



PROJECT MUSE®

Monarch and Marketplace: Proclamations as News in Early Modern England

Chris R. Kyle

Huntington Library Quarterly, Volume 78, Number 4, Winter 2015, pp. 771-787
(Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2015.0029>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/610826>

Monarch and Marketplace: Proclamations as News in Early Modern England

Chris R. Kyle

ABSTRACT Proclamations served many purposes—they allowed the government to regulate or rule by edict, provided texts for magistrates to enforce the laws, regulated the economy, and tweaked statutory instruments. These (by and large) single-folio sheets were the main method the government used to communicate with the people of England, and as such, were printed in very large numbers. This essay looks at how proclamations functioned as news, how they were received in the countryside, and at local reactions to their arrival—from their display on market crosses and walls to the often elaborate lengths that towns and cities went to when publicizing the decrees of central government. **KEYWORDS:** early modern news networks; oral circulation of news; proclamation as performance; proclamations of monarchs' deaths; reports of James's succession

❧ **PROCLAMATIONS MUST BE** one of the most overlooked categories of printed material in the field of early modern history. Henry VIII's bombastic Act of Proclamations (1539) garnered some scholarly attention in the 1960s to 1980s, and occasionally proclamations have risen to the fore in legalistic arguments as to whether they could make law or only enforce existing laws.¹ More recently, Kevin Sharpe addressed them in terms of the self-representation of the monarchy, but in his book *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, they are forced to compete for space with medals, coins, beautiful engravings, tapestries, and paintings. However, Sharpe did note that proclamations “deserve a study.”²

1. See, in particular, G. R. Elton, “Henry VIII's Act of Proclamations,” *English Historical Review* 75 (1960): 208–22; and M. L. Bush, “The Act of Proclamations: A Reinterpretation,” *American Journal of Legal History* 27, no. 1 (1983): 33–53. See also notes 4–5 below.

2. Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn., 2009), 344.

As with many aspects of the Revisionist high political Tudor field, the interests of Sir Geoffrey Elton defined the historiography of proclamations, as presented in a section of *The Tudor Revolution in Government*, in an *English Historical Review* article in 1960 on the 1539 statute of proclamations,³ and later, in his article on “Points of Contact” and the Privy Council.⁴ Sandwiched between these was a review essay on volume 1 of Paul Hughes and James Larkin’s *Tudor Royal Proclamations*.⁵ This is the starting point of Revisionist interpretations of proclamations. Although praising Hughes and Larkin’s “devoted labours,” “commendable precision,” and, to quote a favorite Eltonian phrase, “lack of preconceived ideas,” he wasted little time in announcing that the review would be critical and that the conclusion of the “two American scholars,” as he referred to them— “that proclamations are a source material for a more complete and accurate history of the period”—struck him “as a trifle naïve. But the manifest pride of achievement is engaging.”⁶ Elton’s following critiques were by and large a high point of Revisionist bean-counting. The Americans were taken to task for calling the “Exchequer, Treasury of the Receipt” the “Exchequer of Treasury Receipts” (“the error suggests an insufficient acquaintance with Tudor administration,” Elton opined).⁷ A recounting of what Elton thought constituted a proclamation knocked twenty-seven items out of Hughes and Larkin’s book, some of the abbreviated titles that headed the proclamations drew particular ire (actually, he had a point there), and their description of proclamations and their production warranted only an “acceptable.”⁸ Despite this, Hughes and Larkin had in part brought to fruition a wish expressed by Elton in one of his lesser-known pieces, “State Planning in Early-Tudor England,” when he wrote that “proclamations remain a subject to be studied; we do not even yet possess a complete list ... nor has anyone yet attempted a systematic analysis of their content, enforcement, and general significance.”⁹

Elton’s critique of Hughes and Larkin’s work had a certain irony, given his place in the acknowledgments of the edition, the fact that one of Hughes’s former students was at the time Elton’s graduate pupil at Cambridge and working on proclamations, and that another of Hughes’s students doing a PhD at the University of Iowa, also on proclamations, appears to have spent as much time with Elton at Cambridge as at his alma mater. But the combination of Hughes’s interests at Wisconsin State University (as it was then called), Larkin’s at DePaul University, and Elton’s at Cambridge would inspire two PhDs on Tudor proclamations and subsequent books from Cambridge

3. On 31 Hen. 8, c. 8, see G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge, 1953), 343–44.

4. Elton, “Presidential Address: Tudor Government: The Points of Contact, 2: The Privy Council,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 25 (1975): 195–211.

5. Elton, “Government by Edict?,” *Historical Journal* 8 (1965): 266–71.

6. *Ibid.*, 266.

7. *Ibid.*, 266–67.

8. *Ibid.*, 267.

9. “State Planning in Early-Tudor England,” *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 13, no. 3 (1961): 434.

University Press. In 1976, Rudolph Heinze's *The Proclamations of the Tudor Kings* appeared alongside Frederic Youngs's *The Proclamations of the Tudor Queens*. These works were meticulous, detailed institutional studies—products of their time and their supervisors. Heinze did acknowledge the importance of the enforcement of proclamations in a brief section, but mainly these studies contributed to the history of central government and the subjects in which the Crown took an interest.

