

The Human Comedy in Westminster: *The House of Commons, 1604–1629*

Thomas Cogswell

Abstract The completion of the *House of Commons, 1604–1629*, a sprawling research project involving over a dozen scholars who have toiled in the archival vineyards for the past quarter century, is a development of fundamental importance for the study of early Stuart history. This essay highlights some of its many findings and suggests some directions for further research, deploying the riches in these six volumes.

In 1833, driven by an astonishing capacity for sustained writing and strong black coffee, Honoré de Balzac began writing *La Comédie Humaine*, a sprawling set of 137 interlocking novels about public and private life in Restoration France. Unfortunately, he died in 1851, leaving 47 projected novels unwritten. If ever anyone needed a research team, it was Balzac, and he doubtless would have finished if he had the team responsible for *The House of Commons, 1604–1629*. In 1980 John Ferris launched the massive scholarly project, and in 1992 he handed direction of it to Andrew Thrush. These two then gathered an ensemble cast of talented and apparently indefatigable scholars for this scholarly blockbuster.¹ The resulting volumes are worthy of the *Comédie Humaine*—six volumes, 4,686 pages, and some 4.6 million words chronicling the lives of 1,754 early seventeenth-century Parliament men (and 26 quasi-members) over seven elections in 259 constituencies. Like Rastignac, Vautrin, and Ronquerolles in Balzac's tomes, commanding figures like James I, Charles I, and the Duke of Buckingham wander through many of these stories. Yet the central focus never waivers from the members themselves.

Successive sets from the History of Parliament Trust, the first dating back to Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke in 1964, have progressively raised the standards of exacting scholarship, but the Ferris and Thrush volumes undoubtedly deserve the accolade of *ne plus ultra*. In an era driven by the Research Excellence Framework's insistence on quick results and the mounting cost of archival research, these volumes remind us how research should be done. For Andrew Thrush and his team, the quick

Thomas Cogswell is professor of history at the University of California, Riverside. He would like to acknowledge his profound debt to the late Professor Alfred Carter for many discussions of Balzac and his age.

¹ The team at the end consisted of Ben Coates, Simon Healy, Paul Hunneyball, and Andrew Thrush. The cast at earlier stages had included Sabrina Baron, Karen Bishop, Lloyd Bowen, Alan Davidson, Anne Duffin, Lynn Hulse, Chris Kyle, Henry Lancaster, Peter Le Fevre, Virginia Moseley, Glyn Redworth, Rosemary Sgroi, Tim Venning, the late Paula Watson, and George Yerby, with cameo appearances by Irene Cassidy and Christopher Thompson. The directors of the trust played a major role in the project—Peter Hasler, Valerie Cromwell, and Paul Seaward—as did Pauline Croft, a board member particularly involved with its completion.

survey of obvious primary sources was not sufficient. Instead, they marched off into the archives—the obscure ones as well as the celebrated ones—for extended periods, probing each collection’s darker recesses. Testimony to their labors can be found in the manuscript bibliography, which is nearly fifty pages long and lists many recondite collections scarcely, if ever, cited before. When else, for instance, have references appeared to C220 (the administrative papers of the Petty Bag Office and the Coursitors’ office), PALA 6/9 (the plea rolls of the Palace Court), or the David Hughes Charity Manuscripts in the Anglesey Record Office? Such archival pointillism has never been conducted on such a scale and, given the escalating financial constraints, may never be again. For that reason, the team’s collective knowledge is so astonishing that the History of Parliament should issue its own Guide to the Archives offering tips on everything from the archivists’ quirks to local lodging and refreshment.

In their pursuit of scholarly exactitude, Thrush’s team has not forgotten either the importance of common sense or the need for the occasional rhetorical gambol. Their judgments are eminently sober; readers are left to decide between two men in murky cases, and they will be relieved to learn that someone else has compared signatures to establish that Meredith Morgan, the Montgomeryshire gentleman, was one and the same as the Earl of Suffolk’s secretary. Furthermore, this formidable display of erudition is often spryly written. To cite only two examples among many others, Edmund Waller “seems to have observed an almost Trappist vow of silence in the Commons,” and Philip Gawdy took his young nephew “to see the lions in the Tower, the tombs of Westminster, and promised to take him to ‘my lo[rd] Mayor’s shows and pageants,’ but he could not persuade him to write to his father” [2/26 and 4/345].² Balzac would surely have been pleased.

There is much to praise in these volumes. The first thing is the unexpected bonus in volume 1, where Thrush presents a monograph about how the Commons operated, and he is particularly compelling when discussing the topography and internal workings of the House. Admittedly, it is possible to quibble about his judgments in places and, above all, to long for a fuller discussion (dare we hope for an expanded, freestanding volume?). Nevertheless, since this volume is the first introduction to early Stuart Parliaments and easily in the same league as J. E. Neale’s *The Elizabethan House of Commons*, it will be a most welcome resource for students (and their instructors) baffled about the oddities of the institution. Volume 2, which covers the constituencies, is also a delight. The individual entries vary wildly, ranging from terse to expansive; although it has to be conceded that when set against sustained analyses like the seventeen pages devoted to Yorkshire and the twenty-four to London, the others, which average two or three pages, invariably look a little skimpy. Yet the entries all convey the basic information about each constituency’s electoral history. Pride of place, however, goes to the four volumes on the Parliament men themselves; here, the sternest scholar will swoon. The analysis of the dominant figures—Coke, Sandys, Phelps, Wentworth, Savile, Digges, and Eliot—is magnificent. Yet the truly astonishing aspect of these volumes is their coverage of the other 1,750-odd Parliament men about whom we previously have known very little, if anything at all. Just as almost all scholars would wince at the thought of having to ferret through the fragmentary local records to produce an account, say, of Alban Stepneth,

² The numbers in brackets after direct quotations refer to the volume and pages numbers.

the Pembrokeshire knight of the shire in 1604, they are by the same token immensely grateful that someone else has done such painstaking work. Consequently, benisons will long wash over Thrush's team for composing nearly 1,800 reports and will ease them over many bumps in their professional careers.

In short, *The House of Commons 1604–1629* affords us a much more granular view of the period, and it represents several paradigm shifts in the field, moving us from the historiographical equivalent of Galileo squinting at Jupiter to CERN's Large Hadron Collider. To be sure, the "S. R. Gardiner particle," which explains everything about early Stuart England, has not yet emerged. But it might well be buried somewhere amid the 4.6 million words. In order to give some sense of what this editorial team has accomplished, this essay will first consider these hitherto obscure Parliament men and then proceed to explore the new picture of the era that emerges from these volumes.



Early Stuart Parliaments revolved around family and friends. Sir Thomas Bromley, for instance, represented the same constituency as his father, uncle, and grandfather had. Two brothers in a session were commonplace, and three not uncommon; however, in 1626, four of Sir Oliver St. John's sons entered the Commons. Fathers often sat with their sons, witness Sir Robert Cotton with Thomas Cotton and Sir Edward Coke with Sir Robert and Clement Coke, and uncles sat with nephews, witness Francis Lawley and Francis Smalman. These volumes make clear that families tended to move together—though this was not always the case. In 1626, for example, Sir William Strode and his son, Sir Richard, loyally supported Buckingham, who named the former to investigate his enemy, Sir John Eliot, and the latter to break another opponent's grip on Bridport: the other son, William, meanwhile, enthusiastically supported Buckingham's impeachment. Parliament also allowed old friends to reconnect; Sir Henry Savile wanted a seat in order "to see my honourable friends in the south," and Sir Thomas Scott's grumbles about the expense of a Parliament eased when he thought about seeing his old colleagues. Sociability was often as important as politics; at the Earl of Leicester's dinner table early in 1628, Buckingham's clients, Sir George Goring and Sir John Hipplesey, broke bread with his critics, Sir William Croft and Edward Alford. Anxious relatives tried to use insider information about the institution to guide new Parliament men away from trouble; Sir John Trevor's aunt wanted him next to Sir Roger Townsend, and Bulstrode Whitelocke's father urged his son to avoid the gallery, the notorious "resort of mutineers" [6/752]. A thorough knowledge of the House and its members led Robert Bowyer to a charitable response to Henry Ludlow's loud fart, which reduced the Commons to pandemonium in 1607. Since Ludlow's father was prone to similar outbursts, Bowyer thought the son's intervention was only "natural, not malice" [5/189].

