popular politics, for they also served as an instrument of government policy. The form itself – the ballad - we might say, was the object of contestation. It had become political. William Gray of Reading’s ballad, ‘The Fantassie of Idolatrie’, said to have been produced in Cromwell’s own household, spoke against the more suspect of the old ways vicar Coveley pined for. The ballad referred to the apparently miraculous movement of the discredited Boxley Rood, ‘a wooden God of the Kentish folk, a hanging Christ who might have vied with Proteus [Prometheus] himself’:

For he was able, most cunningly, to nod with his head, to scowl with his eyes, to wag his beard, to curve his body, to reject and to receive the prayers of pilgrims.³¹

The ballad mocked the installation mercilessly, ‘He was made to jogle, His eyes would gogle’ ... and then a list of helper saints, ‘To Saynt Job for the poxe; Saynt Luke saue

³⁰ Stanza 17, *Ibid.* p. 250.

³¹ G. C. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears During the Period of the Reformation in England and of the Times Immediately Succeeding AD 1533 to AD 1588* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1857), pp. 17-18 <<https://archive.org/details/gleaningsafewsc00gorhgoog/page/16/mode/2up?view=theater>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

myne oxe'.³² It is noteworthy that the damning of such 'idolatry' and 'superstition' was manifest in ballad form. The ballad served as a prelude to a sermon given by John Hilsley at Paul's Cross on 24 February 1538; one that ended with the destruction of the rood. This is the same sermon that witnessed the first public denunciation of the 'blood of Hailes' (discussed in Chapter One).³³

In his mighty work *The Stripping of the Altars*, Eamon Duffy attaches great significance to Gray's ballad. For Duffy, it is a classic example of Cromwell's propagandist literature of the time.³⁴ Essentially, *The Fantassie of Idolatrie* was a celebration of the stripping of the shrines. Now that the shrines had fallen, their abusers were to be exposed as frauds:

For when they bored holes in the roodes back of poles,
Which, as some men saye, dyd speake,
Then lay he still as a stocke,
Receyved there many a knocke,
And did not ones crie "creake".

Then the manifesto, revealing the ballad's real objectives:

Thus were we poore soules
Begyled with idolles,
With fayned myracles and lyes,
By the devyll and his docters,
The pope and his procters:
That with such, have blerid our eyes . . .

With dyvers other trickes,
Whiche sore in mens' consciences stickes:
But to Christ let us all pray!

³² Robert Hornback, 'Lost Conventions of Godly Comedy in Udall's Thersites', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 47:2 (2007), pp. 281-303 (pp. 291-2).

³³ TNA SP 1/129, f. 94 (L.P. XIII(1) 347).

³⁴ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 408-10.

To plucke it up, by the hard rote (Seeing there is none other bote),
And utterly to banyshe it away.

Ballads were a familiar form to all levels of society in 1530s England. They were a highly effective means of spreading news, which made them an ideal medium for sharing popular political sentiment. They could be easily distributed and were, in church precincts, alehouses, and at the market cross.³⁵ Ballads were indeed ‘slippery things, moving in and out of oral, scribal and print cultures’.³⁶ Friar John Pickering encapsulated the ballad’s force in his saying that he composed it [Pickering’s Song] in such a form so ‘that the hearers may better bear it away’.³⁷ This general analysis of ballads prepares the ground for the specific case study that is to follow. So far, this chapter has contributed to the historiography by accentuating the fact that the medium’s very form afforded it significant force in terms of political messaging. This was recognised by both government and anti-government activists. In common with the other core chapters of the thesis, the key theme (ballad) is now explored through a deeply contextualised case study, locating the flow of this medium in the site and occupants of the religious house, Sawley Abbey.

³⁵ For a detailed study of ‘broadside ballads’ (a song printed on a single sheet of paper) covering the period 1557 onwards – commonly pasted to the walls of alehouses – see Mark Hailwood, *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England* (The Boydell Press, 2014), Chapter 3, ‘Good Companions and Fellow Boozers’: The Idiom of Good Fellowship, pp. 113-170.

³⁶ Andy Wood, ‘When this old hat was new’.

³⁷ TNA SP 1/118, f. 277 (L.P. XII(i) 1021).

Sawley Abbey and the pilgrim's marching song: a case study

This part of the chapter on ballads makes a case study of Sawley Abbey, on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border; more so the part played by the brothers of the house and, specifically, the ballad for which they have been attributed authorship, which became the Pilgrims' marching song. It examines the case of Sawley as a religious house and how its occupants became involved and subsequently chased down on the orders of the King himself. If the King himself recognised the threat posed by the brothers' actions, then what was it about the ballad itself and its passage that fed popular political voice and commons' action? It is argued that by contextualising the ballad and reflecting on its use by the brothers attached to its place of origin, a localized perspective on the relationship between popular politics and the ballad form might be drawn.

The Sawley ballad is remarkable for the fact that it presented itself as the voice of 'us commons'. 'Christ crucified! For thy wounds wide Us commons guide!'

Great God's fame	Alack! Alack!
Doth Church proclaim	For the church's sake
Now to be lame	Poor commons wake
And fast in bounds,	And more marvel;
Robbed, spoiled and shorn	For clear it is
From cattle and corn,	The decay of this,
And clean forth born	How the poor shall miss
Of houses and lands	No tongue can tell

The Sawley Ballad: Verse II and Verse X³⁸

³⁸ Ballad reproduced in full in Bateson, 'The pilgrimage of grace and Aske's examination', pp. 330-48. Also in Bush, *The Pilgrims*, pp. 263-66.

Salley or Sawley Abbey was an abbey of Cistercians, founded, according to its own register, *The Coucher Book of Salley*, by William Percy II in 1147.³⁹ Forty years after its founding, Sawley Abbey had something of an existential crisis. This was due to concerns about the cultivability of the surrounding land, 'being reduced to extreme want through the ill temperature of the air, which suffered nothing to thrive upon the ground'.⁴⁰ William's daughter, Matilda de Percy, Countess of Warwick, acted to secure her father's foundation by signing over the benefits of other properties to the monks of Sawley, notably the church of St. Mary at Tadcaster.⁴¹ The Charter of Matilda de Percy granted these benefices in perpetuity for the supply of food and clothing to the nearby convent, and for the reception of the poor and of strangers at the Abbey. This, as well as the customary prayers for the salvation of Matilda's soul, her father's soul, the souls of various family members, and the soul of 'dearest Lord, Henry, the illustrious King of the English'.⁴² The church of St. Andrew of Gargrave was also gifted to the abbey by Henry de Percy, son of the great grandson of the founder, in 1313.⁴³ In 1291, the *taxatio* of Pope Nicholas IV valued the church at Tadcaster at £36 34s. 4d. and the temporalities of the abbey at £54 10s. 7d; the church at Gargrave had been valued at £33 6s. 8d.⁴⁴

³⁹ Harleian Manuscripts (No. 112) British Museum.

⁴⁰ W. Dugdale, *Monisticon Anglicanum: a history of the abbies and other monasteries, hospitals, frieries, and cathedrals and collegiate churches, with their dependencies, in England and Wales; also of all such Scotch, Irish and French monasteries, as were in manner connected with religious houses in England*, Volume 5 (J. Bohn, London, 1846), p. 510

<https://archive.org/details/b30455832_0005/page/510/mode/2up> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁴¹ J. Harland (ed.) *Historical Account of the Cistercian Abbey of Salley in Craven, Yorkshire: Its Foundation and Benefactors, Abbots Possessions, Computus and Dissolution* (London, 1853), p. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.* Charter of Matilda de Percy, Countess of Warwick (*Second Foundation of Salley Abbey*) reproduced in full, pp 8-10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Glynn Coppack, Colin Hayfield and Rich Williams, 'The Architecture and Archaeology of a Smaller Cistercian Abbey', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 155(1) 2002, pp. 22-114, doi: 10.1179/jba.2002.155.1.22

In keeping with the view held that monks of the Order were good farmers, it is notable that Sawley historian, Dr. T. Whitaker, gives the following account in his *History of Craven*:

... throughout the whole of the Percy Fee in Craven – extending 25 miles from north to south and embracing the whole of Ribblesdale within that district and much of the valleys of the Aire and the Wharf – there is no spot equally warm and fertile with that selected as the site of this religious house.⁴⁵

Although a relatively small house, the standing of Sawley may have been offered some surety by the seating arrangement at the enthroning of Archbishop George Neville in 1466. The Abbot of Sawley sat at the second table, alongside the abbots of St. Mary's, York, Fountains, Rievaulx, Whitby, Durham, Byland, Whalley and four others.⁴⁶

Sawley Abbey was situated by the main highway passing north and south. This meant that it served as a place of hospitality for many a traveller.⁴⁷ Although within the borders of Yorkshire, it was only just over the county border and it had strong links with the larger houses of Whalley and Furness in Lancashire.⁴⁸ It is notable that the average figure over England for monastic charities, as given in the 1535 *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, was 2½% of gross annual income, whereas the comparable figure for the seven independent Lancashire houses was three times the national average, 7.6%.⁴⁹ In 1535 Whalley was permitted £116/18/10d. in tax-free alms, given in doles at Christmas and

⁴⁵ T. D. Whitaker, *The history and antiquities of the Deanery of Craven, in the County of York* (Leeds, 1878), p. 36.

⁴⁶ John D. Harland, *Historical Account of the Cistercian Abbey of Salley Abbey* (Smith, 1853), p. 44.

⁴⁷ 'Houses of Cistercian monks: Sawley', in *A History of the County of York: Volume 3*, ed. William Page (London, 1974), pp. 156-158. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/vol3/pp156-158>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁴⁸ Christopher Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace* (Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 53.

⁴⁹ Alexander Savine, *English Monasteries on the Eve of Dissolution* (London, 1909), p. 239.

on Maunday Thursday. This, coupled with the keeping of twenty-four poor men in the house, amounted to an impressive 21% of the income of £551/4/6d. gross.⁵⁰

The churches of St. Mary's, Tadcaster, and St. Andrew's, Gargrave were the same church doors to which were posted a number of seditious bills attributed to the abbey of Sawley, encouraging the commons to rise again, post Pilgrimage of Grace.⁵¹ This section of the chapter will explore how, given its size and relative worth, the religious house of Sawley Abbey exercised a disproportionate influence on the commotion occasioned by the Pilgrimage of Grace. The Pilgrims' Ballad's authorship was said to have rested in the Abbey; hence it being otherwise referred to as the Sawley Ballad. The ballad is one of a number marshalled during the rebellion which combined the themes of church under threat and the material needs of the commons.⁵² Alongside ballad circulation it is also important to consider here another critical medium for the transmission of ideas and suggested action, the posting and transmission of bills, and Sawley Abbey's significant role in their production and usage.

The statute 1536: 27 Henry VIII, c.28 ordered that all religious houses with a net income under 'the clear yearly value of £200' be 'given to the King's Highness, his heirs and successors, for ever'.⁵³ The King rewarded a number of those close and loyal to him with some of the proceeds. Just how it was Sir Arthur Darcy came to warrant being grantee of the Sawley estate remains a moot point. Hoyle puts it down to Darcy being 'a wheeler

⁵⁰ C. Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 53.

⁵¹ TNA SP 1/116, f.101 (L.P. XII(i) 490).

⁵² Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions* (Routledge, 2014), p. 144.

⁵³ Act (1536: 27 Henry VIII, c. 28) in full Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, pp. 383-7.

dealer, a man about whom there was always a whiff of sharp practice', and a man for whom the king was willing to do 'quite extraordinary favours'.⁵⁴ Smith described the granting of Sawley Abbey, with all its lands to Darcy as *the* most remarkable case of all such grants, not the least because the transfer was made before the Court of Augmentations had even had time to make a survey of their value.⁵⁵ A further whiff of malpractice may be detected when the values revealed in communications recorded in State Papers between Cromwell and Darcy and between Cromwell and Robert Southwell in 1537 are considered. Southwell, charged with making a new survey of the Sawley estate, stated a worth of £600, based on information handed him. Darcy, defending himself against any suggestion that he had tried to pull the wool over the King's eyes, put forward a valuation of £465.⁵⁶ The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* records as 'a clear annual value, in spiritualities and temporalities', a figure of £147 3s. 10d.⁵⁷ Little wonder that the legitimacy of Sawley's early suppression caused resentment.⁵⁸ This was compounded by the fact that it could not be contested in the way open to other houses which, not dissolved until due process had been exercised by the commissioners, had the opportunity to submit evidence in support of non-closure. In what was the earliest dissolution in the north, Sawley rested in the hands of Sir Arthur

⁵⁴ Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 79.

⁵⁵ R. B. Smith, *Land and Politics in the England of Henry VIII: The West Riding of Yorkshire 1530-1546* (Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 228-9.

⁵⁶ London, British Museum, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f. 287 (L.P. XII(2) 59); TNA SP 1/122, f. 196 (L. P. XII(ii) 205).

⁵⁷ *Valor Eccl.* (Rec. Com.), v, 144. 'Houses of Cistercian monks: Sawley', in *A History of the County of York: Volume 3*, ed. by William Page (Victoria County History, London, 1974), pp. 156-158, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/vol3/pp156-158>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁵⁸ In his unpublished thesis, Shaw finds that Sawley Abbey is one of three houses (Cockersand Priory and Easby St Agatha Priory being the other two) that fell despite the evidence suggesting they should not have done. Anthony N. Shaw, 'The *Compendium Compertorum* and the Making of the Suppression Act of 1536' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), pp. 384-5 <<https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/id/eprint/1262/>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

Darcy. To rub salt in the wounds, as recorded in the Suppression papers, Darcy also received 'belles, lead, vestymentes and copes, and other necessaries prayed unto' £109 10s. 11d'. Also, 'corne in the garners, and in the ffeldes' £62 15s. 4d.; total £172 6s. 3d'.⁵⁹ Sawley Abbey was formally surrendered 13 May 1536 by the abbot and twenty-one monks, four of whom transferred to the Cistercian monastery at Furness.⁶⁰ It is likely the other monks joined the neighbouring Cistercian monastery of Whalley.⁶¹

By October 1536, Darcy had also claimed the church of St. Mary's in Tadcaster for himself, along with all church goods and tithe corn, securing them at Pontefract Castle. On 12 October the Sawley monks petitioned Robert Aske, leader of the commons, seeking restoration of Darcy's gains and protection, them having been restored to their house by the commons.⁶² The terms for re-occupation were laid out:

The religious persons to re-enter their houses, make a bill indented of all their goods, delivering the one part to the farmer, and continue divine service till "our petition be granted". They are to receive all victuals by indenture from the farmer. "And we trust in God they shall have shortly their right." No person to embezzle their goods on pain of death. – By all the whole consent of the herdsmen of this our pilgrimage for grace.⁶³

Whereas the rebellion led by Aske adopted the metaphor of Pilgrimage, a further movement which started in Richmondshire and grew to incorporate a broader area that included Sawley claimed to act in the name of Captain Poverty. It was overtly

⁵⁹ Cited in 'Houses of Cistercian monks: Sawley', in *A History of the County of York: Volume 3*, ed. William Page (London, 1974), pp. 156-158 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/vol3/pp156-158>> [accessed 10 April 2025].