This, then, was the high point of interest in proclamations. Hughes and Larkin and, later, Larkin alone continued their publication of proclamations through the Tudors and early Stuarts, but no companion monographs followed for the period after 1603.¹⁰ Shifting historical emphases mainly left the official edicts of the Crown behind. But Elton had made the first Revisionist call for attention to proclamations, even if he found Hughes and Larkin's response to it inadequate. Heinze returned to the subject in a festschrift for Elton, but this time through the lens of the parliamentary protests over James I's use of proclamations in the early seventeenth century. Other scholars, such as Steve Hindle, have explored the local context of proclamations and their publication and enforcement during the Midlands Rising.¹¹ Sharpe returned to proclamations in a little more detail in *Image Wars*, while Adam Fox glanced at the local readings of these edicts in *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700*.¹²

More recently, though, in the “post-Revisionist” turn, Peter Lake and Steven Pincus have given us a way to examine public politics through the “post-Reformation public sphere,” which elucidated the episodic engagement of the public with national politics in early modern England. Further work by Jason Peacey modeled a “communications circuit” to examine the impact of cheap print on popular consciousness in the 1640s and 1650s. Both these interventions provide new insights for reconsidering the relationship between center and locality and the extent to which they “talked” and “engaged” with each other.¹³ Taking this “communications circuit” as a starting point, this essay looks at how proclamations were crafted by the government in order to explain Crown policies to the people of England, and how they were received and transmitted as part of a burgeoning news culture.

10. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, vol. 1, *Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603–1625*, ed. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (Oxford, 1973); *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, vol. 2, *Royal Proclamations of King Charles I, 1625–1646*, ed. Larkin (Oxford, 1983).

11. R. W. Heinze, “Proclamations and Parliamentary Protest, 1539–1610,” in *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G. R. Elton from His American Friends*, ed. DeLloyd Guth and J. W. McKenna (Cambridge, 1982), 237–59; Steve Hindle, “Imagining Insurrection in Seventeenth-Century England: Representations of the Midland Rising of 1607,” *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008): 21–61.

12. Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603–1660* (New Haven, Conn., 2010), esp. 35–36, 38–40, 41, 54, 129–30, 150–59, 294–99; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), 41, 44–45, 349, 367, 394.

13. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 270–92 (see also the introduction and essays in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. Lake and Pincus [Manchester, 2007]); Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013).



Viewing proclamations, at least for the purposes of this essay, and specifically from the point of view of the government's need to communicate with its subjects, entails the recognition that effective communication and effective government were one and the same. Violence, or the threat of violence, was arguably the least efficient means of securing obedience to mandates, or at least compliance with them. Indeed, the state depended on effective discourse more heavily than on any other means of achieving stability and quashing unrest. For this reason, it is crucial that we understand proclamations not as dictates but as carefully crafted utterances that would be reiterated in ceremonial, ritual, and performative contexts up and down the land. The government of the realm was at its most vulnerable at points of transition, and while all attempts to secure seamless transition between one monarch and the next were open to disruption, the accession of a foreign monarch to the English throne in 1603 was a point of particular vulnerability.

In one of the most impressive and successfully managed operations of government yet achieved by the Elizabethan regime, James ascended the throne largely without incident. Analysis of the government's communication strategies around the event demonstrates the role of proclamations in this process. Further, while the rituals of transition (trumpets, processions, and so on) were long established, the advent of print, combined with the canny political planning of Robert Cecil, revealed proclamations as a linchpin of Tudor/Stuart strategies of rule.

Between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. on Thursday, March 24, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died in her bed at Richmond Palace. Later that morning, the Privy Council met, and at 10 a.m. Sir Robert Cecil—surrounded by the king-at-arms, the council, and some 300 others—stood outside Whitehall and read the proclamation “most distinctly and audably” that announced her successor. Cecil and his entourage then traveled to Cheapside, where he again read the proclamation aloud, and after that at other places throughout the city.¹⁴ Although they did not enter the Tower, a trumpeter did, and after the musician read the proclamation, the imprisoned and now overjoyed Earl of Southampton sailed his hat over the Tower walls.¹⁵ Two days later, the Bristol chronicler William Adams recorded the following:

The 26th of march 1603 King James was proclaimed at the highe crosse in Bristoll, by mr Iohn Alworth sherife which was acted in this manner: ffirst Triggess the trumpeter sownded 4 times solemnely and mournfully, turning himselfe 4 severall wayes uppon the Crosse, for the death of her maiestie, and so for a while rested. Then began againe, sownding 4 times

14. *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602–1603*, ed. R. P. Sorlien (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 208, 247; British Library (hereafter BL), Stowe MS 1047, fols. 268v–269; John Stow, *Annales, or, A Generall Chronicle of England* (London, 1631; STC 23340), 812–13.

15. BL, Stowe MS 150, fol. 180.

and 4 waies turning his face as before, but now ioyfully for the entrance of King Iames. After which the said sherife read the proclamation aloud and so concluded praying for his maiesties long and prosperous raigne, all our Councell stood with the maior before the Towlsey in scarlet gownes.

For this service, Trigges received 6s., or the rather handsome sum of 9d. per note.¹⁶

On the same day as the events in Bristol, the accession of James VI was proclaimed in Dover, “according to the [tenor] and effect of the p[ro]clamacion hereafter written and Copyed out of the printed p[ro]clamacion w[hi]ch was sent amongst div[er]se other unto S[i]r Thomas Fane Knight Lieutenant of Dover Castle to be p[ro]claymed w[i]thin the Cinq[ue] ports and their members incorporate.” This involved a procession by the robed town council, accompanied by the preacher of St. Mary’s and diverse other gentlemen, preceded by five trumpeters. In the marketplace, the Commons clerk stood on a stool hastily obtained for this purpose, silence was called for, and the “great multitude of people of the town as of the Country” rejoiced and cried, “god save Kinge James.” A bonfire was lit, and then the same process was repeated in St. James Street (appropriately) and at the pier. Ordnance was fired from the castle, and the bells of the parish churches tolled.¹⁷

Here, the ceremonial—and wisely celebratory—aspects of the proclamation were emphasized. The enunciation constituted performance and ritual as another aspect of the increasingly important understanding and practice of government as the theater of state.¹⁸ Crucially, however, the above description is prefaced by an account of the dissemination of the proclamation by print. A printed proclamation is a very different animal from single enunciations, no matter how elaborate performances of them might have been, which suggests that the textual dimension of government communication had come to supersede the spectacle of communication.

