

Promoting the Anglo-Scottish alliance of 1643: the Solemn League and Covenant and the parliamentary press in the first civil war*

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Abstract

This article addresses the print campaign to promote the Anglo-Scottish alliance of 1643 and its accompanying Solemn League and Covenant oath, an exercise that was novel in its involvement of the emerging serial press. The study outlines the reasons for the campaign, records its backers and contributors, and sets out the difficulties it encountered. After examining the nature of the pamphlet literature associated with the 1643 Covenant, the article explores in detail the contribution to the debate made by the newsbook *Mercurius Britannicus*, a publication that was founded specifically to make the case for the Covenant and to encourage universal subscription to its accompanying oath.

The first major engagement of the first English civil war between Charles I and his parliament, at Edgehill in October 1642, was inconclusive. Military stalemate ensued, which only a sustained effort involving the extensive recruitment, supply and financing of armies could break. Consequently, both sides were forced to look for support outside the traditional political classes. They each sought aid beyond England: Charles attempted to organize supplies of troops from Ireland, while parliament negotiated an alliance with the Scottish Convention of Estates. The latter agreement was sealed by the Solemn League and Covenant, which was taken by the Estates on 17 August 1643. It arrived in London on 26 August, was taken by the house of commons and the Westminster Assembly of Divines on 25 September, and by the peers three weeks later. In February 1644, a parliamentary ordinance introduced universal subscription to the oath by all men over eighteen.¹

The universal nature of the Covenant oath, and its religious and political significance, is reflected in multiple references throughout academic studies of the period. Naomi Tadmor has argued that while the religious and political aspects of the Covenant have been widely studied, little attention has been given to its intellectual and philosophical

* The author is particularly grateful to Prof. Edward Vallance and the late Dr. Ian Roy for their observations on, and suggestions for, an earlier version of this article, and to Prof. John Walter and Dr. Elliot Vernon for valuable references and discussions. She also wishes to thank the journal's anonymous reviewers for their comments.

¹ E.67.(33.), *The Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and the Defence of Religion* (1643). All material from the Thomason Tracts, indicated by an E. number, is located in the British Library. Wing and *Short Title Catalogue* (S.T.C.) numbers are cited from the *English Short Title Catalogue* <<http://estc.bl.uk>> [accessed 20 Feb. 2018]. Most of these works are available on *Early English Books Online* <<https://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>> [accessed 20 Feb. 2018].

substance. Gary Rivett has summarized the difficulties the Covenant encountered in its passage through parliament and the arguments employed by the royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* to generate opposition to the measure. Edward Vallance's work enables comparisons and contrasts to be made between the Solemn League and Covenant and similar oaths of the period: the 1641 Protestation, the 1643 Vow and Covenant and the Engagement of 1649. In particular, he has examined the use of casuistry to appeal to the intellectual elite on aspects of taking the Covenant oath. However, London based propaganda surrounding the Solemn League and Covenant has received relatively little attention, especially regarding the role of the popular newsbook, and mouthpiece of the parliamentary war party leadership, *Mercurius Britannicus*.²

This article aims to establish why the instigators of the Scottish alliance believed a press campaign was necessary to persuade the nation that the Covenant was essential for the kingdoms' welfare. It examines the general nature and accessibility of the relevant printed material, and considers the possible existence of a public sphere that made such a promotional exercise necessary. It outlines the difficulties raised by the Covenant for its champions, and royalist exploitation of those problems. The article then looks at *Britannicus*'s historically significant contribution to the Covenant canon of works. It will be argued that this distinctive publication was established specifically to endorse and advertise the Covenant by addressing a socially and intellectually inclusive audience. The article demonstrates the value of the newsbook as a source for historians because of its particular provenance, its covert direction and protection by leading political figures, and its notably regular appearance. *Britannicus* thereby reflects the fluctuations in radical priorities, and acts as an indicator of what public opinion would find acceptable in terms of a policy that was potentially a public relations disaster.³

In order to promote the Scottish alliance, and *ipso facto*, subscription to its oath, *Britannicus* initially presented the Covenant in a highly positive light. It did so in the teeth of fierce opposition from the royalist press, notably from *Aulicus*, its outstanding rival. From the autumn of 1643 to mid 1644 the parliamentary newsbook held out the prospect of speedy victory through Scottish military intervention to recommend the alliance to its readers. However, this stratagem became increasingly impractical as the war dragged on. Despite the great Leaguer victory at Marston Moor in July 1644, the journal thereafter carried fewer references to the Covenant. Although the engagement process was still in progress, it would appear that its audience was far from universally

² N. Tadmor, 'People of the Covenant and the English Bible', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 6th ser., xxii (2012), 95–110, at p. 99; G. Rivett, 'Make use both of things present and past: Thomas May's histories of parliament, printed public discourse and the politics of the recent past, 1640–50' (unpublished University of Sheffield Ph.D. thesis, 2010), pp. 92–127, *passim*; see also G. Rivett, 'English newsbooks, storytelling and political criticism: *Mercurius Aulicus* and the Solemn League and Covenant, Sept. to Oct. 1643', *Media History*, xix (2013), 3–16; E. Vallance, 'State oaths and political casuistry in England, 1640–1702' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2000); E. Vallance, "'An holy and sacramentall paction': federal theology and the Solemn League and Covenant in England', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, cxvi (2001), 50–75; E. Vallance, 'Protestation, Vow, Covenant and Engagement: swearing allegiance in the English civil war', *Hist. Research*, lxxv (2002), 408–24; E. Vallance, 'Oaths, Covenants, associations and the origins of the Agreements of the People: the road to and from Putney', in *The Agreements of the People, the Levellers, the Army and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution*, ed. P. Baker and E. Vernon (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 28–49. See also C. van Dixhoorn, 'Scottish influence on the Westminster Assembly: a study of the synod's summoning ordinance and the Solemn League and Covenant', *Records of the Scottish Church History Soc.*, xxxvii (2007), 55–88; K. MacKenzie, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Solemn League and Covenant of the Three Kingdoms', in *Oliver Cromwell: New Perspectives*, ed. P. Little (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 140–67.

³ J. Macadam, '*Mercurius Britannicus*: journalism and politics in the English civil war' (2 vols., unpublished University of Sussex D.Phil. thesis, 2006).

enthusiastic about taking the oath. On the other hand, the political requirements of its patrons obliged *Britannicus* to invest in other ways of manipulating public opinion in favour of the Covenant's principal tenets, hence its stress on those aspects of the oath that would resonate with its audience: fear of Catholics, the Irish, overmighty subjects and 'malignants' among the royalist hierarchy, both secular and religious; in short, those who could be said to have caused the civil war.

The parliamentary radical leadership undertook the Solemn League and Covenant because of the dire military situation they faced over the spring and summer of 1643. The main army under Lord General Essex, whose instincts lay in defence rather than attack, had been immobilized through sickness and shortages of men and materiel. Sir William Waller's army of the west was destroyed at Roundway Down in early July. Within a fortnight, Bristol, the second city of the kingdom and a major commercial port, had surrendered to the royalists. Besieged Gloucester was reduced to three barrels of gunpowder before it was eventually relieved by Essex in September. In June, parliament's position in the north had been undermined by the defeat of the Fairfaxes at Adwalton Moor, while Prince Rupert and his forces were free to roam north of the Chilterns, with the potential to advance towards London. An alliance with the Scots that would deliver much-needed aid was a logical solution in military terms as Scots forces enjoyed a fine reputation thanks to their contribution throughout the Thirty Years War; furthermore, Scots professional officers had been serving in the royalist and parliamentary armies from the outbreak of the civil war.

The implications of the alliance were to have a great impact in England: the entry into the country of a Scots army that required considerable financial support; an Anglo-Scottish executive, the committee of both kingdoms, that was needed to direct the war and organize peace negotiations; the wholesale reorganization of the Church of England; potentially major limitations placed on the powers of the monarchy; and an apparently open-ended commitment to mutual assistance and closer union with the Scots. These were likely to prove anathema to both royalists and to those who had not already fully committed to parliament.

Winning over public support for the Covenant alliance would require an unprecedented effort to persuade or cajole the population to engage with this highly contentious measure. The associated public oath required detailed arrangements for universal subscription: army commanders were made responsible for the compliance of their officers and men; the commissioners of the great seal were to administer the oath to the officials of the central law courts; the earl of Manchester was to implement the procedure throughout the university of Cambridge; M.P.s were to liaise with their county committees, which would then oversee subscription by their local ministers within six days of receiving the oath. The clergy, aided by church wardens and constables, were to administer the Covenant to their parishioners and the names of 'engagers' were to be recorded in specifically designated books. The names of all 'refusers' were to be recorded and returned to Westminster. The taking of the oath was a very public affair and it was a brave man who chose the latter course.⁴ Those who did not avail themselves of the month's amnesty afforded by parliament in February 1644

⁴ E.g., at Walkern in Hertfordshire, Revd. Nathaniel Ward presented the Covenant to his parishioners on 10 March 1644. 82 names are recorded, including those of William Burr and John Moorcraft, who refused the oath (Hertford, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, D/P114/29/10).

ran the risk of cashiering, loss of livings, and exclusion from the legal process and from office, for example within the City of London and its liberties. The following year, parliament empowered the Goldsmiths' Hall committee to impose the oath on all prospective compounders; those who refused faced sequestration of their estates, a measure that enabled the process of engagement to generate income for the Houses. Prisoners of war who refused the Covenant risked death.⁵

This immense undertaking prompted a major mobilization of the parliamentary press and a royalist counter offensive, both of which exploited several recognizable genres: *polemic*, which Jason Peacey has defined as material produced to advocate a political message to a public audience, and *propaganda*, which he has described as a collection of polemical works produced with the backing of political figures whose interests were served by such publications. As Vallance has shown, the imposition of state oaths afforded ample opportunity for casuistry. The Solemn League and Covenant was no exception, as it raised fundamental questions about rebellion, treason and perjury.⁶

As a means of political and religious persuasion aimed at a mass audience, the Covenant itself may be regarded as a propaganda instrument. Its promotion in the press generated a vigorous, wide-ranging crusade against a background of a burgeoning print culture that had exploited the collapse of royalist censorship after 1640, and was to benefit from the relative failure of parliament thereafter to control the press. The resulting canon contained a range of pamphlets, approximately one third of which were officially sponsored by parliament: such works carried the names of Henry Elsynge, the Commons clerk, or of Edward Husband, their printer, or of John Brown, 'Cler. Parliamentorum'.⁷ Likewise, the official printer in Edinburgh, Evan Tyler, was responsible for various Covenant-related publications, some of which indicate co-ordination with the Westminster authorities: *A Solemne League and Covenant for Reformation*, for example, ordered by Elsynge and printed by Husband in London, went through numerous editions between September and December 1643; an edition of the tract was published simultaneously in Edinburgh by Tyler.⁸

There were also tracts and printed sermons which the Covenant sponsors considered to be worthy of wider distribution beyond the pulpit from which they were delivered, a reflection of the crucial role of parish ministers in the administration of the oath. These frequently carried the imprimatur of dedicated and experienced ministers from the Sion House headquarters of the high Presbyterian faction in the City of London, the centre

⁵ E.33.(8.), *An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons . . . with instructions for the taking of the League and Covenant* (1643), pp. 4–7; E.31.(3.), *The Declaration of the Kingdomes of England and Scotland* (1644), pp. 8–10, 13; *Lords Journals*, vi. 348. The connection between the Covenant and fund raising was probably inspired by the link between the Protestation and the collection for distressed Protestants in Ireland (*The Protestation Returns, 1641 and Other Contemporary Listings*, ed. J. Gibson and A. Dell (Birmingham, 1995), pp. 8–10).