These contacts helped a candidate into the Commons. To smooth out the process involving capricious voters and returning officers as imperious as the Flintshire sheriff who declared in 1626, "I may choose whom I will," fathers, uncles, and cousins intervened; Sampson Eure's stepmother, for example, arranged his victory at Beaumaris in 1621 [6/158]. Family members with some influence naturally inclined to advance their own kin, but once the number of obvious candidates ran out—and they often did—patrons turned to in-laws, the relatives of in-laws,

friends, and even acquaintances. Timely presents could help. Lord Danvers's gift of the Physic Garden helped persuade the voters at Oxford University to return his younger brother, just as Sir Lewis Dyve's thoughtful present of a silver salt-cellar to Bridport helped overcome Buckingham's opposition to his election. Yet nothing could guarantee success, for in numerous cases, as the mayor of Beverly explained to the disappointed candidate, "the election consists in the voices of many" [4/720]. Since candidates could not afford to be fussy, "the best men in the kingdom," a shrewd contemporary noted, were "serving many times (without touch of credit) for the obscurest places, and furtherest from their dwellings" [3/171]. To improve their odds, a few took extraordinary measures; Sir James Bagg won a seat at East Looe by garnering the support of eleven of the town's nine electors, and Sir John Savile famously prevented a poll by kidnapping the undersheriff. William Rolfe, a wealthy London vintner, went one better: to minimize aggravation, he simply purchased the manor of Heytesbury where the voters naturally returned him in 1628.

Once in the Commons, new members joined a group at once diverse and interconnected. These volumes expose the dense tangle of family ties that bound contemporaries together. They enable us at last to see, for instance, just how deeply the Villiers clan had penetrated the county elites, everyone from John Ashburnham to George Wright. Many of these otherwise ordinary men were the Zeligs of their generation. In 1623, Sir Daniel Norton, a Hampshire gentleman, lent Charles and Buckingham his coach on their return from Spain, and later in his house Charles I learned of Buckingham's murder. Amid the hysteria around James I's deathbed in 1625, Dr. Paddy borrowed the king's personal volume of the *Book of Common Prayer*. In 1640 John Paulet, by then the Marquis of Winchester and the king's regular chess partner, delivered a poorly received quip about there being something wrong with Charles's bishops. Indeed, precious little happened in this narrow elite in which these men were not somehow involved.

The precision of these biographies allows these men to emerge as recognizable human types. Contemporaries associated George Snygge with his long nose and missing teeth, Richard Weston with a bright red face, Robert Hitcham with his simian features, and Edward Clerke with his crippled hand. Equally noticeable was William Man with his "great set ruff"; Basil Dixwell, "the bravest man in the House of Commons," with "his quotidian new suits of apparel"; and Richard Vaughan with his girth that forced him to enter the Commons through the large door normally reserved for royal messengers, thus prompting the cry when the door opened "the Black Rod or the Welsh Knight is Coming" [5/86 and 233; and 6/619]. Charles Danvers and Lord Percy were extremely shy, and John Manners thought himself "the worst in the world at words" [5/239]. In contrast, Sir Edward Dennys liked "much to hear himself talk," while Sir Dudley Digges struggled with his "imperfection of speaking fast" [4/50 and 66]. Sir William Twysden was renowned for his impatience, Sir Henry Poole for being "jolly," and Sir Richard Worsley for "flinging of cushions" [5/725 and 6/843]. Robert Bowyer, the famous diarist, had a speech defect; the favorite topic of Thomas Smith, another diarist, was the timing of recess; and Sir Robert Cecil's oldest son had trouble talking about anything other than "hunting and hawking" [3/483]. Few could match the celebrity status of Edmund Doubleday, the Westminster magistrate who tackled Guy Fawkes and tied him up with his garters.

The range of their interests is breathtaking. Mathematics fascinated Sir Charles Cavendish, just as tennis did Arthur Bromfield, who spent £200 erecting a tennis court in Somerset House. The Parliament men ran the poetic gamut from John Donne to Anker Johnson, who composed ditties vilifying his rivals in Nottingham. Sir Thomas Holland collected ancient coins; Sir William Boswell corresponded with Galileo; Sir Thomas Monson sent his singers to Italy to improve their skills; and Edward Nicholas spent quiet moments in the Commons brooding over cooking recipes. Drinking was Henry Edmond's passion, for "no counsel, no advice, [was] able to recall him from that filthy beastly sin" [4/167]. Several were gifted linguists: Sir John Skeffington and Francis Tate translated Spanish and Welsh texts, respectively, while William Whiteway tackled Polish after having learned the obvious classical and modern languages. Sir Thomas Jermyn was famously clumsy, once tumbling down the stairs and dislocating his knees, and his awkwardness on the dance floor was legendary. Meanwhile, Sir Francis Crane's boundless enthusiasm for his new tapestry workshop led him to imagine a market for his product in Persia.

Local attachments and rivalries were never far below the surface. In the 1621 furore that followed Edward Floyd's slander of Princess Elizabeth, some members denounced him as a Welshman, but Thomas Salusbury, who sat for Merioneth, rightly observed that Floyd was actually half English. Indignant with the Speaker in 1629, Sir Peter Heyman announced that John Finch made him "sorry he was a Kentishman" [4/683]. And, notwithstanding hectoring from Lord Keeper Egerton and Lord Burghley, Robert Wallis refused to take the customary oath as mayor of Cambridge because it would require him to conserve the university's privileges. Finally, both of the Godfrey brothers kept their parliamentary obligations in perspective; Thomas left in the middle of the 1628 session to build a new house, and Richard used it to acquire the canopy used in Charles's coronation, with which he upholstered his chairs.

The finances of the Parliament men were as different as their personalities. Montagu Bertie, a Knight of the Bath at the age of eight, the knight of the shire for Lincolnshire at sixteen, and later Earl of Lindsey, rubbed shoulders with Thomas Remching, the unsavory and regularly investigated deputy customer of Liverpool, whose father had been executed for coin clipping. William Cavendish, whose family owned over 100,000 acres and who eventually became the Earl of Devonshire, sat near Giles Greene, whose claim to gentility the College of Arms had rejected and whose beaver pelts the Customs officers had seized as contraband. Some gentlemen were born to several manors. The estates of several Welsh gentleman verged on satrapies—Sir William Herbert controlled 150,000 acres while Sir Richard Wynn made do with 100,000 acres. In the West Country, Sir Edward Seymour inherited 16,000 acres and Sir Walter Erle 13,000 acres; in the Midlands, Sir Oliver St. John 20,000 acres; and in Herefordshire, Sir John Scudamore 15,000 acres. The profits from these estates could be enormous. Sir Thomas Maynard left his daughters £24,000, and Sir Thomas Thynne offered a portion of £40,000 for his daughter's hand. Others had quickly risen from humble circumstances. Sir Edward Barkham's father began life hawking hobbyhorses in London streets; Robert Jenner rose from obscurity to be a goldsmith who in 1617–21 alone smelted over three tons of silver; and Baptist Hicks ended life as a viscount, leaving his wife £1,000 a year and £60,000 in cash. For its part, Whitehall took care—and often very good care—of its own: James Fullerton, for instance, started

life as the usher of a Dublin school before ending it buried with great pomp in Westminster Abbey, and George Goring, who spent his youth dodging creditors, eventually acquired a peerage and a staggering annual income of £26,800.

