The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered
Author(s): Brian Cowan
Source: *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Mar., 2004), pp. 21-46
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091544
Accessed: 17-03-2016 06:50 UTC

THE RISE OF THE COFFEEHOUSE RECONSIDERED*

BRIAN COWAN

Yale University

ABSTRACT. *This article offers a history of British seventeenth-century coffeehouse licensing which integrates an understanding of the micro-politics of coffeehouse regulation at the local level with an analysis of the high political debates about coffeehouses at the national level. The first section details the norms and practices of coffeehouse licensing and regulation by local magistrates at the county, city, and parish levels of government. The second section provides a detailed narrative of attempts by agents of the Restoration monarchy to regulate or indeed suppress the coffeehouses at the national level. The political survival of the new institution is attributed to the ways in which public house licensing both regulated and also legitimated the coffeehouse. The rise of the coffeehouse should not be understood as a simple triumph of a modern public sphere over absolutist state authority; it offers instead an example of the ways in which the early modern norms and practices of licensed privilege could frustrate the policy goals of the Restored monarchy.*

The coffeehouse was a different sort of place from other public houses in early modern Britain. Unlike the tavern, the alehouse, or the inn, it was a novel institution. The first British coffeehouse was founded in 1650 in Oxford, and London's first coffeehouse appeared in 1652.[1] As such, it was treated differently from the more familiar forms of watering holes. Although the coffeehouse carried an air of distinct gentility that set it apart from other common victuallers and public house keepers, the trade also faced a unique image problem as a result of its association with the dissemination of seditious rumours or 'false news' among the general populace, along with meetings of persons disaffected from the established government. Such associations were so strong that both Charles II and James II went to great lengths to regulate the coffeehouse political discourse in their kingdoms. Charles II famously attempted, and failed, to suppress the coffeehouses in England entirely in December 1675. Why did the coffeehouses provoke such hostility? And how did they survive and flourish in the face of determined opposition from the crown?

[1] Brian Cowan, 'The social life of coffee: commercial culture and metropolitan society in early modern England, 1600–1720' (PhD diss., Princeton, 2000), ch. 3, offers a recent history of the origins of the English coffeehouse.

Such questions have been argued over almost from the very inception of the coffeehouse phenomenon. Many high-flying royalists and subsequent tory historians defended the attempts to regulate or even eradicate the coffeehouses as a necessary measure, and they continued to reiterate these views long after the survival of the coffeehouses was a foregone conclusion. Even in the early eighteenth century, Roger North lamented the failure of Charles II to suppress the coffeehouses such that 'now', he thought, 'the mischief is arrived to perfection, and not only sedition and treason, but atheism, heresy, and blasphemy are publicly taught in diverse of the celebrated coffee-houses ... and it is as unseemly for a reasonable, conformable person to come there, as for a clergyman to frequent a bawdy house'.[2]

More common has been the celebration of the survival of the coffeehouse after the Restoration as an indicator of the progress of English liberties. The rise of the coffeehouse, along with parliament and party politics, has played an important role in the construction of a whig view of the transition from later Stuart to early Hanoverian England.[3] The failure of the crown to wipe out the people's coffeehouses has been seen as an early indicator that England could not be ruled in an arbitrary, despotic manner by its monarchs. This view has its origins in the earliest whig histories of the Stuart era, which also saw the coffeehouses as a necessary outlet for the English people's natural aversion to 'the growth of Popery and the French power'.[4] For David Hume, the rise of the coffeehouse was proof of the 'genius of the English government' and a sign of the 'liberty of the constitution'.[5] Other whiggish historians have been even more forthright in their estimation of the constitutional significance of the triumph of the coffeehouses. Hume's contemporary James Ralph thought that the desire to suppress the coffeehouses indicated a desire by the Restoration regime to 'extinguish the light of reason' and to 'subdue the power of reflection' amongst its subjects.[6] When Henry Hallam wrote his *Constitutional history of England* in the early nineteenth

---

[2] Roger North, *Examen: or, an enquiry into the credit and veracity of a pretended complete history* (London, 1740), p. 141. This passage had been composed well before its publication, however: North died in 1734.

[3] While this article studies the political regulation of coffeehouses in the three British kingdoms, the whig historiography of the coffeehouse with which it contends has been a resolutely English one.

[4] [White Kennett], *A complete history of England* (3 vols., London, 1706), III, p. 336. It is worth noting that Gilbert Burnet did not see fit to mention coffeehouses in his *History of his own time* (6 vols., Oxford, 1833 edn).

[5] David Hume, *The history of England from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the revolution in 1688* (4 vols., Albany, NY, 1816 edn), IV, p. 281. Hume's whiggery is so well established in works as varied as Duncan Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics* (Cambridge, 1975); Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 1989), pp. 17, 108–10; and J. C. D. Clark, *English society, 1660–1832* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 142–5, as to be a standard interpretation of his politics, but the image of Hume as a 'tory philosopher' persists in works such as Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping early modern England: the culture of seventeenth-century politics* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 5.

[6] [James Ralph], *The history of England: during the reigns of K. William, Q. Anne, and K. George I* (2 vols., London, 1744), I, p. 297.

century, he saw the Restoration-era proclamations against the coffeehouses as another example of royal 'encroachments on the legislative supremacy of parliament, and on the personal rights of the subject'.[7] For Thomas Babington Macaulay, the coffeehouses of Restoration England were 'the chief organs through which the public opinion of the metropolis vented itself', and soon became a veritable 'fourth Estate of the realm', a phrase which he had coined himself in his review of Hallam's *Constitutional history* two decades earlier. The failure of the court to eradicate this new fourth estate was yet another confirmation of the triumphant historical progress of English liberties that was the subject of Macaulay's grand narrative.[8] In the twentieth century, the survival of the coffeehouses was seen by many historians as a victory against 'a dictatorial challenge to freedom of speech and individual liberty' and a key step towards the establishment of the freedom of the press.[9]

While this unreconstructed sort of whiggish view of Stuart political history has long been out of fashion, it has been repackaged for recent audiences under the more fashionable guise of the concept of the emergence of a 'public sphere'.[10] First adumbrated by Jürgen Habermas as a means of capturing an historical example of what he would later go on to call an 'ideal-speech situation', the public sphere rubric has been seized upon with vigour by early modern historians in recent years, especially since the translation of Habermas's 1962 text into French in 1978 and English in 1989.[11] For Habermas, the coffeehouse exemplified his public sphere: it was open to all comers (except for

[7] Henry Hallam, *Constitutional history of England, from the accession of Henry VII to the death of George II* (2 vols., London, 1850 edn), II, pp. 170–1 (quote at p. 170).

[8] Thomas Babington Macaulay, in C. H. Firth, ed., *The history of England from the accession of James the Second* (6 vols., London, 1913), I, pp. 360–2, quotes at 360, 361; on Macaulay's concept of a 'fourth estate', see John Clive, *Macaulay: the shaping of the historian* (New York, 1974), pp. 124–5. Before the early nineteenth century, the term was not generally applied to the press or public opinion, and it was used derisively, see J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond liberty and property: the process of self-recognition in eighteenth-century political thought* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), pp. 90–2.

[9] Aytoun Ellis, *The penny universities: a history of the coffee-houses* (London, 1956), p. 94. For similar views see Frederick Seaton Siebert, *Freedom of the press in England, 1476–1776: the rise and decline of government control* (Urbana, 1965), p. 296. G. A. Cranfield, *The press and society: from Caxton to Northcliffe* (London, 1978), pp. 20–1.

[10] For a recent defence of a whig view of history, see Annabel Patterson, *Nobody's perfect: a new whig interpretation of history* (New Haven, 2002).

[11] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1962); idem, *L'espace public: archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, trans. Marc B. de Launay (Paris, 1978); idem, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1989). On Habermas's reception history, see Brian Cowan, 'What was masculine about the public sphere? Gender and the coffeehouse milieu in post-Restoration England', *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001), pp. 127–57; Dena Goodman, 'Public sphere and private life: toward a synthesis of current historiographical approaches to the old regime', *History and Theory*, 31 (1992), pp. 1–20; and Markman Ellis, 'Coffee-women, *The Spectator* and the public sphere in the early eighteenth century', in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona O'Gallchoir, and Penny Warburton, eds., *Women and the public sphere: writing and representation, 1700–1830* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 27–52.

women); it was an urban and a commercial venue (hence it was 'bourgeois'); and, most importantly, it was a place in which rational debates on diverse matters, ranging from literary worth to high politics, could be carried out in a sober and rational way among equals. It was a place where right reason, and not social rank, was supposed to determine who won and who lost in debate.[12]

Although few historians have taken Habermas's rosy view of the Augustan coffeehouse at face value, the central and innovative role of the coffeehouse in the political culture of the period has been often endorsed by historians of late. For Steven Pincus as well as C. John Sommerville, the emergence of the coffeehouse as a centre for political debate in the Restoration era signalled a decisive break with the elitist and religiously driven politics of the first half of the seventeenth century. It forged the way for a more inclusive and more secular political culture.[13] Robert Bucholz's study of the court of Queen Anne argues that the rise of the coffeehouse, along with the world of commercialized leisure of which it was a part, offered the social elite of early eighteenth-century England an alternative venue for social and political advancement and hence it hastened the decline of the court as a centre of elite sociability in the early eighteenth century. John Brewer pushes this supposed contrast between court and coffeehouse even further in portraying the later Stuart coffeehouses as outright 'centres of opposition to the crown'.[14] For Lawrence Klein, the emergence of the coffeehouse is integrally related with the development of a post-Restoration political 'culture of politeness', an urbane and secular world which must be clearly distinguished from the courtly and clerical political culture of the early Stuarts.[15] Margaret Jacob's reading of Habermas's public sphere rubric, and the importance of the coffeehouse within it, is perhaps the most unapologetically celebratory. Coffeehouse politics, she argues, 'set one of the preconditions for the emergence of modern democratic society in the West'.[16] In accounts such as these, there exists a

[12] Recent accounts of the coffeehouse in a Habermasian vein include James van Horn Melton, *The rise of the public in enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 240–50, and T. C. W. Blanning, *The culture of power and the power of culture: old regime Europe, 1660–1789* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 159–61.

