


## Chapter 1



# Introduction

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In 1986, Kevin Sharpe noted that ‘communication to the king and from the king was the binding thread of government’.<sup>1</sup> It was an important corrective for historians focused solely on the machinations of Westminster politics or the daily operation of village communities. For Sharpe the early Stuart period saw a fragmenting of the lines of political communication between centre and locality as the monarch, aristocracy and Privy Council became increasingly isolated from the politics of the ‘periphery’ and a steadily building distrust of central government. In this move, Sharpe highlighted questions about the relationship between political and social history, and the possibility that this kind of communication ought to be central to debates about the political dynamic of the early Stuart period.<sup>2</sup> If this was conceived as a call to arms then few were willing to take up the cudgels. Given that the dust has settled on the debate over revisionism, now is the time to revisit the value of communication as a means of addressing fragmentation within the discipline and the political tensions of the age. What is required is recovering these lines of communication and interrogating how they operated, not least with a view to tracing change and continuity over an extended period beyond the 1620s and 1630s. It might also require investigating a variety of forms and methods beyond that of just court and Council. Thus, this collection of chapters is set up to explore the dynamics of local/national political culture in seventeenth-century England, with particular reference to political communication. It examines the degree to which connections were forged between politics in London, Whitehall and Westminster, and politics in the localities, and the patterns and processes that can be recovered. The fundamental goal is to foster a dialogue between two prominent strands within recent historiography, and between the work of social and political historians of the early modern period.

The primary focus of this volume is the long seventeenth century, which reflects in part the areas where work is being done on political communication

and matters addressing the relationship between centre and locality. But also it is in this period that the social, political, economic and religious dynamics foregrounded these issues in unprecedented ways for contemporaries. We need to be alive to the fact that England confronted profound changes in all aspects of life, from confessionalisation to Europe's religious wars, economic transformation, an agrarian revolution and a communications revolution marked by the rise of the newspaper and professional newsletter writers, the development of the newsbook and the creation of a partisan print culture, to name but a few of the most important developments. All of these revolutions have an impact on centre/locality relations, and yet all too often the dots have not been connected. As such, one of the aims of this volume is to start the process of thinking about how various early modern revolutions were connected and to suggest that political communication provides a useful way of achieving this. One volume cannot hope to address adequately all these seemingly disparate revolutions and fundamental changes in society. However, its long seventeenth-century focus also reflects the opportunities to build upon some of the most exciting work being done in this field. In future, research undertaken by Tudor scholars may well alter this meta-narrative and analysis, and perhaps even shift the focus to an earlier period and emphasise different aspects of communication, but with some notable exceptions this research has not yet begun in earnest.<sup>3</sup>

In recent decades social historians have gone a long way towards revolutionising our understanding of the politics of local communities, whether in terms of parish life, industrial communities or civic corporations. This has been particularly apparent, for example, in the work of Andy Wood, Phil Withington and Keith Wrightson, and in research into the local dynamics of state formation and office-holding, and into what has been dubbed the 'unacknowledged republic'.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, our understanding of the potential for political engagement outside the capital has also been transformed by the work of scholars such as Tessa Watt, Adam Fox and Alastair Bellany, who have done so much to shed light on the textual and material culture of public life, and on the ways in which both printed and scribal texts impinged upon the consciousness of even the most humble individuals.<sup>5</sup> It is clear, in other words, not just that there was a vibrant politics within specific localities but also that this was predicated in no small part on the fact that people lived in a literate environment, even if they were illiterate themselves.

At the same time, of course, equally important strides have been made towards rethinking the nature of political life at a national level, not least on the part of those who might be described as 'post-revisionists'. Central to this strand within recent historiography have been attempts to emphasise how far our appreciation of conflict and consensus can be enhanced by focusing on print culture, the news revolution and communicative practices. This has involved everything from analysis of cheap print (and indeed the popular stage) to the development of newsbooks and the contemporary pre-

occupation with ‘popularity’, and indeed with the possibility of detecting a ‘post-reformation’ or indeed Habermasian ‘public sphere’. This is evident, therefore, in the work of Tom Cogswell, Richard Cust, Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, as well as that of Tim Harris and Mark Knights, and considerable attention has been paid to the relationship between elite and popular politics, and to the ways in which politicians of various hues became increasingly conscious of the need to consider ‘public opinion’.<sup>6</sup> This could involve either propaganda or censorship, or indeed attempts to protect the *arcana imperii*, to clampdown on ‘lavish and licentious discourse’, and to punish seditious speech.