⁶ J. Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 2, 23, 237; Vallance, 'Protestation', p. 410; E. Vallance, 'The kingdom's case: the use of casuistry as a political language', *Albion*, xxxiv (2002), 557–83, at p. 557.

⁷ For a comprehensive list of Covenant publications, see the *English Short Title Catalogue*. Examples include *A Solemne League and Covenant for Reformation* (multiple editions from Sept. to Dec. 1643) (Wing, no. S 4444); E.70.(22.), *The Covenant . . . also two speeches . . . by Mr. Philip Nye. The other by Mr. Alexander Hendersam [sic]* (1643); E.1200.(1.), *England and Scotlands Covenant with their God* (1644); *An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons . . . with instructions for the taking of the League and Covenant* (1644) (Wing, no. E 2111); *It is hereby ordered . . . that Master Marshall be desired to preach . . .* (1643) (Wing, no. E 2602); E.31.(3.), *The Declaration of the Kingdomes of England and Scotland* (1644).

⁸ E.1210.(2.), *A Solemne League and Covenant for Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1643). See also *The Declaration of the Kingdome of Scotland, concerning the present Expedition into England* (Edinburgh, 1643) (Wing, no. S 1219A); *A Solemn League and Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1643), printed by Robert Bryson and signed by Henry Elsynge (Wing, no. S 4447A); *Foedus sacro-sanctum* (Edinburgh, 1643) (Wing, no. F 1394).

from which their finest preachers were dispatched to parishes that were seen to be dragging their heels over engagement. This group included Edmund Calamy, James Cranford, Simeon Ashe, sometime chaplain to the earl of Manchester and author of an occasional newsbook in 1644, and Joseph Caryl.⁹ They worked closely with like-minded Scots, notably Robert Baillie, who had played a major part in the original programme in support of the 1637 National Covenant, and the prominent Scottish writer David Buchanan.¹⁰ There were also clergy from outside the capital like Richard Ward of Stansted, Essex, and Thomas Mocket of Holt, Denbighshire and later Gilston, Hertfordshire, who made valuable contributions to English Covenant literature, thereby reflecting the prominence of men of the cloth in public debate over secular, moral or spiritual issues.¹¹

It is difficult to be definitive about the provenance of much of the remaining literature that did not carry an official sanction or imprimatur on the title page. There may well have been offerings by interested individuals, some of whom preferred to remain anonymous, who enjoyed access to printing houses. Such items would fall into the category of polemics rather than official propaganda. There were, however, ‘borderline’ publications that almost certainly received strong, covert, political backing, such as speeches by eminent Covenant supporters like Sir Henry Vane.¹² Moreover, as Peacey has noted, elements of the newly emerging serial press were operating with the unofficial support and protection of highly placed political figures. Foremost among these was *Mercurius Britannicus*.¹³

The entire Covenant corpus was original in terms of both scale and intellectual scope. Its sheer volume, whether openly sponsored by parliament and the Presbyterian ministry or covertly by the alliance’s English advocates, contributed by individual casuists to the intellectual debate, or officially-endorsed royalist counter-propaganda, including *Aulicus*, was unprecedented in the early stages of the conflict. The inclusive nature of its prospective audience required particular tools to achieve maximum accessibility, with the nascent serial press emerging as a promising example. Leading civil war newsbooks had a potential print run of between 500 and 1,000 copies for each edition. Following earlier trends established in the sixteen-twenties, newsbooks could be passed on from the initial purchaser to relatives and friends in London and then sent to the provinces, where the process was repeated. Thus it was possible to reach a nation-wide audience many

⁹ E.71.(13.), [Ezekiah Woodward], *The Solemne League and Covenant* (1643); E.327.(6.), Edmund Calamy, *The great danger of covenant-refusing and covenant-breaking* (1646); E.71.(14.), [George Smith], *The Three Kindgomes Healing-Plaister* (1643); E.4.(21.), *The Covenanters Catechisme* (1644); E.78.(4.), Thomas Case, *The quarrell of the covenant* (1643).

¹⁰ M. Mahoney, ‘Presbyterianism in the City of London, 1645–7’, *Historical Jour.*, xxii (1979), 93–114, at pp. 93, 94, 95, 104–6.

¹¹ E.70.(20.), Richard Ward, *The Analysis, Explication, and Application of the Sacred and Solemne League and Covenant* (1643); E.80.(2.), Thomas Mocket, *A View of the Solemn League and Covenant* (1644); *The covenanters looking-glasse* (1644) (Wing, no. M 2305A); E.1208.(1.), John Saltmarsh, *A Solemn Discourse upon the Grand Covenant* (1643).

¹² E.74.(4.), *Two speeches delivered before the subscribing of the Covenant Two speeches spoken at Common Hall Octob. 27. 1643. By Sir Henry Vane. By Master Marshall* (1643); *A letter from Mr. Marshall and Mr. Nye . . . concerning the successe of the affaires . . . partly concerning the covenant* (1643) (Wing, no. M 759); [Philip Nye] *An exhortation to the taking of the Solemne League and Covenant* (1644) (Wing, no. N 1494); E.318.(7.), Philip Nye, *The excellency and lawfulness of the Solemne league and covenant* (1646).

¹³ Peacey, *Politicians*, p. 237; B. Worden, “‘Wit in a roundhead’: the dilemma of Marchamont Nedham”, in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. S. Amussen and M. Kishlansky (Manchester, 1995), pp. 301–37, at p. 306.

times larger than the print run would suggest. It is conceivable that a popular journal like *Mercurius Britannicus* could reach a combined reading and listening audience approaching 10,000 every week, a factor its political patrons sought to exploit fully: thus in February 1644, the newsbook changed its publication day from Thursdays to Mondays in order to exploit the Tuesday post from London to the provinces.¹⁴ By the time the ordinance for universal subscription to the Covenant had been introduced on 5 February 1644, *Britannicus* was tailor-made for promoting the Scottish Covenant alliance to a truly national public.

The extent of the Covenant canon, and the opposition literature that it generated, provides an opportunity to apply the Habermasian concept of the 'public sphere' to the early sixteen-forties in England. The potential for reasoned, open and public discussion about matters of state among the well-informed has generated considerable debate across a range of academic disciplines. Some historians of early modern England, persuaded by the explosion of cheap print from the beginning of the civil war crisis, have dated the emergence of a public sphere to a century earlier than Habermas's eighteenth-century model. However, Peacey has maintained that politicians' attitudes towards 'the public', and specifically the extent to which officially sponsored publications were intended to involve their readership in open debate, as opposed to demanding compliance and commitment, need investigation before a positive recognition of a public sphere can take place.¹⁵

The passing of the Covenant legislation undoubtedly prompted its parliamentary backers to mobilize the presses to achieve compliance. The overriding aim of their propaganda was to educate and, where necessary, to force the public to engage with the oath, not to encourage open discussion about its efficacy or its aims. Nevertheless, many of those additional contributions that were not officially sanctioned by the Westminster parliament, such as the body of literature that had been directed at English readers by the Scots covenanters during and after the Bishops' Wars, and the royalist material published at Oxford, point to the existence of 'public spheres of sorts', as envisaged by Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus, where public opinion existed that required to be addressed. Joseph Black has identified a public sphere arising out of print culture of which the Scots were well aware; they recognized the potential benefits to their cause of active support from strategically placed groups and powerful individuals within English society. However, according to Sarah Waurechen, the Scots inadvertently created a number of publics that were to prove difficult to control.¹⁶

¹⁴ A. Cotton, 'London newsbooks in the civil war: their political attitudes and sources of information' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1971), pp. 10, 14; M. Frearson, 'Readership and distribution of London corantos, 1620–41', in *Serials and their Readers*, ed. R. Myers and M. Harris (Winchester, 1993), pp. 1–25; *Mercurius Britannicus*, xxi, 5 Feb. 1644.

¹⁵ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); J. Raymond, 'The newspaper, public opinion, and the public sphere in the 17th century', *Prose Studies*, xxi (1998), 109–36; J. Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 26; D. Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture, Printing, Petitions and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); P. Lake and S. Pincus, 'Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England', *Jour. British Stud.*, xlv (2006), 270–92, at pp. 270, 273–4, 279–80; D. Como, 'Secret printing, the crisis of 1640, and the origins of civil-war radicalism', *Past & Present*, cxvii (2007), 37–82, at p. 58; Peacey, *Politicians*, pp. 317, 323, 331; J. Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 1, 12.

¹⁶ Lake and Pincus, pp. 274, 277; J. Black, "'Pikes and protestations': Scottish texts in England, 1639–40", *Publishing History*, xlii (1997), 5–19, at p. 7; S. Waurechen, 'Covenant propaganda and conceptualizations of the public during the Bishops' Wars, 1638–40', *Historical Jour.*, lii (2009), 63–86, at pp. 63–5, 67, 85; L. Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution: Covenanted Scotland, 1637–51* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 8, 31, 324.

