

# Corruption, Conspiracy and Collusion: Anti-Monopoly Petitioning in the Parliament of 1621★

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In the Jacobean period, monopolies were central to crown financial policy. Through petitions, subjects protested the effect of these grants on their trades and livelihoods. In the parliament of 1621, the Commons' standing committee for grievances emerged as an important recipient of anti-monopoly petitions. Moving beyond the current historiographical focus on institutional and procedural developments in parliamentary petitioning practice, this article offers a close rhetorical analysis of anti-monopoly petitions and counter-petitions in 1621, highlighting the dialogic nature of petitioning disputes. An emerging language of corruption and modes of politic reasoning will be shown to have shaped petitionary appeals, as subjects used the concepts of faction and conspiracy to oppose and defend monopolies. The article argues for the need to consider the close interrelation between the economic and political in 1620s England.

**Keywords:** petitions; monopolies; public sphere; faction; corruption; politic reasoning; print; corporations; rhetoric

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'Two things come to be considered of this day – the King's supply and the subjects' grievances which are monopolies which, like incubus and succubus, suck out even the vital spirits of the subjects'.<sup>1</sup>

On 15 February 1621 the MP Sir Edward Sackville delivered a lively and passionate speech to the Commons. Discussing the need for subjects' grievances to be considered before the House granted James VI and I any supply, Sackville drew the attention of his fellow members to one particularly contentious economic policy: monopolies. Sir Lionel Cranfield moved to lament the various grievances in the realm, focusing especially on the decay of trade and the number of 'patents or grants' restraining the same.<sup>2</sup> The monopoly

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<sup>1</sup>*Commons Debates 1621*, ed. W. Notestein, F.H. Relf, and H. Simpson (7 vols, New Haven, CT, 1935), ii, 85.

<sup>2</sup>*Commons Debates 1621*, ii, 89.

issue continued to be discussed in ensuing debates. The MP Sir Dudley Digges even likened patentees to dogs; whilst 'His Majestie loves hunting' he claimed, 'he loves no such hounds'.<sup>3</sup>

The monopoly-mania of the Jacobean period has been no secret in scholarship. Cramsie, Peck and Thirsk have all highlighted James's frequent recourse to monopolies as both a revenue-raising and patronage device throughout his reign.<sup>4</sup> The discontent monopolies triggered in the parliamentary sphere is in many ways well-covered ground: Russell described this as a 'headline issue' in the parliament of 1621.<sup>5</sup> Hitherto, most scholars have focused on the condemnation of particular grants in this parliament, including those held by individuals associated with George Villiers, the duke of Buckingham, and his faction.<sup>6</sup> Others have focused extensively on the revival of impeachment by parliament as a device used to punish unpopular patentees.<sup>7</sup> Overlooked, in contrast, is the response of the realm's humble subjects to this controversial economic policy, and, in particular, their penning of petitions to incite real changes in monopoly policy.

The importance of petitioning as a form of communication utilised by subjects has been recognised by scholars amidst a growth in works charting the existence of a popular politics in the early modern period.<sup>8</sup> Hoyle, Peacey, and Waddell have all demonstrated the power and prevalence of petitioning as subjects of varying degrees appealed to such centres of authority as quarter sessions, council, and crown.<sup>9</sup> Larger structural and institutional developments in the early 17th century have been credited for increasing the importance of parliament as a recipient of petitioning complaints. Thrush and Kyle have pointed to the development of standing committees in the Commons for providing petitioners with a cheaper and simpler means through which to approach parliament than the tiresome and expensive process of proceeding by bill.<sup>10</sup> The importance of the development of print on parliamentary petitioning practice has also been considered; Kyle has argued for the centrality of printed petitions in the 1620s for the development of a new public sphere within parliament.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vi, 40.

<sup>4</sup> John Cramsie, *Kingship and Crown Finance under James VI and I 1603–1625* (Woodbridge, 2002); L.L. Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (1990); Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Conrad Russell, 'What was New in the 1620s? (Trevelyan VI)', in *King James VI and I and his English Parliaments*, ed. R. Cust and A. Thrush (Oxford, 2011), 182.

<sup>6</sup> M.A. Abrams, 'English Gold and Silver Thread Monopolies, 1611–1621', *Journal of Economic and Business History*, iii (1931), 382–406; Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics 1621–1629* (Oxford, 1979), ch. 2; Robert Zaller, *The Parliament of 1621: A Study in Constitutional Conflict* (Oakland, CA, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Peck, *Court Patronage*, ch. 8; E.R. Foster, 'The Procedure of the House of Commons against Patents and Monopolies, 1621–1624', in *Conflict in Stuart England: Essays in Honour of Wallace Notestein*, ed. W.A. Aiken and B.D. Henning (1960), 57–86.

<sup>8</sup> For popular politics, see *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics in Early Sixteenth-Century England', *HR*, lxxv (2002), 365–89; Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013), ch. 8; Brodie Waddell, Jason Peacey, and Sharon Howard, *The Power of Petitioning in Seventeenth-Century England*, <https://petitioning.history.ac.uk> (accessed 25 July 2022).

<sup>10</sup> *HPC, 1604–1629*, [www.historyofparliamentonline.org](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org) (accessed 25 July 2022), s.v. Legislation and Petitions; C.R. Kyle, *Theater of State: Parliament and Political Culture in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, CA, 2012), 141.

<sup>11</sup> Kyle, *Theater of State*, 10. See also Jason Peacey, 'Parliament, Printed Petitions and the Political Imaginary in Seventeenth-Century England', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, xxxviii (2018), 350–63.

The consequent presentation of anti-monopoly petitions to Jacobean parliaments has received some analysis, though often within larger works focusing on broader procedural developments. Foster's analysis of the process through which monopolies were investigated by the Commons' committee for grievances in 1621 has drawn attention to the role of petitions for triggering investigations into the ills of numerous grants.<sup>12</sup> Seldom have these myriad petitions been placed at the heart of analysis and subjected to a detailed rhetorical examination to draw larger conclusions pertaining to the strategies employed by subjects when petitioning parliament.

The broader interaction between this anti-monopoly petitioning activity and prevalent ideas and discourses in larger political culture has been overlooked. The 1620s have long been recognised as a high point for political discussion, as issues including the Spanish Match, factionalism, and evil counsel, dominated political discourse.<sup>13</sup> Lake and Pincus have recognised the importance of these issues for public 'pitch-making', whilst Kyle has similarly attempted to trace the impact of these discourses on the culture of parliament.<sup>14</sup> Concerns that corruption was plaguing the commonwealth were also pertinent and articulated through a developing language of corruption.<sup>15</sup> The way events were interpreted and understood has been explored by Millstone, who argues for the importance of 'politic reasoning' as a mode of thinking in the early Stuart period. He argues that contemporaries frequently viewed events in larger frameworks dominated by issues of evil counsel, conspiracy, and deceit, acting as important modes of narration in politic histories of court and parliament.<sup>16</sup>

Hitherto unnoticed is the way such patterns of thought and issues impacted parliamentary petitioning discourse. These very same ideas of faction and collusion were a key feature of earlier petitions, utilised particularly by courtier-patentees to defend their grants. Heightened concerns with monopoly, court corruption, and faction in the 1620s made these themes particularly pertinent. In turn, subjects framed their supplications around these ideas to appeal to the concerns of MPs. Both Holmes and Kyle have demonstrated the ability for petitioners to shape their supplications to appeal to the authority addressed.<sup>17</sup> Scholars of litigation have similarly analysed the existence of formulaic elements within suits, questioning the extent to which certain claims were reflective of real events, or strategic interventions designed to appeal to judges.<sup>18</sup> In the realm of petitioning, disentangling

<sup>12</sup>Foster, 'Procedure', 67; For the argument that procedural developments were piecemeal, see S. Lambert, 'Procedure in the House of Commons in the Early Stuart Period', *EHR*, xciv (1980), 753–81.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv (2006), 279; T. Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>14</sup>Lake and Pincus, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', 279; Kyle, *Theater of State*, 3.