Such success stories were sadly not the norm. Edward Dowse's father left him £100—provided he could collect it—and his finances never really improved. James Pringle was a Dover baker, Edmund Day an Ipswich dyer, John Fisher a tobacconist in Canterbury and sometime local muster-master, John Haselock a Worcester apothecary, Robert Berry the porter of Ludlow Castle and occasional informer, and Edward Maplesden brewed beer and owned the Sign of the George in Maidstone. All eventually became municipal worthies, amassing estates whose value sometimes ran well into the low three figures. Such modest success eluded other Parliament men. Bevill Grenville, although regularly elected to Parliament, could rarely attend because of his struggle with family debts totaling £15,000. John Roberts became so impoverished that the members of the Chippenham Corporation, those celebrated plutocrats, ejected him from their midst; James Lasher ended up living with his former apprentice; and Sir Henry Mainwaring's estate at his death consisted of a horse and clothing worth £8. While these were men who rarely, if ever, spoke in the House, even more prominent Parliament men also often possessed only modest financial means. Thomas Wentworth, the vocal burgess for Oxford, left his eldest son nothing but his books and office furniture. Henry Sherfield, the recorder for Southampton and Winchester and no less than Sir Edward Coke's attorney, struggled to keep up with a daughter, fourteen stepchildren, and debts of around £2,000 on an income that fluctuated between £150 and £500 a year. Likewise, Sir John Eliot shook the foundations of the Caroline regime in the late 1620s, but he inherited only 400 acres in Cornwall. Small wonder then that when Eliot had the opportunity in 1624, he quietly palmed £300 from the Admiralty.

These Parliament men began with little and sometimes ended with less. But at least they avoided financial disaster, which regularly engulfed others. Sir George Gresley steadily hemorrhaged land and money, dropping from well over 13,000 acres in 1609 to next to nothing in 1638 when his tailor had him arrested for unpaid clothing bills. Sir Richard Grosvenor, notwithstanding a distinguished parliamentary career, spent the 1630s imprisoned for debt. Nicholas Arnold and Francis Bullingham each inherited considerable debt that steadily deepened until their creditors closed in; they each subsequently spent their last twenty years in prison. Others were more elusive. In 1629, having amassed debts of £18,000, Edward Popham fled to France, where he died in 1641, bequeathing his estate to his younger brother—if the creditors had left anything. James Price, also outlawed for debt, hid either with relatives in rural Wales or “in secret and privileged places in and about . . . London” [5/757]. In their grim descent from fiscal grace, a seat in Parliament—and its accompanying freedom from arrest—was invaluable. Not surprisingly, these men were eager to get elected as regularly as possible and were quite understandably hypersensitive to the slightest increase in the subsidy rates. John Carville, a minor Yorkshire lawyer who sat for Aldborough from 1621 to 1626, announced in May 1626 that “the people thought now that the parliaments were called for nothing but to give subsidies” [3/459]. Before *The Commons 1604–1629*, scholars knew almost nothing about him, and since he did not rate an entry in the old or the new *Dictionary of National Biography*, they could only assume he was reflecting general anxieties. But we can now see that Carville had immediate pressing concerns.

After a failed reelection bid in 1628 he was arrested for debt, bobbing in and out of confinement until he posted bond in 1635, and then disappearing altogether. Desperate to remain a step ahead of their creditors, many men were eager to serve in Parliament, every day of which postponed their bleak financial reckoning. While there, they were deeply skeptical of any proposal, no matter how lofty, that would increase their own burdens.

Whatever their personal finances, the members were well traveled. Economic, religious, and military ties made the United Provinces a second home, with many spending months and some years there. Some went farther afield. Sir George Somers died in Bermuda on his way to Virginia, and George Thorpe, who made it there, constantly advocated the evangelization of the Indians until the Powhatans slaughtered him. Edward Popham survived two chilly years in Maine; Michael Humfrey supported early settlement plans for New England, where his son moved; and Richard Yearwood's stepson was John Harvard. In an appalling story, Samuel More, after learning that he might not have fathered his children, sent them to New England as indentured servants; one subsequently died on the *Mayflower* and two more in Plymouth. Sir William Russell, Sir Dudley Digges, and Sir Thomas Smythe witnessed the "time of troubles" in Russia. Twenty-three members attended Padua University, and Francis Winterton died on the Oder while fighting for Gustavus Adolphus. In Asia, the Dutch tortured William Towerson's brother to death at Amboyna; Sir Thomas Roe survived postings in both Constantinople and Agra; and Sir John Eyre spent several years along the Bosphorus where he became "very sick . . . of the Turks and most of all of the Turkey Company" [4/213].

A rough tally reveals their collective devotion to the Protestant cause. In 1620, John Hotham and Ralph Hopton went to Prague with Frederick V and Elizabeth. In 1620–23, at least seven members helped Sir Horace Vere in the Lower Palatinate, where two of Ferdinando Fairfax's brothers died.³ In 1623, at least ten Parliament men joined Prince Charles in Madrid.⁴ In 1624, six thousand Englishmen and seven Parliament men went to assist the Netherlands where Lord Wrothesley died trying to relieve Breda, and Ralph Hopton had the distinct misfortune of serving in the Mansfelt expedition.⁵ Once open war erupted in 1625, Parliament men stepped forward. At least eight were involved with privateering ventures, and their success varied wildly; Sir Thomas Freke's ship, the *Leopard*, went down in a storm, while Marmaduke Rawdon's vessel captured a Brazilian ship loaded with sugar.⁶ At least six Parliament men sailed with Wimbledon to Cadiz in 1625.⁷ And the 1627 Ile de Ré expedition, the "maximum effort" of the Caroline war machine, attracted some twenty members. After the initial landing party fled, Sir Richard Graham, John Ashburnham, and Secretary Conway's oldest son rallied the troops,

³ Thomas Conway, William Devereux, Richard Grenville, Ralph Hopton, Robert Knollys, and Dudley Norton. This list of names, like the following ones, is only a rough estimate.

⁴ Francis Carew, Thomas Carey, Edward Chaike, Spencer Compton, William Croft, Lewis Dyve, John Hippisley, Thomas and William Howard, and Thomas Jermyn.

⁵ Peregrine Bertie, Edward Conway II, Thomas Littleton, Lewis Morgan, Dudley North, Charles Price, Ralph Hopton, and Lord Wrothesley.

⁶ John Barker, Arthur Champernowne, Sackville Crowe, Thomas Freke, Marmaduke Rawdon, Thomas Gear, John Montagu, and Thomas Powlett.

⁷ Thomas Brett, Francis Carew, Edward Cecil, Edward Conway, Richard Grenville, and Francis Leigh.

and Conway was badly wounded. Francis Carew served on the blockading fleet, while Sir William Beecher, Reginald Mohun, Sir Henry Hungate, and Sir Thomas Littleton shuttled messages on and off the island. They fortunately missed the heavy fighting on the army's reembarkation in which thousands died, including Sir John Radcliffe, Roger Poley, and the sons of Sir Alexander Temple and Sir John Stradling. Although reported dead, Sir Richard Grenville was eventually found among the wounded, and Sir Thomas Glenham had a particularly awkward journey home, captured first by the French and then by Dunkirkers. Thomas Alured had to raise his nephews after his brother-in-law failed to return.⁸ For these men, debates about the conduct of the war were not abstract discussions.