In England, the Covenant was initiated by a radical faction with powerful Scottish connections. They were experienced in the manipulation of print to promote their political viewpoint: Sir Henry Vane and Oliver St. John had been involved in drafting the religious clauses of the Grand Remonstrance in 1641, and Lord Saye and Sele, leader of the war party in the house of lords, was familiar with the publishing industry from his service on a committee of peers to investigate the sale of unlicensed books. His son, Nathaniel Fiennes, took to print to defend his decision to surrender Bristol in July 1643. Saye's nephew, Henry Parker, was an outstanding pamphleteer; his most famous tract, *The Observer*, was one of a number of distinctive pamphlets published by a radical clandestine press in 1642.¹⁷ As the radical leaders' dedicated journal, *Britanicus* endeavoured to be both popular and accessible, thereby emphasizing its patrons' belief in mass communication to promote their cause, and to counter the alarming success of *Aulicus*. The newsbook's patrons were apparently aware that major issues of the day, of which the Scottish alliance was a prime example, were being debated in public fora such as alehouses and round military campfires, where officers read newsbooks to their men. There was a similar recognition on the royalist side: the Oxford publication *Mercurius Rusticus* described 'mills, alehouses, smith shops and barbers' as 'our country-exchanges, wherein we talk of as many things with little good success as they do at Westminster'.¹⁸ This being the case, the political advocates and adversaries of the Covenant were determined to direct public opinion in favour of their respective positions; in the process, they provided their adherents, possibly unwittingly, with arguments that could be brought to bear in discussion in the nascent public sphere.

These public locations fostered open debate, whereas in that other major arena, the body of the church, the congregation were more accustomed to receiving clerical instruction on matters of religious and secular interest, not encouragement to argue about them. Nevertheless, while the moral contentions that distinguished the casuistry of sermon and religious tract tended to be more targeted at individuals than was the case with the editorial comment of the newsbook, the lines of reasoning presented in the former were likely to be discussed in social conversations beyond the privacy of the study. As Barbara Donagan has noted, the clergy tailored the methods they had used to ease troubled consciences in the private sphere to address that of the public.¹⁹ The first indications of an emerging public sphere were becoming apparent in England by late 1643, thanks in no small part to the June Vow and Covenant and subsequently by the Solemn League and Covenant itself.

From the outset, the Covenant alliance was highly controversial although its breakdown was by no means inevitable. In some quarters there was considerable enthusiasm for the partnership with the Scots: this was particularly so in London, for example in the

¹⁷ C. Russell, 'The Scottish party in English parliaments, 1640–2, or the myth of the English revolution', *Hist. Research*, lxvi (1993), 35–52, at pp. 47, 49; J. Peacey, 'The politics of British union in 1642 and the purpose of civil war pamphlets', *Hist. Research*, lxxx (2007), 491–517, at pp. 505, 512; P. Donald, 'New light on the Anglo-Scottish contacts of 1640', *Hist. Research*, lxii (1989), 221–9, at pp. 223, 229 and *passim*; E.64.(12.), Nathaniel Fiennes, *A Relation made in the House of Commons by Col. Nathaniel Fiennes Concerning the Surrender of the City and Castle of Bristol*; E.65.(26.), *Colonell Fiennes Letter to my Lord Generall concerning Bristol*; M. Mendle, *Henry Parker and the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 18–21; J. Peacey, "'Fiery spirits" and political propaganda: uncovering a radical press campaign', *Publishing History*, lv (2004), 5–36, at pp. 6, 11, 15–16, 23 and *passim*.

¹⁸ *Mercurius Rusticus*, 26 Oct. 1643, p. 1.

¹⁹ B. Donagan, 'Casuistry and allegiance in the English civil war', in *Writing and Political Engagement in 17th-Century England*, ed. D. Hirst and R. Strier (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 89–111, at p. 90.

radically minded congregations of St. Olave Jewry and St. Clement Eastcheap, where parishioners took the oath as early as October 1643. There was interest among those who had had military experience of Scottish troops on the continent in the sixteen-thirties. Sir William Waller had a high regard for the Scots as soldiers: 'braver men I am confident, no man could command'.²⁰ The Covenant provision for religious reform 'according to the word of God' was sufficiently ambiguous to win the support of the Independent Philip Nye, assistant minister to the English commissioners in Edinburgh. However, the task of persuading the doubters and objectors, the essential audience for the promoting propagandists, was fraught with difficulties.²¹

A major hurdle to be overcome was the long standing and intense dislike of the Scots that permeated English society.²² Admittedly, there had been sympathy for the Scots covenanters during the Bishops' Wars among Charles I's political opponents, cultivated by a highly professional press campaign south of the border that featured works by Alexander Henderson and Archibald Johnston of Wariston.²³ Moreover, English puritans had been encouraged by the fact that they did not stand alone against the Arminianism that Charles and Archbishop Laud had introduced into the Church of England in the sixteen-thirties. Nevertheless, by 1644, the English were preoccupied with their own difficulties closer to home: victory was not going to be speedy, and the generally disappointing performance of the Scottish covenanter forces once they had crossed the Tweed did little to redeem them in the eyes of their English allies.²⁴ The latter tended to overlook the fact that the Scots covenanters were fighting a war on two fronts after Montrose took the field for the king in April 1644. Furthermore, the presence of the Scots army in the north of England, and the reluctance of their commanders to advance south to help the parliamentary war effort was unlikely to win

²⁰ Vallance, 'Protestation', p. 419; Sir William Waller, *Vindication*, cited in J. Adair, *Roundhead General: the Campaigns of Sir William Waller* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 116–17; Russell, 'Scottish party', p. 46–7.

²¹ Philip Nye, *Two speeches delivered before the subscribing of the Covenant, the 25 of September at St Margaret's in Westminster. The one by Mr Philip Nye. The other by Mr Alexander Henderson. Published by special order of the House of Commons* (Edinburgh, 1643) (Wing, no. N 1501); E.318.(7.). *An exhortation made by Mr Phillip Nye to the Honorable House of Commons and reverend assembly* (repr. 1646).

²² Waurechen, pp. 84–5; M. Stoye, *Soldiers and Strangers: an Ethnic History of the English Civil War* (New York, 2005), pp. 73–90, *passim*; H. Morgan, 'British politics before the British state', in *The British Problem c.1543–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago*, ed. B. Bradshaw and J. Morrill (1996), pp. 66–88, at p. 88; T. Harris, *Rebellion: Britain's First Stuart Kings, 1567–1642* (Oxford, 2014), p. 90; C. Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–42* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 179–80. See also M. Stoye, 'English nationalism, Celtic particularism and the English civil war', *Hist. Journal*, xliii (2000), 1113–28, at p. 1126; C. Firth, 'Ballads illustrating the relations of England and Scotland during the 17th century', *Scottish Hist. Rev.*, vi (1909), 113–28; P. Croft, 'Libel, popular literacy and public opinion in early modern England', *Hist. Research*, lxviii (1995), 266–85, at pp. 276, 277.

²³ Church of Scotland, *The remonstrance of the nobility, barones, burgesses, ministers and commons within the kingdome of Scotland* (Amsterdam, 1639), S.T.C., no. 21907; E.111.(10.), *The lawfulness of our expedition into England manifested* (1640); *The intentions of the armie of the kingdome of Scotland, declared to their brethren of England* (1640) (S.T.C., no. 21921); Archibald Johnston of Wariston, *A Short Relation of the State of the Kirk of Scotland since the reformation of religion, to the present time* (Edinburgh, 1638) (S.T.C., no. 22039). See also [Scotland, Parliament], *Information from the Scottish nation, to all the true English concerning the present expedition* (Edinburgh, 1640) (S.T.C., no. 21917); E.239.(3.), *Some speciall arguments which warranted the Scottish subjects lawfully to take up armes in defence of their religion and liberty when they were in danger* (1642); *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1637–62), i. 188–9; *By the King, a proclamation against libellous and seditious pamphlets, and discourses sent from Scotland* (1640) (S.T.C., no. 9154); Black, p. 9; Waurechen, p. 80; Como, pp. 41, 47, 49, 55, 56, 57–9; Russell, 'Scottish party', pp. 47–51; Donald, *passim*; *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1636–9*, p. 353.

²⁴ *The Journal of Thomas Juxon, 1644–7*, ed. K. Lindley and D. Scott (Camden Soc., 5th ser., xiii, 1999), pp. 27, 61–2, 75, 78, 82–4; 'The Letters of Sir Cheney Culpeper, 1641–57', ed. M. Braddick and M. Greengrass, *Camden Miscellany XXXIII* (Camden Soc., 5th ser., vii, 1996), p. 144; Baillie, ii. 166, 167, 302–3, 317–18, 319.

over waverers to the alliance; this was particularly so after the radicals, having originally invited in the Scots, began to undermine their erstwhile allies from 1645.²⁵ While it might be plausible for polemicists initially to present the military league with the Scots as an advantage, it would clearly be detrimental to public morale to justify the Covenant in terms of military necessity for that would draw attention to the failings of the parliamentary armies. Attempts to justify the call for Scottish help would indicate that parliament was incapable of fulfilling its fundamental duty of defending the nation, and the uncommitted would be likely to see the alliance with the Scots for what it was, a last resort to stave off disaster. Ultimately, both morally and legally, parliament's summons to a foreign country to invade English territory to assist them against their sovereign was treasonable.

Beyond these general considerations, the Covenant suffered from intrinsic difficulties that created problems for its proponents. Despite the best efforts of the Edinburgh negotiators and its drafters, the document's wording barely concealed divisions over church reform, outlined in article one, and article two's declaration to abolish episcopacy. Although the majority of the Westminster divines was prepared to do away with archbishops and bishops, they refused to commit engagers to uphold the Church of Scotland unless the latter were persuaded that the Kirk was compatible with Holy Writ. Article three emphasized the rights of parliament but was much more circumspect about the authority of the king. As the republican M.P. Thomas Chaloner was to warn the Scots in 1646, 'The Covenant tells you to maintain in the first place the rights of Parliament and the liberties of the Kingdom, and in the second place the King's person and authority and that only in defence of the former, and not otherwise'.²⁶

Article four's commitment to exact 'condign punishment' on anyone who undertook actions inimical to the Covenant in particular and to the parliamentary cause in general, was unlikely to win the hearts and minds of those who had chosen to remain neutral, either out of indecision or a sense of self-preservation. The threat was likely to encourage insincere subscription or dissuade potential subscribers from aligning themselves with those who might penalize relatives, friends or neighbours of long standing. This was, after all, in Waller's famous phrase, the 'war without an enemy'.²⁷ The extent of the 'firm peace and union' of article five and the 'blessed union and conjunction' of article six was not clarified. Conceivably the English negotiators, while anxious to secure Scottish military assistance, were wary of reviving the ill feeling that had greeted James VI and I's doomed policy of joining together the two countries in a union of 'Great Britain'.²⁸ The practical embodiment of these articles, the joint executive of the committee of both kingdoms, proved to be a relatively efficient instrument for conducting the war but there could be no disguising the fact that it could be interpreted as a rival to, or a usurpation of, the king's privy council.