[13] Steven Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create": coffeehouses and restoration political culture', *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (1995), pp. 807–34; Alan Houston and Steve Pincus, 'Introduction', in Alan Houston and Steve Pincus, eds., *A nation transformed: England after the Restoration* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 14, 18; C. John Sommerville, *The news revolution in England: cultural dynamics of daily information* (New York, 1996), esp. pp. 75–84.

[14] R. O. Bucholz, *The Augustan court: Queen Anne and the decline of court culture* (Stanford, 1993), pp. 149, 200, 248; John Brewer, *The pleasures of the imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (New York, 1997), quote at p. 37 and see ch. 1 passim. Compare also Melinda Zook, *Radical whigs and conspiratorial politics in late Stuart England* (University Park, PA, 1999), pp. 6–7.

[15] Lawrence Klein, 'Coffeehouse civility, 1660–1714: an aspect of post-courtly culture in England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59 (1997), pp. 30–51; and contrast the rather different perspective in Helen Berry, 'Rethinking politeness in eighteenth-century England: Moll King's coffee house and the significance of "flash talk"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 6 (2001), pp. 65–81.

[16] Margaret C. Jacob, 'The mental landscape of the public sphere: a European perspective', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (1994), p. 96.

whiggish tendency to explain the rise of the coffeehouse in terms of the ways in which it was new, or indeed modern.[17] The survival of the coffeehouse is explained as the result of a gradual acceptance of this modern world of politics in the public sphere.

Historians of the post-Restoration period who have adopted a more revisionist bent have tended to ignore the political role of the coffeehouse in their work, preferring instead to emphasize the persistence of more traditional modes of political persuasion, such as royal charisma and court preferment along with the continuing prominence of the pulpit in England's *ancien régime*.[18] The implication in these works is that the rise of the coffeehouse is at best an inconvenient, and perhaps ultimately irrelevant, fact in the revisionist understanding of post-Restoration political culture. But it need not be so. There remains room for an account of the rise of the coffeehouse in which the coffeehouse can be understood to have emerged organically out of the seventeenth-century political and social order.[19]

Most accounts of the rise of the coffeehouse in Restoration political culture have neglected to provide detailed attention to the formal means by which coffeehouses were made legitimate. This occurred primarily through the system of public house licensing. This article offers a history of coffeehouse licensing which integrates an understanding of the micro-politics of coffeehouse regulation at the local level with an analysis of the high political debates about coffeehouses at the national level. This focus on the norms and practices of coffeehouse licensing at both the local and national levels offers an alternative to the older whig as well as the newer Habermasian interpretations of the rise of the coffeehouse. Licensing allowed the new coffeehouse institution to survive and flourish not so much through challenging an old regime, but rather through fitting itself into the social and political order of early modern England. Understanding coffeehouse licensing also helps us better understand the relationship between the state and civil society in later seventeenth-century England.

Both the older whig histories and the newer Habermasian explanations distinguish clearly between an old-fashioned state, epitomized by the court, and a

---

[17] There have of course been many varieties of whig histories. I use the term here to refer to the sense of inevitable and triumphal modernization warned against in Herbert Butterfield, *The whig interpretation of history* (London, 1931); some of the complexities relating to this terminology are discussed in Patterson, *Nobody's perfect*, pp. 1–35.

[18] Clark, *English society, 1660–1832*; Jonathan Scott, *England's troubles* (Cambridge, 2000); on the mutual incompatibility of these two revisionist accounts of post-Restoration England, see Brian Cowan, 'Refiguring revisionisms', *History of European Ideas*, 29 (2003), pp. 475–89. Compare also Tony Claydon, 'The sermon, the "public sphere" and the political culture of late seventeenth-century England', in Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough, eds., *The English sermon revised: religion, literature and history, 1600–1750* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 208–34.

[19] John Miller, *After the civil wars: English politics and government in the reign of Charles II* (London, 2000), pp. 60–4, and Joad Raymond, 'The newspaper, public opinion and the public sphere in the seventeenth century', *Prose Studies*, 21 (1998), pp. 109–40, both offer unusually non-whiggish accounts of Restoration coffeehouse politics.

new, vibrant, and rising civil society, epitomized by the coffeehouses. In the whig view, this opposition often takes the form of a narrative of conflict between crown and people. For Habermas, it is described as the erosion of an older, 'display oriented' public sphere (*repräsentative Öffentlichkeit*) through the emergence of a new 'discourse oriented' and bourgeois public sphere (*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*). While recognizing that there were significant conflicts of interest and principle at stake in the debates over the legitimacy of the coffeehouse in Restoration Britain, this article suggests that these conflicts need not be understood in terms of a straightforward opposition between the state and civil society. The 'state' did indeed make strong efforts to regulate coffeehouses in the British Isles, but the state was not simply the crown. The state was itself a part of the early modern social order; it included the local office holders and magistrates who were in fact more involved in the practical day-to-day regulation of the coffeehouses in their particular jurisdictions.[20] So too were the coffeehouses legitimized primarily through their relationship to the Restoration state. State power actually played a crucial role in enabling the rise of the coffeehouses, especially through the system of licensing. Many servants of the state, most notably the king himself, were indeed opposed to the development of coffeehouse politics in Restoration Britain, but other participants in the functioning of state power granted licences to coffeehouse-keepers that afforded the novel institution an important legal legitimacy. Even the will of the king could not prevail against the stronger and countervailing social and political structures, embodied in the practice of licensing, that permitted the development of coffeehouse society. Understood in this way, the rise of the coffeehouse appears as a useful case study in both the limitations and the flexibility of early modern governance. The coffeehouse was an important new site in which the negotiation of early modern power took place.[21]

I

The primary means by which coffeehouses were regulated was through the system of licensing used for public houses that specialized in the sale of alcoholic

---

[20] This expansive view of the early modern English state is articulated in works such as Mark Goldie, 'The unacknowledged republic: officeholding in early modern England', in Tim Harris, ed., *The politics of the excluded, c. 1500–1850* (Houndmills, 2001), pp. 153–94; Steve Hindle, *The state and social change in early modern England, c. 1550–1640* (Houndmills, 2000); and David Harris Sacks, 'The corporate town and the English state: Bristol's "little businesses", 1625–1641', *Past and Present*, 110 (1986), pp. 69–105.

[21] The coffeehouse has not yet been integrated into the vibrant new social history of early modern politics exemplified in works such as: Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, eds., *Negotiating power in early modern society: order, hierarchy and subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), and Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle, eds., *The experience of authority in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996); hence the important suggestion in Michael J. Braddick, *State formation in early modern England, c. 1500–1700* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 432, that the rise of coffeehouse culture be integrated into future accounts of early modern state formation.

drinks, such as alehouses and taverns.[22] Coffeehouses were distinctive, however, in that they specialized in retailing new and exotic hot drinks. The licensing of retail sales of coffee, tea, chocolate, and sherbet was enjoined by the 1663 Excise Reform Act. Such retailers were required to obtain their licences at the general sessions of the peace for their county or from the offices of the chief magistrate of whatever jurisdiction they lived in.[23] The principal reason for this statute was to allow for the orderly collection of the excise revenue due to the crown on these goods, for no licence was to be granted to anyone who could not show that he or she had paid their excise duties. Although complete records of coffeehouse licensing seem not to be kept in any jurisdiction in England, it is clear that the statute was obeyed and licences for coffeehousing were issued at quarter sessions as well as in other legal jurisdictions throughout the country. The licensing of coffeehouses in Scotland and Ireland was not required by statute, but it became a common practice administered by the borough governments of Glasgow and Edinburgh in the 1670s.[24]

The coffeehouse-keepers of metropolitan London applied for their licences at the sessions for Middlesex county, or those held by the Cities of Westminster and London. The lord mayor of the City of London issued licences for coffee sales for eighteen-month periods, and so did the justices of the peace at the Westminster and Middlesex sessions.[25] Often coffeehouse-keepers obtained their licences in conjunction with the licensing of other victuallers, tipplers, or petty hawkers (badgers).[26] Coffeehouse-keepers who did not obtain the proper licence could face official inquiries and perhaps prosecutions at quarter sessions for their negligence.[27] Concern for the proper administration of coffeehouse licensing in the metropolis seems to have been at its greatest during the 1670s, for there is little information in any of the London jurisdictions on the licensing of coffeehouses after 1680, nor do we find any record of coffeehouse-keepers finding themselves prosecuted at quarter sessions for running an unlicensed coffeehouse after that date. If the existing licensing system had fallen into abeyance, this may explain why a bill was introduced in the House of Commons in 1689 which would have

---

[22] Judith Hunter, 'Legislation, proclamations and other national directives affecting inns, taverns, alehouses, brandy shops and punch houses, 1552 to 1757' (PhD thesis, Reading, 1994), details these regulations in full; see also eadem, 'English inns, taverns, alehouses and brandy shops: the legislative framework, 1495–1797', in Beat Kümin and B. Ann Tlusty, eds., *The world of the tavern: public houses in early modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 65–82.   [23] 15 Car. II, c. 10, § xiv.

[24] *Extracts from the records of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1663–1690* (Glasgow, 1905), p. 172; Marguerite Wood, ed., *Extracts from the records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1665–1680* (Edinburgh, 1950), p. 287.