Religion of course mattered in the early seventeenth century. While everyone had to ponder where to place themselves between the extremes of Rome and Geneva, William Mallory and Sir John Suckling had a particularly hard time doing so; each had one brother who was a senior cleric in the Church of England and another who was a Catholic exile. Sir Edward Herbert was privately skeptical of organized religion altogether, and Sir Miles Fleetwood had a reputation for hypocrisy; he reportedly "went to two sermons in a Sunday and on Monday morning he could sell his friend for two shillings" [4/289]. Their colleagues duly positioned themselves all along the theological spectrum.

The godly made their presence felt. A rigid Sabbatarian, John Ratcliffe as mayor of Chester blocked carriers entering the city and banned even the sale of butter and milk on Sunday; Henry Slingsby's conformity was so suspect that the Archbishop of York declined to consecrate his chapel; John Packer memorized the Psalms and the New Testament; and the reforming zeal of Francis Rous, Pym's half brother, earned him the unflattering epithet of "the old illiterate Jew of Eton" [6/96]. Religion prompted a few to flee. Only the outbreak of the Pequot war diverted Sir Matthew Boynton and Sir William Constable from Connecticut, sending them instead to an Independent Church in Holland, and Richard Bellingham settled in Massachusetts where he scandalized fellow Puritans by officiating at his own wedding. These volumes also reveal why Ignatius Jourdain, who *was* a Puritan killjoy, enjoyed broad popular support in Exeter. Admittedly, his enthusiasm for punishing fornication and adultery earned him ridicule; in 1628, some members responded to his latest proposal by shouting "Commit it! commit it!" only to have Sir Edward Coke explain that they meant "the bill, not the sin." Yet Jourdain remained during the plague outbreak in 1625 when the other magistrates fled, organizing and partly funding the relief effort. Consequently, he won the next election with a slogan that could still be effective: "[I]f you choose any, choose Jourdain; he will be right for the Commonwealth and do the city service" [4/931–32].

Every session witnessed a drive to expel Catholics and their sympathizers, those whom Thomas Scott of Canterbury ungenerously termed "holy-water-pissers" [6/247]. Witch hunts for closet Catholics could go too far—as Sir Miles Hobart discovered when the sea captain whom Hobart had falsely accused of popery tracked him down and assaulted him. Nevertheless, each session contained a number of

⁸ John Ashburnham, Montagu and Peregrine Bertie, Thomas Brett, William Beecher, Edward Conway, Thomas Glenham, Richard Graham, Richard Grenville, John Griffith, Henry Hungate, Thomas Jay, Thomas Littleton, Reginald Mohun, Roger Poley, Charles Price, and John Radcliffe. Alexander Temple, Richard Moryson, and John Stradling lost sons, and Thomas Alured a brother-in-law, there.

crypto-Catholics and more with Catholic relations. Like some other northerners, Richard Molyneux was “a Protestant in London and a Catholic in Lancashire” [5/346]. Several survived close calls during the Gunpowder Plot. Sir Thomas Gerrard’s brother was the Jesuit in the plot; Sir William Sandys helped a conspirator secure a loan; and Henry Spiller’s brother was a “person of interest” in the investigation. Relatives could be embarrassing. Sir Lewis Lewknor’s son was a Jesuit, Sir George Simeon’s daughters were Augustinian nuns, and Jerome Weston’s were Poor Clares. William Mallory struggled politically with a recusant mother *and* a Catholic brother who was deported as a Spanish spy. Schooling also marked them out. Thomas Ravenscroft’s grandsons were enrolled at Douai College, and a Flemish convent school, which their daughters attended, brought together Henry Britton, a potential Parliament man, and William Copley, a parliamentary patron. Meanwhile, John Good’s religious inclination was so well known that in the “the Parliament Fart,” he reportedly insisted that it “came forth from some Reformed brother” [4/416].

Religious beliefs notwithstanding, many were guilty of antisocial behavior. Youthful high spirits could turn violent. Robert Sidney stabbed his schoolmaster; Richard Lewknor tossed chamber pots on passersby in the Middle Temple; and William Howard once fought an epic brawl that sprawled across London. Adulthood was scarcely more tranquil. John Backhouse sought to resolve a dispute over a pew by bringing a spear to church, and although Thomas Hutchinson lost some fingers in a fight, he managed to bite off his opponent’s nose, which he subsequently carried in his pocket. Repeated violence had no discernible impact on political success. Sir William Button assaulted a local doctor, denouncing him as “a piss poor doctor fit only to cure horses and dogs”; set his mastiff on a rival’s dog in a churchyard; and when a serving girl rebuffed his advances, had her whipped until “she bled down from her shoulders to the soles of her feet” [3/372]. Shortly afterward, the Wiltshire freeholders returned him as knight of the shire. If anything, Parliament men were more violent after their election. Sir Edward Bishopp stabbed an annoying creditor; the fifty-year-old Sir Edward Dennys punched a rival in the street; Sir Edward Bayntun threw a royal agent in the Avon; and Walter Long dumped a chamberpot over a messenger from the Privy Council. Road rage overcame Basil Dixwell, and when a minor accident near Moorgate escalated into a fight with a bystander, he split his head open. Their spouses could be as highhanded; Sir William Monson’s wife reputedly liked tying him to the bedpost and whipping him. August surroundings meant little to these men, and the prize for audacity, notwithstanding serious competition from Sir Thomas Savile and Sir Francis Wortley, who brawled on the steps of the Parliament house, goes to Sir Richard Cholmley, who stabbed someone in a Star Chamber hearing. Given the imperiousness of some members, William Poole’s contempt for Ludgershall’s Parliament man in 1626 and 1628 becomes slightly understandable; he not only defecated on his grave but also celebrated the deed in verse:

Here lieth buried Sir Thomas Jay, Knight
Who being dead, I upon his grace did shite. [IV/882]

Sexual restraint was not their strong suit—witness the laughter that greeted Jourdain’s legislative efforts against adultery and fornication. Their devotion to their

wives comes into question after discovering Sir Richard Beaumont leaving a life annuity to a Mary Lewis and her two daughters and Sir William Woodhouse bequeathing £100 to a “girl in my house” [6/842]. It collapses altogether on finding Sir John Eyre trying to kill Sir Edward Herbert for seducing his wife and Samuel More sending his children to the Plymouth Colony after learning of his wife’s adultery. Sir Francis Bacon’s fondness for young men earned him a public rebuke from the pulpit; Sir John Selby seduced Dean Overall’s wife, whom he left (according to the rude libel) “flat as a flounder”; and Sir Edward Sackville disrupted a City banquet by closeting himself away with a city wife in order to put her “to the squeak” [6/261 and 121]. Ferdinand Huddleston lived decorously enough in the metropolis with his “niece”—until she became pregnant. And after Sir Walter Devereux ended the second marriage of his cousin, the Earl of Essex, by revealing his wife’s affair with Sir William Uvedale, young gallants mocked his forthrightness by threatening to reveal one another’s secrets with vows of “I’ll Devereux you” [4/58]. Yet the most vivid illustration of sexual irregularity comes from Sir Robert Howard, who consoled Edward Coke’s daughter, Frances, after her disastrous marriage to Buckingham’s brother, Viscount Purbeck. Late in 1624, she produced a son. Although Purbeck acknowledged the child as legitimate, the duke did not, and at his insistence the High Commission eventually excommunicated Howard. Yet from 1624 to 1629, he was the burgess for Bishop’s Castle, and in the 1626 Parliament, no less than John Selden led the campaign to expunge the verdict. Consequently, the couple’s intermittent relationship continued until Archbishop Laud finally managed to end it in 1634.