One of the more elaborate ceremonies surrounding the oral delivery of the proclamation announcing the regime change took place across the Channel, in Flushing. The garrison commander, Sir William Browne, upon receipt of a letter notifying him of Elizabeth’s death and an enclosed printed proclamation, assembled the soldiers on market day and informed them of the accession of James. Browne then persuaded the burgomasters to extend the reading to the whole town. Armed with the proclamation, Browne, accompanied by the burgomasters, representatives of the Dutch states, and the town preachers, crowded into the State Hall bay window and read the proclamation to the populace before the troops shot ordnance and fired volleys. Not having eaten that day, the officers made the decision to adjourn to the Landryght tavern,

16. Bristol Record Office, Adams’ Chronicle of Bristol, BRO 13748 (4); Mayor’s Audits, BRO 04026 (15), p. 22.

17. BL, Add. MS 29623, fols. 250v–247v. The manuscript runs from both ends of the book and thus is foliated in reverse order.

18. For a treatment of this in Parliament, see Chris R. Kyle, *Theater of State: Parliament and Political Culture in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, Calif., 2012).

where they proceeded to get “drunke.” Worryingly (from the point of view of the safety of Flushing), more ordnance was shot after this, and fires were lit throughout the town.¹⁹

In this instance, proclaiming borrowed some of the features of carnival, and by means of them, celebratory disorder was harnessed in service of the state. However, proclamations were not always occasions for triumphant revelry. In Denbigh, a procession wound through the town in ceremonial splendor: “And Hughe Cloughe being there alderman p[ro]nounced . . . [the proclamation] a loude in Englishe & the Bushoppe [of St. Asaph, William Morgan] deliv[ered] the same in Welshe to the people, who well applauded the same.” (Although it is unclear whether the events are related, that evening Clough was found drowned in the well of his back garden.)²⁰ In the politically sensitive case of Ireland, the proclamation of Elizabeth’s death was delayed until April 5, to prevent the Earl of Tyrone from delaying his surrender in order to negotiate with the new king.²¹

What these proclamations brought, of course, was news—the news of Queen Elizabeth’s death, which no doubt was new news to the vast majority who heard the proclamation. Crucially, of course, these ritual announcements also brought news of the accession of the Scottish king, James VI.

Proclamations served many purposes—they allowed the government to regulate or rule by edict, provided texts for magistrates to enforce the laws, regulated the economy, and tweaked statutory instruments. Most importantly, these (by and large) single-folio sheets were the main method the government had of communicating with the people of England, and as such, were printed in substantial numbers. Although the topic often dictated the print run, somewhere around 1,000 to 1,800 copies seems to have been the norm in early Stuart England for a national proclamation, and 400 for a local matter, especially those concerning London.²² The city gave particular care to proclamations, most likely as it was in the near vicinity of courtly power, where the enforcement of sovereign will or lack thereof would be highly visible. London officials made an elaborate show of their proclaiming and collected a manuscript copy as well as printed versions of the texts. These proclamations were then copied into the records.²³ Companies, too, paid close attention, also noting the arrival of proclamations, and in some cases paid for additional copies to be printed. In 1604 the Woolmen actually paid £2 5s. for a further 500 copies to be printed.²⁴ But as the example of Elizabeth’s death and James’s succession demonstrates, what proclamations also did was to disseminate the news, and in a very public and performative way.

19. *Letters and Memorials of State*, ed. Arthur Collins, 2 vols. (London, 1746), 2:266–68.

20. “Robert Parry’s Diary,” *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 6th ser., 15 (1915): 128. Information from Lloyd Bowen.

21. Fynes Morrison, *Travells* (London, 1617), 277–81.

22. BL, Add. MS 5756, fols. 134–40.

23. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 1:ix. Proclamations are recorded in both the London Letter Books and Journals of the Common Council.

24. Guildhall Library, MS 6901, June 23, 1604.

In the major works that have defined the field of news and its dissemination, such as Fritz Levy's "How Information Spread among the Gentry," Richard Cust's "News and Politics," and Ian Atherton's "The Itch Grown a Disease," however, proclamations scarcely make an appearance, and then not as a news category. Atherton's broad definition of news manages to include ballads and plays but not the humdrum of this government-issued news.²⁵ It would, however, be stretching the boundaries of what constituted news to claim that all proclamations fell into that category. But many did serve a dual purpose of promulgating government policy and announcing events of domestic and foreign significance. The death of Richard III was announced by proclamation; wars with Scotland, France, Spain, Austria, and Burgundy started and ended with proclamations; new religions became matters of state—not only from the pulpit but also from the printed word of proclamations fly-posted in market squares, shops, and posts throughout England.