[25] Coffeehouse licences 1674, 1677, 1680 in Corporation of London Record Office (CLRO), Misc. MSS 95.10; CLRO, SM 47, Sept. 1675 – July 1676, unfoliated, Apr. 1676; London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), MJ/SBB/289, Westminster Sessions, 10 Apr. 1672, pp. 17–19; LMA, MJ/SBB/294, Oct. 1672, p. 24; LMA, MJ/SBB/315, Sept. 1674, pp. 53–4; LMA, MJ/SBB/316, Oct. 1674, p. 23.

[26] LMA, MJ/SBB/302, May 1673, p. 51; LMA, MJ/SBB/303, June 1673, pp. 57–8; LMA, MJ/SBB/316, Oct. 1674, p. 23.

[27] Sessions of the peace, 2 Oct. [1673], in J. C. Jeaffreson, ed., *Middlesex County Records* [1667–1688], vol. IV (London, 1892), p. 36; LMA, MJ/SBB/282, Aug. 1671, p. 34; LMA, MJ/SP/1676/Jan. 2.

introduced a new licensing system for all retailers of beer, ale, cider, mum, coffee, tea, and chocolate.[28] In April 1692, the magistrates at the City of London quarter sessions became so concerned that the licensing system for coffeehouses was being ignored that they reminded their fellow citizens that it was still required, and they followed this up a few months later with a request that the beadles in each ward present a return of all of the coffeehouses and their keepers.[29] The court of aldermen subsequently ruled that all unlicensed coffeehouses should be prosecuted at the next quarter sessions, but there are no records of any mass prosecution at the time.[30] Unlicensed coffeemen in the City of London were occasionally presented before their wardmote inquests even in the early eighteenth century.[31] This suggests that the process of issuing licences remained in force even if care was not taken to document the licensing process.

The regulation of coffeehouses was not solely a metropolitan phenomenon of course, although documentation for the licensing of coffeehouses outside of London is quite scarce.[32] Oddly enough, it seems that magistrates outside of the metropolis were more concerned with maintaining the system of coffeehouse licensing that had fallen into abeyance in the metropolis. William Pearce's coffeehouse in Warminster was suppressed at the Wiltshire quarter sessions in January 1681 because he 'made it his dayly practice to expose to the view of the inhabitants divers seditious pamphlets and libells against the government now established in both Church and State'. Nevertheless Pearce was able to renew his licence within half a year.[33] The justices of the peace in Lancashire licensed the coffeehouse run by Richard Hilton, a barber-surgeon living in Lancaster in 1688.[34] In the City of Cambridge, the office of the vice chancellor was charged with the issue of coffeehouse licences and he continued to do so with diligence until at least 1699. The vice chancellor also added additional stipulations to his licences, namely that the Cambridge coffeehouses take care to observe the sabbath and to prohibit unlawful gaming on the premises, but most notably that they 'suffer no scholars of this University, under the degree of Masters of Arts, to

---

[28] *Commons Journals*, 30 Dec. 1689, X: 319; newsletter, 31 Dec. 1689, in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* [*CSPD*], *1689–1690*, pp. 374–5.

[29] CLRO, SM 62, unfoliated, Apr. 1692; CLRO, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen (Rep.) 96, 13 Apr. 1692, p. 227; CLRO, SM 62, unfoliated, May 1692. If the requested return was ever drawn up, it has apparently not survived.   [30] CLRO, Rep. 96, 8 Sept. 1692, p. 432; 13 Sept. 1692, p. 440.

[31] Guildhall Library (GL), MS 60, Cheap wardmote inquest book, 1705, fo. 22r; GL, MS 4069/2, Cornhill ward, wardmote inquest book 2, 1717, fo. 491v. Many records of licensed victuallers may have been destroyed at some point, for the City of London's victualling licence series are limited for the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, however, some coffeehouse-keepers' licences were included along with all other victualling licences: see CLRO, LV (B), 1701.

[32] Unless otherwise noted, all coffeehouses mentioned here were located in the greater London metropolitan area.

[33] Howard Cunnington, *Records of the county of Wiltshire being extracts from the quarter sessions great rolls of the seventeenth century* (Devizes, 1932), p. 266.

[34] Lancashire County Record Office, QSP 643/14–15 (10 Jan. 1688). I am grateful to Bruce Jackson, county archivist, for providing me with this reference.

drinke coffee, chocolate, sherbett, or tea, in [the] house, except their tutors be with them'.[35] Cambridgeshire justices were also aware of the coffee licensing laws and they may have also issued licences of their own at quarter sessions.[36]

Coffeehouse licensing was supposed to serve the dual purposes of ensuring that the crown received its fiscal due from the excise duties on the exotic drinks purveyed in the houses, but it was also meant to serve as a means of social discipline. It was generally agreed by the authorities at every level that the number of all public houses should be kept to a bare minimum: licensing was the means by which these numbers could be controlled and kept down. The lord mayor of London and the City of London's political elite saw all public houses, be they alehouses, taverns, or coffeehouses as potential public nuisances in need of close observation and careful municipal regulation.[37] A licence could be denied to anyone who had a reputation for disorderly conduct or disaffection to the government or the established church by local magistrates.[38] City wardmotes also revoked licences for running a disorderly house within their jurisdiction.[39] Those who spoke ill of the government, or, perhaps worse, of the local magistrates who issued the licences, risked having their houses suppressed at quarter sessions.[40] Royal proclamations and the orders of the local magistrates made this clear: no coffeehouse-keeper or tippler should be licensed unless he or she could demonstrate his or her reputation as a loyal subject. In 1662, Roger L'Estrange was already recommending that a condition be added to all coffeehouse licences enjoining the keeper not to allow manuscript libels to be read on their premises, and such a clause was ultimately added as a compromise after the failure of the December 1675 royal proclamation suppressing the coffeehouses.[41]

The best index of one's loyalty was taken to be regular attendance at the parish church. Both Roman Catholic and dissenting recusants were clearly judged to be unfit to run a public house because such places would naturally become the haunts of seditious cabals and centres of political unrest.[42] During the political crisis surrounding the anxieties over the Catholic duke of York's potential succession to the throne in the early 1680s, the constables of each parish were

---

[35] Licences and excise certificates of persons selling coffee, etc. (1663–99), in Cambridge University Library (CUL), T.ii.29, quote at item 1, fo. 2r.

[36] Bodleian Library (Bodl.), MS Rawlinson D.1136, pp. 75, 78.

[37] CLRO, journals of the Court of Common Council, 47, fo. 179r, 20 June 1672; CLRO, Common Hall minute books, vol. 5, fo. 416r, 31 Aug. 1659. For the longstanding concerns over the regulation of alehouses, see Keith Wrightson, 'Alehouses, order and reformation', in E. Yeo and S. Yeo, eds., *Popular culture and class conflict, 1590–1914: explorations in the history of labour and leisure* (Brighton, 1981); and Peter Clark, *The English alehouse: a social history, 1200–1830* (London, 1983).

[38] LMA, MJ/SBB/436, Feb. 1686, p. 38; LMA, MJ/SBB/437, Apr. 1686, p. 45; LMA, MJ/SBB/467, 1 July 1689, p. 47.

[39] GL, MS 68, Vintry wardmote inquest minutes, 1693, fo. 16r; GL, MS 4069/2, Cornhill ward, wardmote inquest book 2, 1719, fo. 497v, and 1720, fo. 501v.

[40] For an incident of magisterial vendetta, see LMA, MJ/SBB/420, Dec. 1684, p. 44.

[41] [Roger L'Estrange], [24 Feb. 1662] in Public Record Office (PRO), SP 29/51/10.I.

[42] LMA, MJ/SBB/391, Oct. 1681, p. 45; LMA, MJ/SBB/401, Dec. 1682, p. 44.

enjoined to issue certificates of conformity to their local tipplers and coffeehouse-keepers.[43] Peter Kidd, the master of the notorious Amsterdam coffeehouse in which Titus Oates regularly held forth, ran afoul of this stipulation and was arrested and tried at court several times for his nonconformist recusancy.[44] John Thomas, another dissenting coffeehouse-keeper on Aldersgate street, was served with a royal writ of *excommunicato capiendo* and imprisoned by a church court for his recusancy.[45] Even a show of loyalty through proper voting could be required of prospective licence holders. In late 1682, a moment of supreme royal confidence, the king informed the lord mayor of London that he should require every ale-house-keeper and coffeehouse-keeper in the City to attend their wardmote meetings and 'there to vote for such men as are right to the King and govern-ment', if 'they shall expect licenses for the year ensuing'.[46] The crown's attempt to purge suspected whigs from the London City government reached as far down as attempts such as this to impose a religio-political litmus test upon drinking house licences.[47]

   If the public houses of Stuart and Hanoverian Britain were representative of an increasingly dense and influential 'fourth estate' of public opinion, as they cer-tainly were, they were also consistently regulated by the structures of national and local government and these structures were based upon the assumption that some members of society, namely loyal subjects of the crown and the established church, were more fit than others to be privileged guardians of that fourth estate. The persistence of aspirations to, if never the complete achievement of, a con-fessional state shaped the development of the political structures through which public opinion could be expressed in post-Restoration England. This confessional state was not adamantine of course: dissenters such as Peter Kidd and John Thomas could slip through the cracks and receive licences even if they were not supposed to do so in theory. It is likely that other more quiescent dissenting