⁶⁰ Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire* (The Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1995), pp. 199-206.

⁶¹ Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: a Study of the Rebel*, 217-223.

⁶² TNA SP 1/108, f. 180 (L.P. XI 784).

⁶³ TNA SP 1/108, f. 180 (L.P. XI 784).

sympathetic to the position of suppressed monasteries and raised concerns that were openly agrarian in nature.⁶⁴ The Sawley house also petitioned Sir Thomas Percy, ancestor of their founder. Mistrustful of their “most sinister back friend,” Sir Arthur Darcy, they sought reassurance on hearing news of Aske’s resignation from his captaincy. In this they claimed that the whole country supported them in re-entering their house, indeed stated that they had been ‘advised by the commons to remain in their house’.⁶⁵

Just days after the Sawley monks’ restoration, over the county border, the religious houses of Conishead and Cartmel followed suit.⁶⁶ King Henry VIII appeared to have adjudged the monks of Sawley as being the root cause of the trouble. The King commanded the Earl of Derby to gather his forces and march against the rebels on the border. Further, they were to ‘take the said abbot and monks forth with violence and have them hanged without delay in their monks’ apparel, and see that no town or village begin to assemble’.⁶⁷ The King followed this up with a further letter to the Earl on 28 October, expressing his frustration that the Sawley rebels had not yet been dealt with, for in their restoration ‘they must have been either authors or abettors’. He ordered that Derby ‘at once cause the abbot and certain of the chief monks to be hanged on long pieces of timber or otherwise out of the steeple, and the rest to be executed in such places as you think fit’.⁶⁸ The monks had possession of Sawley for five months until expelled for a second time at the end of February 1537, as reported by Darcy.

⁶⁴ Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, Chapter 8: ‘The ‘Captain Poverty’ Revolts pp. 209-255.

⁶⁵ SP 1/108 f. 183. [L.P Hen VIII XI 785].

⁶⁶ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 62.

⁶⁷ SP 1/108 f. 176 [L.P. XI 783].

⁶⁸ SP 1/109 f. 224 [L.P. XI 894].

In his confession, Sir Stephen Hamerton told of his conversation with the abbot of Sawley's chaplain, Estgate. Hamerton was offered a reading of the abbey's letter to Darcy, one he declined. Hamerton claimed that he was held in suspicion by the abbot because he had set men to arrest men posting seditious letters on church doors.⁶⁹ The abbey was indeed connected with other contentious bills. One of these was nailed to the church door at Tadcaster. Sir Ralph Sadler, in his letter to Cromwell of 23 January 1537, after passing through Tadcaster to York, reported that everywhere bills had been 'set on church doors urging the commons to stick together for the gentlemen had deceived them'.⁷⁰ After visiting Sawley on 25 February, Darcy advised Cromwell in no uncertain terms of his certainty that the monks of Sawley 'stirred this pestilent sedition' and 'not only thatt butt would have efftsoones quyeckend and revyffyed ye same'. Darcy sent an examination of one his tenants that supported his view.⁷¹

It is suspected that responsibility for a bill posted to the church door in Gargrave also rested with the monks of Sawley.⁷² The Earl of Cumberland's growing concern over certain "assemblies" of men prompted him to write directly to the King.⁷³ The Earl wrote of the actions and 'demeanour of certain light persons' since the 'appointment taken at Doncaster', with bills posted on the church doors at Garston, Rylston, Lynton, and Burnsall, in Craven. He enclosed a copy of a bill from the commons of Craven, addressed to the priests of Gargrave. It called for the priests to tell the constable of

⁶⁹ TNA SP 1/119, f. 19 (L.P. XII(i) 1034).

⁷⁰ TNA SP 1/115, f. 13 (L.P. XII(i) 200).

⁷¹ TNA SP 1/116, f. 115 (L.P. XII(i) 506).

⁷² Bush and Bownes, *The Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 148.

⁷³ TNA SP 1/112, f. 186 (L.P. XI 1299).

Gargrave to charge his parishioners to be at Rylston the following Tuesday at 9:00, to kill all the deer they could find. The main focus of this part of the chapter – a case study – is Sawley as an example of balladeering and the patently significant impact it had on the functioning of the Pilgrimage of Grace as a serious rebellion. What is also apparent is that Sawley also serves as an excellent example of bill-casting in the period; an orchestrated one, at that.

After the initial momentum of the Pilgrimage of Grace was arrested by attempted negotiation directly with the King, there was a spike in bill posting, covering a range of ideas and recommended actions.⁷⁴ Sir Ralph Sadler, again, reported in January 1537, that:

diverse bills and scrolls [were] set up on posts and church doors throughout the bishopric [of Durham] and lost and scattered abroad in the country... and by such means it was put into the heads of people that my Lord of Norfolk came down with a great army and power to do execution and to hang and draw from Doncaster to Berwick in all places northward notwithstanding the king's pardon.⁷⁵

One such bill, posted at Richmond, was written in the ballad's rhyming form, soliciting: 'all commons stick ye together... Claim ye old customs and tenant right to take your farms by a God's penny, all gressums and heightenings to be laid down...'⁷⁶ This particular grievance was something that the commons in the Sawley area would have readily recognised, as something that dated back pre-Pilgrimage. As discussed, when

⁷⁴ Ethan Shagan, 'The Pilgrimage of Grace and the public sphere?', in *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England* ed. by Peter Lake and Steven C. A. Pincus (Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 31-59.

⁷⁵ Cited *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁶ TNA SP 1/114, f. 201 (L.P. XII(ii) 163).

focusing on the question of gender in Chapter Three, in June 1535 trouble between landlord and tenant peaked in the Craven area. A large group of people assembled intent on removing enclosures erected by the Earl of Cumberland at Giggleswick. At Rathmell, tenants of the Earl of Northumberland and of the Abbot of Furness pulled down enclosures erected by one John Catterall. At Airton, in Craven, villagers removed enclosures, along with a house situated within one of those newly erected enclosures.⁷⁷ 82 people were indicted, with 18 committed to various prisons.

Written bills were copied and passed on. They surface in State Papers in places near and far in relation to the main theatre of northern rebellion; places as distant as Reading and Cornwall.⁷⁸ Maintaining focus on passage of bills closer to Sawley and that for which religious houses played a part, two significant glimpses feature in state records. The abbot of Whalley received a copy of the Pilgrims' oaths and articles of grievance from the hand of one of his servants, a copy of that scribed by one William Talbot and the abbot of Pontefract.⁷⁹ In January 1537, immediately prior to the secondary rising in the north, Sir Francis Bigod, dining at Malton with Prior William Todde, was shown a copy of the same articles, devised at Doncaster. He gave a servant of the prior two groats to make a copy, to be sent on to him.⁸⁰ A serious attempt to curb this means of communication was actioned the following month in a proclamation

⁷⁷ TNA SP 1/93, f. 69 (L.P. VIII. 863) For further detail on the extent of anti-enclosure protest in the build up to the Pilgrimage of Grace see Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 207-17. Also, Harrison, *The Pilgrimage of Grace in the Lake Counties*, pp. 60-66.

⁷⁸ For Reading see William Wyre, innkeeper of the Cardinal's Inn, and his reading aloud of a bill in the name of the Pilgrimage leader Robert Aske, its origin and onward transmission TNA SP 1/112, f. 110 (L.P. XI 1231); For St. Keverne, Cornwall TNA SP 1/118, f. 245 (L.P. XII(i) 1000), TNA SP 1/118, f. 247-8 (L.P. XII(i) 1001).

⁷⁹ TNA (L.P. XII(i) 853).

⁸⁰ TNA SP 1/116, f. 165 (L.P. XII(i) 534).

made by the Duke of Norfolk, 'lieutenant general from Trent Northwards': 'Prohibits all assemblies without the King's authority, and all ringing of bells backwards, lighting beacons, setting bills on church doors, &c., or conveying of bills'.⁸¹ It would appear though that the horse had bolted, quite literally. Witness Robert Aske's communication with the King of January 1537 on reports of new rebellion in the north: 'As I am informed, the commons of one country hath posts to commons in other countries and quarters'.⁸² Organised postal routes with extra horses for greater efficiency in facilitating the passage of written communication, in other words.⁸³

Shagan, in his revisiting of the politics of the Pilgrimage of Grace, argues that the rebellion might be viewed as a legitimate protest movement, in opposition to the politics of the Tudor regime.⁸⁴ One of the pilgrims' key lines of protest was, if not restoration of all religious houses put down, then space for negotiation on the policy. There is ample evidence of the clamour for restitution. Marmaduke Neville, soliciting Cromwell for his own removal from prison, testified to his first hearing of the rising in Yorkshire when a servant of Robert Hothom shared the content of the oath sworn by the commons of Beverley and Howdenshire, proclaiming that they would restore religious persons to their houses and die for the Faith and Church.⁸⁵ Again, George Shyttlworth, servant to the abbot of Sawley himself, under examination in February 1537, spoke of a conversation had in Richmond when lodging there: 'Fye on them that dwell nigh about

⁸¹ TNA SP 1/115, f. 180 (L.P. XII(i) 322).

⁸² TNA SP 1/114, f. 189 (L.P. XI 136).

⁸³ Shagan, 'The Pilgrimage of Grace and the public sphere?', p. 46.

⁸⁴ Ethan Shagan, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace revisited' in Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 89-128.

⁸⁵ TNA (L.P. XII(i) 29).

that house [Sawley], that ever they would suffer the monks to be put out of it'. Clearly angered by such capitulation, the men of Richmond stated that 'rather than our house of Saint Agathe should go down, we shall all die; and if any insurrection should happen here again, where there was but one in the same before, now there would be three'.⁸⁶

Protest complicity on the part of those residing in the religious houses was nowhere more evident than at Furness, Sawley's larger sister house. Under examination, the vicar of Dalton attested that the brothers of Furness Abbey funded local commons' action. The prior and another brother charged abbey tenants 'on pain of death or pulling down their houses to meet the commons in their best array'. This was corroborated by Robert Legate, friar. Legate further attested that the abbot of Furness had caused the monks placed in his monastery on Sawley Abbey's suppression to 'repair home again to rebel', expelling one such brother who refused to do so.⁸⁷ Friar Legate also claimed that a brother of the house at Furness, John Broughton, had shared a prophecy with the abbot. This accusation was significant because of its treasonous content. Broughton had prophesied, 'in England shalbe slaine the decorat rose in his mothers bely'. The prophecy foretold the death of the King: 'Your Grace shall die by the handes of preestes for their churche is your mother and the church shall sley your Grace. The Abbott of Furness confirmed this, saying that Broughton had shared the prophecy with him; with the addition that 'A. B. C. and iij ttt shud be all in one state and... the red rose shulde die in his mothers wombe'.⁸⁸ 'A. B. C.' had become familiar references to Anne Boleyn and Cromwell in prophecies circulated during the 1530s (see Chapter Seven). Broughton's

⁸⁶ TNA (L.P. XII(i) 491).

⁸⁷ London, British Museum, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f. 133 (L.P. XII(i) 841).

⁸⁸ London, British Museum, Cotton Cleopatra E/IV f. 133 (L.P. XII(i) 841).

prophecy drew from the heraldic device of the rose and from prophecies credited to Thomas Becket whose murder was purported to have been predicted thus: ‘the son shall slay the father in the womb of the mother’.⁸⁹ Friar Legate further declared that brother Henry Salley, of Furness, had told him that ‘There should be no lay knave head of the church’.⁹⁰ All this helped stoke the fire that the Earl of Sussex was eager to exercise his bellows to, in communication with Cromwell: ‘the monks of Furness have been as bad as any other’.⁹¹

Widely associated with the monks of Sawley Abbey, though presented as the voice of ‘us commons’, the Sawley ballad objected to the government’s seizing of church assets on the grounds that it offended the commandment ‘thou shall not steal’ and the Mosaic order applied to property, ‘thou shall not remove thy neighbour’s landmark’.⁹² Blame for all was placed with those named in the final verse of the ballad, verse XVI:

Crim, Cram and Riche
With three ell [that is Ls – Latimer, Leigh and Layton and the like]
As some men teach,
God them amend!
And that Aske may,
Without delay,
Here make a stay
And well to end

⁸⁹ See Sharon L. Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII* (Boydell, 1991).

⁹⁰ TNA SP 1/117, f. 7 (L.P. XII(ii) 652).

⁹¹ TNA SP 1/117, f. 72 (L.P. XII(i) 695).

⁹² Bush, *The Pilgrims’ Complaint’*, p. 12.