While a stint in Parliament was socially and professionally advantageous, it remained an expensive assignment. One member’s accounts revealed that he spent about £1 4s. daily, some £36 a month, and the number of corporations that paid their representatives anything was in steady decline [4/460]. But there were rewards. Leicester toasted Sir Henry Beaumont with wine and sugar both on his return and at his wedding; Plymouth presented John Glanville with a silver basin and ewer engraved with a map of the city; and years after Marmaduke Rawdon came home, Aldeburgh still sent him fish at Lent. Parliamentary service also helped Richard Godfrey out of a potential disaster after he accidentally killed a man in New Romney; although the charter of the Cinque Ports allowed the town to seize his goods, the corporation waived its right because he had served without pay, “which is more than any other jurat hath done heretofore” [4/395].

After their parliamentary service, members scattered. The tumult of the 1629 session convinced Bevill Grenville “not to intermeddle with the affairs of the commonwealth,” and Sir Thomas Walsingham came to prize his letters from Buckingham, which he kept under lock and key. Sir Walter Erle subsequently joined the Dutch army, and on his return this early version of Sterne’s Uncle Toby filled his garden with model fortifications. The Personal Rule meanwhile so appalled Sir William Spring that he dared not write John Winthrop “what I think and would you know” [6/409]. At the end of the 1630s, Henry Darley interrupted a planned move to Providence Island to carry secret messages between the covenanters and their English sympathizers. In 1639, the lack of support for the men he had marched from Kent to the Tweed so upset Sir Thomas Wilford that he burned his own colors and urged the king to summon Parliament; when Charles observed that “there were fools in the last Parliament,” he added “there were wise men too” [6/809].

After 1640, the surviving Parliament men were generally swept up in events. Henry Stanley, for example, had to explain an outburst that “there is none but my lord mayor and a company of cuckoldy alderman that do desire a Parliament, and they are all sons of whores” [6/421]. Parliamentary veterans dominated the ensuing fireworks; indeed, four of the Five Members—Pym, Hampden, Holles, and Strode—and their opponent, Strafford, had cut their legislative teeth in the 1620s. Hotham blocked Charles’s entry into Hull; Grenville, Hopton, Northampton, and Rawdon faced off against Fairfax, Manchester, Warwick, and Cromwell on the battlefield; Nathaniel Tomkins was strung up as a royalist agent in front of his house in Fetter Lane; John Arundell surrendered the last royalist stronghold in 1646; and at least six old Parliament men signed Charles’s death warrant in 1649. John Finch spent the 1650s in exile in the Dutch Republic, where the pickled herring did not agree with him. Several old members were still going strong during the Restoration when Grimston served as the Speaker, Bellingham governed Massachusetts, Holles entered the House of Lords, and Dyve, notwithstanding his poverty, haunted the gaming rooms of Whitehall. Of those associated with Charles I’s trial, Edward Cawley wisely relocated to Switzerland. Others were not as lucky. Miles Corbett was hanged and eviscerated; Sir Henry Mildmay slowly rotted in a jail in Tangiers; and until his death in 1672, William Monson became a London institution, emerging from the Tower every January 27, seated in a sled with a rope around his neck and dragged through the streets to Tyburn.

Their deaths were often far from mundane. Shock claimed Sir James Ley, who died four days after the 1629 “agitation,” and John Stonhouse followed his father so quickly to the grave that both were buried together. The plague carried off Sir George Hastings; John Whitson fell on the nail; lightning struck Sir Richard Onslow; a surfeit of oysters did in William Cholmley; and Satan himself reputedly came to fetch Sir John Jephson. Sir John Boteler discovered the unpleasant problems that can follow from extracting decayed teeth with rusty pliers; a London traffic accident claimed the life of Sir Miles Hobart; John Hoskins succumbed to complications after “a massive country fellow trod on his toe”; and Thomas Hoyle, a regicide, hanged himself on the first anniversary of Charles I’s execution [4/795].

Equally fascinating, if less ghoulish, were their bequests. Some remembered their friends. Sir John Suckling left the Earl of Middlesex a favorite painting, John Thorowgood gave Sir Benjamin Rudyerd a satin gown trimmed in silver, and Sir Nathaniel Rich bequeathed John Pym £20 and a gelding. Others remembered their towns. Evidently frustrated at the glacial pace of maintenance, Thomas Martin earmarked £5 for road repairs in Exeter, and William Doughty left 1s. to one hundred poor families and 3s. to his thirty neighbors in Kings Lynn. Sir Dudley Digges and Thomas Smyth ensured that they would not be soon forgotten: the latter left £1,000 to the poor of three Somerset parishes, and the former endowed an annual footrace in Chilham where two boys and two girls competed for a £20 prize. Educational endowments were popular. The Earl of Derby left money for a Manx university; Sir Robert Naunton endowed Naunton College, Cambridge; and Sir Edwin Sandy set aside £2,500 for metaphysical chairs in both Oxford and Cambridge.⁹ They remembered old patrons. Sir Carew Reynell, who survived the Essex

⁹ None of these educational plans came to pass, and Digges’s race eventually ended. Yet while all remain eminently worthy, the sad financial fact is that the endowed chairs, to say nothing of a Manx university or a

rising, left the 3rd Earl of Essex a picture of his father and £30 to decorate it. Sir Thomas Meautys had himself buried at the foot of the monument he erected to his old master, Sir Francis Bacon; regrettably, Harbottle Grimston later reburied Bacon so that he could have his tomb. They also remembered their family and servants. Sir Robert Bevill's opinion of his wife becomes crystal clear with his bequest of 10s. Sir Michael Stanhope left his bailiff £20 and the exhortation "leave drunkenness"; Sir Francis Barrington gave the parish poor £10 if they stopped "haunting alehouses, breaking hedges and lopping trees" and a further £10 if they behaved themselves more generally; and Jephson tried to incentivize his son's £800 bequest that he would receive at age thirty—or sooner if he became either a barrister or a Parliament man [3/148]. Sir John Evelyn disinherited his daughter for marrying a Tory, and Sir Richard Strode left his daughter £1,000—if she married a Baptist. And they remembered past glories. Thomas Godfrey provided money for a sermon commemorating the nation's deliverance on 5 November, the same day on which Robert Bateman established a feast. That was not enough for James Bunce, who endowed sermons to commemorate the Armada victory and Elizabeth's accession as well as the Gunpowder Plot. The monument for Martin Bond, who died in 1643 in his mideighties, depicts him in his finest moment—as a foot captain in his tent surrounded by his men at Tilbury in 1588. Perhaps the most evocative bequest from a former Parliament man came from Christopher Capull, who left his parish church in Gloucester a communion cup "as is in the church by Westminster where the House of Parliament did receive the sacrament" [3/418].



In one of its many wonderful discoveries, the *House of Commons, 1604–1629* reveals that by 1626, the Speaker of the House, Sir Heneage Finch, had become convinced the Parliament was "a sea unmanageable especially if you sail by another [i.e., royal] compass" [4/267]. The vivid information in these volumes naturally thrusts individuals to the fore. But, as the cases pile up, patterns emerge. Plainly political behavior underwent a major transformation in the late 1620s when the continental war brought ideological tension and religious controversy to a boil. Yet precisely how and why the House became "unmanageable" has been more obscure—at least, until these volumes illuminated the pivotal role of "the honest knot."