<sup>15</sup>Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (New Haven, CT, 2016), 116; Peck, *Court Patronage*, ch. 7–8.

<sup>16</sup>Noah Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2016); N. Millstone, 'The Politic History of Early Stuart Parliaments', in *Writing the History of Parliament in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, ed. P. Cavill and A. Gajda (Manchester, 2018), 179–81.

<sup>17</sup>Clive Holmes, 'Drainers and Fenmen: The Problem of Popular Political Consciousness in the Seventeenth Century', in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (Cambridge, 1985), 166–95; C.R. Kyle, 'Parliament and the Politics of Carting in Early Stuart London', *London Journal*, xxvii (2002), 1–11.

<sup>18</sup>Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1998), 11–19; N.Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA, 1987).

which discourses were purely strategic and which were reflective of an actual engagement by subjects with larger political and constitutional concerns is an important, albeit tricky, task. This article argues that petitioners followed events in parliament closely, employing a range of discursive mechanisms designed to appeal to MPs. Yet those subjects who petitioned against monopolies in this parliament also harboured real concerns with corruption and faction as they grappled with larger political and economic concerns through their petitionary appeals.

This article will offer an analysis of three anti-monopoly petitioning campaigns directed to the Commons in 1621. It will focus not only on petitions sent protesting monopolies, but also on counter-petitions presented by patentees intent on defending their grants. It will thus illuminate the strong dialogic element present within anti-monopoly petitioning disputes, challenging past assertions made by Zaret that cross-petitions first occurred as a feature of petitioning practice in the 1640s.<sup>19</sup>

More broadly, this article argues for the need for historians to reconceptualise how we consider the 1620s and the broader interaction between economic and political issues in this period. Monopolies politicised subjects, triggering petitioning activity which saw concerns with this economic policy articulated in larger discursive frameworks heavily influenced by prevalent ideas in political culture. Catholicism, the Spanish Match, and foreign affairs were not the sole causes of debate and politicisation: the monopolies issue was divisive and paramount.

After offering an overview of Jacobean monopoly policy, this article will proceed to focus on our first campaign, launched by the Stationers' Company against a monopoly for the printing on one side of paper. An analysis of an often-overlooked counter-petition produced by patentees will reveal the ways through which the language of faction and self-interest was used as a defensive strategy by monopoly holders. The second section of this article focuses on the creation of a new monopolistic corporation: the Company of Gold and Silver Beaters. The use of concepts of conspiracy and collusion, as well as active engagement with contemporary debates surrounding corporate governance, will be shown to have been a dominant aspect of this campaign. Finally, the article concludes by considering petitioning opposition directed against Sir John Lepton, a patentee for the writing of all bills in the council of the north. Drawing on overlooked and local manuscript sources, the sophistication of the counter-petitioning attack, and the use of notions of faction and conspiracy by Lepton in response, will be demonstrated. Overall, these petitions will be shown to offer important insights beyond the developing procedures of the House or of the impact of print on petitioning practice. Instead, they reveal the rich rhetorical nature of petitions as sources, and the close interaction between the political and the economic in 1620s England.

<sup>19</sup>David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 251.

Patents of monopoly were an integral aspect of Tudor and Stuart financial policy, bestowed using the prerogative powers of the crown. Generally, they fell into four main categories.<sup>20</sup> Patents could be granted for new inventions or technologies, or issued in the form of *non obstante* grants, as licences allowing holders to import or export prohibited goods. More controversial were patents allowing holders to supervise entire trades or industries, or those which provided patentees with the sole power and authority to produce, sell, or exercise specific trades or goods. The latter were especially unpopular: patentees were given powers of enforcement to seize and confiscate goods, whilst many subjects were forced to pay for licences to continue exercising their trades.

Whilst patents were issued in the early Elizabethan period to inventors or skilled foreign artisans to encourage England's economic development, they were increasingly granted from the 1580s as a patronage and revenue-raising device.<sup>21</sup> The crown made claims to the existence of the right to grant patents as an ancient aspect of the royal prerogative, using this as a new means to fill the royal coffers.<sup>22</sup> In exchange for grants, patentees paid rents. Despite James's promises in a proclamation of May 1603 to rid the realm of the burdens of odious grants, monopolies remained an integral feature of crown financial policy.<sup>23</sup> The Jacobean political and economic landscape was dominated by unscrupulous courtiers, greedy projectors, and groups of merchant-courtier syndicates determined to take advantage of this policy to amass their own fortunes.<sup>24</sup>

Monopolies were an important feature of the murky world of court politics. Projectors swarmed James's court seeking grants and favours, and courtiers frequently used their proximity to the king to gain grants for themselves or for others. Buckingham was especially active procuring monopolies for his larger family. His brother and half-brother, Kit Villiers and Sir Edward Villiers, were recipients of patents for the writing of wills and the licencing of alehouses.<sup>25</sup> Concerns with the domineering influence of Buckingham as a corrupt favourite thus combined with the grievances on trade occasioned by monopoly grants, causing both issues to join in the minds of subjects.

As Peck has demonstrated, the early 17th century witnessed a growing concern with corruption.<sup>26</sup> The definition of what constituted a corrupt practice expanded beyond statutory proscriptions: activities including gift-giving, the sale of office, and monopolies began

<sup>20</sup>H.G. Fox, *Monopolies and Patents: A Study of the History and Future of the Patent Monopoly* (Toronto, 1947), 62–5.

<sup>21</sup>John Guy, 'The 1590s: The Second Reign of Elizabeth I?', in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge, 1995), 5–8; Thirsk, *Economic Policy*, 51–75.

<sup>22</sup>Clive Holmes, 'Parliament, Liberty, Taxation, and Property', in *Parliament and Liberty: from the Reign of Elizabeth to the English Civil War*, ed. J.H. Hexter (Stanford, CA, 1992), 129–32.

<sup>23</sup>See Cramsie, *Kingship*, ch. 1, for his argument that this was linked to James's open style of kingship. For proposals for projects, see BL, Add. MS 10038, papers of Sir Julius Caesar, Notes Concerning Projects.

<sup>24</sup>Robert Ashton, 'Conflicts of Concessionary Interest in Early Stuart England', in *Trade, Government, and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F.J. Fisher*, ed. D.C. Coleman and F.J. Fisher (1967), 113–31; Thirsk, *Economic Policy*, ch. 4.

<sup>25</sup>Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592–1628* (London and New York, 1981), 90.