The problem, however, is that these two hugely fruitful strands within the historiography of early modern Britain have not yet been connected as successfully as they might have been, and that they have not often been brought into dialogue with one another. The perils of such fragmentation of scholarship are that local communities can seem disconnected from national politics, while, on the other hand, historians of central government are in danger of imposing a top-down model of political communication, and one which leaves little room for considering the agency and authority of specific localities, or indeed their impact on the wider political landscape. The risk is that historians fail to question persistent assumptions and ideas about the pervasiveness of localism and fail to consider the degree to which the early modern period witnessed the emergence of something much closer to a shared political landscape. This is not to say that such issues have not been addressed. From debates about the ‘county community’ and ‘state formation’ to work on ‘negotiating power’ and ‘mobilisation’, it has become clear that historians are beginning to think about ways of recovering the communicative links between the centre and the localities. Nevertheless, the issue can scarcely be said to have achieved the degree of prominence that it deserves.

## THE DEBATE OVER THE COUNTY COMMUNITY

The issue of how best to understand the relationship between ‘centre and locality’ has been a live one for generations, although in certain ways it has been – and perhaps continues to be – dominated by the reverberations caused by the work of scholars like Alan Everitt, not least his account of *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion*.<sup>7</sup> Grounded as it was in the possibilities offered by the opening up of gentry family archives and the development of a network of county record offices in the 1950s and 1960s, Everitt’s book offered a provocative interpretation of the relationship between centre and locality, which conjured the notion that local communities were insular, self-contained and uninterested in political affairs beyond their boundaries, especially those at court and Parliament. This idea about the prevalence and importance of the ‘county community’ – and of national politics as involving something like a ‘confederation of county commonwealths’ – may well have

provided a necessary corrective to an old-fashioned political history which focused solely on the goings-on in Westminster and Whitehall, and yet the idea of the county community was a controversial one, not least because it became central to the 'revisionist' assault on the idea of there being a high road to civil war, involving profound and pervasive ideological division. In no small part, therefore, revisionism was grounded in the work of historians who were indebted to Everitt, not least Anthony Fletcher (on Sussex), and perhaps also David Underdown (on Somerset). Fletcher certainly insisted on the 'inherent tension' between centre and locality, and on ingrained localism in the face of the 'growing pretensions of the state'.<sup>8</sup> More particularly, such ideas were evident in the work of John Morrill, in terms both of his monograph on Cheshire and of his subsequent account of the 'revolt of the provinces', in which he detected evidence about a reaction against the intrusion of political discord into the otherwise consensual world of a provincial 'silent majority' from outside, manifested most obviously in terms of neutralism and later of hostility towards the parliamentary state, and the disruption that this brought to traditional forms of local government.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously, the idea of a county community was subjected to powerful critiques from a number of directions almost immediately, not least in terms of other studies of particular counties, which raised a series of methodological and evidential issues, and which argued that more needed to be done to do justice to both local affairs and national politics, and indeed to the connections between them. In part, of course, the challenge came from scholars who defended older ideas, rooted in the work of historians like Christopher Hill, not least in terms of William Hunt's *The Puritan Moment*.<sup>10</sup> It was also possible to argue that a focus on localism ran the risk of underplaying the impact of government attempts to enforce national policies.<sup>11</sup> Hassell Smith, of course, insisted on the need to recognise a *complex* relationship between local and national politics, partly in relation to financial exactions, partly in relation to local factionalism and partly in relation to the ways in which institutions like Parliament were regarded as useful means of solving local problems.<sup>12</sup> Most obviously, perhaps, the response came from those whose work became central to the so-called 'post-revisionist' turn, and studies of Warwickshire (Ann Hughes), East Anglia (Clive Holmes) and Herefordshire (Jackie Eales) made it clear that English counties were not all insular and not all the same.<sup>13</sup> They did not all have natural boundaries or dominant urban centres, and they were only more or less economically and socially self-contained, and evidence was found to suggest that familiarity with the outside world – through education, domestic service and military experience, as well as through time spent in London – acted as a powerful solvent of localist customs, traditions and mentalities.

It was demonstrated convincingly that the picture of political life within individual counties could look very different depending upon who was made the focus of attention. Within Cheshire, therefore, Sir Richard Grosvenor did

not look like William Davenport, and elsewhere the picture of local politics looked rather different when attention was turned to the aristocracy, whose members very often had strong ties to Whitehall and Westminster, not to mention through the lens of post-reformation Catholics.<sup>14</sup> It certainly looked different through the lens of parochial elites and the 'middling sort', a point which began to emerge with Underdown's study of Somerset, and which certainly came through in Peter Clark's account of *English Provincial Society*.<sup>15</sup> What emerged from a range of studies, indeed, was the need to recognise the significance of religion and ideology, not least in terms of the strength of godly communities, and it became clear that the divisions that would lie at the heart of the civil war could and did emerge from *within* counties.