These provisions could, and did, arouse deep-seated objections to the oath among potential subscribers. Embarrassingly, there was suspicion, hostility and foot dragging among leading war party supporters: Colonel Oliver Cromwell M.P. belatedly took the oath when presented with the choice of promotion to lieutenant general or being

²⁵ D. Scott, 'The "Northern Gentlemen", the parliamentary Independents, and Anglo-Scottish relations in the Long Parliament', *Historical Jour.*, xlii (1999), 347–75.

²⁶ E.361.(7.), Thomas Chaloner, *An answer to the Scotch Papers* (1646), p. 14.

²⁷ Sir William Waller to Sir Ralph Hopton, 16 June 1643, cited in Adair, p. 79.

²⁸ For a study of the English radicals' propaganda skills, their attitude to the Scots and political union, see Peacey, 'The politics of British union in 1642'; Harris, *Rebellion*, pp. 73, 75–6, 89.

cashiered; Lord Saye swallowed his doubts and engaged, but his second son Nathaniel made public his objections, and his eldest son James refused the oath altogether.²⁹ The Covenant alliance was hindered from its inception by divisions between political Presbyterians and Independents over such fundamental questions as peace negotiations, and between Scottish and English commanders over operations in the field. Nevertheless, for many Englishmen, their dislike of the Scots was outweighed, at least in the early years of the civil war, by their fear of Charles I's accommodation with the Irish.³⁰

Beyond these basic problems, polemicists seeking to promote the Solemn League and Covenant were confronted by the quality and quantity of royalist counter-propaganda. In spite of Charles I's personal aversion to the medium of print, his supporters readily accepted that the press was a potent weapon in the civil war arsenal.³¹ They were able to draw on the services of the Oxford university printers, Leonard Lichfield and Henry Hall, and a pool of university-trained authors that included such avid casuists as Peter Heylyn and Henry Ferne.³² Their tendency to emphasize duty and loyalty, rather than advancing convincing, positive policies, had the potential to render the royalist message less appealing than the occasionally more nuanced, reasoned approach that characterized some parliamentary literature. Therefore the royalists had potentially less appeal for the uncommitted, although they clearly had a stronger legal case than their opponents. These were features of the civil war propaganda battle in general, with the polemical clashes over the Covenant epitomizing the struggle. In the case of the Covenant, the royalists were eager to go on the attack, not least as the surest form of defence: royalist exposure of parliament's weaknesses over the Scottish alliance, and its accompanying oath, might divert public attention away from the Irish cessation, a potential public relations debacle for Charles.³³

Inevitably, the royalists bore down on the Covenant's two principal areas of controversy, the religious content of article one and the political and constitutional aspects of article three.³⁴ Consequently they related their concerns over the Covenant to

²⁹ V. Pearl, 'Oliver St. John and the "middle group" in the Long Parliament', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lxxxi (1966), 490–519, at pp. 496–8.

³⁰ Baillie, *Letters*, ii. 103.

³¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Peter Heylyn, *The rebels catechism* (1643) (Wing, no. H 1731A), p. 4; Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, p. 328; but see L. Bowen, 'Royalist print and the clergy in Britain, 1639–49 and 1642', *Historical Jour.*, lvi (2013), 297–319, at pp. 298–9.

³² E.87.(5.), [Henry Parker], *The contra-replicant* (1643), pp. 1, 3.

³³ E.71.(29.), *A proclamation, concerning a cessation of arms ... the fifteenth of September ...* (repr. by Edward Husband, 1643); E.50.(31.), *A remonstrance of the barbarous cruelties committed by the Irish rebels* (1644). A notable defection to the parliamentary cause over the Irish cessation was that of the earl of Northumberland (Baillie, *Letters*, ii. 115, 141).

³⁴ E.80.(4.), D. Featley, *The gentle lash* (1644), p. 31; E.25.(11.), J. Gauden, *Certaine scruples and doubts of conscience about taking the Solemn League and Covenant* (1645), pp. 2, 4, 6–7, 9, 10; E.102.(19.), Henry Hammond, *Of resisting the lawfull magistrate upon colour of religion* (Oxford, 1644), pp. 71–87, *passim*; E.73.(1.), *A briefe discourse declaring the impiety and unlawfulness of the new covenant with the Scots* (1643), pp. 8, 9, 15; E.36.(10.), *The iniquity of the late Solemn League or Covenant* (1644), pp. 2–5; Henry Ferne, *The unlawfulness of the new covenant* (Oxford, 1644) (Wing, no. F 806A); E.43.(5.), [John Barwick], *Certain disquisitions and considerations representing to the conscience the unlawfulness of ... A Solemn League and Covenant* (Oxford, 1644); E.75.(5.), Peter Heylyn, *Lord have mercie upon us* (Oxford, 1643), pp. 31–2; *The rebels catechism* (1643) (Wing, no. H 1731A), p. 26; E.40.(29.), *The anti-confederacie, or an extract of certaine quaeries, concerning the Solemn league and Covenant* (Oxford, 1644); *An Examination of such particulars in the Solemn League and Covenant as concerne the Law* (Wing, no. W 2667); *Certain Observations, Upon the New League or Covenant* (Bristol, 1643) (Wing, no. C 1714). See also E.65.(5.), *New Quaeries of Conscience Touching the late Oath* (Oxford, 1643), which was dated 12 Aug. 1643 and addressed the recent parliamentary Vow and Covenant, a 'rehearsal' for the subsequent Solemn League and Covenant.

the broad themes of royalist propaganda, notably the wickedness of treason and rebellion.³⁵ Many of their publications were highly competent scholarly treatises but universal engagement was a broad exercise: royalist counter-propaganda needed to look beyond the narrow, politically and intellectually aware readership that was likely to be attracted by the tracts that constituted the royalist canon. Moreover, the rolling process of engagement would suggest a serial format, a newsbook, as an appropriate weapon to launch a continuous offensive against the oath rather than leaving the timing of anti-Covenant literature to chance. In *Mercurius Aulicus*, the royalists already possessed a successful tool, although its name, the *Court Mercury*, reflected the ambivalence of some of Charles's supporters towards a wide social audience.³⁶

Aulicus duly attacked parliament's choice of ally and the Covenant itself with alacrity and penetrating perception, and capitalized extensively on the oath's inherent problems. The Covenant's ambiguity, which had enabled the English and Scots commissioners to overcome their differences, conversely provided the royalists with an irresistible target, open to 'a million of interpretations'.³⁷ *Aulicus* joined other royalist authors in putting the worse possible interpretation on parliament's motives. In addition to familiar charges of treason,³⁸ rebellion and the usurpation of the king's authority with parliament's adoption of a new great seal,³⁹ and the intention to depose the king, or worse,⁴⁰ *Aulicus* consistently sought, throughout October, November and December 1643, to terrorize potential subscribers with hints of perjury and tales of suicide by remorseful engagers who had been duped by enemy propaganda.⁴¹ On a personal level, two of the Covenant's architects, Alexander Henderson and Philip Nye were accused of gross fraud.⁴²

Aulicus's staff evidently considered English prejudice against the Scots a highly promising furrow to plough, given the newsbook's multiple references to the irritation factor of the Scots,⁴³ their presence on English soil,⁴⁴ and, above all, their legendary rapacity and greed.⁴⁵ Moreover, the 'public faith of both the nations' was to be

³⁵ *A Declaration of the Lords and Commons of Parliament assembled at Oxford . . . 12 March 1644*, in J. Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State* (8 vols., 1721–2), v. 565; Henry Ferne, *The Resolving of Conscience upon the Question* (Cambridge, 1642) (Wing, no. F 801); E.97.(7.), Henry Ferne, *Conscience satisfied upon this Question* (Oxford, 1643); E.74.(9.), Henry Ferne, *A reply unto the several treatises pleading for the armes now taken up by subjects in the pretended defence of religion and liberty* (1643); Dudley Digges, *The Unlawfulness of Subjects taking up Armes. . .* (Oxford, 1643) (Wing, no. F 24); E.36.(13.), James Ussher, *The soveraignes power and the subjects duty* (Oxford, 1644); E.30.(22.), John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta regum majestas* (Oxford, 1644).

³⁶ P. Thomas, *Sir John Berkenhead 1617–79: a Royalist Career in Politics and Polemics* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 29, 43, 52, 57, 61; J. McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 19, 24, 33.

³⁷ *A Briefe Discourse*, p. 11.

³⁸ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 12 Oct. 1643, p. 576; 19 Oct. 1643, p. 591; 26 Oct. 1643, p. 609; 6 Nov. 1643, pp. 634–5; 30 Nov. 1643, pp. 687–8; 3 Dec. 1643, p. 704.

³⁹ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 13 Oct. 1643, p. 577; 16 Oct. 1643, p. 585; 26 Oct. 1643, p. 609; 22 Dec. 1643, p. 728; 23 Dec. 1643, p. 738; 31 March 1644, p. 916.

⁴⁰ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 29 Sept. 1643, p. 547; 26 Oct. 1643, p. 609; 9 Nov. 1643, p. 642; 22 Dec. 1643, p. 728; 12 Feb. 1644, p. 821 (mispag.); 20 Feb. 1644, p. 842.

⁴¹ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 7 Sept. 1643, p. 496; 27 Oct. 1643, pp. 610–12; 25 Dec. 1643, pp. 736–7; 11 Feb. 1644, p. 821 (mispag.); 25 Feb. 1644, p. 852; 8 Apr. 1644, p. 928.

⁴² *Mercurius Aulicus*, 27 Oct. 1643, p. 610.

⁴³ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 1 Nov. 1643, p. 623; 12 Feb. 1644, p. 825; 19 March 1644, p. 893.

⁴⁴ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 22 Feb. 1644, p. 844; 9 March 1644, p. 872; 14 March 1644, p. 882; 23 May 1644, p. 994.

⁴⁵ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 3 Sept. 1643, p. 488; 10 Sept. 1643, p. 512; 18 Sept. 1643, p. 522; 2 Oct. 1643, p. 554; 12 Oct. 1643, p. 576; 16 Oct. 1643, pp. 584–5; 19 Oct. 1643, p. 592; 1 Nov. 1643, p. 623; 30 Nov. 1643, pp. 687–8; 23 Dec. 1643, p. 738; 7 Jan. 1644, p. 768; 24 Feb. 1644, p. 846; 16 March, 1644, p. 882; 18 March, 1644, p. 888; 8 May, 1644, p. 975.