God would punish chief minister Cromwell, the archbishops, Cranmer and Latimer, Richard Rich, and the King's commissioners charged with monastery visitation and suppression, Thomas Legh and Richard Layton.⁹³

Richard Rich was chancellor of the court of augmentations, formed in 1536, charged with overseeing the dissolution of the monasteries. Rich was coupled with Cromwell and damned too in the Pilgrim petition, under item 8: 'Lord Cromwell, the Lord Chancellor, and Sir Ric. Riche to have condign punishment, as subverters of the good laws of the realm and maintainers and inventors of heretics'.⁹⁴ Legh and Layton were not, it would seem, admired by many of their contemporaries, those on the receiving end of their activities or otherwise. Cardinal Gasquet considered Layton to be of 'a thoroughly brutal and depraved nature'. Dom Knowles judged him to be no better than the other 'adulatory, pliant, time-serving, and wholly materialistic' servants of Henry VIII.⁹⁵ Legh was described by the Duke of Norfolk as being 'a vicious man'.⁹⁶ Item 11 of the Pilgrim petition advanced to the king in December 1536 stated the rebel position in no uncertain terms: 'That Dr. Lighe [Legh] and Dr. Layton have condign punishment for their extortions from religious houses and other abominable acts'.⁹⁷

⁹³ Entries in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography:

P. R. N. Carter 'Rich, Richard (1496/7-1567), first baron Rich, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2023), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/23491

Anthony N. Shaw, 'Legh, Sir Thomas (d. 1545), Diplomat, and Ecclesiastical Administrator', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2008), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/16363

⁹⁴ TNA SP 1/112, f. 118 (L.P. XI 1246).

⁹⁵ D. Knowles, *The religious orders in England*, 3 (1959), pp. 270-1.

⁹⁶ TNA SP 1/116, f.249 (L.P. XII(i) 629).

⁹⁷ TNA SP 1/112, f. 118 (L.P. XI 1246).

Sawley Abbey was something of an enigma. Coppack et al argue that the fact the population local to Sawley was moved to put the monks back in at the suppression should be of no real surprise. Sawley typified the smaller Cistercian houses, it had its place in the hierarchy of Cistercian houses and was close to both nature and the breadline; a keeper of the Cistercian tradition.⁹⁸ The uncertainty raised over the house's actual worth begs the question just how close to the breadline it actually was. Was it indeed in a strong position so far as the giving of succour referred to in the ballad is concerned? What was the level of insight held by the abbot of Sawley and his brothers around smaller monastery suppression and, therefore, indignation and sense of injustice?

Sawley Abbey was closely aligned with those houses of Lancashire on which border it was situated. These were the same houses that excelled in alms giving when compared to elsewhere in England. Haigh suggests that in the aftermath of the initial rebellion, further trouble arose specifically in those areas where the religious houses were important. This was more evidence of the role the monasteries played in provoking the Pilgrimage of Grace.⁹⁹ The Pilgrimage Captain, Robert Aske, spoke of this under examination. Aske 'grudged against the statute of suppressions, and so did all the country, because the abbeys in the North gave great alms to poor men'. Also, many of the abbey's tenants 'were their fee'd servants, who now want refreshing both by meat,

⁹⁸ Glynn Coppack, Colin Hayfield and Rich Williams, 'Sawley Abbey: The Architecture and Archaeology of a Smaller Cistercian Abbey', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 155:1 (2002), pp. 22-114, doi: 10.1179/jba.2002.155.1.22

⁹⁹ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, pp. 83-4.

clothes and wages, and know not where to have any living'.¹⁰⁰ The words of the Sawley

Ballad resonated with all such expression:

For there they had	In trouble and care
Both ale and bread	Where that we were
At time of need,	In manner all bare
And succour great	Of our substance,
In all distress	We found good bait
And heaviness,	At churchmen's gate
And well intreat.	Without checkmate
	Or variance

The Sawley Balled: Verse XI and Verse XII¹⁰¹

But the ballad also represented something of a clarion call, quite literally a call to arms, summoning the commons to rise in defence of that that was being lost to them.

Churchmen for ever
So you remember,
Both first and later
In your momento
These pilgrims poor
That take such cure
To establish sure
Which did undo.

The Sawley Balled: Verse XV

The arch villains were named: Cromwell, Cranmer, Rich, Latimer, Leigh and Layton. If authorship of the Sawley ballad did indeed rest with the monks of Sawley then the monks of Sawley were singing to the converted. The rhetoric around defence of religious houses and wealth of the commons hit the right note. The Sawley ballad had

¹⁰⁰ TNA (L. P. XII(i) 901).

¹⁰¹ Ballad reproduced in full in Bateson, 'The pilgrimage of grace and Aske's examination', pp. 330-48. Also in Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 263-66.

much in common with Pickering's Song: they were both used to marshal support for the rebels' cause. They also both used the same device in appealing to the rebels' sense of northern-ness, vying against the government in the south who were spoiling the commonwealth.¹⁰²

In his wrath, King Henry VIII believed that the monks must have been if not authors then abettors of their restoration. The production of bills and their nailing to the church doors of the Sawley holdings at Tadcaster and Gargrave, the church of St. Mary and the church of St. Andrew, respectively, plus the carefully crafted Sawley ballad itself, is suggestive of Sawley house authorship. The records inform us that two monks of Sawley were put on trial, Richard Estgate and Henry Banaster. They both were in the four that transferred to Furness on the initial closing of Sawley, and both returned on its restoration in October. In March 1537 they were tried alongside the abbot of Whalley, and Estgate's brother, John, a monk of Whalley. They were convicted on two grounds: 'they had laboured to infect others by the sowing of sedition' and 'continually devised upon the same'; and they were guilty of 'the maintenance and receipting of such traitors as continually devised' sedition.¹⁰³

Strong evidence exists in the written records that the working relationship between Sawley, Furness and Whalley meant they were well placed to play a significant role in conducting and fomenting protest and rebellion against the existential threat posed by the government. The written records of the period also offer up a host of telling

¹⁰² Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint*, pp. 168-70.

¹⁰³ TNA SP 1/117, f. 18 (L. P. XII(i) 668); TNA SP 1/116, f. 263 (L. P. XII(i) 632).

glimpses that speak of both the oral traditions of the time and the means of transmission when written pieces were shared with the largely illiterate commons. The Sawley ballad, the Pilgrims' marching song, offers up a prime example. So too the bills posted to what were, essentially, Sawley Abbey's own front doors in Tadcaster and Gargrave. In its early days Sawley Abbey's existence was threatened by the poor nature of the land upon which it stood. Generous benefactions, along with the aptitude of the Cistercian brothers where farming was concerned, turned the house around. When under threat in the turbulent days of the 1530s, the brothers of the house actively cultivated commons protest and did so on a scale that belied the relative size of the house compared to their more illustrious sister houses.

Government action in the face of circulating 'seditious' ballads became even more intensified as rebellion spread in 1536, spilling over into 1537. The government recognised the threat level, thus recognising the voice of those behind insurrection. The voice it heard was popular and political. It tracked the passage of ballads, calling in all relevant people for interrogation. The case of Sawley also highlights the threat posed by an associated medium, the posting of bills on church doors. In the same way as political prophecy operated, the ballad form represented a living language in which people communicated their feelings about people, king, and nation to one another. The third of the three media used to amplify popular political voice, political prophecy, is considered next.

Chapter Seven: Political Prophecy

Yes, yes: know, that there is nothing that renders human counsels difficult, but the uncertainty of future time; nor that so well directs men in their deliberations, as the foresight of the sequels of their actions; prophecy being many times the principal cause of the event foretold.¹

Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury

A living, political language – a general analysis

This chapter of the thesis is the third of three chapters dealing with a discrete medium that served to amplify popular political voice in the study period. As was the case with rumour (Chapter Five) and ballads (Chapter Six) the government found it difficult to stem the flow of political prophecy in the period. The first part of the chapter includes a general discussion, preceded by – a departure from the other core chapters of this thesis - a more in-depth analysis of the priest, John Dobson. The case of Dobson illuminates how the language of political prophecy unsettled the authorities, leading to determined and rigorous investigation. The cases analysed after that of Dobson serve to demonstrate how the language of political prophecy was widespread and engaged in by all levels of society. The second part of the chapter is a deeply contextualised case study of the prophetess Elizabeth Barton, known as the ‘Holy Maid of Kent’ or the ‘Nun of Kent’ by her contemporaries. Barton claimed to receive revelations directly from God and the Virgin Mary. The significance of the case rests in it being high-profile, to the degree that, at one point, Barton found herself face-to-face with the King himself – an

¹ *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury Vol. 6*, ed. by William Molesworth (Longman, 1847), p. 399.

encounter of his choosing – and not afraid to offer her critical view. Again, it is argued that this approach adds something to the existing historiography of the period, through a broad and deep interpretation of another of the three media of information flow that coloured popular political culture of the time, political prophecy. The general analysis, including the activity of a clergyman, offers breadth, with depth sought through directing attention to the high-profile case of a low-born woman, with influential backers, who evolved as a prophetess feeding extensive oral networks. The woman, Elizabeth Barton, wielded a threatening level of influence that emanated from her issuance of political prophecy that fuelled popular political debate.

What defines political prophecy and how did it function as a political language? Rupert Taylor, in his ground-breaking work *The Political Prophecy in England*, stated that the term *political prophecy* essentially applies to ‘any expression of thought, written or spoken, in which an attempt is made to foretell coming events of a political nature’.² In considering the development and decline of the political prophecy, Taylor concluded that no one literary form ever came to be recognized as *the* medium of such expression. The only quality the prophecies had in common was obscurity.³ The methods of disguise affecting obscurity on political prophecies allowed for some kind of classification into prophecy types. The most common type is that employing animal symbolism. The main source for this *Galfridian* type of prophecy was Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*. In a feudal society where heraldic emblems were identified with families and individuals, this kind made perfect

² Rupert Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England* (New York AMS, 1911), p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

sense. A second kind of prophecy was based on combinations of letters or numbers, called Sibylline, drawn from the *Oracula Sibyllina*. A third type is the 'painted prophecy', an illuminated scroll featuring such subjects as kings, priests, and heraldic symbols.⁴ Less common but distinguishable by a unique method of disguise are those including numbers, dice, stars, and Dominical letters.⁵

Some ninety years after Taylor's treatise, Lesley Coote, in examining how prophecy functioned as a political language, argued that it is not a genre, but a discourse, 'a particular range of language, which provides a specific and exclusive way of talking about and viewing a subject'.⁶ Political prophecy is able to react to altered circumstances, and it is this flexibility that afforded it longevity, while still being considered appropriate for the given age. Coote argues that political prophecy was 'not a code, but a living language in which people communicated their feelings about people, king, and nation to one another'.⁷ Coote suggests that in considering political prophecy, the focus should be less on the text and the writer, than upon the audience and their interpretation of texts. For it was their interpretation which made prophecy political.⁸

Why and how did political prophecy find a hold in the popular political climate of 1530s England? In his magisterial work *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas suggested that it was no accident that the periods when prophecies were most

⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Wedenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), pp. 461-3.

⁵ Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII*, pp. 12-13.

⁶ Lesley A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Boydell & Brewer, 2000), p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

prominent in English life were precisely those of rebellion, discontent, and violent change.⁹ Thomas founded his argument on the basis that political prophecy was typically invoked to demonstrate that radical change, either pursued or achieved, had been foreseen by the sages of the past. Thus, it may be regarded as a propaganda device, 'based on the eternal truth that nothing is more likely to bring about the success of an enterprise than the conviction of those who undertake it that they are predestined to succeed'.¹⁰ Thomas offered the break with Rome during the Reformation as a prime example, it representing a return to the situation which had existed prior to the Papal 'usurpation'.¹¹ In formulating a strategy to bring about the break with Rome and selling the Supremacy, Cromwell emphasized this alleged usurpation by the papacy of powers traditionally and properly belonging to the English crown.¹²

The events of the 1530s - widespread theological, ecclesiastical, social, and political controversies - did indeed see political prophecy rise to prominence in English life. State Papers telling of the time refer to prophecy in reports made by Cromwell's correspondents. So too did the reports of those under investigation by, for example, the Council of the North. For all their variety of form and apparent obscurity, all those concerned at the time in the numerous cases involving political prophecy understood the language. Government records included little detail on the prophecies under investigation, adding little more than the fact the subject of inquiry was, for example, 'a

⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 505.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

¹¹ For further development of Thomas' argument see his section on 'The Appeal to the Past', chapter 13, 'Ancient Prophecies', in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 461-514.

¹² David M. Loades, *Politics and the Nation 1450-1660: Obedience, Resistance and Public Order* (Harvester, 1974), p. 165.

prophecy of Merlin'. It is how the language was used and how the audience interpreted the prophecy that is the interest of this chapter of the thesis, along with how this living language travelled through communities and further afield. Chapter Two of this thesis focused on the part played by the religious (regular and secular) in the maelstrom of change that hit 1530s England. It is first the case of a member of the clergy, John Dobson, priest, that helps illuminate how the language of political prophecy unsettled the authorities, leading to determined investigation. Exhaustive and targeted interrogations aimed at unearthing the source of the trouble left their mark on the record. It is worthwhile tracing the course of the Council of the North's investigation of this case, laying it out for due consideration.

John Dobson, priest, vicar of Muston, East Riding, Yorkshire, was charged before the Council of the North, at York on 2 December 1537, on the word of his accusers, three of his own parishioners.¹³ It was claimed that Dobson had not prayed for the King or 'set forth the Supremacy' for a year and more, until challenged and urged to do so by one of Sir Ralph Eure's servants. Reluctance in recognising the King as Supreme Head of the Church in England was not unusual in itself. What makes the case of Dobson relevant to this chapter of the thesis is what was reported of him further to his non-recognition of the Supremacy. Namely, what he was reported to have said 'both in the church porch and the alehouse of Muston'. Dobson said that the King would be driven from his realm and would return to be content with the third part of it. Also, that he that beareth the eagle [the Emperor] shall spread his wings over all this realm. That the dun cow [the

¹³ TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212).

bishop of Rome], which 'is casten in her stall, and she shall come into England jingling with her keys and set the Church again in the right faith'. Further, that 'When the Crumme [Thomas Cromwell] is brought low, then shall we begin the Christis Cross row'. That 'the moon [the badge of the Percies] shall kindle again and take light of the sun'. That 'the cock of the North [the cock was the crest of the Lumleys]' shall do great things.

Statements elucidated here using brackets made perfect sense to those who heard them at the time; the summary of charges made against Dobson show this to be so. The whole amounted to 'a series of very specific and topical seditious appeals, a potent mixture of political and religious propaganda'.¹⁴ It was a matter that was taken very seriously at the time. The case was thoroughly investigated and reported to the King on 18 December. Further instructions were sought, and advice requested on what should be done with 'those who have concealed it so long'.¹⁵

Dobson claimed that they were the prophecies of Merlin, Bede, and Thomas of Erceldoun.¹⁶ The Council went to great lengths to extract the source of the prophecy from Dobson, recorded in the form of two petitions submitted by him. He stated that the previous October he had been in Scarborough with Friar Chapman, warden of the Grey Friars, where he had borrowed a roll containing the prophecy from Friar John Boroby, the prior of the White Friars in Scarborough. Dobson claimed that he returned

¹⁴ Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII*, p. 4.