More importantly, perhaps, it was argued that politics within local communities was rarely *distinct* from national politics, and that the categories of 'local' and 'national' were not mutually exclusive, much less 'distinct and usually antagonist spheres'. This made it possible to move beyond ideas about national politics intruding into local affairs and enforcing its policies, and about an 'extractive and coercive centre', and to develop instead an 'integrationist' approach which recognised that local and national politics overlapped, intersected and interacted in interesting ways. This involved arguing that local politics could be seen as reflecting, expressing and responding to, as well as speaking the language of, national politics, and that it was possible to discern national expressions of local concerns, as well as the filtering of national issues through local interests. It also involved arguing that local interests could be harnessed at the centre in a somewhat co-operative fashion, and that there was a complex relationship between local affairs and national politics, in which local divisions did not map neatly on to national alignments and in which all sides could appeal to the centre.<sup>16</sup> What emerged was a picture of an 'integrated system of government', in which 'politics and administration had become fused in a unitary process of political management and the balance of interest groups', and the fact that a term like 'country' could refer to both local and national communities serves to question 'the polarity between centre and locality'. This was clear in Peter Lake's studies of Cheshire, in terms of how the collection of Ship Money revealed the 'interdependence' of, and 'fruitful tension' between, centre and locality, and in terms of how petitioning in the early 1640s involved much more than merely local politics, and the mediation of local opinion and national events.<sup>17</sup> It was clear in Tom Cogswell's account of the complexities of relations between the centre and locality in *Home Divisions*.<sup>18</sup> And it was also clear in Mike Braddick's response to the rather under-developed study of the relationship between central and local politics during the Restoration, in which he argued that, rather than thinking in terms of neat divisions between centre and locality, it was important to recognise that the institutions of the 'centre' could provide resources for rival interest groups within the 'locality', not least in terms of lobbying. 'Political power', in other words, 'was not

necessarily a zero-sum game between centre and locality', and local problems sometimes 'enhanced the penetration of national into local politics and thus heightened the interrelation between the community and the state'.<sup>19</sup>

In a variety of different ways, moreover, it was argued that the county might not provide the ideal *scale* on which to analyse early modern political culture. This was true not least because of what could be observed by 'zooming in' to observe particular provincial towns – whether Richard Cust's Great Yarmouth or David Underdown's Dorchester.<sup>20</sup> However, it was also true because of the potential for recognising that differences in political and religious culture might more obviously map on to *pays* or *regions* which cut across administrative boundaries, and which could be differentiated by geographical features and land use. This kind of analysis, pioneered by Joan Thirsk, and even Everitt, was expressed most powerfully in Underdown's controversial argument about the economic, social, cultural, political and religious differences between 'chalk' and 'cheese' areas of western England.<sup>21</sup>

None of this is to say, of course, that the county – and even the 'county community' – has become irrelevant. A series of essays reflecting on Everitt's contribution, edited by Jacqueline Eales and Andrew Hopper, re-evaluated the idea of the county community and suggested that a turn to a regional framework offered one fruitful way forward, while Stephen Roberts in his concluding remarks to the volume noted the need to understand more about the role of the sheriff in the county and of the militia.<sup>22</sup> There may still be mileage, in other words, in focusing on politics at county levels, even if this will almost certainly involve recognising that the county offered only one amongst many ways in which contemporaries thought about their political lives, and about their geographical frame of reference, interest and influence. This would seem to be the direction being pursued by Peter Lake and Richard Cust, in their study of Cheshire in the early Stuart period, which will insist that the county continued to exert *some kind of hold* upon at least some contemporaries, even if only as an 'imagined community'.<sup>23</sup>

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY

Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the heyday of the debate about the county community passed some time ago, not least because, as Tom Cogswell noted, 'rather than defend or modify their position' in the face of scholarly criticism, 'the "localists" simply abandoned it altogether'.<sup>24</sup> The result, however, has arguably been that, following the period in which county studies proliferated, the ways in which 'local' and 'national' politics were studied came to be rather *fragmented*, and that more often than not this has involved rather different approaches by social and political historians.