---

   [43] LMA, MJ/SBB/394, Jan. 1682, p. 48; CLRO, SM 53, unfoliated, Oct. 1682; CLRO, journals of the Court of Common Council, 49, 1 Mar. 1683, fo. 404v; mayor's precept, 26 Feb. 1686 in CLRO, Alchin box H/103, 15, no. 2; PRO, SP 29/417, part 1/77; newsletter to Roger Garstell, Newcastle, 19 Oct. 1682 in *CSPD, 1682*, p. 485; PRO, SP 29/422, part 2/110, Mar. 1683; PRO, SP 29/422, part 2/151, 12 Mar. 1683.
   [44] Folger Shakespeare Library (Folger) MS L.c. 1367, 24 Apr. 1683; MS L.c. 1530, 1 May 1684; MS L.c. 1532, 6 May 1684; MS L.c. 1608, 30 Oct. 1684; newsletter to John Squire, 31 Jan. 1685, Newcastle in *CSPD, 1684–1685*, p. 305. CLRO, sessions papers, box 2, 1679–86, depositions concerning remarks made against Sir John Moore, [c. Oct. 1681], information of T. Novell, also transcribed in Dom Hugh Bowler, ed., *London sessions records, 1605–1685* (London, 1934), pp. 344–45; Bryant Lillywhite, *London coffee-houses* (London, 1963), pp. 80–3.
   [45] Folger MS L.c. 1510, 15 Mar. 1684. Such writs were a powerful and controversial means of punishing dissenters: Craig W. Horle, *The Quakers and the English legal system, 1660–1688* (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 44–6, 53, 231–2, 250–3 nn. 112, 117, 132.
   [46] PRO, SP 29/421/102; for the context of these elections see J. R. Jones, *The first whigs: the politics of the exclusion crisis* (London, 1961), pp. 203–6.
   [47] CLRO, sessions minute book 53 (Oct 1682); journals of the Court of Common Council, 49, fo. 404v. For the broader campaign, see Tim Harris, 'Was the tory reaction popular? Attitudes of Londoners towards the persecution of dissent', *London Journal*, 13 (1987–8), pp. 106–20.

coffeehouse-keepers were able to go about their business without receiving much trouble from local or national authorities. But the use of religious and political tests to determine the worthiness of a potential coffeehouse licence-holder demonstrates just how powerful and how deeply embedded into the structure of local as well as national politics was the notion that only participation in the national church as by law established qualified one to be a full participant in the body politic.

Licence holding mattered greatly to the struggling men and women of the middling sort who comprised the coffeehouse-keeping trade.[48] The possession of a licence could provide a degree of security and legal recognition to those who possessed them. Although the coffeemen of England did not attempt to form a guild or a corporate identity as the *café* proprietors (*limonadiers*) of seventeenth-century Paris did, it seems that they viewed their licences as a sort of privilege.[49] Possession of a licence entailed not only freedom from official persecution, but also membership within a protected trade monopoly. The licence provided the closest thing to job security that the volatile early modern economic system could offer.[50] The founder of the first coffeehouse in Glasgow and indeed all of Scotland, Colonel Walter Whytfoord, petitioned the Glasgow authorities in 1673 not only for a licence of nineteen years duration, but also a monopoly right to the sale of coffee within the city for the same amount of time.[51]

All coffeehouse-keepers guarded their privileges jealously, and were not afraid to assert their right to practise their trade unhindered by virtue of their licences. In 1672, no less than 140 coffeehouse-keepers signed a remarkable petition to the lord high treasurer of England in which they complained of their harassment by agents of the crown despite their possession of licences obtained in good faith and by virtue of statutory authority. The petition included the names of some of the most prominent coffeehouse-keepers of London, including William Urwin of Will's Coffeehouse, Thomas Garraway of Garraway's, and James Farr, who had opened one of the first coffeehouses in London in the late 1650s. Similar sorts of protestations continued to be made over the course of the next year.[52] There was an implicit challenge to the prerogative power of the crown to regulate economic affairs as it saw fit in this petition; similar arguments were raised in response to Charles II's efforts to eradicate the coffeehouse phenomenon. The implication

---

[48] On the social origins of coffeehouse-keepers, see Cowan, 'The social life of coffee', ch. 5.

[49] Alfred Franklin, *Le café, le thé, et le chocolat* (Paris, 1893), pp. 202–6; and idem, *Dictionnaire historique des arts, métiers et professions exercés dans Paris depuis le treizième siècle* (New York, 1968 edn), pp. 434–5.

[50] See Margaret Hunt, *The middling sort: commerce, gender, and the family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), for a telling study of the effects of economic insecurity on early modern lives.

[51] *Extracts from the records of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1663–1690* (Glasgow, 1905), p. 72.

[52] Richard Tooth and Benedict Thistlethwayt to the lord high treasurer, with a petition of the coffeesellers, 4 Mar. 1672, in PRO, CUST 48/1, pp. 51–2; William A. Shaw, ed., *Calendar of Treasury Books*, IV: 1672–1675 (London, 1909), 11 Feb. 1673, p. 59, 7 May 1673, p. 132. For the coffeemen, see *Oxford DNB* (Oxford, 2004), s. v. 'Urwin, William', and 'Garraway, Thomas'; and Ellis, *Penny universities*, pp. 33–4.

here was that a licence granted by parliamentary statute could not be revoked by royal whim. Of course dedicated royalists would have none of this, and it was their belief that King Charles was entirely within his rights to revoke these licences should he see fit to do so. Although the crown never backed down from this position, the king never succeeded in pushing through a wholesale revocation of the coffeehouse licensing system. The keepers of public houses often complained of unjust treatment or arbitrary suppression by their local magistrates, and they used their licences, especially the contribution to the revenue of the crown signified by those licences, as a defence against such assaults on their livelihoods.[53]

Licensing was not, however, the only means by which the coffeehouses were regulated. Like all other traders, coffeehouse-keepers within the jurisdiction of chartered civic corporations such as the City of London or the Burgh of Edinburgh were required to possess the freedom of the City before practising their trade.[54] City of London coffeemen were more likely to be presented before their wardmotes for trading without the freedom than they were to be questioned about the state of their licence or excise certificate. The monopoly rights of freemen of the City to trade within its jurisdiction continued to be jealously guarded well into the eighteenth century, and citizens were unafraid to challenge their neighbours to show proof of their freedom if they were suspected of interloping.[55]

Coffeehouse-keepers were also subject to the discipline of parish government. Local churchwardens could present and fine members of the parish for misconduct. Parish assessments could be made of house-keepers who maintained disorderly houses, or of local customers who were drunk, who swore, drank on a Sunday, or otherwise disturbed the peace. Of course these offences could be prosecuted only irregularly, but fines in some parishes were meted out. The Westminster parish of St Paul's Covent Garden was particularly vigilant in this regard, most likely to the great chagrin of local coffeehouse-keepers, who were occasionally fined for offences on their premises.[56] Other London

---

[53] PRO, CUST 48/4, July 1690, pp. 30–1; and compare PRO, CUST 48/3, 6 July 1687, pp. 134–6.

[54] Marguerite Wood, ed., *Extracts from the records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1665–1680* (Edinburgh, 1950), p. 211.

[55] GL, MS 4069/2, Cornhill ward, wardmote inquest book 2, 1660, fo. 281v; CLRO, ward presentments, 242B, St Dunston and St Bride in Farringdon without, 1690, p. 36; Cordwainer ward, 1698, p. 47; 242C, Aldgate ward, 1703; 242D, Farringdon ward extra, 1706, and Broadstreet ward, 1712; 242E, Cordwainer Street, 1714, part of Farringdon extra, 1718, and Tower, 1720; 243A, Aldersgate in and out, 1728; 243C, Bridge Within, 1750. For a general complaint by citizens about the encroachments made by interlopers not in possession of the freedom, see: CLRO, sessions papers, box 3, Apr. 1688 sessions, 3 Apr. 1688. For the wider context, see J. R. Kellett, 'The breakdown of gild and corporation control over the handicraft and retail trade in London', *Economic History Review*, n.s., 10 (1958), pp. 381–94.

[56] Westminster Archives Centre, St Paul's Covent Garden, churchwarden's accounts, H 449 (1667), unfoliated; H 450 (1668), fos. 5r, 21r; H 452 (1670), fo. 22r; H 453 (1671), fo. 21r; H 454 (1672), fo. 22r; H 455 (1673), [p. 23]; H 456 (1675), fo. 22r; H 461 (1680), unfoliated; H 462 (1681), unfoliated; H 466 (1686), unfoliated.

parishes, such as St Dunstan's as well as St Alphage's, took care to present local coffeehouses for moral offences in the wake of the Restoration, although their attention to such concerns seems to have waned by the end of the seventeenth century.[57]

Despite the lamentations of its contemporary opponents and the encomiums of its modern champions, the coffeehouse should not be understood as an institution that developed in complete opposition to the existing structures of late seventeenth-century government. In most cases, the coffeehouses of London fit smoothly into the various layers of ward, parish and vestry, civic community, and state governments. Beginning as early as 1672, the vestry meetings of the parish of St Stephen Walbrook were held at various local coffeehouses.[58] The City ward of Cornhill, which was crawling with coffeehouses, held its wardmote inquests at Farren's Coffeehouse beginning in 1674.[59] Even judicial functions such as petty sessions could be hosted by coffeehouses, as the Ship Coffeehouse on Mansell St, near Goodman's Fields, Whitechapel did.[60] Coffeehouses did not hold a monopoly on this sort of business, of course, for such meetings had commonly been held at other sorts of public houses, especially inns and taverns, but it is striking how quickly and how fervently the new coffeehouses were welcomed as useful meeting places by the numerous governmental and voluntary organizations of later Stuart London.[61]

There was no one single means by which coffeehouses were regulated in post-Restoration Britain. The crown was only the tip of a very large and dense iceberg of official authority in the kingdoms ruled by the later Stuart monarchs. Because the coffeehouses had become such an integral part of neighbourhood sociability, their regulation became a matter of local as well as national concern, primarily at the city, parish, and county levels. Paradoxically then, King Charles II found it almost impossible to extirpate the new coffeehouses even when he believed it politically expedient to do so.