'mortgaged' to pay for the Scots' incursion and the Church of England subjected to the model of the Scottish Kirk.⁴⁶ Worryingly for the parliamentarians, *Aulicus's* coverage of the Westminster debates on article one displayed such intimate knowledge of the discussions that it pointed to an enemy source inside the chamber. Such a breach of security threatened to supply royalist propagandists with invaluable information, in this case about a matter of great controversy within the Houses themselves. One royalist boasted that *Aulicus* succeeded in killing, 'more in a sheet, in a week, than we can kill in many moneths in the field'.⁴⁷

It was against this background of penetrating royalist propaganda, particularly in London, and growing public disillusionment with the conflict, that the war party and its supporters embarked on their mission to promote the Covenant.⁴⁸ Their efforts were particularly robust immediately after the taking of the oath by parliament and the Westminster Assembly, with a further series of publications appearing at the time of the universal subscription ordinance. There was another wave of activity early in 1646 when the issue of church governance came to the fore. The inclusive nature of the campaign's intended audience would require a spread of printed material directed at the widest range of intellectual ability and literacy, from the weighty Latin tome *Foedus sacro-sanctum* to the highly accessible Revd. Richard Ward's analysis which was designed 'to be read, observed, and kept by all who take the said Covenant'.⁴⁹

In addition to these general exhortations to take the oath, some casuists concentrated on particular issues arising from the Covenant debate. Royalist charges of perjury, for example, elicited *C.C. The Covenanter vindicated from perjury* in May 1644. *The plain-meaning Protestant*, published in the same month, sought to address the problem of equivocation among engagers. This work's provenance is questionable: it claimed to be printed in Oxford by Leonard Lichfield, but Falconer Madan, who described it as an attempt to justify a royalist taking the Covenant, believed it to be a London counterfeit. Was this pamphlet to be taken at face value, or was it an example of covenanter subterfuge? Greater transparency is evident in attempts to assuage fears about the nature of the kirk model that the Scots and the high Presbyterians in England hoped would replace episcopacy: for example, *Reformation of church government in Scotland cleared from some mistakes and prejudices*, sometimes attributed to Alexander Henderson, was published in Edinburgh and London early in 1644.⁵⁰

Authors who promoted the Covenant closely aligned their compositions with the larger body of more general parliamentary works. Therein lay the risk that in covering well-trodden territory these offerings might appear stale and therefore lack impact. Nevertheless, there was the advantage of consistency with the rest of parliamentary

⁴⁶ *Mercurius Aulicus*, 18 Sept. 1643, p. 522. See also 10 Sept. 1643, pp. 495–6; 3 Oct. 1643, p. 557; 10 March 1644, p. 876.

⁴⁷ *The Souldiers Language* (1644) (Wing, no. S 4426), unpag.

⁴⁸ I. Roy, 'This proud unthankfull city: a Cavalier view of London', in *London and the Civil War*, ed. S. Porter (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 149–70, *passim*, but see pp. 164–6, 168.

⁴⁹ *Foedus sacro-sanctum*; Ward.

⁵⁰ E.44.(20.), *C.C. The Covenanter vindicated from perjury* (1644); E.49.(16.), *The plain-meaning Protestant, or an honest Defence of the taking of the COVENANT . . .* (Oxford [London], 1644); F. Madan, *Oxford Books: a Bibliography of Printed Works Relating to the University and City of Oxford, or Printed or Published There*, ii: *Oxford literature, 1450–1640, and 1641–50* (Oxford, 1912), p. 1643; Vallance, 'Protestation', pp. 418–19; E.30.(5.), [Alexander Henderson], *Reformation of church government in Scotland cleared from some mistakes and prejudices* (1644). For the Edinburgh edition, see Wing, no. H 1437.

literature. The wording of the oath, recalling plots and conspiracies against true religion and threats to the safety and peace of the kingdom, placed it squarely in the mainstream of parliamentary polemics. Supporters of the Covenant were also able to draw on well-rehearsed arguments in support of defensive arms to counter royalist accusations of treason and rebellion. More explicitly, the content of article three, grounded as it was in the theory of the king-in-parliament, complemented the writings of Charles Herle, Philip Hunton, William Prynne and Henry Parker. Likewise, article two's declarations against popery and prelacy coincided with the publication of Prynne's *Romes master-peece* that alleged Archbishop Laud's conspiracy with the pope to convert England to Catholicism, and Robert Baillie's 'biography' of the English primate.⁵¹

Beyond the works that promoted the Covenant itself, some related publications addressed topics of mutual interest between the allies. The performance of the Scots armies spawned 'puffs' for the earl of Leven's forces and demands for material aid.⁵² The Sion House press advocated a Presbyterian church settlement as a means of restoring social discipline in the London parishes. Eventually, however, the consensus of the early months of the Anglo-Scottish alliance fractured over various issues, notably the Scots' contribution towards success in the field, the long term structure of the church, and the issue of peace negotiations with the king. These major differences gradually surfaced in the press. As early as January 1644, Philip Nye co-authored with four other leading Independent ministers a tract pleading for a church halfway between that of the sectarian 'Brownists' and the 'authoritative Presbyterian Government' of the Scottish kirk. The Leaguer victory at Marston Moor generated friction between the allies that made its way into the London press. The peace talks at Uxbridge in February 1645 were largely a Scots initiative, a likely explanation for the unrealistic proposition that Charles I himself should 'swear and sign the late Solemn League and Covenant'. More pragmatically, the English radicals assumed that the negotiations were doomed from the outset.⁵³

By mid 1645, the successes of the New Model Army at Naseby and Langport suggested that military victory was achievable without Scottish support, while Montrose's spectacular campaign against the covenanters in Scotland, recriminations over the behaviour of Scottish soldiers garrisoning Carlisle, and the withdrawal of the Scots force besieging Hereford raised further doubts about the value of the Scots as military partners. Moreover, following the collapse of the Uxbridge talks, both the Scots and the English radicals indulged independently in putting out covert peace feelers

⁵¹ E.243.(1.), [Edward Husband], *An exact collection of all remonstrances* (1643); E.239.(3.), Alexander Henderson, *Some special arguments for the Scottish subjects lawfull defence of their religion and liberty* (1642); E.108.(42.), *A declaration of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament* (1642); Stephen Marshall, *A plea for defensive armes* (1643) (Wing, no. M 768); E.102.(3.), Charles Herle, *An answer to Doctor Ferne's reply* (1643); E.245.(3.), *A fuller answer to a treatise written by Doctor Ferne* (1643); E.103.(15.), Philip Hunton *A treatise of monarchie* (1643); E.248.(4.), William Prynne, *The soveraigne power of parliaments and kingdoms* (1643); E.249.(32.), *Romes master-peece* (1643); E.72.(3.), Robert Baillie, *The Life of William now Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, examined* (1643).

⁵² Baillie, *Letters*, ii. 166, 267, 317–20; E.301.(8.), *A declaration of his excellency, earle of Leven* (1645); E.1179.(5.), David Buchanan, *Truth its manifest* (1645), pp. 41–4, 46–7, 48–50; E.307.(4.), *Divers papers presented to the Honourable Houses of Parliament by the Commissioners of the kingdom of Scotland* (1645).

⁵³ E.80.(7.), Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughs and William Bridge, *An apologeticall narration* (1644); J. Macadam, 'Soldiers, statesmen and scribblers: London newsbook reporting of the Marston Moor campaign', *Hist. Research*, lxxxii (2009), 93–113, at pp. 105–6; E.343.(1.), E. Bowles, *Manifest truths* (1646), in response to Buchanan's *Truth its Manifest* (see Mahoney, 'Presbyterianism', pp. 99–105, 110–13); Rushworth, v. 787–843; *Mercurius Aulicus*, 27 Feb. 1645, pp. 1390–1.

towards the royalists.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the Covenant alliance was not completely redundant. With confusion reigning over the form of the English church, social discipline under threat in many London parishes, and the thorny issue of religious toleration coming increasingly to the fore, the high Presbyterians believed it necessary to mount a further publicity campaign to which calls for Covenant engagement would contribute. The propaganda drive by the London high Presbyterian faction and their Scots allies in late 1645 and 1646 illustrates how they set out to manipulate public opinion through a combination of tracts and a vigorous petitioning movement aimed at securing a strictly Presbyterian ecclesiology, and a return to the principles of the Covenant, with Calamy and Ashe in the vanguard, backed by Cranford, Baillie and Thomas Edwards. The attempt to resurrect the Covenant had political ramifications, however. In January 1646, David Buchanan's *Truth its Manifest* fell foul of the political Independent majority in the Commons: this 'scandalous Pamphlet' was ordered to be publicly burnt; in April *Some papers of the Commissioners of Scotland*, the responsibility for which George Thomason ascribed to Buchanan, suffered a similar fate.⁵⁵

Aulicus's great success as a weapon of propaganda indicated that promotion of the Covenant would benefit from a similar operation on the parliamentary side. By late August 1643, when the Covenant arrived in London, newsbook readers already enjoyed a choice that included *Mercurius Civicus*, the *Parliament Scout*, the *Perfect Diurnall*, the *Weekly Account* and the *Kingdome's Weekly Intelligencer*. These newsbooks did not have the close bond with the parliamentary authorities that *Aulicus* enjoyed with the king's closest advisers. Their editors saw their role essentially as purveyors of factual information: the subtitles of both *Civicus* and the *Intelligencer* claimed 'to prevent misinformation'. The Covenant's sponsors needed a publication with a more directed approach; thus, on 29 August the first edition of *Mercurius Britannicus: Communicating the affaires of great Britaine: For the better Information of the People* appeared on the streets. A highly effective means of communication to inform debate in the public sphere was now firmly established.

Covenant subscription was going to be a continuous and prolonged process. Consequently, the serial press potentially possessed an advantage for the promotion campaign over the more sporadic pamphlet literature in that the journals could offer a regular 'rolling barrage' of information and polemics. Moreover, given the well-known public thirst for news, the journals' capacity for reaching a wide audience gave them an advantage over many of the more erudite tracts issued in support of the Covenant. However, newsbooks that chose to endorse the Covenant encountered difficulties over and above those confronting the authors of individual treatises. As commercial organizations, they depended on the loyal support of their readership. Editors were continually faced with prioritizing news stories; any editor who ignored the proclivities

⁵⁴ D. Scott, 'The Barwis affair: political allegiance and the Scots during the British civil wars', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, cxv (2000), 843–63, at pp. 849–53; *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Jean de Montreuil . . . 1645–8*, ed. J. Fotheringham (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1898–9); M. Mahoney, 'The Savile affair and the politics of the Long Parliament', *Parliamentary Hist.*, vii (1988), 212–27.