Under the influence of Keith Wrightson, therefore, it is noticeable that social historians increasingly turned their attention to a different kind of local politics, in terms of the 'social distribution and uses of power', and

in terms of 'micropolitics', 'local level politics' and 'the history of social relationships and of the culture which informs them', as well as in terms of 'the political dimensions of everyday life'. This has involved revolutionising our understanding of the politics of local communities, in terms of parish life, industrial communities or civic corporations, and in terms of the politics of patriarchy, neighbourliness and custom, and it has involved focusing on a variety of different kinds of local community, from the village of Terling (Wrightson and Levine) to the vale of Gloucester (Beaver), the city of York (Withington) and the lead mining districts of Derbyshire (Wood).<sup>25</sup> The result has unquestionably been that we have achieved a much deeper understanding of piety, poverty and poor relief, of the politics of religion and of the politics of enclosure riots and food riots. Very clearly, therefore, the 'new social history' has transformed our understanding of the 'social depth of politics' within local communities.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, of course, equally important strides have been made towards rethinking the nature of political life at a national level, not least on the part of those who might be described as 'post-revisionists'. In no small part this sprang from dissatisfaction with the ways in which Elton and Russell dealt with the relationship between centre and locality. This is not to say that they denied the need for historians of politics at the centre – and in Parliament – to recognise the 'world beyond Westminster', but rather that this was explored only in limited ways. In Elton's case this involved a somewhat limited notion of 'points of contact' between the political elite and the country at large.<sup>27</sup> In Russell's case, meanwhile, the appreciation of the need to set 1620s parliamentary history in the context of a 'wider world' felt like background scene-setting, and for both scholars there was also a danger that the interactions between centre and locality, and the involvement of localities in parliamentary affairs, were regarded as being largely free from ideological division.<sup>28</sup> Parliament, in other words, came to be seen as a place where business was done, rather than where ideological conflicts were played out.

To the extent that this was challenged, historians have obviously focused in part on the need to gain a better understanding of how local politics could impinge on Parliament. Very often, of course, this involved debating the extent to which parliamentary elections were contested, but there have also been broader discussions of the nature of parliamentary representation, in terms of the possibility that MPs were doing more than representing a locality or a county, and representing instead a national or an ideological community.<sup>29</sup> In addition, a significant body of work has explored the issue of lobbying and parliamentary legislation in a more or less conscious attempt to analyse the 'interplay' and reciprocity between centre and locality.<sup>30</sup> David Harris Sacks's study of Bristol was significant for showing that the city's 'little businesses' indicated 'not localism but the need of the local community to call upon the state to help it perform necessary services or cope with its own internal problems', and he concluded that local problems sometimes

'enhanced the penetration of national into local politics and thus heightened the interrelation between the community and the state'.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, and despite calls for 'much more work' to be done on such topics, it also seems clear that political historians moved on from discussions of the relationship between centre and locality, not least during debates over the so-called British problem – a rather different revisionist project to reconfigure politics at the 'centre' – and more recently as part of moves to think about the European and transnational dimensions of 'England's troubles'.<sup>32</sup> For historians of the Restoration, of course, national, international and imperial politics – whether elite or popular – never faced quite the same challenge to rethink the relationship between the centre and the localities that marked scholarship on earlier periods.

Of course, this is not to deny that there have been signs of how social and political historians can usefully enter into dialogue. After all, Keith Wrightson's account of the 'politics of the parish' posited the existence of a 'parochial public sphere' and a complex interaction of, and refraction of, local and national issues, and the development of a 'single political society'. It made clear, in other words, that while the 'infrastructural reach' of the state had become more powerful, this reflected in part the 'willingness of individuals and groups in local society to employ the resources of state power for their own particular purposes'. As such, it was necessary to explore agency, negotiation, participation and mediation within local communities, and Wrightson insisted that vibrant local politics was not necessarily insular, and that more work was needed on the relationship between local communities and national culture.<sup>33</sup> This might involve thinking about how urban citizenship set the tone for national political culture and discourse, as Withington argued in the *Politics of Commonwealth*, or connecting 'micro-politics' and 'high politics', not least through petitioning and popular legalism, whether in terms of the 'voices of Radwinter', the activities of the 'Colchester plunderers' in the late 1630s and early 1640s or the repercussions of disputes that centred on specific individuals.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, as scholars move away from rather simplistic models of political allegiance and religious belief, there is scope to develop further Mike Braddick's ideas about the possibility for exploring political *mobilisation*.<sup>35</sup>

Most obviously, the impulse to reconnect studies of 'centre and locality' has emerged as a result of interest in 'state formation' and state building, something which is, as Braddick pointed out, inherently related to 'the relationship between centre and locality'.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, both Joan Kent and Steve Hindle have argued that it is impossible to explore the history of the 'state' while overlooking the localities, given that, while the early modern state may have been *centralised*, it was less obviously *bureaucratised*, and as such it is important to recognise the degree to which it was predicated upon the participation of agencies, officers, institutions at many social levels and in many geographical locations. This means that, rather than thinking about



state formation as a 'one-sided drive towards ever greater penetration or acculturation', it is necessary to recognise that it was a 'dynamic process of communication between centre and localities'.<sup>37</sup> Rather than thinking about 'government' in terms of central institutions and their impact on the localities, therefore, it is possible to think about *governance* as a *process*, which was predicated upon activities across a 'diffused state' and within the 'local state' and the 'parish state', and about the state as something that involved a network of power relations. And what this requires is an exploration of the *negotiation of power* and the *social depth of governance*, and an integration of local structures into an appreciation of an early modern state in which active *participation* was vital.<sup>38</sup>