Although many proclamations were sterile announcements—factual, instrumental, dictating instructions to be followed and devoid of rhetorical flourish and finesse—the contents of many were explanatory markers of government policy and testaments to the truthfulness of the printed words. It therefore behooved the government not just to issue law to the people but also to explain itself to them in the process of securing their obedience. As Jason Peacey has noted, proclamations "constituted public ordinances with power to affect events."²⁶ The proclamation of the death of Richard III noted that Richard's body had been taken to Leicester and lay there, open for viewing, "that every man might see and look upon him."²⁷ This was a deliberate means of conveying throughout the realm that Richard really was dead, as well as an attempt to forestall rumors that he was exiled or in hiding, through the means of visible, public proof of the body. Henry VII's war with Scotland in 1496 was, rather melodramatically, "open and at large," and it was explained to the English people in overt terms of the crimes committed by James IV in invading the north of England, burning towers and committing acts of cruelty.²⁸ A century later, Elizabeth used proclamations to explain her policy on invading Ireland: the 1599 proclamation is in fact titled "Declaring Reason for Sending Army into Ireland."²⁹

Similar rationales for actions were used under James as well, and a proclamation also gave the opportunity to emphasize how the Crown worked in consultation with the governing class and Parliament. The "Innes, Ale-houses, and . . . Gold and Silver

25. F. J. Levy, "How Information Spread among the Gentry, 1550–1640," *Journal of British Studies* 21, no. 2 (1982): 11–34; Richard Cust, "News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 112 (1986): 60–90; Ian Atherton, "The Itch Grown a Disease: Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century," in *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Joad Raymond (London, 1999), 39–65 at 39.

26. Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, U.K., 2004), 37.

27. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 3 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1964–69), 1:3.

28. *Ibid.*, 1:34.

29. *Ibid.*, 3:200–202.

Threed” Proclamation of 1621 noted “the great damage, hurt, and oppression of many of his Majesties Subjects; which abuses were altogether unknowne to his most Excellent Majestie, untill they were discovered by the complaint of the Commons in this present Parliament.” For his part, James was “well pleased with that exemplarie course of Justice,” and now he would “put His owne Royall hand and Princely care, to the speedy and utter abolishing of all that evill, which might heereafter spring from those rootes.”³⁰ The rhetorical strategy and picture of government delineated here is far from that of the model of absolutist decree; it emphasizes instead the state’s role in protecting its subjects from harm and “oppression.” Furthermore, it illustrates the importance of the political process from the bottom up, in which James reacted to information from his subjects when told of their parlous predicament.

Through proclamation, the Crown not only conveyed news to its own people but also broadcast its policies abroad. The proclamation on the flight of the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell in 1607 was published in English, French, Spanish, and Latin.³¹ The latter in particular was added at the insistence of the king, as James wanted to ensure that “all princes and states may be truly informed of the consequences of their flight.”³² Certainly, proclamations about the cessation of French or Spanish wars were printed in multiple languages, and those proclamations that affected Catholics in England, while not printed by the government in French or Spanish, were quickly translated by ambassadorial staff and sent across the Channel. Proclamations on fishing tend to turn up in Dutch translations in The Hague archives. For the queen’s proclamation declaring peace with France in 1560, 350 were printed in English, and another 60 in French and 60 more in Italian.³³ In issuing this proclamation, Elizabeth wished not only to declare the war over but also to make sure that the news spread as widely as possible. The final clause of the proclamation noted:

And for better Intelligence herof to all Manner of Persons, hir Majestie hath willed this to be proclaimed in English and French, that, although the same have ben specially declared to the French King and to the said Principalls of Guise in France, and also to the Dowager Quene in Scotland, and to all the Ambassadors of France here resident . . . it shuld not be hid from others, that percase might be induced otherwise to thinke of judge than the very Truthe is.³⁴

The purpose here was to reach a transnational public from England to Scotland to France and to emphasize the newly minted “peaceful” arrangement by respectfully proclaiming it in the languages of the treaty partners.

30. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 1:503–5.

31. *Ibid.*, 1:176–79. For a French copy, see BL, Add. MS 30662, fol. 64v.

32. HMC Salisbury, 19:327–28.

33. BL, Add. MS 5756, fol. 136.

34. Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 152/73; *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 2:141–44.

That proclamations formed part of the news network of early modern England seems clear from how they were reported. Newsletter writers such as Joseph Mead regularly commented on their dissemination and what was contained in them. From Cambridge, Mead wrote on April 9, 1621, to Sir Martin Stuteville that “[o]n Sunday comes forth a terrible and strict proclamation (which I have seene). No man so much as by his countenance to abuse no man to look on but to be equall in fault.” The occasion that Mead was reporting concerned the aftermath of the abuse three apprentices had given to the Spanish ambassador as he went by in his litter. After Gondomar’s complaint, James issued a proclamation designed to suppress insults to both foreign dignitaries and “the whole Nobility and Gentry of our own Realmes” by the “baser sort of people.”³⁵ Mead also had sufficient intelligence to pass on what had occurred at the reading of the proclamation in London: “While the proclamation was reading a gentleman in the crowd trod upon a Spanyards toe who tooke him a box on the eare, he asking what reason he had for it, he gave him another & the gentleman tooke both patiently, this I saw just in a l[ett]re.”³⁶

This proclamation also spread through the gentry news network via Samuel Albyn’s correspondence with Sir Simonds D’Ewes:

on the 7th of aprill his maiesty came from theobalds to the gild hall & there in a short speech to the mayor & aldermen somewhat reproved them for suffring such disorders in the Citti as he was informed & with a charge for suppresinge such further abuses to that end let out his proclamation dated the 8 Aprill against base people their abuses to strangers & other of eminence. . . . On the 9th of Aprill the Lord Mayor the Recorder & the Aldermen held a cort at the gild hall & ther agreed upon Certayn articles to be observed by Counstables & other officers of the citty w[hi]ch wear printed & bor date the same 9th of Aprill.³⁷

The proclamation came at a time of heightened political tension over the Spanish Match negotiations between England and Spain, when every incident or rumor was circulated widely. James’s attitude toward the Spanish was keenly watched for signs of the direction of English foreign policy. For Albyn and D’Ewes, the proclamation and its enforcement in London provided news of the pro-Spanish leanings of their monarch.