⁵⁵ E.327.(6.), Edmund Calamy, *The great danger of covenant-refusing and covenant-breaking* (1646); E.327.(5.), Simeon Ashe, *Religious covenanting directed and covenant-keeping persuaded* (1646); E.333.(12.), *Anti-toleration, or a modest defence of the letter of the London ministers to the reverend Assembly of Divines* [imprimatur James Cranford], (1646); E.317.(5.), Robert Baillie, *A dissuasive from the errors of the time* (1646); Thomas Edwards, *The first and second part of Gangraena* (1646) (Wing, no. E 227); Mahoney, 'Presbyterianism', pp. 100, 101–6, 111–13; *Commons Journals*, iv. 422; E.333.(1.), *Some papers of the Commissioners of Scotland . . . concerning the propositions of peace* (1646).

of his audience did so at his peril. It was unfortunate for the Covenant, therefore, that major steps in its progress coincided with events that were of greater interest to an English audience: in September 1643, the subscription of the Commons and the Westminster Assembly coincided with news of the first battle of Newbury, in which the London trained bands distinguished themselves; subscription by the Lords was overtaken by the victory at Winceby in October; even the confusing and disappointing news of the second battle of Newbury a year later overshadowed the Scots' eventual capture of Newcastle.

Many London newsbook editors had initially welcomed the Covenant enthusiastically. The usually restrained *Perfect Diurnall* declared: '[the] Dammeepapistical-Malignant-crew ... shall see an Army of 21,000 true hearted Bonny Scotchmen viz. 18,000 foot and 3,000 horse within this kingdom by 16 of next month, at the farthest'.⁵⁶ The prospect of swift military victory was the most conspicuous theme. More specifically, it was hoped that a rapid Scots relief of Newcastle, and thus of the north east's coal production, would ease pressure on the capital's fuel supplies, a major practical concern of Londoners as winter drew on.⁵⁷ Readers were regaled with reports of the ceremony in St. Margaret's Westminster at which the Commons and Westminster Assembly divines took the oath. *Mercurius Civicus*, which aimed specifically at a London audience, announced that subscription would be extended to the City and suburbs on Sunday 1 October, 'and afterwards (as soon as may be) through the whole kingdom'. The *True Informer* advocated 'the cheerful, unanimous and free taking of this Covenant throughout these three kingdoms', adding 'no man that loves either God, his King or Country, can deny either his hand or heart from subscription to it', while *A Continuation of certaine Speciall and Remarkable Passages* did not doubt the Covenant would be taken 'with much alacrity and expedition' throughout the kingdom. Such optimism would appear to be well-placed, at least according to the newsbooks: the *Continuation* asserted that the taking of the Covenant in Scotland had persuaded several commanders to desert the royalist cause, while the *Weekly Account* claimed 'a far greater inclination of the people then unto the Oath that was before administered'. *Mercurius Britannicus* felt it appropriate to add concrete, if unsubstantiated, data to the sweeping and imprecise comments of many journals: in December 1643, 'between four and five hundred' royalist prisoners took the oath; 'refusers' were 'to be resolved in their scruples with Newgate and other Prisons'. Another tale of coercion appeared in May 1644, with *Britannicus* praising Captain Swanley, on patrol off the Welsh coast, for tendering the Covenant to his captives; the 'refusers', allegedly Irish rebels, he threw into the sea.⁵⁸

Figures for voluntary subscription are notably absent throughout the newsbooks, conceivably because editors were unable, or unwilling, to access records outside London. Alternatively, what may be described as 'positive', as opposed to 'forced' subscription rates, may not have been sufficiently high as to act as an inducement to waverers. The *Perfect Diurnall* was unusual in providing a firm statistic of subscription,

⁵⁶ *Perfect Diurnall*, ix, 18 Sept. 1643, 66.

⁵⁷ E.69.(20.), *An ordinance of the Lords and Commons assembled in parliament. For the cutting and felling of wood within three score miles of London* (1643); *Parliament Scout*, xv, 6 Oct. 1643, 133; *Weekly Account*, v, 4 Oct. 1643, 6; *Perfect Diurnall*, xiv, 23 Oct. 1643, 108. See also *Mercurius Britannicus*, xlv, 22 July 1644, 348; lvii, 11 Nov. 1644, 454.

⁵⁸ *Mercurius Civicus*, xviii, 28 Sept. 1643, 143; *True Informer*, ii, 30 Sept. 1643, 14; *A Continuation of certaine Speciall and Remarkable Passages*, liv, 29 Sept. 1643, 6; lv, 6 Oct 1643, 8; *Weekly Account*, v, 4 Oct. 1643, 2; *Mercurius Britannicus*, xvii, 21 Dec. 1643, 135; xxxvi, 20 May 1644, 282.

that of 228 M.P.s who, by mid February 1644, had taken the oath, 'besides such as are absent in the counties and employed upon the service of the House'.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, after reporting the various official signings and the anticipated coming of the Scots, press interest in the Covenant declined as the alliance failed to deliver its expected results. Moreover, editors were understandably loath to venture into the potential minefield of the religious provisions of articles one and two, given widespread public reluctance outside high Presbyterian circles to countenance the wholesale dismantling of episcopacy. There were concerns over the possibility that an intolerant kirk would impose rigid social discipline, while many in England shared the conviction, reinforced by the ambiguity of article three, that Scottish Presbyterianism went hand in hand with revolutionary politics.⁶⁰ Newsbooks that devoted themselves to Scottish news, on the assumption that Englishmen should be informed about Scottish affairs for their own good, rapidly succumbed to market forces: *The Scots Army Advanced* survived from February to April 1644 before expiring, presumably because its title bore little relation to reality.⁶¹ The *Scottish Dove*, edited by the Presbyterian sympathizer George Smith, survived by switching to English news.

It was against this background, that *Mercurius Britannicus*, a work of blatant propaganda, emerged to promote the Scottish alliance on behalf of the media-conscious war party leaders John Pym, Saye, St. John and Vane.⁶² The title, most likely chosen as a compliment to parliament's new northern allies, was coincidentally that of a 1641 pamphlet-play, a satire on the ship money case, in which Saye and St. John had been involved as the originally proposed defendant and his legal counsel.⁶³ The radicals stood to benefit from the introduction of a robust and entertaining newsbook that could command a broad readership: such a journal would counteract royalist propaganda, defend the reputation of parliament's commander-in-chief, the earl of Essex, after the military disappointments of the summer of 1643, and encourage public support for the parliamentary cause to assist the recruitment of armies and the bolstering of financial reserves through taxation and forced loans. With the establishment of *Britannicus*, efforts to promote the Covenant gained a means of publicity that the radical cause had lacked hitherto.

While sharing the issues of profitability and compliance with the licensing authorities that were common to all newsbooks, *Britannicus*'s editorial staff had other considerations to take into account. We have already noted the journal's aim to exploit the postal service beyond London as the ordinance for universal subscription to the Covenant was

⁵⁹ *Perfect Diurnall*, xxx, 19 Feb. 1644, 234.

⁶⁰ Russell, *Fall of the British Monarchies*, pp. 179–80.

⁶¹ See also *The Scotch Intelligencer or the Weekly News from Scotland and the Court*, i, 17 Sept. 1643, 1.

⁶² *Mercurius Urbanus*, ii, 9 Nov. 1643, 14; Worden, pp. 305–6; Cotton, p. 71; J. Peacey, 'Henry Parker and the parliamentary propagandists of the English Civil War', (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1994), p. 154.

⁶³ E.172.(34.), Richard Braithwaite, *Mercurius Britannicus, or the English Intelligencer* (1641). In Feb. 1646, editor Nedham commandeered for his personal use the motto from the coat of arms of the kings of Scotland, *nemo me impune lacessit*, an apt summary of Nedham's approach to life in general, and to journalism in particular (*Mercurius Britannicus*, cxvi, 2 Feb. 1646, 1017). Nedham has been accused of being thoroughly mercenary, prepared to write for any cause that would pay him well (see J. Raymond, 'A mercury with a winged conscience: Marchamont Nedham, monopoly and censorship', *Media History*, iv (1998), 7–18; J. Raymond, 'Nedham [Needham], Marchamont (bap. 1620, d. 1678), journalist and pamphleteer', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19847>> [accessed 9 Feb. 2018]. However, he demonstrated long term personal loyalty both to Sir Henry Vane and to the Fiennes family, marrying Saye's niece, Elizabeth Thompson, in 1663 (Macadam, 'Mercurius Britannicus', ii, 109, 111).

being introduced. It had also developed its own distinctive style that was forceful and witty, and its content readily accessible, in order to command as wide an audience as possible. In the first instance, the newsbook employed a wide variety of literary sources, styles and devices that aimed at an eclectic appeal: its editors added religious, historical, political, philosophical works and popular folklore, satire and ridicule, gossip, riddles and puns to the mix. Side headings and comments replicated the appearance of more cerebral works, such as the tracts of William ‘Marginal’ Prynne, to create the appearance of intellectual gravitas, in order to appeal to an elite readership. These would also act as ‘signposts’ to aid the less accomplished reader in navigating the text. In contrast, the use of a ‘catechizing’ presentation through a weekly ‘Doubt’ and ‘Satisfaction’ section exploited a familiar tactic for rendering complex issues understandable to a non-intellectual audience. Edition twenty-two of 12 February 1644, for example, took a mere six lines to set out the case for taking up defensive arms that underpinned the Covenant’s preamble and postscript, while number twenty-five of 6 March, with the allied executive committee of both kingdoms fully operational, explained succinctly the concept of mixed monarchy that was embedded in the oath’s third article.⁶⁴ Such tactics suggest an editorial intention to facilitate and exploit the practice of reading the newsbook aloud, as did the brevity, clarity of expression and arresting content that became the hallmarks of this extremely popular publication. And in terms of subject matter, *Britanicus* proved as capable as a university-trained casuist of addressing such basic issues of conscience as perjury, and of descending to the depths of ‘the gutter press’ to attack its royalist enemies.⁶⁵

A constant preoccupation for *Britanicus* was the need to counter the continuous onslaughts of the equally popular *Aulicus*.⁶⁶ This was nowhere more urgent than in relation to the Covenant. The royalist newsbook indulged itself to the full in embarrassing its enemies with libellous jibes against the Covenant’s political and clerical initiators, and scaremongering about engagers who had apparently regretted their commitment, particularly on grounds of perjury. *Aulicus* aimed to fracture the parliamentary-Scottish alliance in relation to the joint military forces of the league and their funding, to exploit the confusion over the future structure of the Church of England, and, predictably, to take gleefully expansive swipes at the oath’s allegedly rebellious and treasonable nature. It was in *Britanicus*’s brief to protect the alliance and the oath’s subscription process from royalist propaganda in general, and especially from *Aulicus*. Its first editor Thomas Audley certainly felt he met his obligations in this regard; in his final edition of 30 September 1644 he declared: ‘there is not now so much as a young *Apprentice* that keeps shop, or a Labourer that holds the Plough, not one from the City to the Country, but he can tell ye, that *Aulicus* is a juggling, lying piece of Paper’.⁶⁷ This boast suggests an appreciation by *Britanicus*’s authors, and by inference by its sponsors, that an open battle for public opinion was being joined in a public sphere where the newsbook had a crucial role to play, and no more so than in relation to the Covenant.