That popular politics, mobilisation and state formation have created opportunities for reconnecting social and political history, and revisiting the relationship between centre and locality, is clear not just from protests regarding the 'enclosure' of social history, and regret that 'social, political and intellectual history have become entirely separate enterprises',<sup>39</sup> but also from the attention that political historians have paid to the so-called 'unacknowledged republic' of office-holding, and from the way in which scholars from a variety of backgrounds can share an interest in documents like the Swallowfield articles. The latter provided an example of how political ideas were embedded within everyday practice, and of the point where the politics of neighbourhood and local custom intersected with the state, not least as authority was delegated to people in the localities, who were able to *interpret*, rather than merely *implement*, national initiatives.<sup>40</sup>

## COMMUNICATION

There are, in other words, clear signs of *convergence* between the 'new political history', with its interest in the social depth of politics, and the 'new social history', with its determination to study the politics of people of 'less exalted social standing'. However, if we are to look beyond either central institutions or county communities in order to explore 'more inclusive and dynamic situations', then it will be necessary to turn our attention to 'participatory situations' and to 'governance in motion', and this will mean thinking about the 'mechanisms of interaction between Westminster and the localities' and the culture of communication.<sup>41</sup> In some ways historians have explored the infrastructure of communication from road systems and waterways to the politics of postal networks but this has not often extended to, or involved thinking about, communicative practices.<sup>42</sup> But the most obvious way that this has occurred is in the well-established field of scholarship related to government management and interference in the pulpit as a way of conveying messages to the general population, whether through set prayers, the distribution of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, or indeed sermons. More recently this has involved interesting work on the dissemination of state prayers and the

use of the pulpit as a means of conveying news.<sup>43</sup> Less well-travelled paths that could also be very fruitful include the prevalence of, and response to, travelling players in the localities in both civic and private settings, the significance of royal progresses and state visits, and the communicative purposes of the legal circuit and the reading of texts at the assizes.

In other ways, of course, communicative practices have become a central topic in recent scholarship, for both so-called 'post-revisionist' political historians and social historians. Thus, having been overlooked – or more accurately dismissed – by revisionists, printed and scribal texts have become an increasingly important means of recovering the nature and importance of public culture, the interest in and dissemination of news and the value of a range of texts – including ballads and libels – for gauging the social depth and geographical reach of information, ideas and opinions, as well as the politics surrounding the control and secrecy of information.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, in addition to enriching our understanding of early modern public discourse, and offering the possibility of detecting the emergence of a public sphere – either in its post-reformation or Habermasian guises – social and political historians have also analysed texts in a more dynamic fashion. This means recognising the need to explore barriers to communication (not least linguistic ones) rather than merely channels of communication, and it means recognising that texts – like news, indeed – could move not just from the centre to the localities but also from the localities to the centre, whether as libels, petitions or lobby documents. As such, there has been some recognition that studying practices and processes relating to texts and publicity is vital for understanding the dynamic of early modern politics. The comments by Kevin Sharpe with which we began were actually prefigured by Ann Hughes's work on Warwickshire, which suggested that a poor understanding of the importance of communication may have been more important than 'localism' in generating political difficulties in the 1620s and 1630s.<sup>45</sup>

Thereafter, a number of scholars began to integrate communicative practices into their analysis of political tensions and the relationship between centre and locality, and indeed to make it the focus of their work. In his study of Caroline financial policies, therefore, Richard Cust emphasised not just the enforcement of national measures but also the importance of communication, and of a variety of different texts, in relation to the mobilisation of both support for, and opposition to, the Forced Loan. Importantly, these included texts addressed to 'all true-hearted Englishmen'.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, in exploring the mobilisation for war in Elizabethan England, Neil Younger emphasised the importance of communication as a means of ensuring local compliance, while also recognising failures of communication and the fact that an 'intensive web of communication' made it possible for local communities to 'talk back'.<sup>47</sup> Both David Cressy and John Walter have tried to assess the impact of texts like the 1641 Protestation across the country and below the level of the elite.<sup>48</sup> Ann Hughes has demonstrated how contemporary discus-

sions of religious radicalism in the 1640s could be constructed through the active involvement of local informers.<sup>49</sup> And, as already noted, Peter Lake has demonstrated that by carefully contextualising local petitioning it is possible to complicate simplistic depictions of the relationship between local and national politics, as Sir Thomas Aston became a 'one man point of contact', who used his influence at the centre to enhance his local position, and his local standing to enhance his status at the centre, and who sought to 'coordinate and interconnect events at the centre and in the localities'.<sup>50</sup> Among social historians, meanwhile, Andy Wood has emphasised the growing trend for ideas about 'custom' to be recorded, and communicated, in writing and in print, while Steve Hindle has noted the role of libels, 'bills' and broadsides during the Midland Revolt, not just as mobilising devices but also as means of engaging with, and eliciting responses from, national authorities.<sup>51</sup> What seems clear, indeed, is that a range of textual genres, both scribal and printed, were used in increasingly creative ways, and by people representing different perspectives and interest groups, in order to address a variety of audiences, both national and local.<sup>52</sup>