<sup>26</sup>Peck, *Court Patronage*, 11.

to be seen as corrupt.<sup>27</sup> In turn, an emerging rhetoric of corruption became important within political discourse, acting as a 'powerful mode of criticism' which was applied to a range of issues.<sup>28</sup> Numerous ideas and words were part and parcel of this evolving language. Metaphors of decay and disease emerged as powerful images to lament the state of the commonwealth. In the political sphere, corruption was defined as the subversion of the public interest for private benefits.<sup>29</sup> This existed alongside an already flourishing language of commonwealth: accusations that individuals had worked for their own gain and neglected the public good became an important charge, and the terms 'monopoly' and 'self-interest' central to this emerging discourse.<sup>30</sup>

The Jacobean court itself was seen as a hotbed of scandal. Perceptions that courtiers were 'locusts' bent on procuring their own fortunes were frequently articulated.<sup>31</sup> This discourse was widely circulated and readily available throughout the realm. Through libels, ballads, and sermons, ideas of corruption were spread throughout society, whilst news of scandals, most notably the Overbury Murder, offered explicit examples of political corruption to subjects beyond the court.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, ideas of faction were widespread, and contemporaries well-versed in interpreting events in the frameworks of conspiracy and collusion.<sup>33</sup> Accusations that petitions were the product of conspiracies organised by factions who had dubiously procured signatures were frequently articulated by opponents to undermine the strength of petitioning campaigns. Concerns with underhand dealings were especially rife in the 1620s: monopolies were in themselves perceived as a product of these activities. As such, it is unsurprising that subjects petitioning within this context would frame their appeals around the same ideas, engaging with prevalent discourses in the political sphere to express their concern with monopolies whilst also appealing to the perceived sentiments of MPs.

By the opening of parliament in 1621, monopolies were pervasive. In a letter written in July 1620, the newsletter writer John Chamberlain reported that 'the world doth euer grone vnder the burthen of these perpetuall patents', which had 'multiplied' as 'soures' on the body politic.<sup>34</sup> The concurrent outbreak of economic depression within the realm meant that the detrimental effects of monopolies were a particular source of concern and discussion. Debates surrounding the merits of corporate governance and regulations were also pertinent. The decline of England's cloth industry and scarcity of bullion led to speculation concerning the causes of the realm's woes.<sup>35</sup> The activities of some of the realm's corporate institutions consequently came under attack; the East India Company was accused of drain-

<sup>27</sup> Peck, *Court Patronage*, 186.

<sup>28</sup> Peck, *Court Patronage*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Joel Hurstfield, *Freedom, Corruption, and Government in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1973), 141; Peck, *Court Patronage*, 184.

<sup>30</sup> D.H. Sacks, 'Parliament, Liberty and the Commonweal', in *Parliament and Liberty*, 85–121.

<sup>31</sup> Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James* 116.

<sup>32</sup> Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News, Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge, 2002); Richard Cust, 'News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England', *P&P* cxii (1986), 60–90; Peck, *Court Patronage*, ch. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Millstone, 'Politic History', 177–8.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, SP 14/116, f. 20v: Chamberlain to Carleton, 8 July 1620.

<sup>35</sup> Barry Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England 1600–1642: A Study in the Instability of a Mercantile Economy* (Cambridge, 1959).

ing the realm of bullion supplies, whilst the Merchant Adventurers faced renewed attacks that they were a restrictive company failing to purchase cloth from the realm's struggling clothiers.<sup>36</sup> Whilst both companies were able to survive this surge of criticism with most of their monopoly powers intact, concern with their policies meant that issues of monopolistic practices and corporate regulation were high on the parliamentary agenda.<sup>37</sup>

Even James adopted the language of corruption in a speech delivered to both houses in March, criticising the 'secret corruptions' which had vexed his subjects, whilst the Commons moved to investigate numerous instances of judicial misconduct.<sup>38</sup> They sought to investigate the role of referees and courtiers who had approved patents.<sup>39</sup> Prior to parliament's calling, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Edward Coke, and Sir Henry Montague, wrote to Buckingham advising him to ensure that the council cancelled a number of monopolies before parliament sat, especially those with which he was personally implicated.<sup>40</sup> They were certainly aware that the inevitable investigation of the monopoly problem would shed light on the dubious dealings in James's court.

The impeachment of lord chancellor Sir Francis Bacon in this parliament further demonstrates the close intersection between ideas of monopoly and corruption. The revival of this judicial power was largely triggered by the desire to punish patentees, and the notorious patentee for inns, Sir Giles Mompesson, was the first to fall victim to parliament's censure.<sup>41</sup> Later in 1621, Bacon was accused of approving many damaging monopolies and of accepting gifts and bribes as a judge. The impeachment proceedings saw concerns with bribery and corruption at the forefront of MP's discussions. This focus on both corruption and monopoly undoubtedly encouraged subjects to approach the Commons with their own supplications, framing them around these very same concerns.

The development of the standing committee for grievances and the ease with which petitions could be presented to this body facilitated this petitioning activity. By 12 March, 80 petitions had already been presented to the committee for grievances, as MPs expressed their concern to ensure that 'every Petition may be answered'.<sup>42</sup> Earlier on 2 March, a subcommittee of six MPs was nominated to receive and vet all petitions in response to the 'Labyrinth of greivances' sent to the House.<sup>43</sup> Such was the number of petitions received that one MP noted the number of 'poore petitioners [who] stand at the Doore, like the sicke people at the poole of Bethesda wayting who shall enter first to be healed'.<sup>44</sup> Subjects clearly took advantage of institutional developments and the mood of the Commons to gain redress from burdensome monopolies, turning to petitioning to contest this form of prerogative taxation.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Leng, *Fellowship and Freedom: The Merchant Adventurers and the Restructuring of English Commerce, 1582–1700* (Oxford, 2002), 226; Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London and New York, 2003), 211–12.

<sup>37</sup> The Adventurers did have their monopoly reduced somewhat as outport merchants were given permission to export the lucrative commodity of new draperies, see Leng, *Fellowship and Freedom*, 226.

<sup>38</sup> Peck, *Court Patronage*, 187.

<sup>39</sup> They especially investigated Sir Henry Yelverton, see Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 100–5.

<sup>40</sup> *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding (7 vols, 1868), vii, 147.

<sup>41</sup> See C.G.C. Tite, *Impeachment and parliamentary judicature in early Stuart England* (1974), ch. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *CJ*, i, 549–51.

<sup>43</sup> Thrush, 'Legislation and Petitions'; *Commons Debates 1621*, vi, 276.

<sup>44</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, v, 195.

A plethora of subjects presented anti-monopoly petitions to the Commons: supplications were written by individuals, localities and corporations. Kyle has noted that London's companies, so well-versed in parliamentary lobbying and petitioning, used printed broad-side supplications to challenge monopolies which infringed on their jurisdictions and trades.<sup>45</sup> Over 60 printed petitions survive from this parliament alone, a third of which were either issued by London's companies or dealt with matters pertaining to the City.<sup>46</sup> London's corporations had been especially prominent petitioners against monopoly grants from Elizabeth's reign onwards; the sitting of this parliament offered them a new avenue through which to agitate for redress.<sup>47</sup>

The Stationers' Company emerged as one such body. The Stationers were an especially important corporation, governing the realm's all important book trade.<sup>48</sup> They primarily attempted to protect the rights of their members, who were required to gain licences to print texts and enter these into the Company's Register.<sup>49</sup> Even for a company as dominant as the Stationers, James's granting of monopolies posed real challenges.<sup>50</sup> Privileges for the printing of specific titles or classes of books were issued by the monarch to certain printers within the Company. Yet James also granted patents for titles or genres of texts to individuals outside of the Company's jurisdiction. In 1619, James granted such a patent to three individuals. A squire of the bodyguard named Marin de Boisloré, along with two of his assignees, Roger Wood and Thomas Symcock, were granted a monopoly for the printing of all one-sided materials for 31 years.<sup>51</sup> In return, they were required to pay the exchequer an annual rent of £10.<sup>52</sup> This patent was far-reaching, intrusive, and lucrative: it provided the patentees with the power to print a range of materials including playbills, apprenticeship indentures, bonds, and licences, although it did exclude proclamations and ballads.<sup>53</sup> The patentees were authorised to establish printing presses and to hire apprentices for their work. This was clearly intended as a revenue-raising enterprise; neither Boisloré, Wood, nor Symcock had any prior printing experience and Wood was already involved in the farming of wines.<sup>54</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the intrusion of these outsiders in the Stationers' trade triggered strong opposition from the Company, who prohibited all journeymen from working with the patentees. Master printers were reported as expressing their hope that Symcock would be 'hanged' by his patent 'about his necke', providing us with a fascinating insight into the

<sup>45</sup> Kyle, *Theater of State*, 163–6.