The early seventeenth-century House of Commons was roughly divided into three groups—a half dozen "tribuni plebis," the dominant members like Coke, Sandys, Phelips, Digges, Wentworth, and Eliot; three or four dozen more who made regular contributions; and then the other Parliament men who, as a minister rather rudely put it, "peep now and then into the House to inquire, 'What news?'; that sit there sometimes for recreation, that are present mainly to help a friend, or promote an interest" [6/472]. But as the extensive papers of Sir Thomas Jervoise reveal, some silent members nonetheless carefully followed debates. All members shared a common devotion to the ideals of civic humanism and to "sound, religious and honest men who respect the good of the republic more than any man's favour or

Cambridge college, would now require an enthusiastic multimillionaire to fund them. The revival of the Chilham race, however, is well within the financial reach of even hard-pressed academics, who arguably should pass the hat and revive it.

private ends" [6/535]. Those who hoped to be persuasive appealed to these values. Yet many vocal members also had more complicated motives.

Some entered the House with assistance from a patron—the Crown, an aristocrat, or an influential gentleman—who naturally expected some consideration for their vital interests. An exchange in 1628 clearly marked out such a relationship. Edward Kirton, who served the Seymour family, then deferred to Sir Francis Seymour, who “being knight of the shire, and understanding more than myself, has altered me to his opinion; therefore I agree with him.” With a slightly snotty air, Sir Francis responded that “I am glad to see for my own country Mr Kirton agrees with me” [4/31]. While such relationships could be quite loose, they certainly constrained a member’s freedom of maneuver. So too did the desire for advancement, which most leading Parliament men poorly hid. Contemporaries could name those who had vaulted from Parliament into royal service; years later, Sir Edward Peyton was still fingering Yelverton, Savile, Glanville, Heath, Wentworth, and Noy. Consequently, since many leading members were interested in a government post, they had when they rose to speak one eye on their colleagues in the House and the other on those outside in Whitehall and in the Lords.

These tensions and ambitions loomed large after Charles I attacked Spain in 1625. Grumblings in 1625 had become much more ominous when a new Parliament opened in February 1626. The Mansfelt expedition and the French Match had proven unhappy; Charles’s attitude to Catholics and Arminians was uncertain; and almost everyone was uneasy about Buckingham’s grip on the young king. Finally, there was the highly localized but vexatious issue of billeting. In the summer of 1625, as thousands of soldiers milled around Plymouth waiting to embark, local families were happy enough to take in a few lodgers. But once the Exchequer had trouble paying the billeting costs, tensions rose along with the arrearages. Unfortunately for the residents, relief at watching the expedition depart turned to despair a few weeks later when some vessels returned and the surviving troops were billeted over the winter. Over the next two years, other parts of the country came to experience the frustrations of billeting, but by the beginning of 1626, residents in the West Country already knew them all too well.

In 1626, when a broad aristocratic coalition tried to dislodge Buckingham, some Cornish gentlemen happily fell in behind their local magnate, the Earl of Pembroke. Chief among them was William Coryton, Pembroke’s vice-warden of the Stannaries, and Sir John Eliot, Buckingham’s vice-admiral for Cornwall, who had watched the billeting debacle from his house a few miles from Plymouth. Consequently, the thirty-three-year-old Eliot led the parliamentary charge against his former patron whom he had known since they were schoolboys together in France. But late in the session, Buckingham split his aristocratic opponents by promoting Pembroke to Lord Steward and his brother Montgomery to Lord Chamberlain, and by marrying his daughter to Montgomery’s son. The rapprochement, however, did not extend to Coryton and Eliot; in addition to losing their local offices, Coryton was dismissed as vice-warden and Eliot as vice-admiral. By the standard political rules, their political careers were in serious jeopardy, if not altogether at an end, and any rehabilitation would involve renewed obedience to the Crown. But then, as *The Commons, 1604–1629* makes clear, something extraordinary happened.

After the 1626 Parliament declined to approve five subsidies, Charles I collected them anyway, and he had leading gentlemen who refused the Forced Loan confined

without trial. Billeting furthermore became a political tool, the troops being moved from cooperative areas to more refractory ones. While most counties cooperated, some did not, and what one contemporary termed the “Northampton and Warwickshire [*sic*] disease” spread across the Midlands, establishing “hot spots” in Lincolnshire, Essex, London, and of course the West Country. The regime’s hard-line attitude produced a new revenue stream—and a generation of martyrs. Sir John Pickering and Sir John Corbet died from prison ailments, and Sir Francis Barrington almost did too. The Forced Loan had the unintended consequence of vaulting Coryton and especially Eliot into prominence; thus, young protégés like Bevill Grenville apologized to Eliot when he inexplicably escaped imprisonment, even though “no man hath with more boldness declared his resolution in this particular [the loan] than myself, which nor fire nor torture can divert me from” [4/453]. To widen their appeal, Coryton and Eliot each produced a popular manuscript, the former a defiant interview with the Privy Council and the latter a petition from prison. For their boldness, both were arrested and confined—but imprisonment only allowed Eliot to recruit new followers like John Hampden from Buckinghamshire, Thomas Hatcher from London, and Thomas Godfrey from Kent. After Sandys’s arrest in 1621, Sir Henry Widdrington cautioned to his bolder colleagues who were “brave whilst you are together,” asking “what becomes of you when you are parted?” [6/778]. Buckingham’s opponents over the Forced Loan weathered the challenge by becoming organized and expanding their geographical scope. Eliot’s ties with the Lincolnshire *refuseniks* brought Benjamin Valentine of London to his attention; his allies helped Yorkshire friends into Cornish seats, and Edward Alford in Sussex offered to find candidates safe constituencies elsewhere—provided they opposed Buckingham. The group even generated collective names for themselves, each employing the adjective “honest”; the “*honest knot*” of Eliot’s Cornish supporters, the “*honest sons of Lincolnshire*,” and all men devoted to doing “the duty of an *honest Englishman*.”

The power of this organization became clear once the election writs went out. Scholars have long argued about the impact of the Forced Loan on the 1628 elections. Some have downplayed the Forced Loan, arguing that most loan refusers won seats that they had previously held and that local rather than national issues concerned most voters. Yet in his splendid study of the loan campaign, Richard Cust dissented, insisting “that the loan was often an issue which transcended localism and that for many freeholders it offered a touchstone by which to judge the fitness of candidates to serve ‘the Country.’”¹⁰ To support his case, he cited many elections across the country, but with *The House of Commons 1604–1629*, we can now return to this question with a more definitive grasp of the electoral results.

Instead of securing a new patron to replace Pembroke, Eliot depended on his Cornish protégés. When Coryton and Eliot faced serious opposition in the county election, their friends—John Arundell, Charles Trevanion, and Bevill Grenville—mobilized a large party of freeholders to carry the day. In particular, *The House of Commons 1604–1629* deserves full marks for bringing Trevanion out of historical shadows; although he only sat in the 1625 Parliament, he was a formidable electoral agent. These three men then organized the return of five other loan refusers in

¹⁰ Richard Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics, 1626–1628* (Oxford, 1987), 315.

Cornwall (Arundell, Buller, Nicoll, Grenville, and Trefusis). They found seats for at least four and possibly six sympathizers (Rous, Vyvian, Valentine, Cotton, and possibly Harris and Edgcumbe). As a favor to Sir Thomas Wentworth, they secured the return of Sir William Constable, and when the Yorkshireman declined the honor, they engineered the election of another northerner, Sir George Radcliffe. These returns were something of a youth movement; the average age of the six “novice” Parliament men (Harris, Nicoll, Radcliffe, Trefusis, Valentine, and Vyvian) was forty. Consequently, when Eliot walked into the Commons with a dozen enthusiastic supporters, he could well have wondered about the need for court patrons in the first place.