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

Nevertheless, as scholars begin to use print culture to explore transnational and supranational phenomena, and grapple with the idea of multiple publics – both socially and geographically – there remains more to be done in terms of thinking about how the study of communicative practices might enhance our understanding of the relationship between 'centre and locality', and about what value – if any – such terms may have.<sup>53</sup> In other words, in fascinating ways work has been done on these certain strands but rarely have they been brought together. One notable exception is the work of John Walter, a social historian who has explored how politics and religion in local communities reacted to national developments, not least in terms of the link between Laudian reforms and popular violence.<sup>54</sup> The aim of this volume, therefore, is to build upon this work, which means thinking about some questions that are crucial to understanding the issues at stake: What were the practices and mechanisms involved in communicating between centre and locality? What kinds of texts were involved, and by whom were they deployed and distributed, and for what ends? How and why did the state communicate with citizens; when, where and with what intensity did this take place; and what was the impact on political participation? To what extent was state formation – and political culture more broadly – predicated upon enhanced interaction between centre and locality through communicative channels, in terms of news, ideas or political information, as well as bureaucratic data? Was there dynamic interplay between the politics of communication at both national and local levels? What phenomena and patterns can be observed in relation to the ways in which communicative practices were used as a means

of exerting local agency and influencing politics and administration at the centre? Although what follows is not meant to be an exhaustive study of all forms of political communication, it nevertheless highlights a variety of ways in which this agenda can be addressed.

One thing that emerges from these chapters is that, after a long period in which historians stressed the need to complicate overly polarised depictions of 'centre' and 'locality' by stressing interconnectedness and interdependency, the use of the centre to advance local interests (thereby enhancing the power of the state), and a participatory model of governance, there may now be scope to return our attention to the intrusive state, or the intrusive aspects of state power. This is not to say that there emerges a clear or unifying model in terms of how to characterise the relationship between localities and the centre. Beaver (Chapter 8), therefore, highlights novel ways of demonstrating the kinds of local autonomy that persisted in this period, and focuses on modes of communication which did not involve the subordination of locality to centre. Indeed, in relation to provincial Gloucestershire, as well as New England, he uses charters and charter-like texts that relate to local powers to stress the 'integrative power of the written word', and the ways in which it was possible to exercise *de facto* agency in specific localities. Such documents involve, he argues, the communication of 'centreless' political agency, and created a 'sovereign affect', or what he calls 'sovereignty by the book'.

What might also need to be recognised, however, is that contemporary political culture involved both local autonomy and pressure from the centre at the same time; that it is possible to identify episodes where the centre sought to intrude into local affairs; and that these need to be studied very carefully. Millstone (Chapter 4), therefore, revisits what might be thought to be familiar territory, in terms of attempts to impose Laudian reforms on a provincial town, not least in reaction to what were thought to be undesirable communicative practices, in terms of the impact of local Puritan ministers like Samuel Ward. The contributions by Kyle (Chapter 2) and Hughes (Chapter 6), meanwhile, both draw attention to the structures of communication between the centre and locality, in terms of the ways in which the state sought to undertake 'outreach' through proclamations about Lent (Kyle), and sought to elicit evidence from the localities, in terms of information with which to account for public money (Hughes). Both chapters are thus suggestive of the power of the state to intrude into everyday life, or at least attempts to exert power, and in both cases communicative practices – and indeed uses of print – are one of the ways in which such aims and power are brought to light and brought into focus. Wells (Chapter 9), meanwhile, uses unexpected and intriguing evidence about the use of local knowledge and expertise – i.e. Catholic expertise – to re-examine the ways in which the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland involved the exercise of state power by Whitehall and Westminster during the early 1650s.

