

London's News Press and the Thirty Years War

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-The emergence and evolution of professional news reporting and publishing in early 17th-century England is an important phenomenon that has received disparate attention from scholars, much of it in journals and collections of essays, so new, comprehensive work on the subject is always welcome. This book offers especially fresh insight through the author's extensive knowledge of the information about the Thirty Years War disseminated via the corantos published in England in the 1620s and 1630s. The book usefully provides an integrated account of the origins of London news publication in a synthesis of existing scholarship from a variety of disciplines and perspectives. Significantly, Boys correctly (*pace* Joad Raymond and Nick Poyntz) affirms the continuity between the corantos reporting exclusively foreign news in the 1620s and early 1630s and the newsbooks of the 1640s that reported domestic events. Corantos and newsbooks were both media conjured by a desire for information about events transpiring in troublesome political times. Boys' book also offers some useful statistics and censuses of corantos. It is very attractively presented, with a colorful composite cover and images in the text.

This study makes use of important manuscript collections in the British Library, such as the Trumbull Papers and Joseph Mead's correspondence, as well as manuscript newsletters in The National Archives. However, Boys' book relies most on printed sources, both primary and secondary. For example, the author cites the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* for the reigns of James I and Charles I, but not the State Papers Domestic (SP14 and SP16) in manuscript, available on microfilm and online. To understand what attempts the early Stuart monarchs *did* make to control the press, information from the actual documents in SPD is vital. SPD is primarily the archive of the secretaries of state's office which supervised all the monarch's correspondence (indeed all the monarch's government business). The senior secretary of state also

coordinated Privy Council business and exercised crown supervision of printed matter.

This research lacunae (among others) has led Boys' to repeat an unfortunate misidentification of a licenser for the press, Mr. Cottington, who is the joint focus of an entire chapter in her book. Cottington's misidentification here is even more unfortunate because he was correctly identified decades ago by W. W. Greg, with Greg's findings supported later by research from Sheila Lambert. Boys is aware of the controversy over Cottington's identity, but chose to follow mistakes originating with F. S. Siebert, perpetuated in more recent studies by Michael Frearson and Cyndia Clegg. Greg found the autograph imprimatur of George Cottington on a manuscript submitted to him for approval, now in the Bodleian Library. Lambert found George Cottington's entrance to and degree from Oxford. My own research places him among the chaplains of the bishop of London.

Under the terms of Elizabeth I's Injunctions of 1559, it was the queen, a commission of six Privy Councillors, *or* the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishop of London, and the chancellors of the two universities who were responsible for pre-publication licensing for the press in their jurisdictions, with the bishop in ordinary 'alwaies' one of the licensers. Thus, the vast majority of pre-publication licensing duties devolved to the bishop of London, the ordinary of the jurisdiction in England where all printing was conducted save for the university presses. Ultimately, it was the bishop of London's chaplains who did the actual voluminous and quite onerous work of reviewing manuscripts for publication. The consequences of laziness in exercising these duties on the part of Samuel Harsnett, a chaplain to a late-Elizabethan bishop of London and a licenser for the press, has been the subject of several articles.

So George Cottington as a university-educated ecclesiastic was licenser of news in the early 1620s as part of the traditional oversight of the press, at that point extended to the new genre of news. It is no surprise that he was, or at least is to us, an obscure person. Indeed, it would be quite surprising if the licenser had been Francis Cottington, a much more prominent person as a Privy Council clerk extraordinary, secretary to the prince of Wales, member of Parliament, diplomat, and ultimately knight and baronet.

