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The Politics of Starch: Guilds, Monopolies, and Petitioning in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart London

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Using petitioning campaigns to express their discontent to both civic and central authorities, London's livery companies emerged as powerful opponents of monopolies in the late Elizabethan and early Stuart periods. This article focuses on one campaign launched by the Grocers' Company in response to the monopolisation of the production of starch from 1588, analysing a petition by the company and a counter-response offered by the newly incorporated Starchmakers' Company in 1608. It highlights not only the politics surrounding starch, but also the careful utilisation of specific rhetorical devices by both groups in their attempts to persuade the state to favour their cause. It thus contributes to understandings of the sophistication of Jacobean manuscript petitioning culture. The article concludes by suggesting the potential power of such petitioning campaigns, utilised by subjects to respond to the growing presence of powerful projectors and 'odious' patents of monopoly in the realm.

KEYWORDS petitions; petitioning; Grocers' Company; starch; Starchmakers' Company

On 7 May 1603, the lawyer and alderman Richard Martin welcomed James VI & I to his new English kingdom in a speech delivered at Stamford Hill. Martin spoke for the sheriffs of London and Middlesex as he expressed the sheer joy of the 'Honorable and ancient Cittie' at the accession of their new king, the 'bright starre of the North'.¹ Yet the speech contained more than just praise. It was used as an opportunity to communicate the City's desires for the new reign, while stressing the reciprocal obligations expected of ruler and ruled.² James, Martin declared, was akin to

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a 'skilfull and faithfull Phisition' whom they hoped would act like 'a new Sunne rysing' to disperse the 'cloudes of feare' which hung over the realm.³ The problems that were identified by the City as in need of urgent reform were numerous, as Martin used the speech to bemoan the increase in greedy officers, delays in justice, and even the presence of corrupt clerics within the kingdom. He also took the opportunity to address one issue that had grown to plague the commonwealth in the late Queen's reign, as he expressed London's wish that no subject hereafter would have their 'marrow suckt with most odious and unjust Monopolies'.⁴

From the 1560s onwards, patents of monopoly became a crucial tool of crown financial policy and the right to bestow them was justified as an aspect of the royal prerogative. While previously these were issued to inventors or foreign artisans to promote domestic industries, a descent into a 'scandalous phase' in their usage saw grants bestowed on inexperienced courtiers by the cash-strapped crown in return for rents.⁵ The wider discontent this triggered is reflected in Martin's decision to include this as a specific grievance in need of urgent reform in a public speech made to the King. These concerns did not fall on deaf ears, at least not initially. On the same day, a proclamation was issued by James addressing the monopoly issue.⁶ All grants were suspended pending review by the Privy Council, aside from those made to corporations. The proclamation proceeded to instruct subjects of the best means to seek redress if any patents were found to be burdensome in the future. Subjects were actively encouraged to approach the King or Council 'by way of humble Petition'.⁷ Yet this did not amount to an encouragement of all petitioning activity; subjects were to resist 'all assembling and flocking together in multitudes', and encouraged to petition 'without clamor, or any other kind of disorder'.⁸ James warned that if their petitions tended 'only to slaunder and calumniation' or used a 'pretence of seeking publike redresses to utter private malice', they would be ignored.⁹ Petitioning was therefore presented as an important device through which subjects could express their discontent with unpopular patents of monopoly, yet the state also expressed a clear anxiety with the way through which this activity was conducted.

Despite James's early promises, monopolies and patents remained a crucial tool of crown finance.¹⁰ The more accessible nature of James's kingship and his propensity to consider counsel offered ample opportunities for projectors to influence fiscal policy.¹¹ This style of kingship simultaneously encouraged subjects to petition their king, heeding the advice given by James in his own proclamation.¹² Petitioning thus became a chief forum through which anti-monopoly discontent was articulated to crown, Council, and parliament between 1603 and 1625. While the role of monopolies in generating complaints and tensions between crown and parliament has been well established, the extent to which this was an issue with which the wider public engaged has received far less attention.¹³ The expression of anti-monopoly discontent through such media as libels, art, and prints has received analysis, yet the importance of petitioning for this purpose has hitherto been overlooked.¹⁴