¹⁵ TNA SP 1/127, f. 97 (L.P. XII(2) 1231).

¹⁶ For a detailed examination of the 'The Prophecies of Rhymer, Bede, and Merlin' see Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, pp. 63-90.

the roll within fourteen days, as was his agreement with Prior Boroby, but took no copy of it.¹⁷ In a second petition, Dobson supplemented those prophecies that were subject to investigation with details on further prophecies contained within another roll provided by Boroby. Again, these were prophecies made by Merlin, and Thomas of Erceldoun. They foretold an equally portentous fate for the current regime, including the downfall of A, B, C [Anne Boleyn and Cromwell], and that ‘a long man in red shall rise [the exile, Reginald Pole]’. All to happen ‘about the year of our Lord God a thousand v. hundred and xxxvij’.¹⁸

Called before the Council on 5 December 1537, Prior Boroby was interrogated on the origin of the prophecies he provided Dobson. Boroby stated that he had taken copy of certain prophecies shown to him by a priest he had met in Beverley at the rogation days in the twenty-eighth year of the king’s reign. He claimed not to know the name of the priest and that he had not seen him since. Boroby confirmed that he had shown the prophecies, which began ‘France and Flanders shall rise’, to Dobson and the warden of the Grey Friars, Chapman. He had granted Dobson’s wish to take the said prophecies home with him so that he might make a copy. Boroby then added further grist to the mill by telling of a visit he made to a place called Werthorpe. The vicar there showed him ‘a less quire than the other, with prophecies beginning ‘When the cock of the North hath builded his nest’. He asked to take it home with him and did not return it. Boroby admitted to keeping it along with ‘a little tale of a Cromme and a Christ’s Cross rowe’, which he had copied from that shown by a gentleman in Scarborough called William

¹⁷ TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212 ii).

¹⁸ TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212 iii).

Langdale. Boroby also told of a scroll of paper given to him by one of his brothers which spoke of the black fleet of Norway and a child with a chaplet. His brother had received it from a priest of Rudston called Sir John Peacock.¹⁹ Despite the part he played in collecting and disseminating seditious prophecies, Boroby remained in office until his house was surrendered on 9 March 1538-9.²⁰

William Langdale, in turn, was interrogated on 8 December 1537. Langdale confirmed that Boroby had borrowed the said scroll from him for a few days. He added that, on returning it, Boroby lent him a long paper roll of prophecies. These he took with him to Scarborough Castle, where, subsequently, they were stolen by the commons during the northern uprising. As Boroby had done before him, Langdale then told of further such literature in circulation. Indeed, Langdale claimed that he had received copy of the same prophetic verses from Thomas Bradley, a priest at Ayton, who told him that he had received the same from Richard Stapleton, priest, at Sockburn.²¹

The Council interrogated Thomas Bradley on 11 December 1537. Bradley reported that Richard Stapleton had read the prophetic verses to him in the buttery at Ayton, some twelve months before. He confirmed the content of the verse, that he took a copy of it, and that he gave it to William Langdale.²²

¹⁹ TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212 v).

²⁰ Cross and Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, p. 478.

²¹ TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212 vi).

²² TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212 vii).

Richard Stapleton faced the Council on 14 December 1537. Stapleton confirmed that he had met with Langley, who had told him of the prophecy. He said that Langley had agreed to provide him with a copy and did so, having it forwarded to him at Sockburn by his man servant. 'There were certain letters in it, and "crummies". It was not past 12 lines, and went in metre.' Stapleton further deposed that while travelling on his master's business to Ayton, he had handed a copy to Bradley and, on his return journey, the original copy to a kitchener at Gisburn.²³

Commenting on the case, the following month, January 1538, Archbishop Tunstall of York, in communication with the King, wrote concerning the priest [Dobson] in ward at York for the prophecies and the priest at Durham committed to ward by my lord of Norfolk'. The priest at Durham had been convicted of interpreting prophecies.²⁴ Tunstall informed the King that the members of the Council were consulting the justices of the assize 'to bring down the opinion of the judges as to what such matters weigh, for it is not unlike that more such shall be found'.²⁵ It would be difficult to arrive at anything other than the conclusion to which Tunstall arrived. This set of examinations conducted in investigating the reported words of one man, the priest John Dobson, revealed that many people had access to all kinds of political prophecy. Dobson's own parishioners claimed that he had uttered such words in 'the church porch and ale house of Muston'. It might not be considered too much of an assumption that others present heard the prophecy and shared its content with their own associates. Dobson volunteered further information on prophecies to which he had been given access, beyond those first

²³ TNA SP 1/127, f. 51 (L.P. XII, 1212 viii).

²⁴ TNA SP 1/131, f. 56 (L.P. XIII(1) 705).

²⁵ TNA SP 1/128, f. 124 (L.P. XIII(1) 107).

enquired after. The sharing, copying and collecting of prophecies was evidently a thing amongst the set of individuals subject to investigation. It would be incredible to imagine that such sharing was restricted to this group of people. In this one case alone, the geographical spread was significant. From Dobson's parish, Muston, East Riding of Yorkshire, locations mentioned radiate southwards to Beverley, 34 miles, and northwards to Scarborough, 8 miles, and then Sockburn, 65 miles further north still.²⁶

Tim Thornton makes the point that although John Dobson's immediate connections may be difficult to divine, there is no doubt that others named in this case were very well connected.²⁷ William Langdale was a prominent Scarborough townsman. Langdale had received the prophecy roll from Thomas Bradley. The buttery at Ayton where Bradley and Stapleton met was, Thornton suggests, at Sir Ralph Eure's house. Bradley was a witness to Ralph Eure's will, on his death in 1539. Thornton argues that the Eure's household was very much involved in the circulation of these prophecies. Stapleton resided at Sockburn, the seat of the Conyers, an affluent, powerful and well-connected northern family. It is important to keep hold of the fact that John Dobson had been summoned before the Council of the North, primarily, because of his reluctance to recognize and pronounce the King as Supreme Head of the English Church. The Carthusians' stance in denial of the Supremacy had caused a stir that clearly troubled the government, one that was met with vigour and, for some, a ruthless putting down. What is clear from tracing the investigation into Dobson is the interest and no little concern as to the source and passage of political prophecy texts. Dobson was found

²⁶ Distances using current roads (Google maps). A crude method, admittedly, but a guide, nonetheless.

²⁷ Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People*, pp. 36-7.

guilty of treason at the Lenten assizes at York in 1538, for 'interpreting prophecies', and executed.²⁸

Also featured in the State Papers is a deposition given by another clergyman, John Hale, the vicar of Isleworth. Hales's examination before the Council had been prompted by a claim made by John Leek, a clerk of Syon. Leek says that one Thomas Skidmore had heard Hale 'called the King the "Molywarppe" that Merlin prophesied of, that turned all up, and that the King was accursed of God's own mouth, and that the marriage between the King and Queen was unlawful'.²⁹ Hale made a strained plea in his own defence of such a charge. He detailed how and why he fell into ill health, blaming several falls from his horse over the previous year and his age. His 'wits troubled with sickness', Hale confessed to several conversations had. He reported that two years previous he, along with others in Syon, had been shown the prophecies of Merlin by a 'fellow of Bristow'. Further, that he had discussed the same with Skidmore on more than one occasion, especially 'the King's marriage and other behaviours of his bodily lust'. Also, conversations that he had had with the prior of Hounslow about 'the Acts of Parliament made against churchmen', who had offered to show him a prophecy, '... but we had no leisure to speak together further, for we only met at the new inn, where Mr. Yowng, Awnsam and his wife, and others, dined with us'.³⁰

²⁸ TNA SP 1/131, f. 56 (L.P. XIII(1) 705).

²⁹ TNA SP 1/92, f.26 (L. P. VIII 565).

³⁰ TNA SP 1/92, f.36 (L. P. VIII 567).

Hale was well connected in his interest in prophecy.³¹ The Syon community was renowned as a learned community, with an impressive library that included an extensive collection of prophecy texts.³² Henry VIII and other family members were regular visitors and donors to Syon, supportive of Henry V's foundation at Isleworth up until Henry's marriage crisis in the late 1520s. The religious community at Syon was made up primarily of Bridgettine nuns but was also home to a number of brothers who, in the words of Dom David Knowles, were:

... without parallel in Tudor England; men who combined personal austerity of life with theological or devotional competence, and who by their books, by their direction of a fervent and aristocratic nunnery, and by their influence as counsellors and confessors of leading laymen, were a power to be reckoned with in a religious world which contained all too few centres of enlightened piety.³³

Syon was staunch in its opposition to the royal divorce when it was first mooted.³⁴

Hale's fate was likely sealed by the reported words of Robert Feron of Teddington, also under investigation. Feron attested to having heard Hale talk, accusing the King of neglecting his duty to his wife and offending the Holy sacrament of matrimony, 'and now he hath taken to his wife of fornication this matron Anne, not only to the shame and undoing of himself, but also of all this realm'.³⁵ The consequence, Hale is said to have stated is that, 'Until the King and the rulers of this realm be plucked by the pates, and brought, as we say, to the pot, shall we never live merrily in England'. Further, that

³¹ Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People*, pp. 28-30.

³² Vincent Gillespie, *Syon Abbey, with the Libraries of the Carthusians* (British Library, 2002).

³³ D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 3, *The Tudor Age* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 213, cited in Peter Cunich, 'The Brothers of Syon, 1420-1695', in *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400-1700*, ed. by Edward A. Jones & Alexandra Walsham (Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 39-40.

³⁴ D. Knowles, Chapter XVIII: Syon in *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 3, *The Tudor Age* (Cambridge, 1959), 212-221.

³⁵ TNA (L.P. VIII 609).

‘three parts of England is against the King’. Hale held high company on his execution for resistance to the Supremacy, namely three priors: John Houghton of London, Augustine Webster of Axholme, and Robert Laurence of Beauvale, and then four monks, including Richard Reynolds of Syon. What is interesting about this case is that Hale absolutely recognised the dangers inherent in having the conversations he had. His response on being accused and then examined was to claim ill health and ill mind. This is one further example of a clergyman – well connected, at that - having dangerous conversations; the words of which ended up with the authorities. In Hale’s case, the fact that his source of material was Syon must have, at least in part, sealed his fate.

Also in State Papers is a letter from Sir Thomas Arundell to Cromwell, dated 20 May 1535. Arundell reported a conversation had between the servants of one of his associates, Lord Dawbeny, and one Alexander Clavell. Clavell had made a prediction, ‘saying it was a heavy world, and likely to be worse shortly, for he had heard say that the priests would rise against the King’.³⁶ Arundell examined Clavell, who told him that he had heard the saying from one of his father’s tenants, who had it from an old man called Payne. This was confirmed by the tenant who had heard it from old man Payne several times. The tenant also adding that Payne had said, ‘the priests should be fain to flea and Hyde themself and cover their crowns with the filth of the beasts, because they would not be known’. Arundell examined Payne who confessed that he had heard it from his master, ‘a well learned man who had been dead 50 years’. Payne added that the parish priests would rule the realm for three days and three nights, and then the

³⁶ TNA SP 1/192, f. 194 (L.P. VIII. 736).

white falcon would come out of the north-west and kill all the priests. The white falcon was the badge of Anne Boleyn. The invocation of Galfridian prophecy, dating back to Geoffrey of Monmouth, predicting that priests would bear arms and rise up against the Crown was dangerous stuff. The addition of Anne into the mix was equally dangerous but also mischievous and indicative of the feelings held about her at the time, as evidenced in Chapter Three.

The government's response to all the prophecies circulating expressing discontent with the policies of the crown was to silence the prophets, yes, but it also embarked on propaganda initiatives of its own. This campaign of counter-prophecy is testimony to the fact that the government did take the voice of the people seriously.³⁷ It is argued by this thesis that such a contest, involving the harnessing of the power of political prophecy by both government and its critics, was distinctly political. The medium of political prophecy was used in just the same way as ballads were (Chapter Six). The usage of both, by both, was a political act. What is more, it could be argued that such a response from the government helped actually make the sort of sentiments being aired, political, if they were not already.

Never was it more necessary for the government to supplement its arsenal than it was in October 1536, during *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, when the threat to the government was at its height as the rebel army hesitated on the north bank of the River Don. Time had been bought, Henry and his first minister, Cromwell, released a barrage of

³⁷ Harris, *The Politics of the Excluded*, p. 16.

propaganda on the sin of rebellion and the rewards of obedience.³⁸ The most prolific of the writers employed was Richard Morison, the man who, Elton says, ‘wielded far and away the best propagandist pen in Henrician England’.³⁹ Cromwell made Morison a member of his household in May 1536, serving as a member of his secretariat until 1540.⁴⁰ Morison revealed both his view of things and his grasp of propaganda techniques when commenting on the popularity of Robin Hood plays, suggesting they actively taught people disobedience. Rather, he suggested, they should be replaced by plays demonstrating the pope’s wickedness and the teaching of obedience to the King. For, ‘into the common people things sooner enter by the eyes than by the ears’.⁴¹

Morison did, though, excel in penning for the ears. His counter-prophecy *An exhortation to styrre all Englyshemen to the Defense of theyr countreye*, published in 1539, was based on the ‘authority’ of scripture, namely the book of Esdras. The prophecy is of a mighty eagle, defeated by a lion.

That prowde Rome is mente by this prowde Egle, the texte is playne, the circumstaunces are suche, that thoughe it were in doubtte, we myght easily who is ment, the texte sayth nothyng. What if I contende, noble HENRY the VIII. to be the Lyon?⁴²

Morison had discarded Merlin, Bede and Becket for the older authority of scripture. His prophecy was a vision for England, and Henry’s reign, in particular. The overall message

³⁸ Gordon W. Zeeveld, *Foundations of Tudor Policy* (Methuen, 1969), pp.170-71.