---

[57] GL, MS 9583/2, part I, 4 Nov. 1664; parish of St Dunstan's West, fo. 23v; 8 Nov. 1664; parish of St Alphege's, fo. 53r.

[58] GL, MS 594/2, St Stephen Walbrook, vestry minutes, 19 Dec. 1674; 13 May 1675; 29 Apr. 1680, passim. The various coffeehouses included Holcher's, Maddison's, the Berge Yard, Cragg's, and Powell's coffeehouses.

[59] GL, MS 4069/1–2, Cornhill ward, wardmote inquest book, vol. I (1674), fo. 316v; (1675), fo. 322r; (1683), fo. 353r; (1704), fo. 437r; (1711), fo. 469r; (1712), fo. 473r; (1715), fo. 483r. There were at least six coffeehouses in Cornhill as early as 1663: CLRO, Alchin box H/103, no. 12.

[60] LMA, MJ/SBB/601a (1702). Quarter sessions for Hertfordshire were often held in local coffeehouses by the mid-eighteenth century. I am grateful to A. J. Cassidy, archivist for the Hertfordshire County Record Office, for this information.

[61] The wardmote inquests for Vintry were often held at the Dogg Tavern, until 1717, when they were moved to Solford's Coffeehouse. GL, MS 68, Vintry wardmote inquest minutes, see esp. (1717), fo. 84r. The Tower Hamlets Society, a key organization of the reformation of manners movement, held its meetings at Hamlin's Coffeehouse near the Royal Exchange: Bodl., MS D.129, fo. 29; and the City of London's committees for market regulation also met at a coffeehouse: CLRO, MS 020D, markets journals, 2 vols., 16 Oct. 1740, 1: 364.

BRIAN COWAN

II

The Restoration state in fact was caught in a bind with regard to its policies towards the new world of the coffeehouses. On the one hand, a vital part of the fiscal basis of the Restoration settlement was the award to the crown of the revenues based on the excise taxes and the licensing system of which the coffeehouses were a part. In the mid-1670s, somewhat less than 2 per cent of the neat produce of the excise revenues came from the duties levied on coffee and similar exotic liquors sold in coffeehouses; by the end of the reign of Charles II in 1685, over 4 per cent of the neat excise produce derived from coffee revenues.[62] Excise collection shifted from farming to direct collection by agents of the crown in 1683, a move which instantly doubled the state's revenue from coffee excises.[63] The Restoration excise revenue was itself increasingly effective as a proportion of the wealth it was trying to tax, namely domestic expenditure on consumer goods.[64] The collection of these excise revenues was frustrated by the crown's attempts to suppress the coffee-houses in the 1670s, and excise sub-farmers petitioned the treasury for a deduction from their farm quotas as a result of official persecution of the coffeehouses.[65]

Despite the usefulness of the excise revenue derived from coffeehouse con-sumer activity, the coffeehouses were viewed by King Charles II as potentially dangerous centres for subversive activity from their very inception. Charles II and the earl of Clarendon were well aware that James Harrington's republican Rota Club was meeting at Miles's Coffeehouse in London even after the Resto-ration of the monarchy had been assured in early 1660.[66] Some contemporaries thought that dissenters in particular were 'great frequenters of coffeehouses', as if this association was an ominous threat to the security of the Restored monarchy.[67] None of this could have endeared the coffeehouses to Charles II, but it was the role of coffeehouses as centres for political debate and news cir-culation that most frightened the managers of the Restoration regime. Even before the Restoration, the marquis of Newcastle warned the future monarch that access to political news 'doth over heate your people extreamly and doth your Majestie much hurte', therefore he recommended that 'they should be forbid eyther domesticke or forrayne news', in both print and manuscript, 'so all our discourse will bee of hunting and hawkeing, boling, cocking, and such things, and

---

[62] BL, Harliean MS 1898, fos. 64–5. It should be noted that these figures do not match the figures recorded by the treasury board in PRO, T 38/376–8, 14 July 1683 – 25 Mar. 1684.

[63] C. D. Chandaman, *The English public revenue, 1660–1688* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 72–5, and see p. 41 on coffee excise yields.

[64] Michael Braddick, *The nerves of state: taxation and the financing of the English state, 1558–1714* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 194–5.

[65] William A. Shaw, ed., *Calendar of treasury books*, V: 1676–1679 (London, 1911), pp. 82, 93, 443, 445.

[66] 'The examination of James Harrington', in J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The political works of James Harrington* (Cambridge, 1977), esp. pp. 856–7.   [67] BL, Stowe MS 185, fo. 175r.

bee ever ready to serve your Majestie'.[68] Newcastle's scheme fell through. The Restoration regime was obliged to provide news to its subjects at the risk of leaving the business to an uncontrolled free market of information.[69] The Licensing Act of 1662 gave the secretaries of state a monopoly on the printing of news and the *London Gazette* soon became recognized as the kingdom's only official newspaper after its establishment in 1665.[70] Unofficial news writing continued to flourish both in print and in the less easily monitored medium of scribal publication: the *Gazette* held a monopoly on news only in principle but not in fact.[71]

Soon after their introduction into English society in the 1650s, coffeehouses became the prime sites in which news was consumed, and sometimes even produced. A coffeehouse-keeper who ran an 'exchange for newes' on Bread Street met with a clerk from the House of Commons to transcribe (illegally) parliamentary proceedings on a regular basis beginning in the early 1660s. Manuscript copies of these proceedings, along with drafts of parliamentary acts, were later sold for profit at the coffeehouse. Such scribal reports formed the basis for newsletters concerning parliamentary business throughout the Restoration era.[72] It is no wonder, then, that from its very inception the Restoration regime thought it wise to monitor the activities that took place in the coffeehouses. The job was entrusted to men like Henry Muddiman and later Roger L'Estrange, both of whom held monopolies on the publication of licensed news and had an interest in seeing that their prerogatives were not infringed upon.[73] For an anxious monarch newly restored to his throne, however, this was not enough, and Charles II was determined to find some means of eradicating the coffeehouses from his kingdom.

In late 1666, Charles II conferred with his high chancellor, the earl of Clarendon, to discuss the possibility of suppressing the coffeehouses outright.[74]

---

[68] Thomas P. Slaughter, ed., *Ideology and politics on the eve of Restoration: Newcastle's advice to Charles II* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 56.

[69] See the detailed documentation of the Restoration news craze in Steven Pincus, *Protestantism and patriotism: ideologies and the making of English foreign policy, 1650–1668* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 276–88; and idem, '"Coffee politicians does create"'.

[70] J. B. Williams, 'Newsbooks and letters of news of the restoration', *English Historical Review*, 23 (1908), pp. 252–76; Peter Fraser, *The intelligence of the secretaries of state and their monopoly of licensed news, 1660–1688* (Cambridge, 1956); James Sutherland, *The Restoration newspaper and its development* (Cambridge, 1986).

[71] Timothy Crist, 'Francis Smith and the opposition press in England, 1660–1688' (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1977); John Stephen Tawhana Hetet, 'A literary underground in Restoration England: printers and dissenters in a context of constraints, 1660–1689' (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1987); Harold Love, *The culture and commerce of texts: scribal publication in seventeenth-century England* (Amherst, MA, 1998), esp. pp. 9–22.

[72] PRO, SP 29/99/7; Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) vol. I, *First report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1870), p. 44; Tim Harris, *London crowds in the reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 28. For an example of such reports, see Library of Congress (LC), MS 18124, vol. 2, passim.

[73] PRO, SP 29/47/118; PRO, SP 29/51/10.I; Love, *Culture and commerce*, p. 74; Miller, *After the civil wars*, p. 60.

[74] Compare here Paul Seaward, *The cavalier parliament and the reconstruction of the old regime, 1661–1667* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 73, 257.

Clarendon agreed with the king that this was desirable, given that the coffee-houses allowed 'the foulest imputations [to be] laid upon the government', and that 'people generally believed that those houses had a charter of privilege to speak what they would, without being in danger to be called into question'. He proposed banning the coffeehouses by royal proclamation as well as the skilful use of spies to record the conversations of those who persisted in deriding the government so publicly. Charles agreed with the suggestion and asked Clarendon to propose a suppression of the coffeehouses in a meeting of the privy council. This was done, but the proposal was shot down by the secretary of state, William Coventry, who argued that the excise duties on coffee were valuable to the crown, and that such a total ban might stir up even greater resentment against the crown. Besides, he added, 'the king's friends had used more liberty of speech in [coffeehouses] than they durst do in any other'. The king was swayed, and the matter was dismissed for the moment.[75] This brief clash of wills between Clarendon and Coventry in 1666 established the terms of subsequent debate on the question of suppressing the coffeehouses. Were the coffeehouses such a threat to the monarchy that they must be suppressed? Or might they be seen as a valuable new venue through which loyalist sentiment might be cultivated? Although the latter argument prevailed in 1666 and continued to do so at every challenge, both Charles II and his royal successors persisted in pursuing the dream that they might finally quell the potentially seditious chatter that filled the coffeehouses of their kingdoms.