In recent scholarship, the prevalence and power of petitioning in early modern society has been stressed.¹⁵ However, a heavy focus on printed petitions and those produced during and after the turmoil of the Civil War years has meant

that earlier manuscript petitioning practices have received less attention.¹⁶ Petitions were a crucial form of participation in Jacobean England, and central to the narrative of the monopolies issue. They became a key means through which projectors requested monopolies despite the King's own declaration against this type of petition in his *Book of Bounty* (1610).¹⁷ Equally, they were also a crucial device through which subjects affected by monopolies expressed their discontent throughout the period in question.

The role of the City of London in such petitioning activity cannot be underplayed. From the 1590s onwards, London's livery companies and civic officials emerged as powerful opponents of monopoly patents that infringed on their trades.¹⁸ The readiness of London's companies to agitate for action and lobby on a range of issues more broadly has been demonstrated through the works of Ian Archer, Chris Kyle, and David Dean.¹⁹ The multiple reactions of the companies and their members to monopolies parallel this activism, with a barrage of petitions sent to Parliament, to civic authorities, and to the Privy Council.²⁰

In 1608, the London Grocers' Company attacked one such monopoly imposed upon the production of starch. The Grocers were one of the Great Twelve ancient livery companies of London, specialising in the retail of a range of goods.²¹ This came to include the increasingly popular commodity of starch, used to clean linen and to stiffen the ruffs worn on the necks of many courtiers. While Thirsk has noted the 'storms of protest' the starch monopoly provoked, the supplications presented by the Grocers against it have not received extensive analysis.²² This case, however, is important and deserving of a more thorough investigation. The opposition of the Grocers to the starch monopoly and the newly incorporated Starchmakers' Company (1607) offers a vital window into observing both the complex politics surrounding the production of starch in the City, and the sophistication, skill, and strength of anti-monopoly petitioning campaigns. The case offers a clear example of a dispute between concessionary interests of the sort described by Robert Ashton, as starch became a highly contested commodity.²³ In exploring the politics of this dispute through a close textual analysis of the supplication of the Grocers and counter-response of the Starchmakers, the skilled construction of arguments by these different interests in the city is further revealed. This in turn reflects findings by Clive Holmes and Chris Kyle on the capacity for early modern petitioners to utilise specific language to appeal to the perceived sentiments of authority.²⁴ The Grocers used powerful notions of commonwealth and the liberties of London to express their discontent to the monopoly, appealing to both civic authority and to crown and Council. The Starchmakers' Company also carefully constructed their arguments in this case, drawing on James's own views on unruly and seditious petitioning campaigns as articulated in his initial proclamation to defend themselves against accusations of monopoly. An analysis of this overlooked yet well-documented case thus demonstrates the various rhetorical strategies utilised by subjects when communicating with the state on the issue of monopolies.

The case also enhances our understanding of the perceptions of the King to petitioning activity more broadly. James's subjects were clearly aware of his anxiety surrounding uncontrolled petitioning behaviour and used it as a strategy to

characterise the petitions against them as instances of seditious and illegitimate activity. The arguments deployed by subjects thus help to inform our understandings of the state's complex reaction to this activity, while the outcome of the case suggests the potential long-term impact of anti-monopoly petitioning campaigns in securing tangible changes to monopoly policy.

After beginning with an overview of patent policy more broadly, this article will describe the monopolisation of starch from the late Elizabethan period onwards, providing the necessary background for contextualising the petition and response that follow. In doing so, it casts light on important aspects of London's economic world, namely, the involvement of syndicates of businessmen in money-making ventures in early Stuart England.²⁵ Following this, a detailed examination of the rhetoric and arguments presented in the petition of the Grocers and the answer of the Starchmakers' Company will be offered. The politics of starch were contested and complex, prompting the utilisation of numerous discourses by subjects in their petitions as they battled to control this influential commodity in early Stuart London.