Mead also conveyed much news of parliamentary prorogations and the reasons for them, but his proclamation news was not necessarily concerned simply with high politics. Proclamations as news could encompass more than matters of state. On March 21, 1622, Mead informed Stuteville: “No newes stirring here but onely, That the

35. BL, Harleian 389, fols. 49–50; *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 1:508–11.

36. BL, Harleian 389, fols. 49–50.

37. BL, Harleian 383, fol. 18.

Proclamation for wearing of cloth will come forth shortly & certainly be put in practise, but whether for the good or hurt of this Kingdome time will reveale.”³⁸

In November 1622, James ordered all nobles and “Gentlemen of quality” to remove themselves from London, ostensibly because of the “time of scarcity and dearth,” but, as a Venetian ambassador noted, the “real and secret” reason was to halt the widespread discussion of the Spanish Match.³⁹ This caused a considerable stir among those lords used to the pleasures of London life, who, unable to secure dispensations, left the city in fear of royal reprisal, as the proclamation had threatened. By January 1623, Mead wrote: “It is here sayd, that the two last Proclamations have caused the remove from and about this citty & Westminster of 7000 families & with them 1400 coaches; Yet are things here nothing cheaper, but the dearer; provisions not coming up as was wont; All tradesmen complaine much as to the poore of their departure, some already to returne if not too soone.”⁴⁰ Mead’s report clearly showed the effectiveness of proclamations as mechanisms of enforcement and as news fit to be disseminated into the country.

Mead also enclosed proclamations in his letters (or, on occasion, tried to). As he commented to Stuteville on February 4, 1626, “I would have sent you the Proclamation for Thanksgiving but that it was gone afore I was aware.” He did manage to obtain and forward a copy of the proclamation that halted the spread of the Commons remonstrance that year.⁴¹ Nor was Mead the only newsmonger sending proclamations as part of his newsletters. Robert Gell, writing to Stuteville in 1628, noted, “I have enclosed ye Curranto mentioned, & ye proclamation newly come out.”⁴²

Whereas newsletter writers saw proclamations as news to be forwarded, diarists saw them as news to be copied into their journals. When John Rous was in Bury St. Edmunds in May 1629, he noted seeing the proclamation for peace with France and another prohibiting the transportation of corn abroad. As regards the latter, Rous was inspired to discuss the “why” of its creation—and so he wrote at length about buyers, dearth, and adverse weather conditions:

The reasons are disliked at the buyers hands who thinke the publishing doth much hurte. 2 reasons are rendred of this restrainte. 1 That the unseasonable weather hath caused that the present shewe on the ground p[ro]miseth no plenty. 2 that kingdomes formerly wont to helpe in time of dearth are not like now to doe so & wherefore to prevent extremity the Proclamation published.⁴³

38. BL, Harleian 389, fol. 161v.

39. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 1:561–62; *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collection of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, vol. 17 (London, 1864), 530, 538.

40. BL, Harleian 389, fol. 268v.

41. BL, Harleian 390, fols. 9, 78.

42. BL, Harleian 383, fol. 65v.

43. Rous Diary, BL, Add. MS 22959, fol. 35.

John Rous's diary is actually full of notes about both seeing proclamations posted and remarking on their contents. During the 1626 Parliament, Rous

sawe a Proclamation at this time running thus By the King. His Majestie being given intelligence that certaine of the house of Commons (Committees) did entende to present to him a Copie of Remonstrance etc which copie his Majestie refused to be presented to him (the house having refused a most equall tryall of matters objected, at the honourable Courte of the kinge bench, & his maj[es]tie understanding that they meante to disperse copies of the same Remonstr. & for that it containeth in it things touching the honour of the late deceased king, the nowe king reigning & the credite of a great Peere of the Realme therefore his Majestie forbiddes all his subjects the keeping of the same Remonstrance charging them immediately upon sight of it to burne it, otherwise if it be found with any, that they expecte his displeasure according to the qualitie of this facte etc. This Proclamation having the third p[er]son altogether His Maj[es]tie never having We or Our pleasure or the like, had yet no Councillors handes to it, being subscribed God save the king. The Printer added.⁴⁴

The weight Rous gave to his journal entries on this proclamation highlights not only the importance of the issue but also the way in which he considered proclamations as worthy of keeping for posterity and, perhaps, later reflection.

Although Rous is unusual in his exacting use of detail and the extent to which he went to record the contents of proclamations, it was certainly commonplace for others to note their posting and contents. Robert Woodford, for example, closely followed the covenanting proclamations of 1638–39 and the fast proclamations of November 1640.⁴⁵ Walter Yonge in Exeter peppered his diary with proclamations regarding, among other topics, Parliament; the involvement of the Earl of Northumberland in the Gunpowder Plot; the new flags that ships should carry, now that James was king of “Great Britain”; and religion.⁴⁶ Whereas Yonge recorded what he had read or heard from Exeter, Henry Machyn as a London merchant taylor often witnessed the elaborate proclaiming in London. So he saw the proclamation of the peace declared between France and England of 1560: “the xxvii day of Marche was proclamasyon [at the] cowrt and at the crosse in Chepe and at the strett tyme . . . Lumbard street in dyvers places, of the Frenche [king] and the Skottys quen, boyth in Englyus and Frenche, with [a] trumpett blohyng, and a serjant of armes with a great masse [mace], and the ii shreyffe(s) all on hors-bake.”⁴⁷

44. *Ibid.*, fols. 6v–7.