Boys is correct that the crown, through the senior secretary of state's office, began to take a more active direct role in pre-publication licensing when Georg Rudolph Weckherlin in 1627 was given oversight of news, as well as other print genres deemed to be politically dangerous. Weckherlin was well educated and well read, skilled in a number of languages, and familiar with continental European politics due to his German origins and connections, his early employment in the Palatinate, and his work as a government translator and letter writer. However, he was designated to license news not because of those talents, but rather because he was a member of the personal staff of the senior secretary of state, Sir Edward Conway. (Incidentally, John Milton became licenser for the press in the 1650s in the same way and for the same reasons, in fact, succeeding Weckherlin in the job.) It is worth noting also that, technically, Weckherlin was not a direct employee of the crown, but rather was employed by the senior secretary of state on his personal clerical staff. Weckherlin's service in that capacity transferred to Conway's successors as senior secretary, namely Sir Dudley Carleton, viscount Dorchester, Sir John Coke, and Sir Henry Vane. When Charles I personally asked Weckherlin to stay on as a member of Vane's support staff in 1640, Weckherlin was bitterly disappointed to not be promoted to a full crown appointment with more adequate wages.

Just as the bulk of pre-publication licensing fell to the bishop of London's support staff such as George Cottington, so too had the licensing authority reserved to the monarch and Privy Council devolved to their man of business, the senior secretary of state, and (due to the overwhelming responsibilities of that position) from him to his support staff, of whom Weckherlin was one. Only in very rare, extraordinary situations did the senior secretary himself license materials for publication. Highly placed, professional bureaucrats such as the secretaries of state, Privy Council clerks both ordinary and extraordinary, signet clerks and the like did not have the time, much less the inclination, to review manuscripts for publication. This duty was pushed down the food chain to lower level, if talented, clerical employees.

Robert Reade taking over the licensing of news in the late 1630s must be understood in the same context of the inner workings of the secretaries of state's office. Furthermore, Reade's exercise of that duty is

intelligible only in the setting of internal office politics at that point, designed to displace the aged Sir John Coke as principal secretary of state. Reade was employed on the personal clerical staff of the junior secretary of state appointed in June 1632, his uncle Sir Francis Windebank. As the decade wore on, Windebank was anxious to succeed Coke as senior secretary and a major part of the drama of Coke's ouster was not only Windebank intruding in Coke's duties and claiming Coke kept him in the dark about important matters, but also Windebank's personal staff competing with Coke's staff for control over business. Reade was in the thick of the competition.

From at least December 1638, when Reade first appears as licenser, there was talk that Coke was too weak to carry out the duties of his office. Coke was at that time part of the Privy Council Committee of the North, appointed to deal with the problems in Scotland, as well as a member of the Commission for Saltpeter and Gunpowder, in addition to all his other duties, in the midst of preparation for war. Coke was seriously overworked, especially for someone in his late 70s, and increasing numbers of tasks were being diverted to Windebank, including the king's personal correspondence.

In March 1639, Coke as the senior secretary and Weckherlin as a member of his staff, went north with the king to pursue war against the Scots. Windebank, as junior, and Reade on his staff remained in Westminster. As Windebank took over even more duties that would normally have fallen to Coke, so his staff member Reade took on the licensing that Weckherlin would have done had he been in the capital. Reade stepping in as licenser had nothing to do with Weckherlin's performance or inclinations; Weckherlin just happened to be working for the secretary of state who was sliding, if not being pushed, toward retirement. Coke and Weckherlin remained in the north of England until late July, when the secretary went to his estate in Derbyshire and Weckherlin returned to the royal court in Westminster. Coke's decision to visit his country estate ultimately sealed his ouster from office.

While Coke was with the king in the north, Algernon Percy, tenth earl of Northumberland, allegedly as part of the war effort, had commandeered the 'olde Noddie['s]' lodgings in Whitehall Palace. Weckherlin's mission in late summer 1639 was to try to reclaim those lodgings, or get the king to grant new ones. Weckherlin was apparently unsuccessful in this (as was Henry Rich, earl of Holland, Lord Steward of the queen's household). Nevertheless, the king ordered Coke to return to court on September 4 and just a day later news writers were reporting that Coke's replacement was imminent. Rumor had it the new secretary would be Sir Henry Vane, treasurer of the royal household, and indeed, on February 3, 1640, Vane was sworn secretary while continuing to serve as treasurer. Windebank got the increased diet and title of senior secretary of state, although he viewed Vane as meddling in business that was none of his, and Windebank was once again left behind when the king went north to fight the Scots again in 1640. In December, under scrutiny by the Long Parliament (of which he was a member), Windebank fled to France along with Reade, leaving Vane as the sole secretary, until his own ousting at the displeasure of the king the following December.