That said, the chapters by Millstone, Kyle, Hughes and Wells also suggest

that care is needed when discussing what was happening in these episodes, in terms of the dynamic of centre-locality relations, and in terms of the power of the state that is revealed, not least by communicative practices. Millstone complicates matters by emphasising that the chief means of effecting reform in Ipswich – Bishop Matthew Wren – was not really an outsider, but someone with powerful local connections, and he also emphasises that Samuel Ward was a threat not just because of his use of pulpits, lectureships and indeed printing but also as someone with powerful allies in London. He also stresses that the underlying issue for both Wren and Laud was the existence of local privileges, which ensured not just local influence over the appointment of clerics but also local control over their activities, in ways which made clerics beholden to the views and interests of local elites. The campaign in Ipswich, in other words, was predicated on sophisticated local knowledge. In Cromwellian Ireland too, local knowledge proved to be vital, but it was provided by local powerbrokers, whose interventions and initiatives were crucial in a situation where effective direction from the centre was perhaps lacking.

Indeed, what emerges from these chapters is not a straightforward story of a lack of communication, but rather unexpected problems with the ways in which communication from the centre happened, albeit in ways which did not really involve localist impulses. For Wells, therefore, there were problems in terms of how initiatives were communicated from London to Dublin, as well as internal communications problems within Ireland. Underpinning these, however, was not straightforwardly resentment regarding the power of the English government in London. Thus, while the authorities in London regarded Dublin as a periphery, authorities in Dublin regarded themselves as working in partnership with Whitehall and Westminster, which justified local pragmatism, and in that sense contemporaries were confronting asymmetrical understandings of what constituted the ‘centre’ and the ‘locality’. Kyle, meanwhile, demonstrates that even the development of a sophisticated bureaucratic system to enforce Lenten regulations, involving a serious administrative and surveillance system, did not work in practice, such that proclamations proved unenforceable. This reflected a series of issues, from the availability of fish to the possibility for counterfeiting the recognisances that were central to the process of enforcement, as well as the methods for gaining exemption, not to mention opposition to the cost and indeed to the use of proclamations as regulatory devices. None of this involved localism. Meanwhile, in the case of civil war accounts – another issue where it is important to recognise that texts flowed both *outwards* and *inwards* – Hughes argues that the state got more than it bargained for, in the sense that people responded to demands for information in ways that blended financial accounts with personal reflections and commentary on the experiences of civil war, thereby transforming or even undermining the government’s intentions. This can be recognised, indeed, without resorting

to notions of opposition to state power within the localities, although, if this is because it makes sense to recognise that state power was being *negotiated*, then it must also be recognised that this involved an ideological framing of responses, and one which reflected national debates. This perspective is also shared by Millstone, who notes that Laudian initiatives in Ipswich provoked a concerted and indeed violent backlash, and one that fed very clearly into national debates, not least through the pen of William Prynne. Hughes also demonstrates, however, that ideological divisions existed *within* local communities, rather than simply *between* localities and the centre, and like Millstone she recognises that different groups in the localities were also well connected to like-minded people in London and Westminster.

What these chapters highlight, in other words, are new ways of complicating relationships between the political centre and the localities in the early modern period, and this can also be achieved by examining the behaviour of individuals from within the political elite. In part, as Cogswell (Chapter 3) demonstrates, this involves re-evaluating controversial grandees like the Duke of Buckingham, in ways which suggest that he was more responsive to provincial pressure than might once have been assumed, not least in his capacity as Lord Admiral. What is well known, therefore, is that Buckingham became an increasingly controversial figure in the period leading up to his impeachment and assassination, and it is also well known – not least through the work of Cogswell himself – that the duke also courted ‘popularity’, and sought to be an effective communicator, in order to explain himself before the reading public, and in order to mould popular perceptions of him, whether through print or patronage of the stage. What Cogswell highlights here, however, is that Buckingham faced complaints about the threat to shipping in the narrow seas, and to the livelihoods of coastal towns, as a result of continental warfare and the threat from Dunkirkers, which took the form of parliamentary speeches by MPs on behalf of their constituencies, as well as petitions from the localities. He also demonstrates that, by paying attention to official warrants rather than merely official statements, it becomes possible to appreciate that Buckingham was remarkably responsive. In other words, as someone who sought approval, Buckingham also felt compelled to react to the pressure communicated to him from the localities, even if this merely placed him in the awkward position of wanting to pursue incompatible strategies – the protection of coastal shipping and a new foreign expedition – simultaneously. Even a ‘warlord’ like Buckingham, in other words, was not immune to pressure from the provinces, even if this was more obviously true while Parliament was sitting than when it was not.