Monopolies and the Starch Industry, 1588–1601

Patents of monopoly became a crucial fiscal tool employed by the cash-strapped crown from the 1580s, offering opportunities to reward courtiers and to gain rents from ambitious projects.²⁶ Generally, these fell into four main categories. Patents for new inventions were some of the first to be granted to introduce new skills and industries in the realm. Other patents were more controversial, including *non obstante* grants that gave the holder licences to dispense with the law, for example, export licences to trade in prohibited goods. Patents could also interfere in pre-established trades by providing patentees with powers of supervision over industries, such as the alehouse trade. Others gave holders the sole authority to produce and sell certain commodities.²⁷ Patentees were consequently given vast powers of licensing, searching, and punishment; established participants in these industries found themselves either denied the opportunities to trade or having to pay heavily for licences to do so.²⁸

The granting of patents remained a crucial aspect of crown financial policy, despite James's early promises to discontinue their use. The papers of Sir Julius Caesar, Chancellor of the Exchequer, are full of proposals for money making projects offered by projectors, many of which were trialled as the King's debts continued to increase.²⁹ Courtiers were not the only individuals to benefit from such grants, as many were sublet to syndicates of merchants in return for rents. They often took the form of new incorporations: companies as diverse as the Spectacle-makers and the Tobacco-pipemakers were established in James's reign.³⁰ By the terms of the proclamation of 1603, these were an acceptable form of grant, causing some projectors to propose their schemes under the guise of seeking lawful corporations.³¹ Often, these projects were presented via petitions to crown and Council. Yet even corporations did not remain free from attacks and public hostility. James's first parliament witnessed calls for free trade as London's

overseas trading companies were denounced as monopolistic bodies detrimental to the commonwealth.³²

In this atmosphere of monopoly-mania, the commodity of starch proved unable to escape the clutches of monopolists. Changes in fashion had caused the growth in popularity of the product in Elizabeth's reign, as a material integral for the starching of ruffs.³³ Whilst previously it was imported from the Low Countries, it was increasingly produced within London.³⁴ It was relatively easy to make, albeit time consuming, needing little specialised equipment and only a large room, tubs, and barrels, and was therefore made by subjects in their own homes.³⁵ However, the use of wheat in its production meant that controlling the industry became a necessity in the face of recurrent food shortages.³⁶ This was certainly one motivation behind the crown's monopolisation of its production, although shadier motives swiftly emerged. On 15 April 1588, a monopoly was first granted to the customs official and Middlesex JP Richard Young, giving him the sole right to sell and produce starch made from bran in England for seven years, as well as to search ships for any unlawful starch imported into the realm.³⁷ Young was an associate of Burghley and an intelligence-gatherer; the monopoly's issuing was both a reward for past services and to repay debts owed to him.³⁸ On 6 July 1594, the patent was re-issued to another courtier, Sir John Pakington, a favourite of the Queen who had commanded her attention during a royal visit to Worcester.³⁹ Pakington was granted the rights to import, sell, and produce starch from bran, as well as the power to licence all other makers. Grain scarcity led to the temporary suspension of his right to produce starch, but by May 1598 the grant was re-issued to Pakington on account of his 'good service'.⁴⁰ He was given powers to search ships, warehouses, and shops for all starch made and sold contrary to the patent. Other individuals, including George Rivers and John Ellis, creditors to Richard Young, also had shares in this patent, which was sold and traded for private financial gain almost like a commodity in itself.⁴¹

The Grocers' Company emerged as a powerful opponent of the starch monopolies, deploring the limitations now put on a trade that they had freely exercised. The Grocers were involved in the retail of a range of goods, the variety of which only increased over time, including spices, currants and later, tobacco. In its membership, the Company included wholesalers, who purchased large quantities of goods both domestic and imported, and retailers, who purchased and consequently sold products on for private consumption.⁴² The increased popularity of starch meant it became one such product imported and sold by the Grocers. The new restrictions imposed on starch selling were protested heavily by the Company, who utilised petitions to express their discontent. In 1592, the Company sent a petition to the Privy Council complaining of the 'grievs conceived by the Grocers touching the hard execution of her Majesties Patent for starch'.⁴³ The Grocers lamented that they were restricted to buy starch only from the patentees and bound to sell it to licenced individuals. They invoked the rights of London to argue that the monopoly was a violation of the 'custome and liberties of the Citie'.⁴⁴ Opposition to the patent continued after it was re-issued to Pakington. On 6 October 1595, apprentices in London stole a cartload of starch and 'grevyouslie beate' Pakington's deputies.⁴⁵ Thirty-seven members of the Grocers' Company also petitioned Lord