<sup>46</sup> Kyle, *Theater of State*, 164.

<sup>47</sup> Ashton, 'Conflicts', 124–5.

<sup>48</sup> C.S. Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, 2001), ch. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 41; Arnold Hunt, 'Book Trade Patents, 1603–1640', in *The Book Trade & Its Customers 1450–1900*, ed. A. Hunt, G. Mandelbrote and A. Shell (1997), 27–54.

<sup>51</sup> Hunt, 'Book Trade Patents', 48.

<sup>52</sup> Hunt, 'Book Trade Patents', 48.

<sup>53</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 425.

<sup>54</sup> W.A. Jackson, *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company 1602 to 1640* (1957), xvii.

'hidden transcript' of these subjects.<sup>55</sup> The grant was particularly vexatious for those printers in the Company who had previously printed these materials, including William Jaggard, Thomas Purfoot, John Beale and Humphrey Lownes.<sup>56</sup> The Company thus launched what was most likely a leadership-led opposition campaign to protest this monopoly.

As early as January 1620, the Stationers petitioned the lord mayor, Sir William Cockayne, and the aldermen of London against the patent. Their supplication was subsequently forwarded to the archbishop of Canterbury, the main official responsible for dealing with printing disputes.<sup>57</sup> Cockayne rightly noted that the Stationers stood to lose their ability to print a range of documents which were essential to their trade.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Cockayne also took the opportunity to lament other 'like attempts' which had been made 'vppon the Companies of London, by Proiectors vnder faire pretences' to achieve their own 'private endes of gaines'.<sup>59</sup> He was here boldly vocalising London's distress with the range of monopolies which had affected different companies from the 1590s onwards.

Whilst the effect of this supplication is unknown, the calling of parliament in 1621 was clearly embraced by disaffected printers as an opportunity to direct their petitioning complaints to a potentially more receptive body of authority. The Stationers utilised print to circulate a broadside petition lamenting the effects of this grant on their members.<sup>60</sup> Whilst precise details of its presentation are lacking, this was most likely examined by the standing committee for grievances after having been vetted by the subcommittee for petitions. It included the names of 31 petitioners, and primarily requested the Commons' help to restore their 'free liberty to imprint' all such materials.<sup>61</sup>

Their petition triggered a rich response in the form of a counter-petition titled as the 'Humble Petition and Answere of Marin de Boisloreë, Roger Wood, and Thomas Symcock'.<sup>62</sup> The use of a detailed answer by the patentees attests to the dialogic element in monopoly petitioning campaigns to parliament: as the Commons investigated grants and considered supplications, defensive suits became a standard feature of proceedings as patentees were summoned to offer their own testimonies.<sup>63</sup>

The patentees began by justifying their patent as a rightful reward for the frequent services of Boisloré who had been 'imployed by his Maiestie in waighty affaires in diuers forraigne Countries'.<sup>64</sup> The petitioners went further in their defence, engaging with the issue of the royal prerogative to present their grant as lawfully bestowed through the intrinsic rights of

<sup>55</sup> Hunt, 'Book Trade Patents', 35; J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT, 1990), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *Records*, xviii. For Foot and Jaggard, see D.W. Rude and L.E. Berry, 'Tanner Manuscript No: 33: New Light on the Stationers' Company in the Early Seventeenth Century', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, lxxvi (1972), 105–34; E.E. Willoughby, *A Printer of Shakespeare: The Books and Times of William Jaggard* (1934).

<sup>57</sup> London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), COL/RMD/PA/01/005, ff. 58–9: copy of a letter from lord mayor and aldermen to the archbishop of Canterbury and the Stationers' Petition, Jan. 1620.

<sup>58</sup> LMA, COL/RMD/PA/01/005, f. 58r.

<sup>59</sup> LMA, COL/RMD/PA/01/005, f. 58r.

<sup>60</sup> Kyle, *Theater of State*, 165.

<sup>61</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 535–6.

<sup>62</sup> *To the Right Honourable, the House of Commons assembled in Parliament. The humble petition and answere of Marin de Boisloreë, Roger Wood and Thomas Symcock...* (1621).

<sup>63</sup> Foster, 'Procedure', 67.

<sup>64</sup> *The humble petition and answere*.

the monarch. They reminded the Commons that their grant was lawfully granted by James himself, who, 'by vertue of his prerogative Royall' had full power and authority to 'graunt this priuiledge of Printing vnto the Patentees, and all other priuiledges of printing at his pleasure'.<sup>65</sup> As noted, monopolies were granted via the monarch's prerogative powers. Yet their use raised important constitutional questions pertaining to the rights of subjects, and the relationship between common law and royal prerogative. Ideas that a subjects' trade was their property which could not be taken without consent were stressed by common law advocates such as the puritan Nicholas Fuller.<sup>66</sup> Petitioners here adopted a more absolutist position on the prerogative designed to appeal to James and his supporters, reminding the Commons that James was not to be 'restrained by any law to the contrary'.<sup>67</sup> By doing so, subjects engaged with a prominent issue in constitutional and political thought. They articulated a view that the royal prerogative allowed James an unrestrained right to grant monopolies. The implication was clear: to declare their monopoly as void would be to criticise the prerogative powers of the king himself.

The petitioners proceeded by attempting to undermine the authenticity of the petition presented against them, questioning its authorship by constructing a narrative which focused on the internal politics of the Stationers' Company. The patentees focused attention on the internal fissures plaguing the Company, whilst simultaneously engaging with larger concerns in the realm surrounding the presence of factions, collusions and deceptions. They employed the language of politic history and reasoning as a defensive mechanism, creating a narrative to undermine the petition against them. They presented the Stationers' supplication as the product of a self-interested plot organised by a few greedy printers. They suggested that the commonality of the Stationers' Company was at the mercy of a mere '22 Master Printers' who, with their own journeymen and apprentices, 'doe Print all things for all England, Ireland, and Wales'.<sup>68</sup> These master printers had monopolised all aspects of the trade, abusing the privileges enjoyed by the Company to serve their own interests. The patentees claimed that:

the rich men of the Company by the power of their ordinances, dispose of all things in priuiledge to their owne peticular benefits for the most part, and the poore Masters, and Iourney-men Printers, haue little, and some of them no worke at all from the Company.<sup>69</sup>

These master printers had caused 'great wants', distress, and poverty for the Stationers' journeymen.<sup>70</sup> Aware of the Commons' disdain for monopolists, the patentees attempted to turn the accusations levelled against them on their head. It was really one faction of the Stationers who had monopolised trade. If the Commons wished to purge the realm of monopolists, they should thus look no further than within the Stationers' own ranks. The patentees argued that this one subset of wealthy members was responsible for the petition

<sup>65</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

<sup>66</sup> J.P. Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2014), 140–5.