Instead of prosecuting the coffeehouses directly, the privy council issued an order banning the sale of printed works to the hawkers who sold libels and pamphlets in the coffeehouses.[76] It was not long after Clarendon's ill-fated proposal that the crown again began to consider taking further action against the coffeehouses themselves.[77] By February 1671, the king was again openly querying his privy council whether there might be a legal and effective means of sup-pressing the coffeehouses.[78] Although nothing was done at the time, later that year the secretary of state Joseph Williamson put the notion that 'nothing can be more to the establishment of the government', than pulling down the coffee-houses in London firmly on his agenda.[79] By early 1672, the king had referred the question of the legality of outlawing the coffeehouses to the lord keeper Orlando Bridgeman and a committee of judges for their consideration.[80]

---

[75] Henry Hyde, *The life of Edward earl of Clarendon, lord high chancellor of England* (2 vols., Oxford, 1857), II, pp. 298–9.

[76] Stationer's Company Archives (SCA) court books, lib. D, fo. 143b, 10 Aug. 1668.

[77] Newsletter, 30 July 1667, in Bodl. MS Don. c. 37, no. 900, fo. 34r; also printed in: HMC, 12th report, App., Part VII: *Manuscripts of Sir Henry Le Fleming* (London, 1890), p. 52.

[78] PRO, PC 2/63, p. 173.   [79] PRO, SP 29/294/64.

[80] LC, MS 18124, vol. 3, fo. 154r, 20 Feb. 1672; Bodl., MS Don. c. 37, fo. 223v, 20 Feb. 1672; Harry Ransom Humanities Center, Univ. of Texas–Austin (Ransom), Richard Bulstrode newsletters, 23 Feb. 1672.

It seems that their judgement was not favourable to the plan, for Charles II resolved at this point to attempt to chastise the seditious behaviour he saw taking place there. In May of 1672, the king ordered his attorney general, Sir Heneage Finch, to prepare a draft for a proclamation against coffeehouse rumour-mongering, and in June, he duly issued a royal proclamation to

command all his loveing subjects of what[ever] state or condition soe they may be, from the highest to the lowest, that they [shall not] utter or publish any false newes or reports or ... intermeddle with the affaires of state and government, or with the persons of any of his Majesties counsellors or ministers in their common and ordinary discourses.

Coffeehouses in particular were singled out for royal scorn, and anyone who even heard such political discourse in a coffeehouse was enjoined to report the speaker to the authorities.[81] The proclamation was reiterated and republished in Edinburgh and in Dublin for Charles's Scottish and Irish subjects as well.[82] The proclamation may have encouraged greater circumspection in some people's coffeehouse talk for a time, but it did not succeed in ending it entirely. Andrew Marvell, that master of political caution, warned his friend William Popple in June 1672 about the 'severe proclamation issued out against all who shall vent false news, or discourse it concerning affairs of state. So that in writing to you I run the risque of making a breach in the commandment.'[83] Despite the dangers, Marvell continued to keep Popple in the know, just as the political news-mongering continued apace in the coffeehouses.

Information continued to pour into the secretary of state's office about poten-tially subversive activities taking place in the kingdom's coffeehouses.[84] At the same time, public discontent with royal policies was understood to be vented primarily through the coffeehouses. The circulation of news and rumours re-garding the course of the third Anglo-Dutch War, 'does much prejudice in dis-heartening the people', Henry Ball averred in a letter to Joseph Williamson, and his lament was certainly not a lone one. He was particularly worried that pro-Dutch and anti-French propaganda were circulated in the coffeehouses, to the obvious detriment of the war cause.[85]

---

[81] PRO, SP 29/311/112; PRO, PC 2/63, p. 252; CLRO, journals of the Court of Common Council, 47, fo. 179v (quoted); PRO, PC 2/63, p. 259.

[82] Robert Steele, ed., *A bibliography of royal proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart sovereigns ..., 1485–1714* (Steele) (3 vols., Oxford, 1910), III, no. 2359, 12 June 1672; II, no. 824, 9 July 1672.

[83] Andrew Marvell to William Popple, June 1672, in H. M. Margoliouth and P. Legouis, eds., *The poems and letters of Andrew Marvell* (2 vols., Oxford, 1972), II, p. 328.

[84] PRO, SP 29/318/30; James Hickes to Joseph Williamson, 19 Feb. 1673, in T. H. Elliott, *State papers domestic concerning the post office in the reign of Charles II* (Bath, 1964), p. 56; PRO, SP 29/333/155; PRO, SP 29/360/18; PRO, SP 29/360/33.

[85] W. D. Christie, ed., *Letters addressed from London to Sir Joseph Williamson while plenipotentiary at the Congress of Cologne in the years 1673 and 1674*, Camden Society, n.s., nos. 8–9 (2 vols., London, 1874), I, p. 39 (quoted), I, p. 46; I, p. 88; I, p. 194; II, p. 13. Compare Steve Pincus, 'From butterboxes to wooden shoes: the shift in English popular sentiment from anti-Dutch to anti-French in the 1670s', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 333–61; and idem, '"Coffee politicians does create"', p. 828.

Such disgust with the venting of criticism aimed at the regime did not abate with the close of the war either. On 2 May 1674, the king issued yet another proclamation declaiming against the practice of spreading false news and 'licentious talking of matters of state and government' in public.[86] It had as little effect as its predecessor, of course, and Secretary of State Henry Coventry continued to complain of the 'making publick of such scurrilous language' in political discussions.[87] Anti-court libels were attached to the king's statue at Charing Cross after the prorogation of parliament in November 1675.[88] Soon afterwards, the controversial pamphlet *A letter from a person of quality to his friend in the country* (1675) appeared in the coffeehouses.[89] This work, which has been justly called 'the manifesto of the whig party', accused the court of falling prey to a cabal of high churchmen and cavaliers who wished to introduce popery in religion and an absolutist state into the kingdom.[90] The House of Lords ordered it to be burned, and that the identities of the author, printers, and distributors of the work should be revealed. They started by searching the coffeehouses of London, and the hawkers who frequented them, but the ultimate source of the tract, the earl of Shaftesbury and his circle, went unpunished.[91] Of course, banning the tract only made it a more desirable read, and clandestine booksellers immediately more than doubled the price they charged for it.[92] In the face of this very public criticism in the coffeehouses, the king was ready again to try to eliminate the coffeehouses by the end of 1675.

This time Charles's privy council was prepared to support him. Steve Pincus has shown how the temporary ascendancy of high church royalists at court in late 1675 provided the necessary political capital to push through a proclamation suppressing the coffeehouses.[93] Thus on 29 December 1675, the king declared that after 10 January 1676 it would be forbidden to sell by retail 'any coffee, chocolet, sherbet, or tea'. All justices of the peace were enjoined to revoke the licences for such sales and to refrain from granting any more such licences in the future. The proclamation was duly recorded by the privy council and the court of common

[86] Steele, I, no. 3595, 2 May 1674.
[87] Henry Coventry to Lord Northampton, 26 Aug. 1675, Windsor, in BL, Add. MS 25124, fo. 53r.
[88] Lady Christina Hastings to earl of Huntingdon, Nov. 1675, in Huntington Library, HA 4685, Hastings MSS, Box 40; see also Ralph Verney to Edmund Verney, 6 Dec. 1675, London; Edmund Verney to Ralph Verney, 9 Dec. 1675, East Claydon; and Edmund Verney to John Verney, 27 Dec. 1675, East Claydon in Princeton University, Firestone Library, (PUFL), Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated.
[89] [Marchamont Nedham?], *A paquet of advices and animadversions, sent from London to the men of Shaftesbury* (London, 1676), p. 4.
[90] Mark Goldie, 'Priestcraft and the birth of whiggism', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political discourse in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 226.
[91] HMC, vol. VIII, *Ninth report*, pts 1–3 (London, 1883–4), p. 66.
[92] William Fall to Sir Ralph Verney, 11 Nov. 1675, [London] in PUFL, Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated.
[93] Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create"', pp. 828–9. Andrew Browning suggested that the proclamation was the earl of Danby's idea, but no evidence links Danby in particular with this project, see his *Thomas Osborne earl of Danby and duke of Leeds, 1632–1712* (3 vols., Glasgow, 1951), I, pp. 194–5.

council of the City of London and it was published as a broadside as well as in the official *London Gazette* and manuscript newsletters.[94] The proclamation was accompanied by another on 29 December encouraging the more vigorous prosecution of people who circulated libels and offered a fifty pound reward for their discovery.[95]

Resistance to the king's uncompromising fiat was immediate, but for a time, it seemed to some that the ban might actually work. Richard Langhorne noted that London was 'now in a mutinous condition … upon the account of coffee-howses'. He thought that 'the suppression of them will prove a tryall of skill. All wytts are at worke to elude the proclamation', but he was 'doubtfull they will doe it. If soe then the advice was ill, and if the Government shew itselfe to feare the people, I suspect the people will hardly feare the Government.'[96] After the ban had been announced, the stakes in the crown's contest with the coffeehouses had been raised considerably. The credibility of the monarchical will was now on the line along with the fate of the English coffee trade and the livelihoods of the coffeehouse-keepers.

Sceptics were quick to doubt that the proclamation could achieve its desired effect. 'I doe not beleeve the putting downe coffy houses will hinder peoples speeches and discourses', mused Edmund Verney upon hearing news of the suppression.[97] His nephew Ralph was even more cynical; he declared:

noe Englishman will long endure to bee forbid meeting together, soe long as they doe nothing contrary to law. I beleeve the meetings will bee as greate, and as constant as ever, and … they will rather drink sage, betony, and rosemary drinkes rather then tea, or coffee, because those native commodities pay neither excize, nor customes, soe the crowne will bee the only looser by this new needlesse prohibition. Nay they will meet though they take nothing but tobacco there.[98]

The most serious opposition to the proclamation came from the coffeehouse-keepers themselves. They of course had the most to lose in the affair, so a large number of them banded together to present a petition to the king. Some observers saw this move as a carefully co-ordinated attack on Lord Treasurer Danby.[99] The coffeemen were received at Whitehall on 6 January 1676, where they argued before the king that the proclamation was most unjust and that it would ruin the livelihoods of everyone who followed their trade. They noted that

---

[94] PRO, PC 2/65, p. 79; compare: PRO, SP 29/376/80; CLRO, journals of the Court of Common Council, 48, pt 1, fos. 189r–191r; *Proclamation for the suppression of the coffeehouses* (London, 1675); Steele, 1, no. 3622, 29 Dec. 1675; *London Gazette*, 27–30 Dec. 1675; Folger MS L.c. 269, 30 Dec. 1675.