45. *The Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637–1641*, ed. John Fielding, Camden Society, 5th ser., 42 (Cambridge, 2012), 281, 288, 291–92, 375, 380.

46. *The Diary of Walter Yonge, Esq.*, ed. George Roberts, Camden Society, o.s., 41 (London, 1848), esp. 3, 6–7, 7–8, 71, 72.

47. *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, ed. John Gough Nichols, Camden Society, o.s., 42 (London, 1848), 229.

Proclamations, too, could halt, at least temporarily, the flow of news and serve as organs of censorship. The proclamation in late 1620 drafted by Francis Bacon against “lavish and licentious” talk of matters of state caused no little caution among writers.⁴⁸ Even as late as March 1621, Elinor Cotton wrote to Lady Elizabeth Apsley, “Madame, I wish you had bene our neighbour this Wynter, that we might have had some Parliament talk together, it is as brave a Parliament for newes as ever was, but we must not wright any.”⁴⁹ More famously, Charles I sought to control the news and rumors that circulated after the 1629 dissolution of the parliament through proclamations. These were at once detailed explanations of his actions in bringing the parliament to an end—news and justification—and attempts to curtail discussion of politics. They show how proclamations disseminated information pertaining to the state in multiple ways. Firstly, the proclamation of March 2 presents Charles’s reasons for dissolving the Parliament: because of “the disobedient and seditious carriage of those . . . ill affected persons of the House of Commons, That We, & Our Regall authoritie and commandement, have been so highly contemned, as Our Kingly Office cannot beare, nor any former age can parallel.” It also explains, though, that most of the Commons have “shewed good affection to Religion and Government.” The proclamation makes it clear to the nation that “faction” and a few turbulent spirits crushed the overall good will of the parliament.⁵⁰ This, then, was the Caroline case and the news of dissolution.

Three weeks later, further news emerged about the dissolution and its aftermath. On March 27, the proclamation “for suppressing of false Rumours touching Parliament” was issued. Like its predecessor, the proclamation explained Charles’s side of the story before it attempted to stop the news of what had happened in Parliament, claiming that it had caused a disruption in trade and that Charles was not likely to call another parliament until the malefactors had been punished and the rumors had stopped circulating.⁵¹ The proclamation does seem to have had the desired effect, as one newsletter writer reported to Sir Simonds D’Ewes, “I have taken the liberty of silence which you pleased to graunt I shall certify you what newes wee have though it be not much; for the Proclamation (you know) stopps our mouths for talking of Parliament.”⁵² In this instance, the proclamation served not only to infringe the news; the order of censorship itself became news. The proclamation disseminated news, curtailed the flow of news, and *was* news.

That there remains a disconnect between historians’ writings on national and local issues, in particular with respect to proclamations, was recently illustrated in Andrew Pettegree’s work on European news networks, *The Invention of News*. Although Pettegree glanced at proclamations, using the example of Mary’s 1553 proclamation on seditious books, he was dismissive of its effectiveness, as it proceeded “cautiously to the

48. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 1:495–96.

49. Beinecke Library, Osborn Files 312, Correspondence of Lady Elizabeth Apsley, March 15, 1621. I am grateful to Jason Peacey for this reference.

50. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 2:223–24.

51. *Ibid.*, 2:226–28.

52. BL, Harleian 383, fol. 84, April 9, 1629.

heart of the issue. . . . Only after six hundred words . . . does the proclamation arrive at the heart of the matter: all are forbidden ‘to print any books, matter, ballad, rhyme, interlude . . . process or treatise, nor to play any interlude except they have her Grace’s special licence in writing for the same.’”⁵³ This statement misses the point—of course, the government had a specific action in mind, banning religious dissent—but the proclamation was not designed to tiptoe around the issue and bury it after six hundred words. It was designed to explain and deliver to the audience the rationale for the prohibition—hence the stress in the first paragraph of the proclamation, that Mary wished to see religious unity in England and to explain her beliefs and the necessity of her actions: “certain false and untrue reports and rumors spread by some light and evil disposed persons, [Mary] hath thought good to do to understand to all her highness’ most loving and obedient subjects her most gracious pleasure, in manner and form following.” The proclamation then explained government policy that all should seek not to “stir unquietness by interpreting the laws of this realm after their brains and fancies, but quietly to continue for the time till . . . further order may be taken.”⁵⁴ Here, then, Mary is using the proclamation to inform her subjects that the government would legislate—but in due course. Further sections note the turmoil created by assemblies of those seeking to spread rumors and the “evil zeal for lucre and covetousness of vile gain” of those printing plays, ballads, and rhymes on matters of controversial Christian doctrine. It is after this detailed explanation that the “enacting clauses” are introduced. Thus, the drafting of proclamations was deliberately designed as both a description and justification, before the orders of the state and the punishments for disobedience were mentioned.