³⁹ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 199.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Woolfson, ‘Morison, Sir Richard (1510-1556), Humanist, and Diplomat’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2015), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/19274

⁴¹ BM, Royal MS 18. A. 1. cited in Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 185.

⁴² Richard Morrison, *An exhortation to styrre all Englyshe men to the defence of theyr countreye, made by Richarde Morysine* (London, 1539)

being that England was a chosen nation, with a chosen leader, who was in the process of restoring the purity of religion.⁴³

Another response to the *Pilgrimage of Grace* came from Wilfred Holme of Huntington, near York. Written in 1537, *The Fall and Evill Success of Rebellion* is a lengthy commentary on recent events, written in the medieval form of a dream-allegory. The poet, Holme, ‘as a gemme without glosse unpublished to shine’, meets a princess, in this case *Anglia*, who commands him to tell stories of the fate of sedition, including the ‘late commotion’, the Pilgrimage of Grace.⁴⁴ Holmes’ tract covered matters such as the spreading of rumours prior to the rising, denunciation of the gentlemen who joined the rising, and took a strong line in support of the Royal Supremacy. It is the final section that is of particular interest here. It is headed ‘Of the Mouldwarp’ and focuses on the Merlin prophecies. It deals with the ‘Prophecy of the Six Kings’ and is of the Galfridian type in the way it represents historical figures by animals, and the political story by wars between them. The mouldwarp prophecy told of the mole, ‘accursed of God for his misdeeds’, that will suffer defeat at the hands of the dragon, the lion, and the wolf. It was an influential and persistent prophecy.⁴⁵

Holme directly addressed the claim made by northern rebels that Henry VIII was the Mouldwarp, this in place of the customary reading of the sixth king (the mouldwarp) being Henry IV. Holme argued that Henry VIII cannot be the mouldwarp, as claimed,

⁴³ Tracey Sowerby, ‘The Propagandist: Part 2’ in *Renaissance and Reform in Tudor England: The Careers of Sir Richard Morison* (Oxford University, 2010), pp. 78-117.

⁴⁴ Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York*, pp. 114-31.

⁴⁵ Howard W. Dobin, *Merlin’s Disciples: Prophecy, Poetry, and Power in Renaissance England* (Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 40.

‘except ye skippe at pleasure’. Henry VIII must be the twelfth king and, furthermore, he is in character far removed from the prophesied character of the Mouldwarp-king:

The prophesie of the Mouldwarpe declareth he shal be
A Caitife, a Cowarde, with a helderley skin:
But is he a Caitife, when playnely we may see
His protrature and vigor a very Herculine?
And is he a cowarde the truthe to define,
When in Fraunce and in Scotlande his noble chivalrie,
And in many places mo so gloriously doth shine,
That he is accounted a Gemme in activitie?⁴⁶

Prophecies did circulate in the north during the rising. At least eight, according to Michael Bush. All ‘rendered relevant’ to the aims of the pilgrimage either by a process of textual revision or by a process of reinterpretation.⁴⁷ Their mention in State Papers is typically light in textual detail but held as significant, indicative of wider understanding. Take, for example, a very detailed record of the examination of the monks of Furness in April 1537, which stated that John Broughton, monk, published a prophecy that ‘the decorate rose should be slain in his mother’s belly’.⁴⁸ Again, from the previous month, and the investigation into the Bigod rebellion, a further, small scale rising, post-Pilgrimage of Grace, William Todd, prior of Malton, was reported as saying that he had been shown a parchment roll of the painted prophecy type. Of the roll, Todd attested ‘whereon was a moon painted growing as the moon did, where the moon was full a cardinal was painted, and beneath him the moon waned’. Todd offered further detail, and then went on to confess to possessing a book called ‘Methodius’, given to him by Sir Ralph Ivers, ‘but has never taken on himself to interpret it’.⁴⁹ Bigod himself, under

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴⁷ Bush, *The Pilgrims’ Complaint*, pp. 14-16.

⁴⁸ TNA SP 1/118, f.1 (L.P. XII(1) 841).

⁴⁹ TNA SP 1/116, f.165 (L.P. XII(1) 534).

examination, claimed that Prior Todd had shown him a prophecy that, until then he had not understood, but ‘now he knew that it was this year it spoke of’. Bigod attested that Todd had earlier related a prophecy that the King would be forced to flee his realm and would then return to rule one third of it. Also, a prophecy that ‘the Church should abide woe for three years and then reflourish as well as ever’.⁵⁰

The notion that prophecies may be rendered relevant did not pass by Francis Bacon. In his essay *On Prophecies*, Bacon recalled how as a child, when Queen Elizabeth was ‘in the flower of her years’, he was familiar with the prophecy:

When Hempe is sponne;
England’s done.

It was generally held that the letters of ‘Hempe’ equated to Henry, Edward, Mary, Philip, and Elizabeth. After their reign, the prophecy foretold that England would come to utter confusion. Bacon’s qualifying point is that, ‘thanks be to God’, the prophecy, ‘is verified only, in the change of the name: for that the King’s stile, is now no more of England, but of Britaine’.⁵¹ Although it is tempting to question whether Bacon did so with tongue firmly planted in cheek.

This analysis, so far, of political prophecy speaks of the way in which the medium was put to work, by whom, and why it was so effective. So far, as was the case for ballads (Chapter Six), this chapter has contributed to the historiography by accentuating the

⁵⁰ TNA SP 1/119, f.73 (L.P. XII(1) 1087).

⁵¹ M. Kiernan (ed.), *Oxford Francis Bacon, XV: The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (Oxford, 2001), 112-14.

fact that the medium's very form afforded it significant force in terms of political messaging. It was used for political purpose both by government and by its critics, in ways that served to amplify popular political voice. It prepares the ground for the specific, deeply contextualised case study that is to follow.

Elizabeth Barton: The Holy Maid of Kent, prophetess - a case study

The second part of this chapter comprises a detailed case study that serves as a high-profile and telling example of just how the receiving and use of political prophecy played out in contentious times. It is the case of Elizabeth Barton. As was the case for the brothers of Sawley (ballads), the case of Elizabeth Barton (political prophecy) contextualizes the medium and its use, building on the general analysis.

Elizabeth Barton, known as the 'Holy Maid of Kent' or the 'Nun of Kent' by her contemporaries, was a prophetess who claimed to receive revelations directly from God and the Virgin Mary. She was a nun of St. Sepulchre's in Canterbury, a Benedictine priory. Barton had made the move there from a farm in Aldington, Kent, where she worked as a servant to Thomas Cobb, the Archbishop of Canterbury's farmer. With Archbishop Warham's blessing, Barton became a nun, and Edward Bocking, a Benedictine monk, her confessor, and spiritual adviser. Bocking had been a member of the commission appointed by Warham in 1526 to investigate the divine revelations claimed to have been received by Barton.

Nothing is known about Elizabeth Barton's early life or her origins. She was likely unschooled and illiterate.⁵² And yet the example of Elizabeth Barton perfectly illustrates that prophecy could offer women an opportunity for direct involvement in the public sphere on a national level.⁵³ Barton's supporters were arranged all over the country, and included Observant Franciscans, posing a significant threat by the way they integrated Barton's campaign of opposition into their own.⁵⁴ Indeed, Barton's influence could be said to have extended beyond national borders as her clerical backers translated her words into Latin, so they could be transmitted to Rome by papal diplomats.⁵⁵ For Diane Watt, as a woman political prophet Barton is a unique figure, standing apart from her predecessors, contemporaries, and successors, by the active part she played in the resistance to Henry VIII's reforms.⁵⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch determines that Barton occupied a 'cultural niche', as 'a divinely inspired innocent' making prophecies of destruction directly to the King's face, the like of which resulted in the death of others, including the Duke of Buckingham a decade before.⁵⁷

Historiography around the case of Barton identifies the very public role she played and its setting on record as a result of the significantly well-resourced inquisition held by the king and his government, an indication of just how much of a threat she was perceived to be. What has become nuanced in the historiography is the level of autonomy

⁵² Diane Watt, 'Barton, Elizabeth (1506-1534), Benedictine nun and visionary', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2008), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/1598

⁵³ Diane Watt, 'Of the Seed of Abraham: Elizabeth Barton, the 'Holy Maid of Kent'', in *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval & Early Modern England* (D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 51-80.

⁵⁴ MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell*, p. 233.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁵⁶ Watt, 'Of the Seed of Abraham...', p. 80.

⁵⁷ MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell*, p. 234.

exercised by Barton herself. Andrew Hope argues that Barton was befriended and raised up by those who saw the need to resist Henry VIII's schemes.⁵⁸ This aligns with J. J. Scarisbrick's argument that once Barton had risen to prominence by acting on her own initiative, she was then exploited by a group of clergymen centred on Canterbury. Scarisbrick does suggest, however, that Barton was 'indisputably a powerful, courageous and dangerous woman whom the wracking anxiety of the late summer and autumn of 1533 required should be destroyed'.⁵⁹ Alternatively, Patrick Collinson finds that the case of Elizabeth Barton offers another instance of a female source providing primary religious inspiration and energy, with the men around her playing out a secondary but critical role, channeling, directing and protecting.⁶⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch saw something 'quite remarkable' in Barton, possessing 'extraordinary self-confidence'. MacCulloch views the Barton affair as 'an exceptionally spectacular case of a phenomenon not uncommon in late medieval England: a female visionary'.⁶¹ He argues that Barton integrated herself with Catherine of Aragon's political supporters, and she took advantage of both the freedoms offered her as a spiritually inspired woman and the uncertain state of English treason law. Things changed when her words were targeted at a crowned Queen, Anne. Barton's biographer, Alan Neame, a direct descendent of the man in whose house Barton saw her first visions and voiced her first prophecy, had no doubt as to her significance. Making the case for the influence she wielded, Neame went so far as to argue that Barton stood for 'a whole

⁵⁸ Andrew Hope, 'Martyrs of the Marsh: Elizabeth Barton, Joan Bocher and Trajectories of Martyrdom in Reformation Kent' in *Pieties in Transition: Religious Practices and Experiences c. 1400-1640* ed. by Robert Lutton and Elisabeth Salter (Routledge, 2007), pp. 41-55.

⁵⁹ Jack J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 261-2.

⁶⁰ Patrick Collinson, 'Not Sexual in the Ordinary Sense': Women, Men and Religious Transactions', in Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays* (Bloomsbury, 1994), pp. 119-50.

⁶¹ MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, pp. 102-9.

departing political system, a whole departing scale of religious values'.⁶² Neame's work, overtly hagiographic, is not shy in affording Barton the highest credit, naming her as 'Kent's lost heroine, England's lost prophetess, the forgotten Catholic proto-martyr of our Reformation'.⁶³ Whether or not Barton was a martyr, or a fraud is not of interest here. Of more interest is what lies underneath, how, and why the state response was triggered to such a degree that moved Sharon Jansen to make the point that references to Barton as a 'deluded prophetess' and Bocking as her 'impresario' are as rhetorically charged as anything included in the sermon preached at Paul's Cross or the act of attainder.⁶⁴

Confessions were wrought from those active in the preaching of Barton's revelations, including: Henry Gold, parson of Aldermay, London; Hugh Riche, warden of the Observants at Richmond; Richard Risby, warden of Canterbury; John Dering, monk of Canterbury College, Oxford; Richard Master, parson of Aldington, Kent.⁶⁵ The state record is detailed in recording onward transmission of Barton's revelations, especially with regard to the prophecy concerning the King's reign. Friar Observant, Riche, is said to have shown the said prophecy to a significant number of people. What is interesting is the wide cross-section of society with whom it was shared: from, the Princess Dowager, the Marquess of Exeter, Lady Derby, and Lord and Lady Husse; to, Thomas More, the abbess of Syon, the prior of Sheen Charterhouse, the brethren of the convent

⁶² Alan Neame, *The Holy Maid of Kent: The Life of Elizabeth Barton, 1506-1534* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), p. 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁶⁴ Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour*. See Chapter 3, Elizabeth Barton: The "Holy Maid of Kent", pp. 41-56 and Chapter 4, Elizabeth Barton and Political Prophecy, pp. 57-75.

⁶⁵ TNA SP 1/82, f. 85v (L.P. VII(2)).

of Richmond, and several priests, named and unnamed; to, named merchants of London, and the recorder of London. The same entry in the State Papers also gives detail on the prophecy's sharing by John Dering, Richard Master and Edward Bocking, and to whom, with, again, several priests named.⁶⁶ It is no great leap to imagine that prophecy content radiated outwards from these people. It was in circulation, and it was politically motivated.

What is of primary interest to the purpose of this chapter of the thesis is the voice of Barton, what she had to say, and how, and the extent to which her messages were disseminated. Gertz and Toscano's use of social network analysis tools offers useful insight here.⁶⁷ Their work was aided by the fact that Cromwell and Cranmer compiled extensive accounts of Barton's associates, particularly those who relayed her prophecies to others. Those accounts are set out in State Papers, and, despite its ultimate bias, the rich data set provided allows for credible examination of just who the key players were in message dissemination. Just as important is that this offers an indication as to how wide the audience base might have been. Through visualization and computational analysis of Barton's documented connections, Gertz and Toscano find that two figures in particular, Hugh Rich and Henry Gold, had the connections and opportunity to pass on revelations: high betweenness centrality, so termed. Rich, a mendicant friar, moved between figures of the court, royalty, and church and monastic leaders, frequenting many of the leading London religious houses. Gold was a secular priest; he served as chaplain and secretary to Archbishop Warham. Rich and Gold were

⁶⁶ TNA SP 1/80, f.118 (L.P. VI 1468).

⁶⁷ Genelle Gertz and Pasquale Toscano, 'The Lost Network of Elizabeth Barton' *Reformation* 26:2 (2021), pp. 105-128, doi: 10.1080/13574175.2021.1977049

both preachers and likely addressed Barton's revelations in their sermons. Gertz and Toscano argue that despite 'Tudor propaganda' suggesting otherwise, Edward Bocking could not have controlled Barton to the degree claimed at the time, due to his comparatively fewer number of connections and his lack of travel. That said, they observe, in conclusion, that Cromwell and Cranmer understood the behaviour of networks as they convicted all the key 'nodes'. 'They did not simply scapegoat Barton's confessor but deftly pulled the entire tree up from its roots'.⁶⁸ The value in Gertz and Toscano's work is their finding that the 'principal movers of information' were not elite figures such as Fisher, Warham, and More, but middling figures, priests, monks, and friars as well as merchants.