Protests against the Forced Loan swept other areas too. The loan was at the center of contested elections in Boston, London, and Westminster, and because both candidates opposed the loan, it accounted for the first uncontested election in Essex in three decades. In the elections in Lincolnshire, Essex, Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire, and Dorset, both county knights had resisted the project, and in Bedfordshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk, Rutland, Somerset, Staffordshire, Surrey, and Yorkshire, one of them had. Of these twenty, fourteen had not sat in the 1626 Parliament and six had never previously been a county knight. The borough elections drove the numbers up further still. In Hythe, Lymington, and Lincoln, voters returned members who refused the loan for each of their two seats, and in London three of the four representatives had refused to lend. Finally, in eighteen other boroughs—Bath, Bedford, Beverley, Christchurch, Colchester, Coventry, East Retford, Exeter, Ipswich, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Pontefract, Scarborough, Southampton, St. Albans, Tewksbury, Thirsk, Wendover, and Winchelsea—one of the two burgesses had resisted the loan, and of the eighteen, eight had no parliamentary experience.

The fifty-six loan refusers later elected in 1628 are conveniently listed in volume 1, appendix IV. The other volumes, however, reveal varying degrees of opposition. Some slipped through the bureaucratic cracks. It is now unclear if Edward Alford did or did not subscribe, and if like Beville Grenville, Sir Nathaniel Rich and Peter Fleming refused and escaped any punishment. Then there were questions of age and wealth. Since his father, the Earl of Bolingbroke, and his uncles, Sir Beauchamp St. John and Sir Oliver Luke, all refused the loan, Sir Oliver St. John would likely have done so as well—if he owned any land, which he did not. Likewise, Herbert Dodington was excused because he was not a householder, and confident reports of Piers Edgcumbe refusing could not have been true because in 1627 he was underage. Furthermore, some who paid made sure they gave minimal support to the campaign. Sir Thomas Posthumous Hoby made his payment directly into the Exchequer, thus escaping any local notice; Sir Thomas Lucy, John Hoskins, and James Tomkins all paid, but they declined to collect the loan from others; and Sir Thomas Crompton’s signal inactivity earned him an abrupt removal from the Staffordshire loan commission. Finally, the tragic death of Sir John Corbet helped prompt his friend Sir Roger Townshend, who initially paid the loan, to oppose it, a position which eased him into the county seat for Norfolk. In Corbet’s constituency of Great Yarmouth, the electors could think of no more fitting tribute in 1628 than to return his younger brother, Miles.

Anger about billeting and martial law heightened the tidal surge of resentment over the loan into a political tsunami that swept over the south and east coast. In their frustration, many thought their highest priority was the removal of the

troops, and in his eagerness to see that happen, Arthur Bromfield spent £10 buying them new shoes. Another solution, which the Maldon electors adopted, was to elect a courtier in hopes that he could get the troops moved, but colleagues elsewhere favored a more direct response. Voters in Devon returned a formidable chorus of Parliament men—Ball, Delbridge, Giles, Glanville, Mathew and Strode—opposed to billeting. The issue also played a major role in the county elections in Devon, Dorset, and Hertfordshire, and in borough elections in Chichester, Dorchester, and Norwich. In a contested election in Sandwich, voters defied Buckingham, the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and rejected his nominee, Sir Edwin Sandys. The most dramatic examples, however, came from Hampshire, where several constituencies were in near revolt after hosting thousands of troops, some of them Scottish, for months. Southampton simply ignored the recommendations from Secretary Conway, the Lord Lieutenant, on behalf of two men closely associated with billeting. Meanwhile, in the Isle of Wight's three boroughs, billeting prompted the first contests in over three decades. Among the six unsuccessful candidates, all backed by the regime, Thomas Malet, the duke's legal adviser, had previously sat for Newtown in 1625 and 1626; in Yarmouth, the captain of Cowes Castle lost to the former captain who had been sacked for opposing billeting; and Conway's oldest son could not retain his seat in Newport, ceding it to Sir Francis Barrington's heir. Finally, the collective effect of the Forced Loan, imprisonment without trial, billeting, and martial law energized the generation's finer legal minds—Coke, Glanville, Littleton, Mason, Noye, Rolle, Selden, and Sherfield, among others. Once in the Commons in 1628, these men gave repeated evidence of their learning and eloquence.

Therefore, by combining these lawyers with the Parliament men opposed to billeting and those who either evaded the Forced Loan or minimized their involvement with it, the number of determined opponents of these royal policies climbs from the fifty-four loan refusers listed in appendix IV to a figure somewhere in the eighties. While this figure must remain only a rough guess, it nonetheless reveals the extent of the opposition arrayed against the regime in 1628. Since there were only 489 members, this number represented almost 20 percent of the Commons, and with absentee rates ranging from 20 to 60 percent, a phalanx of committed members became all the more formidable.¹¹

This remarkable mobilization helps explain two other striking developments in the 1620s. Almost a century ago, Wallace Notestein made us aware of the steady decline of the Crown's influence in the Commons, but now we can see the dwindling numbers as well. In 1604–10, about sixty-two members held posts in the Household, and by 1625 the number had dwindled to thirty-seven. But in 1628, only twenty-eight of these officials secured a seat. Much more unexpected is the corresponding decline in the number of lawyers. James I had often railed at troublesome attorneys, the group that he believed was the source of his parliamentary troubles. Yet the number of Parliament men in the legal profession dropped from approximately one hundred in 1604–10 and ninety in 1614, to sixty in 1625. The figure rose again in 1626 to almost eighty before plummeting to around sixty-four in 1628. The percentage of lawyers thus fell from over 20 percent of the Commons in

¹¹ On attendance, see Thrush's excellent chapter, I:257–78.

1604–10 to 13 percent in 1628 [1/173]. Several reasons explain these noticeable declines, but one plainly was the surge in highly motivated candidates in 1628.

Although others like Coke and Wentworth shined in the 1628–29 Parliament, Eliot was at the top of his game, dominating the proceedings with public eloquence and private planning with his associates. As Noah Millstone will shortly reveal, he also extended his reach well outside the house by flooding the manuscript market with his latest speeches.¹² Some colleagues reacted with fawning admiration for the political celebrity; Henry Waller wrote Eliot in June that “I must confess by hearing of your worth’s and virtues I did honour your name, but seeing them so clearly and faithfully expressed in the service of the Church and Commonwealth it engaged me to bend my studies and endeavours to do you service” [6/647]. To that end, Waller tried to arrange Eliot’s marriage to a wealthy city widow. Nevertheless, Eliot and his friends also alienated other members. After the 1626 Parliament, Christopher Wandersford was of the mind that “the fewer Corytons . . . the better” [6/674]. Yet Sir John felt strong enough that he and his coterie orchestrated a stunning end to the 1629 session. First to prevent the Speaker from rising, and so end the session, Benjamin Valentine and Denzil Holles arrived very early to take the seats next to the Speaker normally occupied by royal ministers. When Eliot proposed his resolution and the Speaker tried to rise, Sir John’s minions held him down. Chaos followed. Sir Peter Heyman denounced the Speaker as an embarrassment to Kent, while Selden lectured him on his duties; Francis Winterton tried to intervene only to run into Coryton, who “violently, forcibly, and unlawfully [did] assault and strike” him; Sir Miles Hobart locked the door and placed the key in his pocket; and Eliot in frustration tossed his resolution in the fire only to have Holles repeat it from memory. Finally, with Black Rod pounding on the door, a majority shouted their assent to Holles’s recitation. Nothing in the previous history of the Commons could equal this political theater.