For the government, this governing and news service was not only a way of speaking directly to the people but also a relatively inexpensive one. A thousand copies of a proclamation ran somewhere between £2 and £3 in printing costs,⁵⁵ and delivery charges by special Chancery messengers came to £5 each for four or five messengers.⁵⁶ For under £30, the government could deliver its message to all parts of the kingdom. The Hanaper accounts reveal a cost for delivery charges of £350–£400 per annum.⁵⁷ The other side of this commercial proposition, though, could come with substantial costs. The towns also paid the messengers who delivered the proclamations. In Exeter, Shrewsbury, and Leicester, the messenger usually received nearly 5s, although the amount could vary quite significantly.⁵⁸ Other payments in Leicester include 3s 4d; in York, the amount ranged from a peak of 6s. 8d. to 3s. 4d.

The other associated cost was for the actual proclaiming. The standard fee for this in Canterbury was 4d., and in Dover, double that.⁵⁹ How many proclamations

53. Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, Conn., 2014), 86.

54. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 2:5–8 at 5.

55. BL, Add. MS 5756, fol. 140.

56. *Ibid.*, fols. 70, 79, 93, 97, 106, 108.

57. The National Archives, E351/1657. I am grateful to Lucy Bates for this reference.

58. See, for example, the figures in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 1:49, 53, 166–67, 206–7.

59. See, for example, the figures in *ibid.*, 1:11, 14, 56, 70, 136, 149.

were delivered and how they ended up in the hands of local officials (for example, JPs who needed to know the contents to enforce the latest regulations) is a little murkier in terms of finance. Certainly, proclamations formed part of the staple fodder of many gentry collections, but to what extent they were able to pick up a spare copy for free is unclear. Proclamations, though, were for sale and readily available to those willing to pay—and at approximately 1d. for a copy, would not have imposed a financial burden.⁶⁰ Looking at this fiduciary dimension, though, obscures an important point. For the vast majority of the population who heard or read the proclamations, this news was free. Whether heard in the marketplace or town square, or read after being fly-posted in various locations, this government news could be obtained and passed on orally and in writing without the need to dip into one's purse.

It is clear, too, that local officials went to considerable lengths to ensure that as many people as possible were informed, and this was common across England. In the example above, a stool was used to increase the town clerk's performative visibility in Dover. York once faced the ignominy of not being able to find a trumpeter in the whole city for the proclaiming of the 1546 peace treaty with France, and so had to make do with a procession led by a drummer.⁶¹ Multiple venues, even in a small town like Great Yarmouth, helped to increase the outreach. The reading of the proclamation started at the Banner, where it was read by the clerk on horseback in "audible voice" before a procession of town officials repeated the reading at the market cross, Haven's mouth, the Crane, and Bridgefoot.⁶² In York, the proclamation was read outside the door of the Minster, and the church porch in Southampton was nicknamed the "proclamation house."⁶³ The 1539 Statute of Proclamations determined that proclamations should be read in at least four market towns, or if there were insufficient markets, six other towns or villages.⁶⁴ Despite the repeal of the statute, this practice appears to have been commonly adopted.

In fact, the statute may have been modest in determining the number of locations at which proclamations were read; the four market towns in practice seem to have been a bare minimum. In Essex and many other counties, it was customary to read and post proclamations on market days in order to reach the largest numbers.⁶⁵ The public nature of royal edicts certainly dates back to the Anglo-Saxon period, and the use of markets as a deliberate venue to inform subjects of the will of their ruler to

60. See, for example, Mary Elizabeth Bohannon, "A London Bookseller's Bill: 1635–1639," *The Library*, 4th ser., vol. 18, no. 4 (1938): 441, 444.

61. York City Record Office House Books, 18/45d, cited in Heinze, *Proclamations of the Tudor Kings*, 29.

62. Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, A/H(a)1, Yarmouth Herring Fair Books, fol. 6v.

63. See Youngs, *Proclamations of the Tudor Queens*, 25.

64. 31 Hen. 8, c. 8, clause 3.

65. See, for example, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 1:9. The Corporation of Rye annotated its collection of proclamations with the dates of proclaiming. These, almost without exception, fell on the Saturday market day. East Sussex Record Office, RYE/48, *passim*.

the reign of King John.⁶⁶ This orality was complemented from around the fifteenth century by the posting of copies in markets as well, and this, too, was enshrined in the Henrician statute. City and town officials also realized the utility of the marketplace for ecclesiastical and local proclamations, and such orders can be found in York, Cambridge, Oxford, and Hereford, among many other places. In those cities with walls, such as York and Exeter, proclamations were also posted on the town gates.⁶⁷

That the government needed to provide the widest access to the news that it wanted subjects to hear seems obvious as a means of distribution of both propaganda and more mundane information. But this also takes on a broader significance in terms of enforcement. One of the most common defenses of proclamation offenders was that of ignorance—not knowing about the proclamation, or not hearing it. In a couple of instances after the 1539 statute of proclamations, some questioned whether a proclamation had in fact been publicized in the required four market towns. In 1542, Thomas Isakke admitted keeping goshawks, contrary to the king's proclamation, but claimed it had not been read in his vicinity.⁶⁸ More extravagantly, in 1541, a deputy customer of Chester claimed that the proclamation did not affect him, as it only mentioned customers, comptrollers, and searchers, but not their deputies.⁶⁹ The lack of adequate proclaiming was actually presented as one of the grievances against proclamations by the House of Commons in 1610 and was again on the agenda in the 1621 Parliament.⁷⁰ In one case of a suspected duel in 1616, the matter was shifted out of Star Chamber and into the common law courts, as the defendant could not have had knowledge of the proclamation against dueling.⁷¹ Still later, in 1641, one of the charges leveled by the House of Commons against Sir Humphrey Davenport was that he forced one James Maleverer to compound for distraint of knighthood before the proclamation was read in the county.⁷²

The audience for oral news was both broad and diverse. But the focus in early modern history has been on the gentry and the circulation of news. This is understandable, of course: they were literate, educated, and wealthy enough to be paying consumers. However, if we rightly think of the pulpit and church attendance as one

66. William Alfred Morris, *The Medieval Sheriff in England to 1300* (Manchester, 1927), 153; James Masschaele, "The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England," *Speculum* 77, no. 2 (2002): 391–92.