[95] PRO, PC 2/65, p. 81; Folger MS L.c. 270, 1 Jan. 1676; SCA, Court Books, Lib. D, fo. 296a, 7 Feb. 1676.

[96] 1 Jan. 1676, Richard Langhorne to Lord Hatton in BL, Add. MSS 29555, fo. 288r.

[97] Edmund Verney to Ralph Verney, 3 Jan. 1676, East Claydon, in PUFL, Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated.

[98] Ralph Verney to Edmund Verney, 3 Jan. 1676, London, in PUFL, Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated.

[99] Richard Langhorne to Lord Hatton, 6 Jan. 1676, in BL, Add. MSS 29555, fo. 292r.

many coffeehouse-keepers had already invested much in their trade, including not only large stocks of coffee, tea, and other liquors but other significant obligations such as property leases and the hiring of servants and apprentices as well.[100] After receiving this petition for leniency, Charles met with his privy council and an assembly of legal experts to debate the matter further.

The next day, the council considered in earnest the legality of the king's actions.[101] The chief issue was the question of licensing. Could the crown legitimately revoke licences to retail liquors that were granted legally and by statutory authority? For the county of Middlesex, the question was moot: all of the licences had expired, and the judges agreed that it was possible to request that magistrates refuse to renew any licences. But many coffeehouse licences in the City of London remained valid, and here the crown was on much shakier legal ground. Even Charles's friendly advisers were at odds on this point. One of those present, Chief Justice Francis North, recalled that 'wee did not agree in opinion, but returned at length that there remained some doubts, and differences of opinions amongst us, whereupon his Majestie pressed us no further'.[102] This impasse seems to have provoked the king to reconsider and the council was soon deeply involved in figuring out a face-saving way of rescinding the proclamation while retaining its original intent of chastising the seditious activities that were thought to take place in the coffeehouses.

The lord chief baron proposed that it might be legal to allow coffeehouse-keepers to retail their coffee 'as the shops do', meaning 'for people to buy and go away, but to sit there and drink it, 40 or 50 in a room, may be a nuisance, and for that reason a license may be refused'.[103] North agreed. He thought that 'retailing coffee might be an innocent trade, as it might be exercised but as it is used at present in the nature of common assemblys to discuss matters of state news and great persons, as they are nurserys of idleness, and pragmaticallness and hindered the expence of the native provisions, they might be thought a common nuisance'.[104] This still left the problem of the outstanding licences as well as the apparent cruelty implied by depriving several hundred householders out of their livelihoods with only a few days notice. Thus Charles resolved to grant a six-month reprieve. Another proclamation was duly issued stating that the coffeehouses could remain open until 24 June 1676, the intent being that all current coffeehouse-keepers should endeavour to sell off their existing stocks. In the meantime, all coffeehouse-keepers were enjoined to enter into a recognizance by which they would not accept any 'scandalous papers, books or libels' into their houses, nor to permit 'any false or scandalous reports against the government or its ministers', and to inform the authorities should anyone do so. By the

---

[100] PRO, PC 2/65, p. 86; compare Ralph Verney to Edmund Verney, 3 Jan. 1676, London, in PUFL, Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated; Folger MS L.c. 273, 8 Jan. 1676.

[101] PRO, SP 29/378/40.   [102] BL, Add. MS 32518, fo. 228r.   [103] PRO, SP 29/378/48.

[104] BL, Add. MS 32518, fo. 228r; compare Roger North, in Augustus Jessop, ed., *The lives of the right hon. Francis North, Baron Guilford …* (3 vols., London, 1890), i, pp. 197–8.

next midsummer, however, it was reiterated that the coffee trade would be extinguished.[105] On 8 January 1676, this additional proclamation was duly published and announced throughout the kingdom.[106]

At this point it was still not clear whether the coffeehouses might ultimately endure royal scrutiny. 'If coffy houses must enter into recognizances to betray their guests,' Edmund Verney opined, 'it is a better way to put them downe then by a proclamation.'[107] This is worth remembering since the additional proclamation of 8 January 1676 is sometimes represented as a dramatic and embarrassing about-face for the crown.[108] Embarrassing it was – Verney thought 'it a very imprudent and inconsiderate contrivance' and the city wits soon began to ridicule the fiasco in libellous verse – but it was not intended by the court to be a wholesale revocation of the intent of the initial proclamation.[109] The king's aspiration to suppress the discussion of politically sensitive matters in the coffeehouses did not abate in the new year. Just days after backing down from the initial ban on the coffeehouses, several persons were taken into custody on suspicion of promulgating 'seditious discourses, and spreading false and seditious news' in an attempt to put the fear of royal wrath into the coffeehouses.[110]

The battle between crown and coffeehouse persisted long after the failure to push through a royal ban on the coffeehouses in January 1676. King Charles ultimately did not try to reinstate his demand that the coffeehouses be fully suppressed in midsummer 1676, when the extension granted in January was due to expire, but even at this point he refused to relinquish the right to reconsider his leniency. Some contemporaries expressed surprise that the king was willing to allow the coffeehouses to remain open even after his grace period had expired and when seditious papers continued to appear in London coffeehouses. Nevertheless, on 21 July 1676, the king granted the coffeehouse-keepers another six-month extension on their licences.[111]

Of course the pretended reformation of the coffeehouses did not last long. Business continued more or less as usual after the court's failure to achieve outright suppression and soon many self-styled 'defenders of the liberty of the people' once again began to return to the coffeehouses and 'asperse all persons

---

[105] PRO, PC 2/65, p. 88, Whitehall, 8 Jan. 1676; PRO, PC 2/65, pp. 92–3, Whitehall, 8 Jan 1676; proclamation, 8 Jan. 1676, in *CSPD, 1675–1676*, p. 503.

[106] Steele, I, no. 3625 (8 Jan. 1676); *An additional proclamation concerning coffee-houses* (London, 1676); *London Gazette*, no. 1059, 10–13 Jan. 1676; LC, MS 18124, vol. 5, fo. 3v.

[107] Edmund Verney to Ralph Verney, 10 Jan. 1676, East Claydon, in PUFL, Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated.

[108] Ellis, *Penny universities*, pp. 93–4; Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create"', p. 831.

[109] Edmund Verney to Ralph Verney, 6 Jan. 1676, East Claydon, in PUFL, Verney MSS, microfilm reel 29, unfoliated (quoted); Bodl., MS Don. b. 8, p. 557; BL, Add. MS 34362, p. 41r, repr. in G. de F. Lord et al., ed., *Poems on affairs of state* (7 vols., New Haven, 1963–75), I, p. 283. Compare [Daniel Defoe], *Review of the affairs of France*, vol. [9], no. 76, 28 Mar. 1713, p. 151.

[110] Folger MS L.c. 275, 13 Jan. 1676; Bodl. MS Don. c. 38, fo. 73v, no. 1697, 18 Jan. 1676.

[111] PRO, PC 2/65, p. 293; PRO, SP 29/383/132; Ransom, Bulstrode newsletters, 30 June 1676; Folger MS L.c. 354, 28 July 1676.

who are now brought into any place of preferment to be of loose and dissolute principles'.[112] Scribal newsletters such as those produced by Henry Muddiman certainly continued to be read and 'publicly exposed' in the coffeehouses.[113] This sort of 'too greate liberty some take to suffer the coffee houses with newes' was understood by many, and not just the king, to be a grievous breach of national security. In October 1676, a plan to engage in a naval expedition against the pirates of Algiers was scuppered because the news had been leaked to the London coffeehouses and it was feared that word would get back to the pirates, who were presumed to have 'very good spies' in the London coffeehouses. Again a number of offending coffeehouse-keepers were brought before the king and his privy council: they were warned not to take in any newspapers and they were interrogated as to the source of the story of the Algiers expedition.[114] By November, Secretary of State Joseph Williamson had learned that two clerks working in his office had been supplying sensitive information about foreign affairs to the coffeehouse newsletter writers.[115]

The issue of allowing the continued licensing of coffeehouses in general therefore came up again when the king's second six-month extension expired in January 1677. After the fiasco over the Algiers leak, the king was not likely to be inclined to be so gracious as he had been in the past year. A group of leading coffeemen and women petitioned his majesty once more to allow them to con-tinue practising their trade. The king accepted their petition, but added an important proviso: 'if at any time hereafter … the petitioners or any of them have misbehaved themselves, or not punctually observed their … promise and engagement' not to accept libels or scandalous discourse, he warned that he might rescind 'this gracious favour and indulgence to them'.[116] It seems that by this point a tenuous compromise on the coffeehouse question had been reached. While the king refrained from pushing through an immediate revocation of coffeehouse licensing, he reserved the right to do so in the future. The threat of yet another royal proclamation suppressing the coffeehouses remained a very real possibility.

Charles II never fully abandoned his desire to effect a complete ban on the coffeehouses. In December 1679 – amidst the mass petitioning campaigns calling for the exclusion of the duke of York from the succession – the proposal was once again floated in the privy council. It seemed that the old debates of late 1675 and 1676 would be rehearsed once again, and indeed the same lobbying effort by

---

[112] Christopher Hatton to his brother, 19 July 1676, in BL, Add. MS 29571, fo. 324r; compare Henry Coventry, 13 Oct. 1676, Whitehall, in Longleat House MSS (microfilm) at Institute of Historical Research, Coventry MSS 72, fo. 205v.   [113] PRO, SP 29/385/250.