Ethan Shagan identifies, too, the Henrician regime's understanding of the threat posed, as it 'crushed Barton's movement' in 'the crucible of the break with Rome'.⁶⁹ Shagan suggests that the 'Barton affair' is a story both of the resistance to the Reformation and of the government's first experiments with the acts of attainder, press censorship, and the execution of dissidents. This was necessary because Barton, the maid of Kent, became famous on a national scale. Shagan suggests that more pamphlets concerning her revelations were produced than historiography reports. 'Barton and her adherents established a word-of-mouth network capable of transmitting her political ideas to a wide audience'.⁷⁰ Barton's messages were, argues Shagan, 'told within the conventions of a traditional genre and describing well-understood phenomena', but she had the

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 126.

⁶⁹ Ethan Shagan, 'Print, Orality and Communications in the Maid of Kent Affair', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52:1 (2001), pp. 21-33.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 22.

misfortune to live at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.⁷¹ And yet, as well as journeying considerable distances herself to inform people of her revelations, Barton also owed her reputation ‘to oral communications and the ability of travellers along England’s roads and waterways to spread political ideas’.⁷² The flow was also inward, as Barton lived in Canterbury, England’s most popular pilgrimage destination, where the redirection of pilgrims visiting Becket’s relics at Canterbury Cathedral was readily achieved. As the cellarer of Christ Church, the cathedral priory, Bocking, Barton had ‘a public-relations man living and working within a stone’s throw of Becket’s bones’.⁷³

The line chosen by the State when it came to recording the ‘Nun of Kent’ affair is notable. Bocking is said to have ‘frequently railed against the King’s marriage’ when in the company of Barton. She, to please her ‘ghostly father’, had feigned revelations that 1. the King would not live a month after his marriage, and 2. that the King was no longer accepted King, by God, after his marriage.⁷⁴ The record reports that ‘many persons’ were ready to preach Barton’s revelations ‘as soon as her spiritual father should get notice from God that it was time’.

The position taken by the government can be drawn from the Sermon against the Holy Maid of Kent and her Adherents.⁷⁵ The sermon was delivered against Barton and her

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 28.

⁷² Ibid. p. 29.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷⁴ TNA SP 1/82, f.69 (L.P. VII 72).

⁷⁵ The sermon is briefly summarised by Professor Gairdner in *Letters and Papers of Henry the 8th for 1534* [L.P. VII 72 (iii)]. L.E. Whatmore produced a more comprehensive transcription of the sermon in his article ‘The Sermon against the Holy Maid of Kent and her Adherents, Delivered at Paul’s Cross, November the 23rd, 1533, and at Canterbury, December 7th’, *The English Historical Review* 58:232 (1943), pp. 463-475.

immediate supporters, with them present, at Paul's Cross on Sunday 23rd November 1533, by Dr. Capon, bishop-elect of Bangor. This was repeated on Sunday 7th December, in the churchyard of the Holy Trinity, Canterbury, by Dr. Nicholas Heath. The sermon speaks of Barton 'perceiving herself to be much made of', of issuing 'trifling words spoken unadvisedly by idleness of her brain', and that 'she feigned herself to have trances'. The sermon acknowledged the following Barton had amassed. Beyond the named clerics, it put a figure of 'two thousand and more' to the famed procession made to the Chapel of Court-of-Street. The sermon made clear the part played by Bocking, for he did:

... rail and jest like a frantic person against the King's Grace, his purposed marriage, against his acts of parliament, and against the maintenance of heresies within this realm, declaiming and blustering out his cankered malice to the said Elizabeth in the said matters.⁷⁶

Bocking then asked Barton to petition God on the said matters. For her part, Barton 'began to feign herself to have visions and revelations from God'. This all led to her statements regarding the marriage between the King and Anne. These 'feigned' revelations were 'spread abroad among all they [the principal disseminators] knew to grudge and not to favour the King's Grace's purpose concerning his marriage of the queen that now is'.

In the which number was the said archbishop [of Canterbury, Warham], the said cardinal [Wolsey], divers prelates of this realm, divers doctors and learned men, many religious persons, and in a manner (excepted few) the whole number of friars Observants and by them a great number of the lay folk of all sorts.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 467.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The sermon went on to reference Barton and her followers' direct solicitation of the Pope, seeking support and condemnation of the King's intentions. It bluntly points out that the King survived and continued to survive the prophecy speaking of his death should he divorce Katherine and marry Anne. The sermon also recognized the existence of a book written in Bocking's own hand, telling of the 'false miracles, false visions, and revelations'. It goes to some length in seeking to invalidate and rubbish the contents of the book, 'heretical propositions... which evidently convicteth them not to be of God, but devised by false seducers of the people'.⁷⁸

At her execution on 20 April 1534, at Tyburn, Barton humbly confessed that the real responsibility for her fraudulent prophecies rested with more powerful others, as reported by contemporary chronicler Edward Hall:

hether am I come to dye, and I haue not been the onely cause of myne owne death whiche most iustly I haue deserued, but also I am the cause of the death of all these persones whiche at this tyme here suffre : & yet to say the trueth, I am not somuche to be blamed cosideryng it was well knowen vnto these lerned men y I was a poore wenche without learnyng and therefore they might haue easely perceiued that the thinges that were done by me could not procede in no suche sorte, but their capacities and learnyng could right well iudge from whence they proceded, and that they wer altogether fayned : but because the thynges whiche I fayned was proffitable vnto them, therfore they muche praised me and bare me in hande that it was the holy ghost and not I that did them , and then I beyng puft vp with their praises fell into a certain pryde and folishe phantasie with my selfe and thought I might fayne what I would, whiche thing hath brought me to this case, and for the which now I cry God & the kynges highnes most heartely mercy, and desire all you good people to pray to God to haue mercy on me and on all them that here suffre with me.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 470.

⁷⁹ E. Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), p. 814.

This mode of confession at the scaffold was typical of its time. Men and women of the sixteenth-century ‘debased themselves before the inscrutable will of the Crown’ and commonly read statements that were likely written for them by the government.⁸⁰ This was all far removed from the King reportedly having offered to make Barton an abbess. An offer she refused, much to the King’s chagrin.⁸¹ There is no doubt that this sort of declaration - Barton placing blame for her words and actions with the educated men around her – was important to the government. It was in the interests of the government that it be framed as an elite-inspired action, thus limiting the potential for it being seen as a form of popular resistance.

A letter written by Thomas Cranmer to Archdeacon Hawkyns on the 20 December 1533 offers some insight into why this was a serious matter for King and government. Cranmer gave an extensive and graphic account of the miracle at the chapel of Court-at-Street, and the significant number of witnesses thereat. He spoke of the book written and published, telling the whole story thereof, ‘which ever since that time hath been commonly sold and gone abroad amongst all people’. Cranmer told of the confidence that many men of the realm - great men, ‘mean men’, and many learned men, but especially religious men – had in Barton. He noted that ‘in three points standeth the great number of her visions, which were so many, that her ghostly father [Bocking] could scantily write them in three or four quires of paper’. The three points were: the

⁸⁰ L. Baldwin Smith, ‘English Treason Trials and Confessions in the Sixteenth Century’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15:4 (1954), pp. 471-498.

⁸¹ TNA SP 1/180, f. 138r (L.P. VI 1468(5)).

king's marriage, 'the great heresies and schisms within the realm, and the taking away the liberties of the church'.⁸²

The act of attainder declaring Barton and her adherents guilty of high treason effectively doubled down on the messages inherent to the sermons.

And the saied Edwarde Bockyng, beeyng maliciously fixed in his opinion, agaynste the Kynges highnes, in his detested Matrimonie with Quene Katheryne, and intendyng in his mynde, afterwarde for his parte, falsely and Trayterously to vse thesaied Elizabeth, as a Diabolicke instrument, to stirre, moue, and prouoke the people of this Realme, aswell nobles as other, to murmoure and grudge, agaynste the Maiestie of oure Souereigne Lorde.⁸³

The act of attainder pardoned all those not specifically named in the statute. To rub salt in the wounds of these opponents of the break with Rome, the text advertised that the King made the decision at 'the humble suit and contemplation of his most entire and well-beloved wife Queen Anne'.⁸⁴

Elsewhere in Europe, the Spanish prophetess, Lucrecia de León, attracted several disenchanted churchmen and courtiers who took issue with the ways of Philip II of Spain. Lucrecia dictated her dreams to these churchmen. A register of more than four hundred dreams was compiled. They leave their mark on the record, having been seized by the Inquisition.⁸⁵ The dreams represented both social and political commentary. Her case offers, in a similar way to that of Elizabeth Barton, an example of 'how an ordinary

⁸² *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* ed. by J. E. Cox (Parker Society, 1846), pp. 272-4.

⁸³ E. Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548), p. 809.

⁸⁴ Krista J. Kesselring, *Mercy and authority in the Tudor state* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 64.

⁸⁵ Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (University of California Press, 1990).

woman could enter the political arena by drawing upon spiritual gifts'.⁸⁶ Kagan argues that Lucrecia's dreams were perceived as a direct threat to the monarchy, at a time when Philip felt threatened by both foreign and domestic enemies. She had also drawn attention to herself and found support amongst several prominent noblemen who welcomed her as a prophet. Having gained credibility as a prophet, Lucrecia warned of divine retribution should certain religious and political reforms not be met.

Fundamentally, Kagan argues, 'protest prophecies represented a bid for power and legitimacy and were a medium for public exposition of grievances that could otherwise only be whispered behind closed doors'.⁸⁷ Such subversion was a political act, as was the comparative case that is the focus of this thesis chapter, Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent. English government recognition that prophecies were a dangerous device deployed by the disaffected, is reflected by legislation passed in 1542. The government recognized the need to suppress such talk - whether whispered behind closed doors and subsequently reported or more openly - in the proclamation and statute 33 Henry VIII, c. 14. The Act made a particular form of seditious talk, that involving prophecy based on animals to be found in the badges or heraldry of the upper classes, into a crime without benefit of clergy or sanctuary.⁸⁸

Seven years later, it is notable that the Mousehold rebels active in Kett's rebellion sought comfort in the passage of a prophecy known to their ranks, which appeared to foretell of victory for the rural commons:

The country grooffes, Hob, Dick and Hick

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

⁸⁸ Bellamy, *The Tudor Law of Treason*, pp. 45-6.

With clubbes and clouted shoon,
Shall fill up Dussyndale
With slaughtered bodies soone.⁸⁹

In turn, government action against political prophecy continued to feature on the statute book and was recognized once again, when the military successes of 1549 were consolidated by parliamentary legislation that made the spread of ‘Phantastical’ prophecies an offence.⁹⁰ Twenty-five years later in 1574, shades of the Barton case might be recognized in the fate of two young girls, Agnes Briggs and Rachel Pindar. After ‘confessing’ to the counterfeit of their apparitions both were made to endure the same ordeal by sermon at Canterbury and Paul’s Cross.⁹¹

Government action in the face of circulating political prophecies was fourfold. First, they marshalled and applied the necessary resources to understand the nature of the prophecy, the intent of its usage, its implications, and threat level. Second, they traced its passage as far back as possible, calling in all relevant people for interrogation. Third, they often pushed back in kind, through counter-prophecy. Fourthly, if deemed necessary, they applied the full force of the law – if that meant changing the law, introducing new law, or simply cutting to the quick and, as in the case of Elizabeth Barton and her adherents, attainting without trial. This made several things evident. The government took the matter of the circulation of political prophecy very seriously and recognized its potential for stirring up trouble and inciting rebellion. The government recognized that because of the perceived authority bestowed upon ancient prophetic

⁸⁹ Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, p. 69.

⁹⁰ Wood, *The 1549 rebellions*, p. 81.

⁹¹ Alexandra Walsham, ‘The Holy Maid of Wales: Visions, Imposture and Catholicism in Elizabethan Britain’, *The English Historical Review* 132:555 (2017), pp. 250-285.

utterances, political prophecies were dangerous. This ancient character and tradition provided the authority for challenge and prompted the voiceless, including women, to enter a world they would not otherwise have frequented. It was this potent mix that triggered government action in the way described by the four points named above. This action left its detailed mark on the record and the State Papers provide the very evidence that tells of widespread political resistance to government authority. A living language in which people communicated their feelings about people, king, and nation to one another, yes. But, more than that, these were uncertain times, and the idea that men would be directed in their deliberations by the ‘certainty’ provided by the foresight of the sequels of their actions rang alarm bells. The case of Elizabeth Barton does feature in the existing historiography and the way in which she and her adherents were dealt with is recognized as a significant event of the period. What this chapter has added to the historiography is an interpretation of the affair through the lens of the third of the media with which this thesis is concerned, political prophecy, and its role in amplifying popular political voice. The first part of the chapter explored how political prophecy functioned as a political language and how it was weaponized for political purposes by both government and its critics. The second part, the case of Elizabeth Barton, exemplifies how this dynamic played out in what became a very public affair, which meant there could only ever be one outcome. Again, it is argued that the application of such methodology across the thesis as a whole adds significant weight to understanding of the period of this study.

It has been established in the two chapters previous to this one that the uncontrolled passage of rumour and ballads, respectively, was widespread. It posed a significant

challenge to the government, and was recognized by it as being so. The government signaled its recognition of this fact by its very response. This chapter, examining the passage of political prophecy, has served to place this third medium alongside the other two. The priest, John Dobson, refused to recognize the Supremacy, thus placing himself in the firing line. What made this case different from other such cases was his chosen mode of political messaging, political prophecy. Dobson was accused by three of his own parishioners. It has been seen throughout this thesis that this was a common occurrence. It was Dobson's words that were reported. After examination, the summary of charges made against Dobson made it clear that the government recognized the threat posed by his language and deemed it to be seditious. The geographical spread of influence that this one example exhibits was significant. It should be of no surprise that another case, that of the vicar of Isleworth, John Hale, provided another instance of a clergyman right in the thick of it, subject to government attention. Dobson was executed for 'interpreting prophecies'. Hale was executed for resisting the Supremacy - after justifying his standpoint through the language of political prophecy. Both clergymen were well connected. Both had responsibility for promoting the very thing they resisted. The conclusions drawn from these cases fortify one of the main arguments of this thesis: that the clergy played a central role in popular politics. In this chapter, clerical involvement in the flow of political prophecy was every bit as significant as it was for rumour and ballads; with all three media being used to amplify political voice.