Weckherlin had gone over to Vane's staff in February 1640. When Vane was removed from office in December 1641 and the king shortly abandoned the capital and the central government administration in January 1642 following the attempt on the Five Members, Weckherlin stayed in London. He moved into the employment of the Long Parliament, resuming many of his former duties such as pre-publication licensing for the press and deciphering coded correspondence.

Better knowledge and understanding of both the bureaucratic and licensing processes is necessary in the cases noted above, as in others addressed in this book. From the time control over printing had first been attempted in the reign of Henry VIII, it was an ad hoc process at best; elsewhere I have characterized the English crown's attitude in considering printed matter to be dangerous as 'crisis and response'. There was no uniform, programmatic approach to such control, if for no other reason than that the crown did not employ the personnel necessary to perform such policing. So, control of the press was catch as catch can, infused from time to time with new government measures and regulations, such as the 1557 chartering of the Stationer's Company of London, the Injunctions of 1559, the 1586 Star Chamber decree, etc. Despite the fact that some regularity had evolved by the early Stuart period in the form of pre-publication licensing via

the bishop of London's chaplains, the process remained very ad hoc, depending in large part, as has been argued by many scholars from many disciplines, on self-policing, or self-censorship.

But in the reign of Charles I, the situation began to change as both printed news reporting and manuscript newsletters began to mature and the political situation became fraught. It was clear, or becoming more so, that ad hoc means of controlling printed matter would no longer suffice. From the early 1630s William Laud, archbishop of Canterbury, was working through the High Commission for Causes Ecclesiastical to regularize and tighten oversight of the press, and likely the subscription manuscript news writing business as well. His staff was researching the situation from early in the decade, and overt actions were taken during the summer of 1637, namely the Star Chamber decree concerning printing, and the trials in Star Chamber of Henry Burton, John Bastwick, William Prynne, and John Williams, bishop of Lincoln, for seditious libel. But Laud's intended program to control printed matter including news was never realized, due to the controversy over the Scottish Prayer Book that same summer which soon escalated to civil war. The coming of war with Scotland distracted the crown bureaucracy, to say the least, and on the heels of that conflict, Charles I's central administration was stagnant, circumvented, and disintegrating. Laud himself was attacked by the Long Parliament, impeached in December 1640 (when Windebank fled) and imprisoned in the Tower in March 1641. To the extent that what might be called censorship had ever existed or was planned, the Caroline crown's ability to act on such matters was effectively destroyed in 1641 with the simultaneous implosion of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the prerogative courts of Star Chamber and High Commission, the Privy Council, and the central crown bureaucracy generally.

Boys' admittedly selected bibliography exhibits some surprising omissions, notably the work of Peter W. M. Blayney on the Stationers' Company, the size of print runs, and the procedures of entry, license, and authority. Blayney presents an original, nuanced understanding of these topics, and knowledge of his work would have greatly informed this book, especially the sections dealing with the licensing process, which Blayney calls 'authority', as did W. W. Greg. Licensing for publication was the dominion of the crown, carried out by the bureaucratic personnel available to it, the clerical staffs of the church and central executive. The Stationer's Company did not grant license to print. The Company did possess the most effective power available to control printing (granted in the 1586 Star Chamber decree): to seize and destroy presses and type. But it was extremely reluctant to use that power, doing so only when sharply prodded by the crown. In most instances, interfering with the output or content of print was trumped by the internal politics and trade concerns of the Company. The crown was left to control the content of printed matter, when it was recognized as potentially dangerous, by whatever means it could co-opt.

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