Burghley on 20 June 1595, appealing for the release of imprisoned members of their Company who had violated the patent.⁴⁶ Such was the extent of opposition that in August 1595, the wardens of the Company were ordered to publicly read the conditions of the patent aloud at Grocers' Hall, to ensure full compliance.⁴⁷ Petitions were also sent by and on behalf of individual imprisoned grocers, and one particularly interesting document took the form of a collection of thirty-eight individual testimonies describing the abuse starch makers and grocers had faced at the hands of the patentees.⁴⁸ By the time of Elizabeth's final parliament in 1601, the outrage against monopolies was such that the patent was one amongst many revoked by proclamation on 28 November.⁴⁹ From its earliest days, the starch monopoly was profoundly unpopular, as appears in parliamentary debate, active resistance, and petitioning activity.

Cranfield, Ingram, Northampton, and the Starchmakers' Company, 1607–1608

At James's accession, starch was freed from any monopolistic constraints. James's initial commitment to continuing Elizabeth's reforms meant that the Grocers remained free to sell starch as they wished. However, the financial opportunities this product offered eventually caught the eye of two important projectors: Lionel Cranfield and Arthur Ingram. Both were merchants of London and were jointly involved in syndicates in the early Jacobean period.⁵⁰ Theirs emerged as one of the most powerful in London and was behind a plethora of money-making schemes, which also involved their court patron, Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton.⁵¹

The syndicate had sought to gain control of the starch industry in February 1607, when a bill was introduced into the Commons by Sir Edward Greville to prohibit the making of starch from wheat.⁵² However, the bill was rejected and the plan was frustrated. Yet this was only a temporary check. By 23 August, their efforts were successful, and a new licensing and monopoly system of control over starch was announced via royal proclamation.⁵³ The proclamation lamented the problems which had been caused by the recent unrestricted making of starch in the realm including the 'noysome stench' and 'waste of Corne' its production caused.⁵⁴ A commission was appointed to licence individuals to continue using the trade throughout England and Wales, and to ensure that no starch was made from any edible wheat, but only from coarse materials such as bran. All who wished to practice the trade were to appear before the commissioners at 'Fownders Hall in London', or to send their names via writing.⁵⁵ On 3 September, the commission received its letters patent, and unsurprisingly, Cranfield and Ingram were both appointed to supervise the trade.⁵⁶ Others were included, such as Greville, who had been facing financial difficulties since Elizabeth's reign.⁵⁷ These commissioners were given powers to search all houses in the land for any starch made. Later, in March 1608, Northampton also received a grant for new impositions placed on starch.⁵⁸ A fee of ten shillings per hundred weight was imposed on all imported starch, and five shillings on each hundred weight of domestic starch. Northampton

sub-let this to Cranfield, Ingram, and other merchants, and Ingram himself became the collector of this new imposition.⁵⁹ It is unlikely that concern for wheat shortages was the prime motivating factor for their involvement in the starch industry: the financial benefits and offices they received were likely far more enticing.

The final move towards their control of the industry came in the form of a new corporation: on 8 November 1607, the Starchmakers' Company received its letters patent.⁶⁰ This was a worrying development for the Grocers, as it signalled a full monopolisation of the product by a new guild. Yet it is likely that the Grocers were also anxious about the potential impact of this corporation on their membership. Corporations already included a range of members. London's custom for freemen to engage in any trade meant members could hold various and differing economic interests.⁶¹ Maintaining corporate unity was thus not always an easy task. For example, the London Clothworkers' Company spectacularly divided on the issue of the Cockayne project in 1613: while artisan cloth workers supported the project, the company's wealthier cloth exporters rejected it, creating a division that nearly led to the separation of the artisan clothworkers as a separate company.⁶² The Grocers faced a similar anxiety over attempts by one sub-set of their membership, the apothecaries, to separate. By 1617, their fears were realised and the new Apothecaries' Company was officially chartered.⁶³ The incorporation triggered petitions by the Grocers, showing their recourse to petitioning in similar disputes.⁶⁴ The creation of the Starchmakers' Company likely created a similar anxiety, as the Grocers faced the possibility that some of their members might join this splinter group.