⁶⁴ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xxii, 12 Feb. 1644, 176; xxv, 6 March 1644, 198.

⁶⁵ G. Rivett, ‘Make use both of things present and past: Thomas May’s histories of parliament, printed public discourse and the politics of the recent past, 1640–50’ (unpublished University of Sheffield Ph.D. thesis, 2010), pp. 92–127, *passim*.

⁶⁶ J. Frank, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper, 1620–60* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 49–51, 58–9, 75.

⁶⁷ *Mercurius Britanicus*, li, 30 Sept. 1644, 399.

Throughout its mission, through its patronage by the radical leadership, *Britanicus* reaped the benefits of privileged access to intelligence and protection from hostile parties. Conversely, though, its editors were more constrained than those of many other London journals, for *Britanicus* was required to toe the war party line.⁶⁸ This is evident in its coverage of the Scottish alliance: following the coinciding of the first issue with the arrival of the Covenant at Westminster, the newsbook appeared continuously throughout the autumn of 1643. However, in January 1644, it uncharacteristically disappeared for over two weeks. On its return, Audley announced that he had put down his pen voluntarily, only to be forced back to work because *Aulicus* was making mischief. However, *Britanicus*'s reappearance on 5 February, with its bid to engage with a nationwide audience, coincided with parliament's endorsement of universal subscription to the Covenant and the presentation to parliament by the Scots commissioners of their credentials to participate in a joint executive.

In addition to its dutiful reporting of Covenant engaging by the Commons and the Lords in September and October 1643, *Britanicus* made a point of publicizing and defending the actions and attitudes of its sponsors regarding the alliance. As a rule, newsbook references to parliamentary personnel were rare as reporting of the Houses' proceedings was forbidden. *Britanicus*, however, made exceptions for its particular patrons: Pym's death in December 1643, for example, which robbed the radicals of a strong and effective leader, and the alliance of one of its most formidable instigators, elicited a glowing elegy from *Britanicus*. By March 1644, the newsbook had crowned St. John 'our second Pym', while Saye 'hath no worke then the Covenant'.⁶⁹

One of the most striking examples of *Britanicus*'s work for its patrons and their operations on behalf of the Covenant was in the area of finance. Article six's provision for mutual assistance involved funding for the Scots' forces in England and their existing army in Ulster, but demands in England for finance earmarked for the Scots were likely to dissuade future 'engagers'.⁷⁰ While there was a potential role here for newsbooks to encourage contributions, few editors were prepared to commit themselves indefinitely to such a thankless task. *Britanicus*, however, pursued a different approach: in February 1644, when Sir Henry Vane proposed to raise revenue from coal production, thereby alleviating the fiscal burden on London, *Britanicus* publicized an alleged royalist plot to fire the pits, along with a 'puff' for Vane.⁷¹ In April, May and July 1644, references by the journal to Scottish funding were accompanied by ringing endorsements of Vane, originally considered by Baillie to be the Scots' foremost ally in the English parliament.⁷²

Military reporting was also influenced by the prevailing attitude of the English war party towards their northern allies. In June 1644, as the siege of York by the Leaguer forces was reaching a climax, *Britanicus* cited the oath, ascribing the continuation of hostilities to 'our hypocrisy to God in our Covenant'. However, with the royalist defeat at Marston Moor, the military alliance had at last delivered the desired results and the

⁶⁸ J. Peacey, 'The struggle for *Mercurius Britanicus*: factional politics and the parliamentary press, 1643–6', *Huntington Libr. Quart.*, lxxviii (2005), 517–43.

⁶⁹ *Mercurius Britanicus*, vi, 3 Oct. 1643, 46; viii, 17 Oct. 1643, 63, 64; xvi, 13 Dec. 1643, 128; xxv, 6 March 1644, 194; xvii, 18 March 1644, 210.

⁷⁰ *Parliament Scout*, xii, 15 Sept. 1643, 92; *Mercurius Civicus*, xx, 12 Oct. 1643, 154; *Perfect Diurnall*, xiv, 23 Oct. 1643, 108; xv, 30 Oct. 1643, 117, 118; *The Scotch Intelligencer*, 17 Oct. 1643, 6.

⁷¹ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xxv, 26 Feb. 1644, 186, 189.

⁷² Brit. Libr., Harley MS. 165, fos. 233, 242; Harley MS. 166, fos. 54v, 62v, 65; *Mercurius Britanicus*, xxx, 8 Apr. 1644, 234; xxxvii, 27 May 1644, 291; xlii, 8 July 1644, 333–4; Baillie, *Letters*, ii. 230, 231, 235.

newsbook's account of the battle in its edition of 25 July awarded unstinting praise to the Scots. It was, nevertheless, accompanied by a brief but fulsome allusion to the anti-Scottish Lieutenant General Cromwell, the 'darling of the sectaries', to be followed two weeks later by a regret that, 'the gallant *Cromwell*, and his godly souldiers are so little heard on, and they with *God* were so much seen in the battle'.⁷³ The radicals may now have considered that Scottish aid was redundant, that the Independent Cromwell's increasing stature gave them superiority over their political opponents, or that the Scottish connection was likely to prove an embarrassment in any future negotiations with the royalists. In each of these scenarios, the Covenant would become an irrelevancy and there would be no further necessity to press it on an unwilling public.

As *Britanicus's* political backers became increasingly equivocal about the Scottish connection, the newsbook fine-tuned its tactics to match. As an insurance policy against disaster in the field, the journal continued to pay lip service to the Scots forces in England. Its ambiguous comments could, however, be taken at face value, or interpreted as sarcastic slights on the Scots' military performance: in June 1645, the newsbook explained the *Scottish* failure to advance south of Doncaster on an *English* failure through 'churlishnesse' to supply them with carts. *Britanicus* also needed to maintain a semblance of parliamentary unity to thwart the royalists, and, incidentally, out of respect for Vane's friendship with the marquis of Argyll, whose reputation remained high in English radical circles.⁷⁴ From September 1644, when Marchamont Nedham replaced Audley as editor, *Britanicus's* interest in the Covenant noticeably diminished, to the extent that when the London Presbyterian clergy launched their press campaign in January 1646, it received minimal coverage in the newsbook. The new editor's token references tended either to anticipate forthcoming peace negotiations, such as the Uxbridge treaty of February 1645, or the impending end to hostilities in the spring of 1646, and were generally designed to bolster the war party's position vis-à-vis the Scots and English moderates, while presenting a show of unity between the engaged parties.⁷⁵

The necessity of maintaining a united façade to encourage public support for the Covenant was reflected in *Britanicus's* original approach to the controversial question of religion. With the Covenant dominating political debate in September 1643, the newsbook declared, 'we can argue, like brethren one against another, and both against you at *Oxford* ... we can agree on our owne Latitude and space in divinity, and can mutually move in our severall Orbes of judgement and discipline without grazing or fretting on each others conscience'.⁷⁶ However, the newsbook's attitude towards the settlement of the church as stated in the Covenant's first article, was, like that of its patrons, equivocal. *Britanicus's* enthusiasm for Presbyterianism ebbed and flowed, as political circumstances demanded. Of the ministers associated with the securing of the Covenant, the newsbook's position was closest to that of Philip Nye: initially both were working to keep the Covenant on track despite Nye's personal reservations about the restrictive nature of Presbyterianism, and notwithstanding the newsbook's association with the Independents Saye and Vane. The journal's comments on Nye's *An apologeticall narration* of January 1644, for example, represented yet another attempt to play down the

⁷³ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xliii, 15 July 1644, 337; xlv, 29 July 1644, 353; Macadam, 'Soldiers', pp. 105–6.

⁷⁴ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xlvi, 26 Aug. 1644, 376; li, 30 Sept. 1644, 403; lxxxvi (1st edn.), 16 June 1645, 784;

Journal of Thomas Juxon, pp. 128, 135.

⁷⁵ *Mercurius Britanicus*, lxvii, 23 Dec. 1644, 488; Calamy; Ashe; *Mercurius Britanicus*, cxx, 2 March 1646, 1052.

⁷⁶ *Mercurius Britanicus*, vi, 3 Oct. 1643, 42–3.

allied differences over religion that were potentially terminal for public acceptance of the Covenant.

Article one raised a number of contentious issues, many of which arose from the perceived rigidity of Scottish Presbyterianism, that were likely to prejudice engagement with the oath. They included continuing uncertainty surrounding the *de jure* or *de humano* nature of the church and its relationship with the state, social discipline and the policing of admission to the sacrament, the ‘power of the keys’, and consideration for tender consciences. *Britanicus’s* comments tended to be guided by political expediency rather than by religious conviction, and, particularly in the case of the Covenant, by the demands of counter-propaganda. In this regard, articles two and four provided scope for an approach that would allow the newsbook to circumvent the controversial aspects of article one. It became one of *Britanicus’s* favourite tactics to go on the offensive, on the assumption that attack was the surest form of defence. In the Covenant’s case, the evils of popery, prelacy and malignancy, while hardly original topics for parliamentary propaganda, nevertheless provided the newsbook with scope to render public opinion more amenable to subscription, while avoiding the pitfalls of parliament’s difficulties over religion.

Britanicus’s belligerency found ample scope in the oath’s second article, with its commitment to eliminate popery and prelacy: in September 1644, Audley declared ‘let it never be said or published, that we who fight against *Popery* and *Prelacy* in the field, should keep it up at home’.⁷⁷ So the newsbook took every opportunity to exploit entrenched protestant fears of rampant Catholicism as a possible means of rendering public opinion more open to engagement, while deflecting attention away from article one’s controversial allusions to reformed religion.