<sup>67</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

<sup>68</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

<sup>69</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

<sup>70</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

against them, penning their suit 'without the knowledge and consent of diuers' of the Company.<sup>71</sup> The entire legitimacy of the petition was therefore called into question. Such techniques had been used in counter-petitions before. In 1608, the Starchmakers' Company defended themselves from accusations of monopoly levelled by the Grocers' Company by suggesting that it was one sub-section of the Company who had made these false claims.<sup>72</sup> Here we see the same idea being used to discount petitions within the parliamentary sphere.

The patentees even named the four men who they claimed were the chief leaders of this malicious petitioning campaign: Lownes, Purfoot, Jaggard and Beale. By identifying these men, the patentees were not articulating an entirely false claim. All four were wealthy printers who stood to lose most from the monopoly, having previously printed these products. Internal issues in the Company meant that master printers did dominate the trade.<sup>73</sup> It is likely that these wealthier members were at the forefront of the petitioning campaign, although it is also possible that other members of the Company joined to protest the intrusion in their organisation of outsiders. This was, after all, not the only time the Company had been vexed by the granting of a monopoly in James's reign.<sup>74</sup>

The strategic nature of the patentees' decision to place internal tensions at the very centre of their suit is further illustrated through another surviving petition. Journeymen in the Stationers had sent their own petition to the Lords and Commons in 1621, complaining of the 'bondage' they faced under the dominance and 'ordinances of the Master and Wardens of the Company', who deprived them of work.<sup>75</sup> Whilst this petition was never discussed in parliament, the patentees had likely seen a copy, thus deciding to make similar accusations concerning the plight of the journeymen and poor masters. Aware of these internal fissures, as well as the Commons' concern with factionalism and monopoly, the patentees tactically based their countersuit around this issue of internal monopoly to undermine the petitioning opposition against them and to justify their patent.

In contrast to these self-interested men, the patentees proceeded to present themselves as the only group willing and capable of rectifying the flagrant abuses in the Stationers' Company, providing work for poor masters and journeymen who currently faced a clear 'lacke of employment and meanes to sustaine themselues and families'.<sup>76</sup> It was they who would thus ensure that the public good, and not the private, was furthered by providing employment for the realm's subjects. In the context of economic depression, this was an important claim to make: the printing industry was already suffering from overcrowding.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the patentees would likely have employed some company members to help them

<sup>71</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

<sup>72</sup> Ellen Paterson, 'The Politics of Starch: Guilds, Monopolies, and Petitioning in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart London', *The London Journal*, xlviii (2023), 30–46.

<sup>73</sup> Rude and Berry, 'Tanner Manuscript', 111.

<sup>74</sup> In 1621, the Stationers protested a patent to George Wood for a monopoly to print on linen cloth, see Jackson, *Records*, xiv–xvi.

<sup>75</sup> Edward Arber, *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London 1554–1640* (5 vols, New York, 1875–94), iv, 525–7; Sheila Lambert, 'The Printers and the Government, 1604–1637', in *Aspects of Printing from 1600*, ed. R. Myers (Oxford, 1987), 12.

<sup>76</sup> *The humble petition and answer.*

<sup>77</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 41.

print these materials.<sup>78</sup> The patentees thus ended their appeal by calling on the House to allow them to quietly enjoy their patent, bestowed through the 'prerogative Royall'.<sup>79</sup>

The counter-petition of Wood, Symcock and Boisloré thus offers a powerful example of the use of supplications by patentees, fostering an important dialogic element to anti-monopoly campaigns in the Commons. By placing internal issues in the Stationers' Company at the heart of their suit, the patentees engaged with notions of conspiracy, deceit, and corruption, devising a politic account of the Stationers' petitioning opposition. The Company's wealthier members were presented not as compassionate leaders of this corporate institution, but as monopolisers of the type so despised by society, a claim enhanced by the journeymen's own supplication to parliament. Ultimately, this tactic was successful. In response to parliamentary pressure, James issued a proclamation on 10 July cancelling a range of monopolies and ordering others to be reviewed by common law.<sup>80</sup> Despite promising to refer this printing patent to law, it continued to remain in force: James and the council were clearly persuaded by Symcock, Wood, and Boisloré's claims. By the parliament of 1624, the Stationers would therefore once again petition parliament against this monopoly.<sup>81</sup>

## 4

The Stationers were not the only corporation to use petitions to protest monopolies in 1621. Throughout James's reign, the luxury commodities of gold and silver had also been monopolised. In 1611, a patent for the sole production of gold and silver thread was granted, sparking resistance from the Goldsmiths' Company.<sup>82</sup> Gold and silver foliat, used for book bindings and interior decorations, was similarly monopolised by influential courtiers with links to the Villiers faction.<sup>83</sup> In October 1619, the projector and courtier Sir Henry Britton, along with the king's physician, Dr George Eglissham, used their influence to secure the incorporation of a Company of Gold and Silver Beaters, with a monopoly over the production of gold and silver foliat. Eglissham had been appointed as James's personal physician in 1616.<sup>84</sup> Britton was a clear courtier-projector: he had already received a commission to investigate parks and warrens and shares in a patent for the making of sealing-wax.<sup>85</sup>

The rationale for the establishment of their new company was, on the surface, legitimate. They claimed to have discovered a cheaper method to produce foliat, using imported bullion rather than the realm's own supplies, a rather pressing topic in the context of depression.<sup>86</sup> They joined with an artisan named William Spencer who claimed to have invented this new process. The involvement of courtiers in the establishment of a corporation was

<sup>78</sup>Jackson, *Records*, xvii–xviii.

<sup>79</sup>*The humble petition and answer*.

<sup>80</sup>'By the King. A Proclamation declaring his Majesties Grace to His Subjects, touching matters complained of, as public grievances', 10 July 1621, in *Stuart Royal Proclamations, volume 1: Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603–1625*, ed. J.F. Larkin and P.L. Hughes (Oxford, 1973), 511–19.

<sup>81</sup>Jackson, *Records*, xviii–xxi.

<sup>82</sup>Abrams, 'English Gold and Silver Thread'; Lockyer, *Buckingham*, 93–4.

<sup>83</sup>Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James*, 110–12.

<sup>84</sup>ODNB, www.oxforddnb.com (accessed 25 July 2022), s.v. Eglissham, George.

<sup>85</sup>HPC, 1604–1629, s.v. Britton, Henry.