The terms of the incorporation of the Starchmakers saw the new company promise to pay James a rent, and to ensure that all starch be made from bran. Both Cranfield and Ingram were members, and the commissioners appointed in September had powers to influence its membership by licencing all starch makers.⁶⁵ It was therefore the final move deployed by the Cranfield/Ingram syndicate to ensure their continuing private profits and authority over the trade.

The Petition of 1608

The Grocers' Company emerged as the chief opponents of the Starchmakers' Company, presenting this as nothing more than a detrimental monopoly to the commonwealth. Undoubtedly, they did so for self-interested reasons, resenting the restraints placed on a commodity they had previously sold. Yet in their campaign of opposition, they had vital support from the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London. On 5 February 1608, Lord Mayor Henry Rowe wrote to the Privy Council and enclosed a petition written by the Grocers which had been addressed to 'my selfe and my Brethren', the Aldermen.⁶⁶ He had decided to forward it to the Council for their 'Consideracion accordinge to your wonted favour to the Comon-Weale of this Cittie.'⁶⁷ The examination of the Grocers' claims and the forwarding of 'Informacion of the same' was necessary, he claimed, to ensure that all 'as are Freemen of this Cittie may Inioye their liberty and Custome of free buyinge and sellinge in their Trade'.⁶⁸ The support of the petition by the Lord Mayor and

Aldermen undoubtedly added authority and strength to the original supplication. In other cases, the City had proved itself willing to forward complaints from guilds to the Council.⁶⁹ With parliament prorogued at this time, petitioning the City with an eye to reaching the King and Council was likely perceived by the Grocers as the best way to ensure their grievances were received by the highest authorities in the land.

The petition can be dated to around January or February 1608 on account of Rowe's letter. It consisted of a folio of text with an impressive 106 signatures collected in seven columns at the end of the document.⁷⁰ This shows the extent to which it was a large scale, collective petitioning effort signed by numerous members of the Company. It was addressed from 'the retailinge Grocers within ye Cittie of London', who were 'members all' of the Grocers' Company.⁷¹ The petitioners claimed to be the retailers in the Company who sold commodities directly to consumers, and the court orders of the Company indeed show that the initiative for sending this petition lay with the 'reteylinge grocers of this Company'.⁷² The supplication was written in a neat, scribal hand, and was likely put to paper by a company clerk or professional scribe. Indeed, the presence of columns with added signatures and names suggests it may have been circulated after being written to facilitate the collection of names.

The petition saw the Grocers present the Starchmakers' Company not as a legitimate organisation but as a burdensome monopoly with detrimental effects on the starch trade. The petitioners lamented that the 'makinge of Starch is now brought into a few hands' causing new 'vnresonable prises' for the commodity.⁷³ The petitioners proceeded to lament the effects this was having on their freedom to retail the product. Not only were they forced to 'buy Starch' from the patentees 'onelye' at places by them appointed and 'at no other place', but they were also made to enter into bonds promising to 'buy onelye of ye patentees and their assignes'.⁷⁴ These bonds were intended to ensure that all grocers purchased their starch from the patentees and licenced makers only—if they refused to sign them, the Starchmakers did 'threaten to comit them to prison without any bayle'.⁷⁵ They also complained of new restrictions on importing starch; if any grocer purchased foreign starch from unlicensed merchants the same would be seized and retained for the patentee's own personal uses. Other demands confirm that the Grocers intended that their petition would be seen by the Council, as they framed their supplication to appeal to both civic and central authorities. Addressing the Council's concern with recurrent corn scarcity, the Grocers suggested a scheme to ban the domestic production of starch altogether, whilst allowing its free importation from abroad. Not only would this ensure that 'the Kings Majesties Custome would be much advanched', but it would also ensure that edible wheat was not used in starch production.⁷⁶ This suggestion was thus framed as a solution to benefit the crown and realm, yet in reality it offered a means for the Grocers to circumvent new restraints on their buying of the product and to continue controlling the sale of the imported commodity. The Grocers ended their petition by requesting the release of members who had been imprisoned by the commissioners, while calling for the re-introduction of their 'free libertie to buye and sell in their trade'.⁷⁷