67. John Hooker, *The Description of the Citie of Excester*, ed. W. J. Harte, J. W. Schopp, and H. Tapley-Soper (Exeter, U.K., 1919), 804, 846; Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, 45.

68. Cited in R. W. Heinze, "The Enforcement of Royal Proclamations under the Provisions of the Statute of Proclamations, 1539–1547," in *Tudor Men and Institutions*, ed. A. J. Slavin (Baton Rouge, La., 1972), 213.

69. *Ibid.*, 212.

70. *Proceedings in Parliament, 1610*, ed. Elizabeth Read Foster, 2 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1966), 2:71; *Commons Debates, 1621*, ed. Wallace Notestein, 7 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1935), 2:452; *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 1, 1547–1629 (London, 1802), 647.

71. Henry Hobart, *Reports*, 4th ed. (London, 1678), 120–21.

72. HMC House of Lords, n.s., vol. 11 (London, 1962), 267–69.

way in which both a godly and a government message was spread through England, then it would be unwise to ignore proclamations. Consider the efforts of local officials and the use of props such as the stool in Dover, as noted above, the back of a horse in Yarmouth, and the proclamation box in the Stratford-upon-Avon church. The government went to considerable lengths to ensure *audible* proclaiming—for example, at multiple sites in towns, with musical accompaniments (a brazen horn in Yarmouth), and through the policy in Essex to pronounce on market days. All these efforts reach down the social scale to those we might customarily think did not receive news. News of this nature, then, from wars to religion to the reasons for dissolving Parliament, was not exclusively the preserve of the governing class or gentry.

Access to this news was further enhanced by fly-posting proclamations—for example, on the town post in Thetford and at a saddler's shop in Watton.⁷³ This provided an opportunity not only for those literate to read the proclamation after its initial voicing but no doubt also for those illiterate to have it read or explained to them. Certainly, it seems to have been where those illiterate expected to read them. In Aylesford in Kent in March 1538, the residents assumed that the papers nailed to the town post were the "King's proclamation," whereas in fact they were discovered to be "dangerous words."⁷⁴ As J. R. Maddicott, discussing the fourteenth century, put it: "The political consciousness thus created was not confined to a provincial elite."⁷⁵ This may seem obvious to us in the world of early modern history, but it is worth emphasizing that it was the government's use of distribution, posting, and proclaiming with great fanfare that in large part created this information network.



The work of Revisionists on proclamations, although primarily institutional, created the framework that enabled new directions to be explored in the history of English government structures, propaganda, and models of communication. The immense labor of Paul Hughes and James Larkin in searching the archives of the world to discover and collate all extant proclamations is reflected in virtually every book on Tudor and early Stuart history. It is all too easy to dismiss this close editorial work and the narrowly focused institutional and high political history of Elton as lacking a human dimension (in particular, the motivation of individual actors) and failing to take into account the social, religious, and community pressures that caused proclamations to be both drafted and published. While this view is undoubtedly valid, Elton's works resonate today: through the awkward relationship between the prerogative powers of the monarch to issue proclamations that might "create" new laws or implement new penalties, and the statute law and edicts issued under the Great Seal. This was, after all, a rela-

73. BL, Add. MS 22959, fols. 32v–33.

74. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, 367.

75. J. R. Maddicott, "The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., vol. 28 (1978): 42.

tionship tested to the limit (and beyond) when Charles I issued proclamations during the autumn and winter of 1637–38 to force the Book of Common Prayer upon the Scots, and so sparked massive public resistance centered around the sites of proclaiming.⁷⁶

Building upon this earlier work and through a detailed examination of the creation, dissemination, and reception of proclamations, it is possible for us to see the degree to which the period witnessed a growing propensity on the part of the government to convey ideas and instructions throughout the country and the ways in which individuals and communities responded to this barrage of information in local contexts. This category of official documentation also illustrates the degree to which, within the localities, individuals and communities were in dialogue with national institutions and able to use communicative practices to exert influence over legal and political processes. It is clear, in other words, not just that there was a vibrant politics within specific localities but also that this was predicated in no small part on the fact that people lived in a literate, news-conscious environment, even if they were illiterate themselves. In reality, the key for successive monarchs, from medieval to early modern, was to reach the broadest cross-section of the population possible—from magistrates, county and town magnates, and clerics to the gentry, and on to informed peasant opinion-makers and all those who frequented markets, churches, town wharfs, saddlers' shops, and even market crosses.

CHRIS R. KYLE is an associate professor of history at Syracuse University. He is the author of *Theater of State: Parliament and Political Culture in Early Stuart England* (2012), and he has edited three books: *Parliament, Politics, and Elections* (2001), and, with Jason Peacey, *Parliament at Work* (2002) and *Breaking News: Renaissance Journalism and the Birth of the Newspaper* (2008). He is currently writing a monograph on Tudor and Stuart proclamations.

76. I am grateful to Laura Stewart for allowing me to read her forthcoming work on this subject.