<sup>86</sup>Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James*, 111.

not novel; throughout James's reign, companies were created and led by syndicates and projectors, many of whom gained monopoly rights under the guise of establishing lawful corporations.<sup>87</sup> Often, courtiers were at the centre of efforts to secure these charters, using their patronage networks to secure privileges.<sup>88</sup> In economic thought, corporations were regarded as essential bodies to regulate and order trade: without them, chaos and disorder would ensue.<sup>89</sup> Yet the boundaries between legitimate corporation and monopolistic institution were easily blurred. After all, corporate bodies held monopoly powers over their trades. Legitimate corporations were understood to use these to bring public benefits to the commonwealth, rather than benefiting the private interests of a few members.<sup>90</sup> This acceptance of corporatism ultimately provided courtiers and patentees with a powerful avenue through which to dominate trade for their own profits. Eglisham and Britton had no difficulty using their influence to secure a charter. In return for a rent of 26s. 8d. and the payment of £7 p.a., the Company was incorporated.<sup>91</sup> They had the sole power to produce gold and silver foliat using foreign bullion.<sup>92</sup>

The incorporation of the Goldbeaters' Company triggered a cross-company petitioning campaign in 1621. Three London-based corporations came together for this purpose, the Cutlers', Painter-Stainers', and Bookbinders' Companies.<sup>93</sup> To produce this supplication, disaffected members most likely relied on the assistance of company scribes, or they may have used joint funds to finance the employment of a clerk. Cross-company petitioning was an effective strategy which could serve to strengthen supplications by demonstrating the extent of discontent to certain policies.<sup>94</sup> Adopting this strategy, the Painter-Stainers, Bookbinders, and Cutlers presented the Commons with both a printed breviate petition and a shorter supplication complaining of the monopolisation of foliat, its worsening quality, and the increases in prices experienced by all three companies. On 17 April, the sub-committee of petitions informed the House of the presentation of this petition against the Goldbeaters.<sup>95</sup> This was referred to the committee for grievances, who conducted a detailed examination of the case on 27 April.<sup>96</sup>

The petitioners revealed their awareness of the shady machinations which had allowed this company to form, making the topic of corruption the focus of their complaint. They suggested that:

<sup>87</sup> George Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (2nd edn, 1918), 301–21.

<sup>88</sup> George Unwin, *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1904), 145–6.

<sup>89</sup> P.J. Stern, 'Companies: Monopoly, Sovereignty, and the East Indies', in *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and its Empire*, ed. P.J. Stern and C. Wennerlind (Oxford, 2013), 187–9.

<sup>90</sup> H.S. Turner, 'Corporations: Humanism and Elizabethan Political Economy', in *Mercantilism Reimagined*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James*, 111.

<sup>92</sup> *A briefe of some of the principall points of the Kings Maiesties late charter to the Company of Gold-Beaters of London...* (1619).

<sup>93</sup> Kyle, *Theater of State*, 164; Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James*, 117–19; *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 526–9.

<sup>94</sup> For an example of the Leathersellers and Skinners' Companies doing this in 1592, see BL, Lansdowne MS. 74/44, ff. 124r–6v.

<sup>95</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, iii, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Edward Nicholas, *Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons in 1620 and 1621* (2 vols, Oxford, 1766), i, 336–40.

About September 1619 certaine persons skilled in the mistery of Gold beating, being in all under thirtie in number, and all or most of them incorporated into some, of the Companies of the Citty of London, combyning and confederating themselves together, did for their own privat[e] lucre and gaine...obtain from the Kings Maiestie a Charter for a Corporation...<sup>97</sup>

The petitioners drew on the language of confederacy and combination to present this incorporation as little more than an attempt to further private interests at the expense of the commonwealth. In this case, this was no exaggeration: the involvement of Britton and Eglisham showed the rather dubious nature of this corporation and its clear connections to the shadowy side of court politics. The petitioners dealt with this issue directly, clearly hoping that, by placing this at the centre of their opposition, they could rouse the concern of the House. They thus moved to provide concrete evidence of this alliance, claiming that Eglisham and Britton received profits of up to £200 and £50 a year from the Company.<sup>98</sup> They also included an anecdote designed to reveal the organisation's cruelty. William Spencer, a 'poore man using his trade in secret places for feare' of the patentees, had had his tools seized and been imprisoned for exercising his trade.<sup>99</sup> As noted, Spencer had been involved in the attempts to incorporate this new company. His later move to resist it reveals he had fallen out of alliance with Eglisham and Britton. Perhaps he had, all too late, seen that they only desired this incorporation for their own benefits. By focusing on the dubious means through which the corporation was established, the petitioners expressed their concerns with corruption within both court and the economic sphere.

Interestingly, the petitioners ended their appeal by engaging with distinctions between legitimate corporations and monopolistic institutions. The Commons had been grappling with this issue throughout James's reign, questioning the need for free trade in 1604, and, in this session, the impact of bodies such as the Merchant Adventurers on the realm's economic prosperity.<sup>100</sup> The petitioners claimed that the Goldbeaters' 'Charter or Corporation is in the nature of a Monopolie, and is obnoxious to the Common wealth', consuming the realm's bullion, enhancing prices, and depriving many of their trade.<sup>101</sup> Coke certainly agreed, declaring to the House that, whilst the king 'maye make a corporation of a companie of men not incorporated before, yet the Corporation can not seclude men from their libertie of trade'.<sup>102</sup> The petitioners thus presented this corporation as a monopoly, explicitly describing the corruption and court-based machinations which had led to its establishment. In doing so, they actively engaged with debates surrounding the monopolistic practices of certain corporations to persuade MPs of the necessity of purging the realm of yet another monopoly body.

Unsurprisingly, the Goldbeaters were not content to leave this petitionary attack unanswered. They presented a printed counter-response, likely written with the help of Eglisham

<sup>97</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 527.

<sup>98</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 527.

<sup>99</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 528.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Ashton, 'The Parliamentary Agitation for Free Trade in the Opening Years of the Reign of James I', *P&P* 38 (1967), 40–55.

<sup>101</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 529.

<sup>102</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, v, 106.

and Britton.<sup>103</sup> The patentees went further than defending the Company from the allegations that they sold expensive and poor-quality goods: they attempted to challenge the charges of corruption levelled against them. The Goldbeaters did not deny their alliance with Eglisham and Britton, yet they did suggest that any personal rewards these courtiers received were drawn from members' 'owne estates' and were 'no more then other trades upon their incorporations have done'.<sup>104</sup>

Drawing on the language of politic reasoning, the Goldbeaters framed their petition as a mini-narrative history of the intrigues of Spencer.<sup>105</sup> They acknowledged that Spencer had once been a warden of their Company, but proceeded to describe his split from the organisation. The new Company had found that Spencer had produced deceitful materials. On being confronted, Spencer had decided to 'brake from his Company, vowing ... he would doe his best to overthrow it'.<sup>106</sup> Spencer had consequently worked to 'draw divers others of the Gold-beaters from their Company' to join with him in opposing it.<sup>107</sup> The Goldbeaters employed the same language used in the petition against them, referring to this as a 'confederacie' designed to 'destroy their sayd trade'.<sup>108</sup> They thus employed a highly sophisticated and tactful petition, engaging with the language of faction, corruption, and collusion to present themselves as the victims of a conspiracy.

The Goldbeaters also engaged with the issue of their status as a legitimate corporation. To do so, they expressed what was perhaps the strongest argument in favour of their existence. If they were a monopoly, they argued, other corporations in London 'may aswell be charged, with favouring of a Monopolie, as this'.<sup>109</sup> To claim that they were a monopolistic body was to attack not only the sheer number of new domestic corporations created in London, but many other craft companies and overseas trading corporations, of which many MPs were themselves members. The petitioners played on larger beliefs in the need for corporatism: if they should be dissolved, the foliat industry would be left 'without order and government' and would be destroyed.<sup>110</sup> They also pointed to the irony that the petitioners against them were themselves corporations. Bellany and Cogswell have argued that the Goldbeaters here admitted to being a monopolistic institution.<sup>111</sup> In reality, they appear to have appealed directly to the dominance of corporatism in economic thought, emphasising their own position as a legitimate corporate body necessary for the proper management of trade.