The Grocers included skilful and deliberate language designed to appeal to the perceived sentiments of the King. They included a reference to James's own

proclamation to present the incorporation as contrary to the policy of James himself. They suggested that ‘if spedye reformacion be not had’ the corporation would ‘tend onelye to a monopoly’.⁷⁸ James had been pleased ‘by his royall proclamacion ... to signefye unto all his lovinge Subiectes his princely care in the suppressinge of the same’.⁷⁹ By citing James’s own language and position on monopolies, the Grocers were able to present themselves as loyal followers of the King’s will who were merely directing the Council’s attention to this wrongful incorporation.

The petitioners also drew on notions of charter culture and individual liberties. As argued by Christopher Brooks, references to Magna Carta and a growing ‘language of liberty’ were frequent in this period.⁸⁰ Articulations of the liberties of subjects and the needs of the commonwealth had also been invoked by MPs from as early as the parliament of 1597 to call for a cancellation of monopolies.⁸¹ The Grocers adopted this language in full force to present the new company as a monopoly that restricted the liberties of free subjects to exercise their labours. The King and Council were likely to be receptive to such arguments, given the rise of new legal ideas that equated the right to exercise one’s trade with property rights, which should not be infringed.⁸² The Grocers also referenced the larger privileges enjoyed by London to portray the incorporation as a burden not just to the commonwealth, but to the essential liberties of the City. This was a deliberate inclusion designed to appeal directly to civic authority, whose disdain with the wider effects of monopolies on the rights of the City were widely known. In the beginning of their appeal, the Grocers reminded the Mayor and Aldermen that

by ye lawes of this Realme and ye Charters graunted to ye Maior and cominaltie & Cittizens of London, by ye Kings most excellent Majestie & his noble proginitors, everye freeman may buy & sell, and vse every honest arte & meanes apperteyninge to his trade; yt he can devise to gaine his livinge without any imprisonment.⁸³

The restrictions on starch selling were therefore a violation of the custom of the City. Despite stressing the importance of this liberty of trade, the Grocers still proceeded to cite the terms of their own charter and the exclusive rights this bestowed on their own members to retail goods. They had been given ‘all manner of liberties franchise, Customes and priviledges’, providing them with the right to exercise their trade without encroachment.⁸⁴ These rights had been enjoyed by the Grocers on account of their ‘longe service’, but were now wrongfully taken from them.⁸⁵ The Grocers’ supplication ended by presenting the incorporation as contrary to law, to the ‘priviledges of ye Cittie of London’, and as tending to an ‘evill example’.⁸⁶ The petition thus included a sophisticated rhetoric that involved not just generalised appeals to the commonwealth and anti-monopoly rhetoric, but specific references to the rights and liberties enjoyed by London and the Grocers’ Company as an ancient guild. They created a forceful and multifaceted argument designed to appeal to different levels of authority.

The Starchmakers responded to the complaints made against them in an interesting manuscript text. A surviving copy of their reply has been misdated to 1592, but

its contents make clear that this was a direct response to the Grocers' petition.⁸⁷ It was an unsigned document and contained no opening address, yet it did call on the Council to consider the plight of the new company. A copy of the document in Caesar's papers is titled as a list of 'Artikkelles moste humblie offerred to your Lordshipps' in answer to 'ye Surmizes aleaged in a petition' and dated to 17 February 1608.⁸⁸ Some parts of it did make use of petitioning language: for example, the Starchmakers frequently called on the Council to 'humbly' consider their case. Yet, in the absence of signatures or a full opening address, it is best characterised as a defensive answer addressed to the Council rather than a formal petitioning document. Its contents make clear that it was written by the new Company, and the potential involvement of Ingram, Cranfield, and even Northampton in its construction cannot be ruled out.