Individual grandees – of varying degrees of prominence and importance – are also at the centre of the chapters by Peacey and O’Neill, both of whom recognise the need to complicate existing narratives of how print, and indeed commercial scribal newsletters, transformed the relationship between centre and localities. For O’Neill (Chapter 10) this involves the

need to recognise that a vital means of circulating news in the early modern period involved personal letters – letters *with*, rather than *of*, news – that passed through the epistolary networks of prominent individuals. For the 7th Earl of Huntingdon, therefore, who can be shown to have been educated in the arts of news very thoughtfully, and to have been a member of an increasingly *mobile* elite, local news was at a premium when he was away from home. However, while the nurturing of epistolary networks can be shown to have been a solution to this problem, O’Neill also argues that the growing importance of local news was actually facilitated by centralising forces, in terms of the development of a national postal system, even if this very system in some ways also proved threatening, to the extent that it became easier to intercept private correspondence for the purposes of political surveillance. For Peacey (Chapter 5), meanwhile, the need to acknowledge the role of print in breaking down barriers between centre and localities does not preclude the need to recognise that individuals in the localities still faced profound challenges, and that they needed help in knowing about and acquiring printed texts. Such mediation, however, is highlighted not in order to suggest that the localities remained remote in important ways but rather to suggest that, on this issue as on others, contemporaries turned to a new breed of ‘freelance fixers’ – or professional agents – whose role was to provide resources such as time and expertise for those who sought to navigate the contemporary world, whether politically, administratively or culturally, and who were intimately involved in communicative practices. Ultimately, what this suggests is that the ‘distance’ between ordinary members of the public and the ‘centre’ was less a matter of geography or indeed mentality than of practical know-how.

Finally, what this collection suggests is that the process of using communicative practices and print culture as a means of rethinking the relationship between, and the binary division of, ‘centre and locality’, extends to the recovery of hitherto neglected phenomena that were specific to certain locations; that were, for the want of a better term, ‘popular’; and that involved interesting links with things that might be thought to have pertained to affairs at a national or ‘central’ level. As in Peacey’s chapter, therefore, Weil (Chapter 11) uses print culture both of and about Newgate prison in order to complicate the relationship between ‘locality’ and geographical remoteness. For Weil, therefore, Newgate was a focal point for print, as well as a place from which print emerged, and in that sense it was both a locality – a specific place with specific issues, albeit within London – *and* a centre, in terms of being a hub for discussion and authoritative textual production. What such texts also reveal, moreover, is a capacity to address both national issues and specific – ‘local’ – audiences at the same time. Finally, Como (Chapter 7) – in another chapter that takes its lead from a printed text relating to communication between locality and centre – teases out the relations between popular Leveller agitation that is sometimes thought to be exclusive to London,

and local agitation and mobilisation in Wiltshire. What this suggests is the capacity for a key Leveller text to make an impact in the provinces, not least in places that had suffered from war and economic hardship, and that the Leveller petition become a focal point for localised mobilisation, which even extended to the delegation of authority to local commissioners. Moreover, while the ideological alignment of Wiltshire and London Levellers was not precise, there were strong links – ‘a thick and tangled web’ – between local people and political figures who were part of the Leveller movement nationally. However, since these links did not extend to the Wiltshire agitators doing the bidding of friends in London, it makes sense to use the episode to demonstrate that the relationship between mobilisation centrally and locally was ‘reshaped and intensified’ by civil war.

Taken together, therefore, these chapters address the key issues of this project and this topic. They examine what mechanisms and what kinds of texts were involved in communication between different places, as well as the different types of people that were involved in their production, and the impact that they could have, and also not have. They highlight the attempted use of state power, and ways in which the state underwent change, but they also reveal the limitations of such power, and the possibilities for local autonomy, agency and mobilisation, and that the development of state power did not necessarily come at the expense of the localities, and could even enhance the possibilities for local action. They demonstrate that communicative practices represent a valuable lens through which to scrutinise such issues, and the relationship between phenomena in different locations; that texts moved in both directions and that such texts were sometimes successful and sometimes less so; and that responsiveness to such texts, and to the pressures that they brought to bear on their chosen audiences, occurred in surprising ways. Indeed, the impact – or otherwise – of such texts indicates that it is possible to show things like resistance to, or negotiation of, central power without resorting to ideas of localism, and also possible to demonstrate ideological as well as personal links between people who mobilised resources both centrally and locally. The end result is to complicate notions of ‘centre’ and ‘locality’ – not least in terms of whether what separated them were things other than geographical distance and mental outlooks, whether people and places in London could also be local, and whether certain phenomena, people and locales were local and national at the same time – without necessarily rendering such terms entirely redundant.

As such, this book picks up nascent themes and ideas within the best recent scholarship, and offers important new insights and perspectives, without in any way exhausting the subject. Ongoing research work will add many more insights, not least in relation to subscriptional culture across the nation, including petitioning and loyal addresses, as well as lobbying and litigation. Nevertheless, this volume will, it is hoped, provide a reminder of the gains to be made by placing political communication at the heart of both



social and political history, and provide an impetus for further scholarship that brings these two sub-disciplines closer together.

## NOTES

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