Afterward, the atmosphere was sharply polarized. Sir George Gresley divided the political universe into those “for us” and “against us,” while Sir Richard Edgcumbe, one of Eliot’s Cornish rivals, sued Sir John over local business. The Tower meanwhile became a political pilgrimage site, attracting everyone from the Earl of Lincoln and Lord St. John to a humbler party led by Roger Mathew from Dartmouth, bringing some godly ministers to comfort the great man. Letters of encouragement came in from Digges, Godfrey, Hampden, and Kirton, among others. In the meantime, friends organized the relief work. Giles Greene smuggled letters from Holles’s wife; Armyne, anxious about Eliot’s legacy and perhaps his sanity, urged him to write; Hatcher proofread the *Monarchy of Man*; and Robert Mason organized their legal defense. When a new session seemed possible in 1631, Bevill Grenville started preparing Eliot’s reelection campaign; Richard Knightley intervened when Eliot’s sons foundered at Oxford; and Sir Oliver St. John took in his daughter, whom Saye and Sele’s son eventually married. Such heartwarming scenes of community action, however, could do little to soothe the king’s anger.

¹² For more on the political uses of “separates,” see Noah Millstone, “Evil Counsel: the *Propositions to Bridle the Impertinency of Parliament* and the Critique of Caroline Government in the Late 1620s,” *Journal of British Studies* 50 no. 4 (2011): 813–39; and his forthcoming book, *Plot’s Commonwealth: The Circulation of Manuscripts and the Practice of Politics in Early Stuart England, c. 1614–1640*.

Having witnessed the power of martyrdom in 1627–28, Eliot and his followers prepared for a repeat performance; once arrested, they remained silent, claiming parliamentary immunity and vowing to stand together. In October 1629 Selden was offered his release, which he ultimately declined, preferring the Tower. A year later Walter Long faced the same choice, and he too eventually chose his colleagues. But by that point, their unity was dissolving, and although Heyman loudly objected to his 14 foot by 7 foot cell, Coryton broke first. Less than two months after the agitation, he was free, and before the end of the year he was back as vice-warden of the Stannaries, ultimately becoming a gentleman of the Privy chamber in 1637. Heyman was released later in 1629. A year later, the Earls of Arundel and Clare intervened for the freedom of Selden and Holles. By that point, Holles too had become a celebrity, and the borough of Dorchester presented him with a standing cup worth £20 for his defiance. Eliot's health then gave way, and after Charles declined a medical release, Sir John hoped to hold on until his oldest son reached his majority and slipped beyond the reach of the Court of Wards. He failed, and after his death in December 1632, the Crown milked a large wardship fine from Eliot's estate. Walter Long left the Tower a few months later. Relaxed confinement in Marshalsea Prison, where a lenient warder had let him wander the city, soon gave way to a stricter regime in the Tower for "the busybody in Parliament" [4/160]. Martyrdom lost its attractions after his wife died in 1631 and after the Crown seized his estates in 1632 to pay a Star Chamber fine of 2,000 marks. Finally, amid mounting financial difficulties in July 1633, Long secured his release. William Strode and Benjamin Valentine, however, remained true to the cause, refusing all compromise; they remained in the Tower until 1640.

Eliot and his associates thus joined the pantheon of Caroline martyrs. Of the 204 instances of royal wrongdoing cited in the Grand Remonstrance of 1641, the treatment of these men came in at number twelve, which lamented

imprisoning divers members of the House, detaining them close prisoners for many months together, without the liberty of using books, pen, ink or paper; denying them all the comforts of life, all means of preservation of health, not permitting their wives to come unto them even in the time of their sickness . . . depriving them of the necessary means of spiritual consolation, not suffering them to go abroad to enjoy God's ordinances in God's House, or God's ministers to come to them.¹³

Since Eliot "died by the cruelty and harshness of his imprisonment, which would admit of no relaxation, notwithstanding the imminent danger of his life," there was only one conclusion: "[H]is blood still cries either for vengeance or repentance" [6/223]. Strode was later buried in Westminster Abbey near his friend John Pym. For the others, Parliament voted financial compensation: Long, Selden, and Valentine each received £5,000, and Sir Robert Howard was awarded £1,000 for his legal difficulties after he had seduced and impregnated Buckingham's sister-in-law. Balzac could not have imagined a finer story.



¹³ "Grand Remonstrance," in *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, ed. S. R. Gardiner (London, 1906), 209–10.

There are nearly two thousand stories in these six volumes, all interesting and some riveting. Collectively, they capture a political universe in flux. In 1604, politics tended to be a local affair in which patrons were recommended, if not essential. By 1629, it was progressively dominated by larger ideological issues, which in turn produced broader parliamentary groupings in which aristocratic support at Court was useful rather than necessary. Oratorical skill remained important through the period, but a talent for organization and the ability to persuade those outside as well as inside the House became increasingly vital. In short, from Eliot and his “honest knot” it was only a short step to the reign of “King Pym” a dozen years later. This fact has long been abundantly clear, but with detailed analysis of constituencies and members, the marginal as well as the prominent, *The House of Commons, 1604–1629* has explained how and why this came to pass.

Sadly, notwithstanding their many merits, these volumes have one crippling flaw: except for the first volume, there is no index. Consequently, the only way to appreciate their riches is to spend weeks and possibly months assembling a crude index. Admittedly, a proper index would increase the size and the price of the set. Yet, as it stands, the material and the patterns are effectively buried amid 4.6 million words. Fortunately, in this digital age, there is an easy solution; if the index exists, it should be placed online, and if it does not, it should be prepared.

This flaw cannot obscure the monumental scale of this project’s achievement. The novel and compelling stories in the volumes deserve the widest possible attention. Toward that end, the History of Parliament Trust should secure a short daily radio segment to highlight the best of these anecdotes (perhaps the “Parliamentary Almanac” copying the popular one about writers?). Meanwhile, with scholars busy mining these volumes for various research projects, *The House of Commons, 1604–1629* will be the natural starting place for research into contemporary society, religion, and economics as well as politics. Among many other projects, we can, for example, now chart out the various clientage networks, everything from the Duke of Buckingham’s sprawling entourage to the Earl of Castlehaven’s tiny one at Hindon. Likewise, given the ropery nature of the surviving evidence, counting the number of contested elections must ultimately remain in Mark Kishlansky’s famous line “a mug’s game,” but these volumes have certainly improved the odds for research on s/elections. Finally, these volumes will be a gold mine for those scholars otherwise immune to the charms of parliamentary history. They will represent a veritable Baedeker for local historians, identifying dozens of hitherto obscure provincial worthies and guiding them through local collections. They will also fascinate social and cultural historians, providing invaluable information on everything from education and social/sexual mores to family and, above all, finance. At last, we can plot the economic fortunes of the Parliament men, and even the briefest survey of the members on the brink of financial disaster will encourage us to ponder Trevor-Roper’s often dismissed suggestion that the Civil War was due to the falling rather than the rising gentry. In 1888, Engels maintained that from Balzac “I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period together.”¹⁴ He might well have reconsidered his dismissive attitude to historical research if he could have read these six volumes.

¹⁴ Engels to Harkness, April 1888, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/letters/88_04_15.htm.

Generations of scholars and students will long doff their hats to the History of Parliament Trust, to this truly remarkable team of scholars, and to the long-suffering British taxpayers for this extraordinary project. More important, the Parliament men themselves would doubtless be pleased to find themselves at the center of so much attention—although they probably would wonder about the wisdom of telling the world *all* of these stories.