[114] Yale Univ., Beinecke Library, Osborn MS N 10810, 21 Oct. 1676, quoted; Ransom, Bulstrode newsletters, 20 Oct. 1676.

[115] Folger MS Xd.529, no. 2, 4 Nov. 1676; J. G. Muddiman, *The king's journalist, 1659–1689: studies in the reign of Charles II* (London, 1923), pp. 205–7.

[116] PRO, PC 2/65, pp. 439–440; PRO, PC 2/65, p. 442; CLRO, Misc. MSS 19.4, 24 Jan. 1677; CUL, T.II.29, item no. 24, 24 Jan. 1677.

the coffeemen of London was again mobilized. They attended the meeting of the council with petitions in hand, and they argued strenuously that such a ban would ruin great numbers of honest men who had already invested in substantial stocks of perishable coffee beans.[117] The council caved in to this pressure again, and a general suppression was not proclaimed. Other means of controlling coffeehouse politics were attempted, however, including another royal proclamation issued on 12 May 1680 forbidding the printing and publishing of unlicensed news.[118] This was accompanied by a vigorous campaign against the opposition press that included both official prosecution as well as royalist counter-propaganda.[119]

Charles II's royal successor was not necessarily any friendlier to the coffeehouse politicians of England. James II demanded that licences be refused to coffee-house-keepers who did not offer up a security fee to guarantee that they would prohibit unlicensed books or papers on their premises. While there is no evidence that this policy was put into effect, public house keepers who allowed false or seditious news to circulate still risked official harassment.[120] As his regime began to crumble in the later months of 1688, King James II issued his own proclamations against those coffeehouses that took in any newspapers other than the official *London Gazette* as well as those who presumed 'to censure and defame the proceedings of state, by speaking evill of things they understand not' in the coffeehouses.[121] This was of course a case of too little, much too late, but James's resort to the methods of his elder brother to regulate the coffeehouses of his kingdoms demonstrate that the old conflicts between the crown and coffeehouse politics had not abated.

In the long term, the crown reluctantly learned to live with coffeehouses. No further plans to suppress the coffeehouses outright were vetted at the national level after the failure of the December 1679 privy council proposal and James II was the last monarch to issue a direct royal proclamation prohibiting the dissemination of unauthorized news and political propaganda in the coffee-houses. The post-revolutionary regimes of William and Mary as well as Queen Anne remained deeply concerned with the spread of what they deemed to be 'seditious libels' or 'false news', and they each issued informal injunctions as well as formal proclamations prohibiting the circulation of such materials, but they did not assert the royal prerogative as a direct means of controlling coffeehouse

---

[117] Folger MS L.c. 876, 20 Dec. 1679; *The (True) Domestick Intelligence, or News both from city and country*, no. 48, 19 Dec. 1679; *The Haarlem Courant*, no. 4, 6 Jan. 1680; Mark Knights, *Politics and opinion in crisis, 1678–81* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 172–3. [118] Steele, I, no. 3715, 12 May 1680.

[119] See Crist, 'Francis Smith'; Hetet, 'A Literary Underground'; and Tim Harris, *London crowds* for these aspects various aspects of 'the tory reaction'.

[120] William Andrews Clark Library, UCLA, Longleat House newsletter copies, vol. 304–3, 19 May 1688, fo. 109r; 30 Aug. 1688, fo. 190v.

[121] Bodl., MS Don. c. 38, fo. 299r, newsletter no. 3276, 9 Oct. 1688; CLRO, journals of the Court of Common Council, 50, pt 1, 26 Oct. 1688, fo. 355r–v; Steele, I, no. 3888, 26 Oct. 1688; Steele, I, no. 3889, 26 Oct. 1688; Narcissus Luttrell, *Brief historical relation of state affairs from September 1678 to April 1714* (6 vols., Oxford, 1857), I, pp. 467, 471.

politics.[122] On this issue, both the older whig and the new Habermasian inter-
pretations have rightly noted that the royal attempts at suppressing the coffee-
houses presented a significant debate over political principle and constitutional
government. Could royal authority, concerned as it was with guarding the
security of the realm from potential enemies both foreign and domestic, over-ride
the legitimacy of licences issued by statutory authority? The 'absolutist' position
of the crown manifestly lost this debate, even if neither Charles II nor James II
cared to admit this unwelcome fact.

III

The attempts by the crown to eliminate the coffeehouse as a political force in the
first two decades after the Restoration were clearly an abject failure. Coffeehouses
remained vital centres for the communication of news and for political debate in
the British Isles for at least the next two centuries.[123] It could be argued that this
successful rise of the coffeehouse offers strong evidence for the gradual acceptance
of a permanent 'fourth estate' and this has indeed been the bedrock of both the
old whig as well as the new Habermasian interpretations. The evidence presented
here suggests that the legitimation of the coffeehouse was accomplished in a much
more complex manner.

   One must carefully distinguish between norms and practices when evaluating
the ways in which the political culture of post-Restoration Britain accommodated
the rise of the coffeehouses and the public opinion that was vented within
them.[124] The practice of coffeehouse politics established itself very quickly, almost
from the very inception of the new coffeehouse institution in the 1650s and 1660s.
The sense that this was a legitimate and acceptable state of affairs developed
much more slowly. Charles II and many of his privy councillors were never
comfortable with the emergence of coffeehouse politics during his reign, hence
the repeated attempts detailed here to issue royal proclamations enjoining the
king's subjects to cease their use of the coffeehouses as venues for political ex-
pression. The centralized power of the English monarchy could cajole and
command its subjects to behave themselves properly in the coffeehouses, but
the strict enforcement of these orders was impossible without the complete co-
operation of the press messengers, the parish officers, ward beadles, county
magistrates, and city authorities that comprised the overlapping structures of
government in early modern Britain. Co-operation there was – a defence of the

---

[122] Queen Mary to the lord mayor of London, 17 Feb. 1691, in *CSPD, May 1690–Oct. 1691*, p. 263;
Steele, I, no. 4315, 26 Mar. 1702. The regulation of coffeehouses after 1688 is detailed in Brian Cowan,
The social life of coffee: curiosity, commerce and civil society in early modern Britain (New Haven, forthcoming).
[123] On early nineteenth-century coffeehouse politics see Iain McCalman, 'Ultra-radicalism and
convivial debating-clubs in London, 1795–1838', *English Historical Review*, 102 (1987), pp. 309–33; and
A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, c. 1780–1850* (London, 1949).
[124] The distinction between a normative and a practical public sphere is introduced in Cowan,
'What was masculine about the public sphere?', pp. 133–4.

right to speak 'seditious libel' or to utter 'false news' was not forthcoming from even the most tolerant of subjects – but it was fitful and hardly reliable in the last instance.

This was because the divisive politics of the later seventeenth century made it increasingly difficult to reach an agreement as to who truly constituted a good subject of the realm, let alone what sort of discourse qualified as 'libel' or 'false news'. The proclamations of Charles II and James II adhered to a tough line in which *any* political discourse in the coffeehouses was *de facto* illegitimate. Many of those faced with the practical realities of enforcing proclamations or other regulations of this nature were much more lenient. The City of London magistrates who initially issued the coffeehouse licences to dissenters such as Peter Kidd and John Thomas obviously thought that they were citizens worthy of receiving such licences, even if they were forced to revoke them later under the pressure of tory reaction. Secretary of State Joseph Williamson may have sympathized with the royal desire to suppress the coffeehouses, yet clerks working within his own office were supplying coffeehouse newswriters with valuable political information and Williamson himself had for a time attempted to set up his own newsletter service to compete with that offered by the likes of Henry Muddiman.[125] There were many such cracks and fissures within the structure of the Restored regime. The normative values of the crown could not easily be translated into the political practice of the king's subjects.

The most forthright defenders of the coffeehouses in Restoration England were the coffeehouse-keepers themselves, for it was they who were faced with the potential destruction of their livelihoods if a royal suppression had been successful. These coffeehouse-keepers did not justify the value of their trade in terms of the positive political good afforded by the free expression of political ideas; they justified it in terms of their possession of licences to practise a trade granted in good faith by local magistrates under the authority of parliamentary statute. The legitimacy of the coffeehouse, in their keepers' numerous petitions and supplications to the privy council, was derived through its relationship to other forms of state power than that of the desires of the monarch and his ministers.

It is for this reason that it is difficult to view the rise of the coffeehouse as a simple case study of the triumph of a public sphere over state authority. The survival of the coffeehouses in the later seventeenth century depended as much on the ability of coffeehouse-keepers to present themselves to their sovereign as well as to their fellow citizens as law-abiding, respectable, and legally enfranchised members of the body politic. They did so through the use of an early modern

---

[125] Muddiman, *King's journalist*, pp. 200–1; for some detailed studies of Williamson's intelligence services, see Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and espionage in the reign of Charles II, 1660–1685* (Cambridge, 1994), and idem, 'Sir Joseph Williamson and the conduct of administration in Restoration England, *Historical Research*, 69 (1996), pp. 18–41.

rhetoric of licensed privilege rather than recourse to a modern rhetoric of political liberty or freedom of expression. The Restoration coffeehouse was a central locus for the practical public sphere; but its legitimation was not achieved through a normative defence of the positive political value that such a public sphere might provide. The rise of the coffeehouse was successful because the coffee-house-keepers could convincingly represent their occupation as an innocent trade, rather than an inherently seditious one.