The answer primarily attempted to refute the claims made by the Grocers, and in doing so, it engaged directly with the argument that their incorporation infringed on the liberties of Londoners. The Starchmakers claimed that their intent had not been to 'impugne or infringe the liberties of the Freemen of London', arguing that they desired that the 'same should be maynetayned and preserved'.⁸⁹ They also correctly noted that their incorporation did not infringe on any pre-existing charters as 'itt dothe not appeere by what lawe or Charter the buyinge and sellinge of Starche is graunted or dothe appertayne unto grocers more then to anie other companie or traders'.⁹⁰ They continued to refute other accusations made by the Grocers, for example by describing the suggestion that they forced them to enter into bonds as being nothing more than a 'shamelesse untreweth'.⁹¹

The Starchmakers' answer also responded to the charge that their incorporation was akin to a monopoly by presenting their company as especially unique in its degree of openness. They argued that 'noe man hath byne or shalbe debarred' from making and selling starch as long as he made it from materials other than wheat.⁹² They claimed that 'a greater number of more honeste and sufficient persons' had been licenced to make starch since their incorporation, in comparison to the number of deceitful makers who had previously exercised the trade, claiming 'itt is not yet knowne of how greate a nomber this Companie of Starchemakers will Consiste'.⁹³ They also presented themselves as a compassionate company, whose leaders had already 'levied a stock' to help their poorer members who were affected by recent falls in starch sales.⁹⁴ Their tenth point contrasted this openness with the charge of 'Monopolie' that had been levelled against them.⁹⁵ They claimed that 'nothing is by us done or intended that can fall within the Compas of that imputation'.⁹⁶ This is illustrative of the degree to which the accusation of 'monopoly' had become loaded. James's publicly stated dislike of monopolies in 1603 meant that patentees and companies were aware of the need to defend themselves against such accusations. Here, the Starchmakers' Company was presented as a large and open organisation that worked to help the poor starch-makers within its remit, challenging the picture of a greedy and exclusive corporation which the Grocers had painted.

Perhaps the most important and successful strategy running throughout the reply of the Starchmakers was an attempt to discredit the legitimacy and authority of the petition of their opponents. To do so, the writers raised questions concerning the

legitimacy of the Grocers' petition by painting it as the product of a seditious and orchestrated petitioning campaign. They argued that

the principall persons procurers and persecutors of ye sayde complaynts are not ye retaylinge grocers as is pretended, but only some fewe persons of ye grocers Companie yt are called warehowse men.⁹⁷

This was an interesting and sophisticated tactic, as the Starchmakers demonstrated an awareness of the internal politics and different interests that made up the Grocers' Company. Here, they suggested that the petition had not been presented by the bulk of the Company's members, but by the wholesalers or 'warehouse men' in their ranks who purchased and imported goods in large bulks to sell to smaller retailers. In doing so, they attempted to undermine the suggestion that the petition was a legitimate document sent from the entire Company. They continued by invoking language used in James's own proclamation of 7 May on 'clamorous' petitions to play on the concern of the state towards seditious petitioning activity. They used the language of disorder to suggest that this small group had 'laboured the retaylinge grocers to Joyne with them in this there untrue and Claymorous petition', using the 'Cover or Cullor' of being a complaint issued by the larger company.⁹⁸ The Starchmakers went on to paint the Grocers' petition as nothing more than an attempt to achieve private aims, thus presenting it as the exact type of petition that James had criticised in his proclamation. It described these grocers as possessing a 'greedy desyre of gaine', which had caused them to deliberately infringe the orders and proclamations of the crown as they attempted to 'disremember what his Majestie hathe of late incorporated'.⁹⁹ They were presented as dangerous subjects who had worked to 'nourishe contempt' and buy starch illegally from 'contemners of his Majesties lawfull proceedings'.¹⁰⁰ It was these grocers who had worked to 'ingrosse all the starche broughte from other Countries', causing prices to rise, and who had ultimately proven that 'their owne gayne not the good of the Comon wealth ys the mark they ayme at'.¹⁰¹ Here, the Starchmakers cleverly played on the unpopularity of engrossing in the realm, drawing on ideas that those who engaged in such practices raised prices for their own private benefit, contrary to acceptable rules of conduct governing the moral economy.¹⁰² The Starchmakers, therefore, painted a picture of a disruptive opposition campaign headed by a few greedy company individuals. According to them, the Grocers' petition was a 'Claymorous' document produced by those who had falsely persuaded other grocers to join with them in their supplication. This was a skilful way for the new Company to undermine the validity of a petition sent by one of London's ancient companies, playing on the state's own fear of disordered and disruptive petitioning campaigns.