The cases of Dobson and Hale, along with others analysed in the first half of this chapter, involved direct criticism of the government. The high-profile case of Elizabeth

Barton was blatantly critical of the government, and deeply personal towards the King. The example of Elizabeth Barton perfectly illustrates that prophecy could offer women an opportunity for direct involvement in the public sphere on a national level. The level of organization around Barton meant that her revelations were set to be broadcast in both written and oral form, to all levels of society. The government was compelled to act and did so. Its actions were well documented and that record now rests within the State Papers.

Chapter EIGHT: Conclusion

It is argued here that through the method of inquiry adopted, this thesis has contributed significantly to the existing historiography of the study period, 1530s England. The method applied has been one of a general analysis, followed by a deeply contextualised specific case study interrogating each of the key themes of the thesis, in turn.

Central to the argument has been the question of the existence of popular political speech in a popular political culture in 1530s England. The thesis finds that debate and commentary on government actions was a very real phenomenon, it was essentially political, and it absolutely evidenced political consciousness at all levels of society. Application of the said method in exploring the three discrete media has resulted in an interpretation of the unchecked and uncontrollable flow of rumour, ballads, and political prophecy that adds significantly to the existing historiography. It is argued that the three media served to amplify popular political voice: being marshalled, first in protest, and second, encouraging and triggering open rebellion in 1536-7. Popular political speech was absolutely recognised by the government and interpreted as a threat. The evidence for this is in the government's own well documented actions. These documents, compiled by government officials, were placed on record, and now rest in State Papers, the key primary resource for this study. The evidence is also in the government's response strategy: it being forced to deny rumours and operating a propaganda machine that made its own use of ballads and political prophecy to counteract its opponents use of the same.

The thesis recognises that information flow (rumour, ballads, political prophecy) and political speech does not happen in a vacuum. It has, therefore, explored the frictions that were being played out in societal relationships, and the place and space in which such friction manifested itself. This space includes the role of the clergy, a group in society who found themselves subject to intense pressure from above and below, key players in a truly turbulent period of political, religious and social change. It has tested the tensions between the workings of patriarchy and the reality of everyday life, finding that women moved within networks that opened up the world of informal politics of local society to them, one in which they often played an important role, and that this did extend to involvement in collective action. It has explored the question of collective identity by looking at those involved in political activity and rebellion and what trade(s) they belonged to. It has explored the significance of place and space, the role of the settings in which political communication took place, and why such space offered up the opportunity for 1. such speech in the first place, and 2. Its onward transmission.

The three media that carried political voice, amplifying its transmission - rumour, ballads, and political prophecy – caused alarm and triggered government action, thus recognising something of its force. The government assembled and applied the necessary resources to understand the nature of the threat political speech posed, the intent of its usage, its implications, and potential threat level. It traced its passage as far back as possible, calling in all significant people for interrogation. It often pushed back in kind, promulgating its own agenda, be it from the pulpit, the market cross or in print. It applied the full force of the law – if that meant changing the law, introducing new law, or simply cutting to the quick and, as in the case of Elizabeth Barton and her

adherents, attaining without trial. This action left its detailed mark on the record and the State Papers collection provides the very evidence that tells of widespread resistance to government authority, challenge that was of an essentially political nature; one that demonstrated a significant level of political consciousness.

The aim of this concluding chapter is to knit all the findings together. The place of finding was primarily State Papers. It is accepted that mining state records does present something of a methodological problem, for official documents do indeed record plebeian voices through the filter of elite sources. Nevertheless, the records of the period this thesis covers - the fourth decade of the sixteenth century - are somewhat remarkable in their scope and detail, credit for which is largely afforded to the skilled administrator and enforcer, Thomas Cromwell. It is the finding of this study that government collection of accounts of conversations had, along with rumours, ballads, and political prophecy shared, amounted to a considerably rich commentary on popular political culture of the time; a public debate that was very real across the whole period.

In seeking popular political voice, this thesis identified four critical government actions that defined the period of focus, 1530s England. The four actions were: the extension to the concept of treason and development of the concept of sedition; the bestowal upon King Henry VIII of the title Supreme Head of the Church of England; the suppression of the lesser monasteries; the discarding of some traditional theology, and the abrogation of the cult of some saints. The four actions described, and the level of discontent they bred, has been fully discussed in the opening chapter, under the heading, 'What was it

about government action in 1530s England that provoked discontent and engagement in popular political activity?’ Defining the context is essential, for this is the prevailing climate of the period in which popular political speech is sought, and it was not an amenable one. The named government actions, especially, plus significant others, made the 1530s in England a quite extraordinary decade in the history of England.

Passing through this tumult, news travelled in the form of rumour, ballads and political prophecy. The media offered expression for popular political commentary and participation. The thesis favours Ethan Shagan’s argument, referring to rumour transmission, that ‘every person spreading them was implicated in the creation of their meaning’.¹ It argues that Shagan’s observation on rumour can also be applied to ballads and political prophecy, for their uncontrolled and uncontrollable passage, too, made them political, and they functioned in a way that involved all participants in meaning creation. The key question posed is: How do the content and flow of rumour, of ballads, and of political prophecy, inform a search for popular political culture? It is argued that in answering this question and through the methodology applied, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the field. It is argued that any answer to this question must factor in the matter of gender. Equally, it is argued that any answer to the question must factor in the matter of place and space. Directing attention to the site of politics in this way results in a novel contribution to the existing historiography.

¹ E. Shagan, ‘Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII’ in T. Harris (ed) *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 30-59.

The comparative studies used, and the cross-disciplinary efforts made by the thesis, proved to be particularly useful when applied to the phenomenon of rumour. The thesis works on the basis that if rumours are to result in action, they need to be related, however couched, to the reality of their audience. Beyond the not easy to measure level of economic distress, distinctly regional, at that, the issues binding discontent were based on the four government actions detailed above. The magnitude of change promulgated by the government created a febrile climate. Rumour was often the only, or at least the first, source of news available. By looking at the reactions that rumours provoked it is possible to obtain a view of what was a lively popular political culture, commenting on and often protesting government action of the time. It was necessary for the government to be 'attuned to the censored speech of the lower orders'.² The changes enacted to the law of treason meant that any man could be accused of such an act, it all depended on the construction given to the words.³ Potentially, this made 'a mere passing comment punishable by death.'⁴ Indeed, it could be argued that the government, by its ideology, its preoccupations, its actions, and its policies, actually created popular politics itself. After all, it was the government that was responsible for attaching a level of threat to what, often, were words casually spoken by individuals who posed no threat to civil order.

The role of the clergy is central to this thesis. The clergy often found themselves subject to intense pressure from above and below. The clergy do not fit neatly into binary

² Wood, 'Poore men woll speke one daye' in *The Politics of the Excluded* ed. by Harris, pp. 67-98.

³ Smith, *English Treason Trials and Confessions*, pp. 471-498.

⁴ Everett, *The Rise of Thomas Cromwell*, p. 244.

models of politics: whether 'rulers v ruled' or 'clergy v laity'. Some clergymen chose to engage in popular politics; others were subject to it.

The case of Nicholas Staunton, parson (Chapter One), is telling of the mood of the period. What would appear to have been little more than grumbling about the King - drunken rambling, at that - blaming him for his own woe begotten state, found its way to the authorities. On the other hand, Staunton's suggestion that it would have been better if the northern rebels had had their way certainly placed it in the field of sedition if the target of his complaining did not.

More serious, the case of John Dobson, priest, discussed in detail in the chapter on political prophecy, offers useful insight across many of the themes of this thesis. Dobson denied the Supremacy and would not recognize it in his role as parish priest, responsible for securing parishioner acceptance of it. He had made his opinion known in both the church porch and the local alehouse. He was denounced by his own parishioners, something that was evidently a common occurrence across many parishes in the land. Dobson's favoured medium was that of political prophecy. He spoke of the diminution of the power of King Henry, and the return of papal supremacy. The language was understood by commoners and government alike. The threat it posed was realized and the response it triggered recognized that the whole amounted to 'a series of very specific and topical seditious appeals, a potent mixture of political and

religious propaganda'.⁵ It was a matter that was taken very seriously at the time. The case was thoroughly investigated and reported to the King. Further instructions were sought, and advice requested on what should be done with 'those who have concealed it so long'.⁶ The investigation unearthed a series of other political prophecies foretelling a sticky end for the current regime, including the downfall of Anne Boleyn and Cromwell, and an expectation that the exiled papist, Reginal Pole would return in glory. Worse, all of this was in circulation and hitting upon many ears, over a sizeable area of the north. In all, the considerable set of examinations conducted in investigating the reported words of one man, the priest John Dobson, revealed that many people had access to all kinds of political prophecy. Dobson had been summoned before the Council of the North, primarily, because of his reluctance to recognize and pronounce the King as Supreme Head of the English Church. Dobson was found guilty of treason at the Lenten assizes at York in 1538, for 'interpreting prophecies', and executed.⁷

Returning to the question posed in the opening, introductory chapter, as to why the government chased down and made such an example of John Dobson and his like, the fact that Dobson was found guilty of treason for 'interpreting prophecies' is telling. The government was aware and fearful of a popular reaction. Dobson was a man of significance, with an influence over his parishioners, and now the expectation was he would operate as a loyal civil servant. The fact that Dobson was so unwilling to switch his allegiance was one thing, his propensity to use his literacy – in a period in which literacy remained limited – in the manner that he did, quite another. In such a climate,

⁵ Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy*, p. 4.

⁶ TNA SP 1/127, f. 97 (L.P. XII(2) 1231).

⁷ TNA SP 1/131, f. 56 (L.P. XIII(1). 705).

where public words constituted an ‘especially contested terrain’, Dobson paid the ultimate price.

The two cases of John Dakyn and John Pickering, discussed in Chapter Two, both played out along similar lines but with very different outcomes. They were both examined under the same set of interrogatories: Dakyn survived and thrived; Pickering was charged with treason, condemned, and executed. Both were active in the rebellion; both used their literacy to further the rebel cause. This thesis argues that, just as John Dobson (above) was charged with interpreting prophecies, and using his position to share their political messages and influence others, so did John Pickering meet the same end for his composition of a ballad that became the pilgrims’ marching song. Challenged with defending his actions, Pickering shared details of how the rhyme was copied and distributed throughout his locality and further afield, adding that he ‘made the said rhyme by rhyme that the hearers might better bear it away’.⁸ Hardly the strongest of self-defence strategies.

Government alertness to the role played by the interpretation of information is detectable in the communication between Cromwell and Norfolk, discussed in Chapter Five.

Your Grace [for the King was also aware] knoweth how the spreading of such a bruit in your own country and in your absence from hence might by some suspicious disposition be sinisterly glosed and interpreted.⁹

⁸ TNA SP 1/118, f. 277 (L.P. XII(1) 1021).

⁹ TNA SP 1/144, f. 135 (L.P. XIV(1) 553).

Evident here is the clearly expressed thinking of Cromwell that the presence of such rumour was one thing, its reception, interpretation, and employment, quite another. One particular rumour was running free, Norfolk admitted as much, reporting that after making enquiries, he was told, 'the words were so universal they could not find the authors'. Ultimately, one of the rumour spreaders was apprehended in Lincolnshire. He claimed that he had heard the rumour from two men in Walsingham. It should be of no surprise that a place such as Walsingham should offer up such news. Journeying to and from Walsingham, on any of the described routes, pilgrims would have passed through market towns, their natural curiosity meeting up with conversations had, and rumours flowing along the way.

The consideration of place and space in Chapter Four underscored the significance of the marketplace as both a place of negotiation and conflict. It was a place of very public humiliation, as directed by courts spiritual and the criminal jurisdiction of quarter sessions. It was also a place where authority was asserted, something that dates back to the Anglo-Saxon period. The deeply contextualised case study of Louth (Chapter Five) tells of how so many of the key events concerned with the rebellion - before, during and after - happened at the marketplace. When the rebellion spread northwards and across the region, the Lancaster Herald was dispatched to assess the situation. He was given a schedule of towns to visit, a trumpet, and a proclamation devised by the King and Council. In his coat of arms, at the marketplaces of the towns, Lancaster was to deliver the said proclamation. All this makes what happened when Lancaster reached Pontefract particularly significant. Lancaster was prevented from reading the

proclamation at the Market Cross. He was told by Robert Aske that everyone was in accordance with the rebels' articles and were determined to see a reformation. Lancaster was escorted out of town. This was a deeply political act by Aske, on behalf of the pilgrims, denying the government access to the public space it was used to occupying, the point at which it was used to asserting its own authority. The voice of the commons was denying the government its right to be heard. This act was hugely significant and distinctly political.

This thesis argues that for all that the denial of space for government in the described instance was effective, just as important were the smaller, everyday acts. Although it was public, the crowded aspect of the marketplace permitted a measure of private subversion of space. It was a place of confluence where news in all its forms could be heard and created. Rumour was a powerful medium in a society in which communications were slow, and information was difficult to verify. If rumours were credible because they matched existing perceptions or expectations, they initiated strong feeling because they corresponded with people's hopes and fears, whether long- or short-term. Beyond proclamations, as was the case for de Vivo's Venice, so did, on their own scale, local marketplaces serve as a resonating box for gossip and conversations had by locals and incomers alike. There is ample evidence, exemplified by so many of the cases discussed in this thesis, that marketplaces served as highly efficient echo chambers. They were information centres, hotbeds for rumour propagation, to which people took the latest news and/or from which they took news away. If that marketplace was in a place such as Walsingham, then the input and output of news was multiplied manifold, and its transmission accelerated likewise.