Despite the skill of the Goldbeaters' petition, their response was not enough to secure the support of MPs; the Company was declared a monopoly by the House in May and cancelled by James's proclamation of July.<sup>112</sup> Undoubtedly, the realm's concern with the use of bullion to make this luxury commodity played an important role. However, the strength of the collective petitioning campaign launched against the corporation must be credited

<sup>103</sup> Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James*, 118.

<sup>104</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 531–2.

<sup>105</sup> Millstone, 'Politic History', 179.

<sup>106</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 534.

<sup>107</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 534.

<sup>108</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 534.

<sup>109</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 534.

<sup>110</sup> *Commons Debates 1621*, vii, 534.

<sup>111</sup> Bellany and Cogswell, *Murder of King James*, 119.

<sup>112</sup> *CJ* i, 602–3; 'A Proclamation declaring his Majesties Grace to His Subjects', 513–14.

for the success of their plight. The effectiveness of this petition, in comparison to that of the Stationers, was undoubtedly enhanced by its collective authorship, which added further legitimacy to the idea that these subjects were speaking for the larger commonwealth. The Goldbeaters might have challenged the idea that they were a monopoly, through a suit issued by their company alone, but these three corporate bodies' collective suit symbolised the coming together of a range of disaffected artisans, intent on securing the public good. When combined with their framing of the supplication around these very same issues, the Painter-Stainers, Bookbinders, and Cutlers, adopted an effective petitioning strategy, painting the Goldbeaters as tainted by the corruption and self-interest plaguing the Jacobean court.

## 5

A rather different monopoly also led to strong collective protest within parliament, organised outside of the auspices of company organisation. In June 1606, a patent had been awarded to a groom of the chamber named John Lepton for the writing of all bills, letters and declarations, produced by the council of the north.<sup>113</sup> Previously, the preparation of documents had been the preserve of the council's secretary and its attorneys and clerks, the latter having authority to produce all bills and petitions presented to the council in return for fees.<sup>114</sup> Lepton's monopoly deprived many attorneys and clerks of their trades.<sup>115</sup> Immediately on its granting, the patent occasioned opposition from attorneys and the secretaries of the council, Sir William Gee and Sir John Fearne, who claimed that the right to draw these bills belonged to themselves.<sup>116</sup> In their own petition to James in September 1607, they expressed their worry that the patent would occasion 'extortion and oppression' of the king's subjects, creating 'scandall' by reducing the ease with which subjects could approach the court.<sup>117</sup> Their objections led a commission to declare that Lepton could only exercise his office by reversion on their deaths. In a move which symbolises the shady nature of Jacobean politics, Lepton made a deal with Fearne, Gee, and the lord president of the council, Lord Sheffield: in exchange for bribes, they allowed him to execute his grant.<sup>118</sup> As predicted, this did trigger negative effects, causing an increase in fees and delays in proceedings as all bills were required to be stamped by Lepton or his deputy to prove the fees had been paid.<sup>119</sup>

Disaffected subjects turned to parliament to express their discontent with Lepton's monopoly. On 14 March, the House was presented with a petition from the 'inhabitantes' of the north, a collective supplication from subjects in York, Northumberland, Cumberland,

<sup>113</sup>R.R. Reid, *The King's Council in the North* (1921), 383.

<sup>114</sup>A.F. Upton, *Sir Arthur Ingram c. 1565–1642: A Study of the Origins of an English Landed Family* (Oxford, 1961), 164.

<sup>115</sup>Reid, *King's Council*, 384.

<sup>116</sup>Cecil Papers (CP), CP 194/40, fo: 40r: King James I to Sir John Fearne and Sir William Gee, 2 Aug. 1607; CP 124/89: John Lepton to the king, Aug. 1607.

<sup>117</sup>CP 122/56, f. 56v: Sir John Fearne and Sir W. Gee to the king, 1 Sept. 1607.

<sup>118</sup>TNA, SP 14/128, f. 6: certificate by Lord Sheffield on Lepton, 2 Mar. 1622.

<sup>119</sup>Reid, *King's Council*, 385.

Westmorland, Durham and Berwick.<sup>120</sup> The petitioners had first approached the committee for courts of justice, but their petition was referred to the committee of grievances.<sup>121</sup> Whilst the names of the precise subscribers to the suit are not contained in the surviving manuscript copy, the petition attests to the capacity for cross-county petitioning collaboration, perhaps organised in the council itself. Organising collectively was clearly perceived as a means of strengthening petitioning complaints, with groups mirroring the technique adopted by the Bookbinders, Painter-Stainers, and Cutlers. Subjects complained of numerous issues with Lepton's patent; not only was their previous liberty to choose whichever attorney or clerk to write and follow their complaint infringed, but Lepton and his deputies had also introduced new fees amounting to a total of £600.<sup>122</sup> Petitioners clearly regarded the Commons as an important authority capable of providing them with redress, asking that Lepton and his deputies be 'sent vnto, and enioyned to bringe theyre Pattente into this Honorable house'.<sup>123</sup>

Another manuscript petition was also presented by 'Resi[d]ants and Inhabitants' of the north and signed by a further ten individuals.<sup>124</sup> This was likely presented to the Commons in May, as the Commons' Journals records the presentation of a certificate from York and 'several Petitions' against Lepton on 2 May.<sup>125</sup> The petitioners shaped their appeal to flatter the Commons, praising MPs for their rigorous consideration of 'the burthens & grievanc[e]s of the Comon-wealth' thus far, and for causing the 'happie reformation, & redresse of the same'.<sup>126</sup> They engaged with notions of both engrossment and the commonwealth, presenting Lepton's patent as detrimental to the prosperity of the north. Whereas fees paid to attorneys and clerks had previously been brought 'into many hands' and widely 'dispersed & spent agayne' in the north, they were now 'carried quite away, out of the Country by one man, who hath engrossed into his owne handes, the livinge & mainteynance of a greate number'.<sup>127</sup> Lepton and his deputies had raised fees, using the same merely for their own private gains. Consequently, and 'contrary to the libertie of all other the Kings subiects', subjects in the north were forced to have their bills drawn by this one, profit-seeking, engrosser.<sup>128</sup>

Crucially, the discussion of the effects of the patent in the committee for grievances was also framed by the issues of deceit and collusion, reflecting the Commons' larger concerns with bribes and gift-giving.<sup>129</sup> As a result, they were particularly concerned with the means through which Lepton had procured his patent. Lepton had paid secretary Fearn 'a great Some of Money' to 'suppresse and conceile' a certificate against the patent written

<sup>120</sup>West Yorkshire Archives Service, Leeds (WYL), 100/PO/1/17, n.f.: petition of inhabitants of the north against Lepton's patent; *Commons Debates* 1621, iv, 153; *Commons Debates* 1621, v, 296.

<sup>121</sup>*Commons Debates*, iv, 153.

<sup>122</sup>WYL100/PO/1/17.

<sup>123</sup>WYL100/PO/1/17.

<sup>124</sup>WYL100/PO/1/53, n. f.: petition to parliament on Lepton's patent, c.1621.

<sup>125</sup>*CJ*, i, 602–4.

<sup>126</sup>WYL100/PO/1/53.

<sup>127</sup>WYL100/PO/1/53.

<sup>128</sup>WYL100/PO/1/53.