The Starchmakers' Company, therefore, used a skilful and rhetorically rich defence to undermine the Grocers' supplication. The sophistication of their response, combined with the involvement of powerful interests such as Northampton in the monopoly, was enough to ensure that the patent was not cancelled at this time. Their invocation of notions of sedition and unrest, combined with their novel assurance that they were an 'open' company, constituted powerful arguments which saw their petition succeed. While the Grocers' appeals to liberty had

persuaded the City to support their suit, this was simply not enough to also persuade the crown of the need to cancel this revenue-raising project.

The controversy and debates surrounding the starch patent were not yet at an end. Further concerns with shortages of wheat, combined with fears that complaints against the monopoly would be aired in the next parliament, led to a full ban on the production of starch on 10 January 1610.¹⁰³ This signalled the end of the new Starchmakers' Company. It had been short lived, and it is hard to ignore the feeling that the petitions of the Grocers had contributed to the state's anxiety regarding its deep unpopularity. The project had also been a fiscal failure for Cranfield and Ingram, who were unable to prevent the continued unlicensed making and selling of starch throughout the realm.¹⁰⁴ However, starch remained a target for projectors throughout James's reign, and Caesar's papers contain petitions for new projects for the commodity and requests for incorporation after 1610.¹⁰⁵ These proposals were ultimately persuasive: by 1619, a new commission for the licensing of starch making was introduced and by 1622, a new Starchmakers' Company was incorporated.¹⁰⁶ Once again, petitions emerged as the chief mechanism through which these developments were resisted.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

While the Grocers may not have secured a revocation of the starch monopoly immediately in 1608, their petition and this episode provide an important insight into Jacobean anti-monopoly petitioning campaigns. In particular, the case highlights the use of various rhetorical strategies by both the Grocers and the Starchmakers as they attempted to negotiate the politics surrounding starch and its monopolisation. Both groups used a range of devices to present their case, demonstrating a skilful use of rhetoric that points to the sophistication of Jacobean petitioning activity. Importantly, the Starchmakers' attack on the legitimacy of the Grocers' supplication also provides an early example of a successful technique which would become common in Jacobean petitioning campaigns, as rival groups presented their opponents as stirrers of discontent and questioned the authenticity of numerous suits and campaigns.¹⁰⁸

Put in context, the above case offers merely one example of the presentation of anti-monopoly petitions by London's guilds, which were frequent throughout the Jacobean period. While individually these campaigns may not have always achieved immediate successes, the longer-term impacts of the torrent of anti-monopoly petitioning agitation can be seen in the eventual passing of the Statute of Monopolies (1624).¹⁰⁹ This Act led to the banning of many types of monopoly grants. Though it has often been regarded as a response to monopoly agitation expressed in the Commons, the frequent and incessant nature of anti-monopoly petitioning campaigns must be seen as having exercised an important pressure on the state in the long run, contributing to this important statutory development.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, monopolies generated a torrent of petitionary complaints that placed significant pressure on the crown to discontinue their use. The case of starch offers a particularly illuminating example of the use of petitions by guilds as they attempted to navigate their way through an economic and urban landscape increasingly dominated by powerful projectors and 'odious' patents of monopoly.

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