The confined space of the alehouse may be obscured from authority but the number of cases telling of words spoken and reported, with thorough investigations commissioned and reported back to the very top of government, made such conversation regrettable for many, with clergymen making up a high proportion of the number. Much of the evidence now resting in State Papers suggests it was an unsafe place for unloading political frustrations. Whether or not there is enough evidence to speak of a concerted effort to monitor what was being said in places such as alehouses, is a moot point. There clearly did exist a good number of people willing to denounce those who did speak out. What this thesis does argue is that such conversations were being had in the first place, and they were of a political nature. Furthermore, for each case that found its way to authority, how many did not?

Just as the government countered the use of political prophecy by using it to serve its purpose, so did it fight fire with fire where balladry was concerned. The anonymous popular ballad composed around 1534 was redolent of such a tack, referencing and ridiculing Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent, and her coterie (Chapter Eight). Given the wealth of evidence across the themes of this thesis, Shagan's argument that the 'Barton affair' is a story both of the resistance to the Reformation and of the government's first experiments with the acts of attainder, press censorship, and the execution of dissidents, is certainly plausible; the evidence is there. Shagan's suggestion that Barton and her adherents established a word-of-mouth network capable of transmitting her political ideas to a wide audience is conceivable, yet less provable. Where this thesis does find common ground with Shagan is his contention

that Barton owed her reputation to oral communications and the propensity of travellers along England's travel ways to spread political ideas. The cases discussed throughout this study feature strong evidence of this: from the mercer, Philip Trotter of Horncastle, travelling from market to market, sharing rumour of impending confiscation of church goods; to the fisherman, Thomas Grant, returning from Dover, conversing with a merchant on Barham Down, and sharing the rumour of new taxes to be levied and the rumoured 'death of the king', with his customers; to the baker, William Rede, carrier of a collection of ballads on behalf of the Knutsford schoolmaster, telling of the northern rebellion, travelling his customary circular route that took in Whalley Abbey, Lancashire, Blackburn, Knutsford, and Oxford; to the two Cornish soldiers who were on pilgrimage to Walsingham, returning from duty in the North, listening in to the contents of the 'seditious paper' that was shared with them and others attending the Bell Inn, Lynne. Then to return home with news to share when asked, What news?

The government took the matter of the circulation of political prophecy very seriously. Political prophecies were dangerous because of the perceived authority bestowed upon ancient prophetic utterances. This ancient character and tradition provided the authority for challenge and prompted the voiceless, including women, to enter a world they would not otherwise have frequented. A living language in which people communicated their feelings about people, king, and government to one another, yes. But, more than that, these were uncertain times, and the idea that men would be directed in their deliberations by the 'certainty' provided by the foresight of the consequences of their actions rang alarm bells.

Just as political prophecy was invested in the authority of times ancient, so too could ballads be. In the same way as political prophecy operated, the ballad form represented a living language in which people communicated their feelings about people, king, and government to one another. The ‘Sawley ballad’, presented as the voice of ‘us commons’, was grounded in scripture and the commandment ‘thou shall not steal’. It objected to the government’s seizing of church assets. It laid the blame with the men around the King, not the King himself. ‘Pickering’s Song’ was founded on two biblical stories. One told of how military force against the government could be justified as willed by God, the other how it was possible to remove an evil minister by petitioning the king. The song laid blame for the move against religious houses at the feet of those heretics advising the king, with Cromwell heretic in chief. The Pilgrim petition submitted to the King in October 1536 called for reversion to the laws of the realm as they were at the beginning of Henry’s reign. ‘That subverters of the laws of God and the realm may be corrected’.¹⁰ The petition named the subverters as being Cromwell, Cranmer, Latimer, and ‘other maintainers of the same sect’.¹¹ All this targeted government actions, even if it most certainly did involve the king and the king’s doings.

The Lincolnshire rebels’ petition to the King was made up of five articles of complaint. Articles 1 and 5 related to spiritual matters, articles 2 and 3 raised the issue of burdensome taxation. Under Article 2 it is claimed that the demands be ‘a great hurt and discomfort to the commonwealth’.¹² Their first leader, the cobbler, ‘Captain

¹⁰ TNA SP 1/112, f. 118 (L.P. XI 1246).

¹¹ TNA SP 1/109, f. 249 (L.P. XI. 902.).

¹² TNA (L.P. XI. 705). reproduced in full in Bush, *The Pilgrims*, pp. 251-2.

Cobbler’, is said to have worn a cloak of crimson satin, embroidered with the words “I love God, the King, and the Commonwealth”.¹³ The rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace took vows in the form of an oath, commonly swearing ‘to be true to God, the king and the commonwealth’. After York was taken by the rebels on 16 October 1536 a proclamation addressed to the northern gentlemen was agreed and signed by Robert Aske ‘in the name of all pilgrimage and commonalty’. An oath for swearing the gentlemen included the statement ‘our pilgrimage of grace for the commonwealth’. Robert Aske argued that the suppression of the monasteries was *not* for the ‘commonwealth of the realm’. Throughout, those protesting government action (otherwise known as, the rebels) were acting according to convention by *not* seeing themselves as rebels against the Crown, rather they were making a political protest, petitioning the king, on behalf of the commonwealth.

Yet, such a strategy offered little or no protection. After the Walsingham conspiracy was nipped in the bud, the carpenter, Thomas Wright, found himself in trouble for declaring that ‘they that did for the commonwealth were hanged up’.¹⁴ On the other hand, when the Lancaster Herald was sent north to issue the King’s proclamation (when he was permitted to reach his proclamation point), part of his remit was to deny any truth to the many rumours of new taxes. Rather, the people had been deceived by ‘the ingratitude of those who would disturb the commonwealth...’ This was a direct strike at the sentiment expressed in both the Sawley ballad and Pickering’s song; both used the

¹³ TNA (L.P. XI 714).

¹⁴ TNA SP 1/121, f. 18. (L.P. 12(2) 13).

same device in appealing to the rebels' sense of northern-ness, vying against the government in the south who were spoiling the commonwealth.

The tussle over what was good for the commonwealth and who best served as its guardian is offered an interesting twist when applied to the 'mini-commonwealth' of the household, with the household head (usually male) as sovereign, his wife, children and servants, subject to his authority. Despite everything being neatly lined up to support this ideal, household conduct books, pulpit missives, the rulings of officials of state and local magistrates, the reality of everyday existence, and the necessarily interdependent nature of the husband-wife relationship denied this. This fracture opened up, for women, access to networks and knowledge that made them very much part of popular politics. Indeed, their very role in the household gave them licence to engage.

It is telling that the wording of Lancaster's proclamation speaks of threat to household security and income: the commonwealth was being disturbed for matters of weddings, christenings, churches, eating white bread and other meats, having beasts marked, and more. Lancaster himself reported that when he was on his way to Pontefract (the market cross at which he was denied a place) he passed men who, whilst not disrespecting his office, spoke to him of the said taxes, and that they were in harness to prevent the 'comontte' and the Church being destroyed. The case of the Lancaster Herald offers much in terms of how rumour functioned and how the government recognised the threat borne of its content, and its speed of travel. It caused much more than a stir; it posed a real threat. Rumour content was political, those engaged in its passage (men and women) were political actors and, on occasion, became activists.

This thesis has focused primarily on rumour, ballads and political prophecy; the main aim being to identify popular political speech. It does recognise one additional form of information flow, and this should not be understated. The form is the posting of bills as a means of passing on information. It is important to note, here, that the point of written bills was to inspire speech, and it is through speech that the message of the bills circulated. This made bills as much an oral as a written means of communication, in the same way that ballads and political prophecy were communicated. The production of bills and their nailing to the church doors of the Sawley Abbey holdings at Tadcaster and Gargrave, the church of St. Mary and the church of St. Andrew, respectively, were believed to be of Sawley house authorship (see Chapter Seven).

The State Papers collection also contains evidence of the writing, copying, and passing on of bills in places far from the main theatre of rebellion in the north, namely Reading and Cornwall.¹⁵ A bill warning of impending repercussions for rebellion involvement, notwithstanding the king's pardon, was pinned to posts and church doors throughout Durham, bringing rumour and written communication together; accepting that written documents were produced by the literate, with the intention they be read aloud to non-literate people. One bill, posted up in Richmond was in rhyming ballad form. All this speaks of a significant level of organisation and determination to disseminate political messaging far and wide. 'Bill-casting' provoked debate and disagreement and stirred

¹⁵ For Reading see William Wyre, innkeeper of the Cardinal's Inn, and his reading aloud of a bill in the name of the Pilgrimage leader Robert Aske, its origin and onward transmission TNA SP 1/112, f. 110 (L.P. XI 1231); For St. Keverne, Cornwall TNA SP 1/118, f. 245 (L.P. XII(i) 1000), TNA SP 1/118, f. 247-8 (L.P. XII(i) 1001).

and emboldened ordinary citizens to act.¹⁶ This alarmed the government, it recognised its significance and moved to deny its impact in the proclamation made by the Duke of Norfolk, 'lieutenant general from Trent Northwards': 'Prohibits all assemblies without the King's authority, and all ringing of bells backwards, lighting beacons, setting bills on church doors, &c., or conveying of bills'.¹⁷

All of this, along with many other actions, discussed above, speaks to the hypersensitivity the government in 1530s England exhibited towards the resistance and self-interpretation exercised by those who were not supposed to hold opinions on matters of government, for this was not the 'natural order' of things. This thesis argues that a political consciousness absolutely existed across all levels of society in 1530s England. The strength of such political opinion and its articulation caused considerable anxiety to the government. The response of the government was far reaching in that it put the words of a likely inebriated, disillusioned clergyman, sounding off in the local alehouse, and the words and subsequent actions of a Lincolnshire cobbler part responsible for initiating a serious and threatening uprising, in the same basket. The breadth of such cases has been made evident throughout the thesis, with complementary deeply contextualized case studies designed to extend understanding of the dynamic that played out across a period of considerable and widespread theological, ecclesiastical, social, and political change. The thesis argues that the reaction was popular, it was political, and it spoke of a popular political culture that is identifiable by the fact the government absolutely recognised it, feeling the need to

¹⁶ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 163.

¹⁷ TNA SP 1/115, f. 180 (L.P. XII(i) 322).

listen in, and take action. Indeed, this raises the question of the extent to which the government itself created popular politics. Government recording of its own actions has produced the very evidence base, now resting in State Papers, that allows for popular political speech of the period to be heard; a political voice that was amplified through rumour, ballads and political prophecy.

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Appendix

State Papers: a project

The term 'State Papers' is used in Britain and Ireland to refer to government archives and records. The collection of State Papers, part of which being pertinent to this thesis, consists of the papers of the Secretaries of State and records assembled by the State Paper Office from 1509, the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII, to 1782, when the State Papers series was closed and two new series opened: the Home Office for domestic affairs and the Foreign Office for non-domestic affairs. In 1856, master of the rolls, Sir John Romilly, appointed John Sherren Brewer (1809-1879) as director for a major new editorial project. In his time at Oxford, Brewer had drawn up a catalogue of some of the manuscripts in some of the college libraries, at the behest of the record commission. He was also employed for a time at the British Museum, in the same capacity. He continued to gain a reputation for the editing of historical texts up to his appointment as director for the new, challenging project.

The project was the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*. The task was to catalogue a set of loose papers, mainly theological, preserved in the State Paper Office (the State Paper Office was then separate from the Public Record Office), representative of the Reformation. Brewer did not, however, rest with the remit he was issued. Rather, he insisted on a unique plan of including all the contemporary

documents wherever they could be found.¹⁸ Commenting on the enormity of the task, David Loades asserts that it was necessary for Brewer to be selective, not so much in respect of which documents to include – the work was to be comprehensive - but in respect of which passages to reproduce, which to paraphrase, and which to omit.¹⁹ The first volume was published in 1862. Brewer was responsible for the editorial policy of the whole project but only fully completed the first four volumes, making a start on the fifth, before his death. The baton was then picked up by Brewer’s assistant, James Gairdner (1828-1912), who took the set of twenty-one volumes to completion. Gairdner authored a number of historical works, but his reputation was established through his work as an editor and collator of documents.²⁰ The last volume of the set was published in 1910, just two years prior to Gairdner’s death.

Currently, the calendars of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII are made up of 28 volumes and summarize the text of original documents held at: The National Archives (TNA); the British Library, incorporating private collections (most notably the Lansdowne, Harleian and Cottonian); and Hatfield House. Many of the original documents are written in Latin. The calendars provide summaries of the documents in English. Many are filed in department code, prefixed SP (State Paper Office). The main body of documents pertinent to this thesis sit within SP1:

¹⁸ Albert F. Pollard, ‘The Letters and Papers of Henry VIII’, *The English Historical Review*, 26:102 (1911), pp. 257-266.

¹⁹ David Loades, ‘Brewer, John Sherren (1809-1879), Historian’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2008), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/3365

²⁰ David Loades, ‘Gairdner, James (1828-1912), Archivist, and Historian’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 2004, rev. 2007), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/33307

Letters and Papers Henry VIII, 1509 – 1547, bound volumes of miscellaneous public and private letters.

State Papers Online are accessible through institutional subscription or free to view at the National Archives. *Gale Primary Sources* works with the academic community and archives around the world in digitising physicals materials, and applying search technology designed to aid discovery in academic research.²¹ Gale launched *State Papers Online: Part I: The Tudors, 1509-1603* in October 2008. Since then, Gale has published eight more parts. *State Papers Online* was upgraded to an enhanced user interface in December 2022. It is a collection of primarily Early Modern materials, consisting of:

- Facsimile images of almost three million State Papers
- Direct linking between the facsimile images of the manuscripts and their individual calendar entries
- Hyperlinking between all references in the calendar indexes and the calendar entries
- The Irish Manuscript Commission series of Calendars of State Papers Ireland
- The manuscripts collections of Sir William Cecil (Lord Burghley) and his successor, Robert Burghley, from the National Archives and the British Library (Lansdowne Collection), as well as the complete twenty-four volumes of

²¹ A particularly useful video account of how *Gale* has worked with The National Archives in Kew, to digitize manuscripts held there, can be accessed here: <https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources> [accessed 08 April 2025]

the *Calendars of the Cecil Papers* in Hatfield House and the Haynes/Murdin transcriptions²²

- transcriptions²³

²² <<https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/state-papers-online-early-modern>> [accessed 08 April 2025].

²³ <<https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/state-papers-online-early-modern>> [accessed 08 April 2025].