<sup>129</sup>Peck, *Court Patronage*, 196.

by the archbishop of York and the bishop of Durham.<sup>130</sup> Lord President Sheffield was also accused of having been bribed to ensure its approval.<sup>131</sup> James had thus been 'abused and misled' by this concealment and 'other vntrue Suggestions made to him by the said John Lepton'.<sup>132</sup> These concerns were enough to ensure that the Commons voted against the patent; by 14 May, they declared Lepton's grant a grievance to the subject.<sup>133</sup> By June, James had referred its further consideration to the privy council.<sup>134</sup>

With his patent pending review, Lepton continued to exercise it throughout the summer, ensuring that it remained a topic of concern when parliament reconvened in November. Petitions continued to be sent against the grant. By November, 14 attorneys and clerks complained of their continued poverty in the face of Lepton's defiance.<sup>135</sup> Yet Lepton was not content to watch his monopoly fall without a fight. He even launched proceedings in star chamber against Sir Edward Coke alongside another patentee, a move MPs suspected was an act of revenge for Coke's role condemning their grants in parliament.<sup>136</sup> Concerned with these developments, the Commons appointed a committee to search Lepton's study for evidence of this plot and design.<sup>137</sup> The House was worried that if it did not take action, other MPs would become fearful to 'do their duty to the commonwealth' by investigating patentees.<sup>138</sup>

In response to these proceedings, Lepton wrote his own supplication to James after the dissolution of parliament, describing in vivid terms the parliamentary and petitioning opposition against him. Lepton engaged with notions of conspiracy and faction as a defensive strategy designed to exonerate him from any personal blame. After recounting the history of his patent, Lepton alleged that MPs had been 'swaied by a strong and potent faction' to make a search of his materials in November, using 'sundrie threats and menaces' to try and persuade him to abandon his office.<sup>139</sup> This faction had worked to incite the petitioning opposition against him. The 'supposed grievances of all yo[u]r loving subiects in the North parts' were in reality the 'p[ar]ticular grievances of the Attornies in that Court'.<sup>140</sup> The attorneys and clerks were presented as leading a factional body intent on damaging his reputation and monopoly. MPs were also involved: Lepton claimed that these attorneys and clerks had been 'animated by some members of the house' to keep all fees due to Lepton for themselves.<sup>141</sup> Lepton thus attempted to appeal to James by presenting these figures as the true corrupt officials. Upton has argued that it is possible that the new secretary of the council, the projector Sir Arthur Ingram, may have helped to draft and organise the

<sup>130</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/19, n.f.: Commons' decision on Lepton's patent, 1621.

<sup>131</sup> *Commons Debates* 1621, iii, 195.

<sup>132</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/19.

<sup>133</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/19.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, SP 14/121, f. 229v: list by Sir Robert Heath of 15 patents which the king condemns, and of others referred to the council, 23 June 1621; TNA, SP 14/121, f. 215: order in council on Lepton's patent, 18 June 1621.

<sup>135</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/16, n. f.: petition of attorneys to parliament on Lepton's patent, 1621.

<sup>136</sup> Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics*, 122–8.

<sup>137</sup> Nicholas, *Proceedings and Debates*, i, 201.

<sup>138</sup> *Commons Debates* 1621, ii, 472–3.

<sup>139</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/11, n. f.: Lepton's petition to the king to confirm his patent, 1621–1622.

<sup>140</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/11.

<sup>141</sup> WYL/100/PO/1/11.

parliamentary petitions against Lepton.<sup>142</sup> Regardless of the validity of this charge, Lepton's decision to frame his whole appeal around the idea of a factional petitioning plot attests to his awareness of the prevalence of this rhetoric within the parliamentary session, including its use by other patentees. This was a tactical strategy, designed to curry sympathy. The idea of disruptive factions was something James himself might very well prove receptive to; he had used these very same concepts to explain the failure of some of his parliaments.<sup>143</sup> Lepton thus ended his dramatic defence by describing the 'mightines of his Adversaries in this office', who had conspired against him, reiterating that 'there is not [any] generall grievance nowe resting against his patent'.<sup>144</sup>

The opposition against Lepton's patent did have some success. By February 1622, the privy council condemned his patent and ordered all fees to be reduced.<sup>145</sup> The richly documented manuscript proceedings of the investigation and petitioning against this patent in 1621 serve once again to highlight the use of the language of factions, plots and conspiracies, as a key feature of monopoly petitioning discourse, designed to appeal to a commons and a king bent on purging the realm of corruption.

## 6

Monopolies were a 'headline' issue in the parliament of 1621.<sup>146</sup> The myriad petitions protesting their use were a key factor ensuring the continued dominance of the topic. As the Commons worked to rid the realm of odious monopolists, subjects took advantage of the anti-monopoly and anti-corruption sentiments of the House to seek redress from patents which infringed on their trades and livelihoods. The power of petitions as a tool of negotiation between subject and authority is demonstrated clearly in the proceedings of this parliament. Supplications helped to ensure that certain monopolies remained high on the parliamentary agenda, receiving examination and debate on the floor of the House. In turn, many grants were condemned as monopolies by parliament and a handful were even cancelled by James in July.

Whilst scholars have long been aware of the time spent by MPs debating monopolies in 1621, a closer concentration on the rhetoric of these petitions reveals the influence of modes of politic reasoning and the language of corruption on parliamentary petitioning discourse. Concerns in the 1620s with faction, corruption, and deceit were rife, and the court was perceived as a hotbed for the pursuit of private interest. The use of these concepts by petitioners was in some ways a tactical negotiation strategy, used by both patentees and their opponents to shape their petitions to appeal to the prevailing concerns of MPs. However, these petitions should not be dismissed as consequently lacking substance. For those protesting monopolies, framing supplications around concerns with corruption made strategic sense, but, for some petitioners, this also likely reflected their very real concern with the plots and factions perceived to be so dominant within political culture, concerns

<sup>142</sup>Upton, *Ingram*, 166.

<sup>143</sup>Millstone, 'Politic History', 181.

<sup>144</sup>WYL100/PO/1/11.

<sup>145</sup>Upton, *Ingram*, 167–8.

<sup>146</sup>Russell, 'What was New in the 1620s?', 182.

which had been articulated broadly in the realm through sermons, news and literature. Perhaps more significantly, the petitions produced also saw subjects demonstrate knowledge of, and grapple with, important questions surrounding such topics as the prerogative and corporatism, as they considered not just the effect of these monopolies on their trades, but the larger economic, political, and constitutional implications of their use.

The discourses used by petitioners undoubtedly helped their supplications to succeed, yet two of our cases have also provided insights into the benefits accrued when subjects launched collective petitioning campaigns. By sending supplications which crossed company, or indeed county, lines, petitioners were able to add legitimacy to their claims. This was an important strategy which helped to reinforce the self-presentation of petitioners as representatives of the commonwealth.

More broadly, these three case studies attest to the need to consider economic issues as central to the public sphere and popular politics in the 1620s. The monopoly issue affected and politicised a range of subjects, triggering petitioning action as artisans and traders attempted to negotiate the effects of these grants within parliament. Issues beyond the Spanish Match and fears of Catholicism politicised the realm's subjects. To protest monopolies, subjects drew on prevalent discourses and concerns in larger political culture, whilst simultaneously engaging with pressing issues in economic thought including the merits of corporatism, the pursuit of private over public interest, and notions of the commonwealth. Much like the differences between legitimate corporation and monopoly, the line between 'economics' and 'politics' was clearly blurred. The 1620s were ultimately characterised by issues other than religion or foreign policy: it is time that we consider economic issues such as monopolies as a central aspect of the politics of this contested and turbulent period.