The prospect of the abolition of episcopacy was more problematical; the Church of England had established firm roots and those who wished to abolish the bishops, including Vane, Nathaniel Fiennes, William Prynne and John Milton, constituted a small but vocal minority. In February 1645, as *Britanicus* set about Charles I’s hapless archbishop of Canterbury, the journal was participating in the highly successful press campaign to destroy the Laudian church.⁷⁸ The bishops, those ‘Goblins and Good-fellowes’, the ‘inhauncers of the Prerogative’, were firmly in the newsbook’s sights, as was the moderate archbishop of York, John Williams, whom *Britanicus* portrayed as a warrior bishop in the medieval tradition, who was preparing for the landing of Irish rebels.⁷⁹ In October 1643, and again in August 1644, the journal resorted to this favoured tactic, using personal attack to make a point, as it pilloried Daniel Featley, a leading advocate of *jure humano* episcopacy.⁸⁰ As well as inciting public antipathy towards the bishops, this approach could be useful, when necessary, in reassuring the

⁷⁷ *Mercurius Britanicus*, li, 30 Sept. 1644, 403.

⁷⁸ E.198.(20.), *Sir Henry Vane, his Speech in the House of Commons ... against episcopall government* (1641); Nathaniel Fiennes, *Reply to Lord Digby’s Speech*, in Rushworth, iv. 174–83; E.121.(39.), *Unparallel’d Reasons of Abolishing Episcopacy* (1642); William Prynne, *Newes from Ipswich* (Ipswich, 1636) (S.T.C., no. 20470); *A Looking Glass for Lordly Prelates* (1636) (S.T.C., no. 20466); *A Breviate of the Prelates Intolerable Usurpations* (Amsterdam, 1637) (Wing, no. P 3904); E.162.(2.), *A new discovery of the prelates tyranny* (1641); *The Antipathy of the English Lordly Prelacy, Both to Regal Monarchy and Civil Unity* (1641) (Wing, no. P 3891); John Milton, *Of Reformation* (1641); John Milton, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (1641); John Milton, *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants* (1641); John Milton, *Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelacy* (1642); H. Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (1987), p. 93; *Mercurius Britanicus*, lxxviii, 3 Feb. 1645, 536–9.

⁷⁹ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xiv, 30 Nov. 1643, 112; lxxiii, 10 March 1645, 584; xciv, 25 Aug. 1645, 845.

⁸⁰ *Mercurius Britanicus*, ix, 26 Oct. 1643, 67–8; xlvi, 19 Aug. 1644, 367.

Scots about English radical commitment, in concealing parliament's difficulties over the proposed structure of the Church of England, and even in serving as a warning to the Presbyterians, including the Scots, against notions of a *jure divino* ministry to replace the Laudian hierarchy.⁸¹

Britanicus persistently muddled the waters by using 'episcopacy' and 'prelacy' interchangeably, despite their different meanings. Like other contemporary polemics, *Britanicus* used the word 'prelacy' as a term of abuse signifying the unacceptable expansion of the jurisdiction and influence of the leading bishops into matters temporal through, for example, the workings of the church courts, and as counsellors to the king and ministers of the crown. In charging the prelates with political interference, the newsbook sought to cast the officers of the church of article two as the 'evil instruments' of article four who hindered reformation, misled the king and created factionalism and dissent.⁸²

The Covenant also raised constitutional and political questions that might deter many from subscribing. The relative positions of the king and parliament as outlined in article three went to the heart of the Houses' justification for their resort to arms. *Britanicus* lost no time in addressing the issue by going on the offensive in terms that would refute *Aulicus* and hopefully persuade the doubters among its readers of the justice of parliament's case. In September 1643, the newsbook promptly rounded on its Oxford adversary: 'But Master *Aulicus* who are the greater Rebels, those that resist King Charles, or the King of England; those that oppose his personal, or his Parliamentary [*sic*] power, me thinks you should distinguish at *Oxford*'.⁸³ Such a statement matched the general thrust of parliamentary polemics and was sufficiently simple and direct for the politically uninitiated to comprehend. However, article three's ambiguity in relation to the king's person and his office allowed the royalists to allege usurpation, tyranny and prospective king-killing.⁸⁴ In August 1644, *Britanicus* produced a masterly abdication of responsibility that anticipated Thomas Chaloner's warning regarding the offending article: 'For any thing in the Covenant, I know very well I am bound to preserve his Majesties honour in the preservation of Religion and Liberty, as the Article [three] is, and how far further, they only interpret the Law, that made it'.⁸⁵

The understanding of its extensive audience about the nuances of constitutional theory and its inherent prejudice against the Scots were particular problems for this deliberately populist publication. It was unlikely, for example, that *Britanicus*'s less well-informed readers would appreciate an association with Gaelic-speaking covenanter clansmen like the MacLeans, the MacCauleys, the Lamonts or the Camerons, to whom they were officially bound by the Covenant alliance.⁸⁶ Fears of political union with the Scots, as suggested by the wording of article five, stood to undermine public support for that practical embodiment of the Covenant, the committee of both kingdoms. The newsbook's efforts on behalf of this new executive were hampered by factional

⁸¹ *Mercurius Britanicus*, cix, 15 Dec. 1645, 967; cxv, 26 Jan. 1646, 9101 (mispag.); cxxvii, 27 Apr. 1646, 1088.

⁸² T. Leng, 'The meaning of 'Malignancy': the language of enmity and the construction of the parliamentary cause in the English Revolution', *Jour. British Stud.*, liii (2014), 835–58, at pp. 836, 837, 843–4, 847.

⁸³ *Mercurius Britanicus*, iv, 19 Sept. 1643, 27.

⁸⁴ Heylyn, *Lord have Mercie*, pp. 7–8, 31 (mispag.), 32; *Mercurius Aulicus*, 30 Sept. 1643, p. 548; 13 Oct. 1643, p. 577; 22 Dec. 1643, p. 728; 25 Feb. 1644, p. 851; 31 March 1644, p. 916; 7 Apr. 1644, pp. 927–8.

⁸⁵ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xlvi, 5 Aug. 1644, 366.

⁸⁶ E. Furgol, 'The civil wars in Scotland', in *The Civil Wars: a Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland, 1638–60*, ed. J. Kenyon and J. Ohlmeyer (Oxford, 1998), pp. 41–72, at p. 41.

wrangling in parliament, the committee's unpopularity with Lord General Essex, continuing disappointment with the performance of Leven's army and, as ever, vituperative attacks by *Aulicus*. *Britanicus*'s reaction to its royalist adversary was characteristic of its methods for dealing with any challenging or embarrassing topic: it simply turned the argument on its head, in this case by insinuating that the king himself was guilty of creating the situation in which such a body had become necessary.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, it was the newsbook's highly personal attacks on Charles I that were arguably the most prominent feature of its contentious interpretation of article three. *Britanicus* mounted a sustained campaign of character assassination against the king, at one point insinuating that Charles had effectively abdicated his throne. He had deserted his parliament, allied with his people's worst enemies, and spilled his subjects' blood by making war on them. Such arguments would, hopefully, convince doubters that they should engage to preserve both the protestant religion and the parliamentary mixed monarchy, neither of which was safe in Charles's hands.⁸⁸ In taking this particular approach, and, in its last edition, recommending to its readers George Buchanan, that arch advocate of deposition for royal tyrants, *Britanicus* was signalling its association with the more radically minded Scots. Unfortunately for Nedham, in May 1646, as the war drew to a close, the fortunes of the English war party were waning, while relations between parliament and the Scots were becoming increasingly toxic, particularly regarding the fate of the king. On 18 May, *Britanicus*'s patron, Lord Saye, lost his majority in the house of lords. Within days, *Britanicus* was shut down permanently by the peers.⁸⁹ For the English radicals, the Covenant had likewise outlived its usefulness; polemic on its behalf had become irrelevant.

In committing to universal subscription to the Covenant, parliament had embarked on a well-nigh impossible task: unlike the circumstances of the 1641 Protestation, the nation was embroiled in civil war and even within areas under parliamentary control, enthusiasm for the alliance with the Scots was hardly unanimous. Official endorsement of so much of the pamphlet literature in support of the oath underlines the Houses' appreciation of the necessity to inform, to inspire and to pressurize the public if a respectable level of engagement were to be achieved. The English Presbyterian clergy sought to extend the audiences of their parish clergy through the printing and distribution of sermons and the sponsorship of Covenant-related tracts. The Scots believed it essential to keep the English public apprised of their position through, for example, the publication of their commissioners' papers presented to parliament.⁹⁰ The determination of these groups to use the press in this way indicates both an anxiety on the part of the alliance's sponsors that the acquiescence of the populace could not be assumed, and their concerns about a potentially damaging public debate fuelled by formidable royalist polemics. It points to the 'public spheres of sorts' proposed by Lake

⁸⁷ Brit. Libr., Harley MS. 166, fos. 3r-v; *Mercurius Aulicus*, 9 Feb. 1644, pp. 825, 826; 12 Feb. 1644, p. 825 (mispag.), 25 Feb. 1644, pp. 851, 852; 23 May 1644, p. 992; *Mercurius Britanicus*, xxvi, 12 March 1644, 206.

⁸⁸ *Mercurius Britanicus*, xcii, 4 Aug. 1645, 825; J. Macadam, 'Mercurius Britanicus on Charles I: an exercise in civil war journalism and high politics, August 1643 to May 1646', *Hist. Research*, lxxxiv (2011), 470–92.

⁸⁹ *Mercurius Britanicus*, cxxx, 18 May 1646, 1111, 1118; *Commons Journal*, iv, 543, 547, 551; *Lords Journal*, viii, 319, 321, 325.

⁹⁰ E.74.(2.), *The Declaration of the Convention of Estates of the Kingdome of Scotland ... concerning the present expedition into England* (1643); E.307.(4.), *A Collection of divers Papers Presented unto the Houses of Parliament by the Commissioners of Scotland* (1645); E.360.(12.), *Some papers of the Commissioners of Scotland* (1646).

and Pincus, a phenomenon that may also be termed a ‘proto public sphere’, not yet fully fledged in the Habermasian sense, but recognizable as a tendency towards that ultimate experience. The necessary conditions in terms of public spaces and the availability of information through print in pamphlet and serial form were present when the Covenant alliance was forged, a situation that the leaders of the political classes found unwelcome but which they could not ignore, nor reverse, in the circumstances of the civil war.

The immediate success or otherwise of the publications that promoted the Covenant, and its subscription, is impossible to judge. For example, *Britanicus*’s sweeping statement of September 1644 that the Covenant was ‘but halfe taken’ should be interpreted as a propaganda ploy intended to prick the consciences of waverers and backsliders rather than an accurate assessment of the extent of engagement nationwide.⁹¹ However, a longer term view would suggest that the press campaign of the first civil war in support of the Solemn League and Covenant was deemed to have had sufficient impact on public opinion to provide inspiration for the subsequent operation to promote the republic’s Oath of Engagement. John Dury, a leading campaigner for the 1649 oath, addressed at length the issue of the compatibility of the earlier Covenant with the later engagement in a series of pamphlets, one of which specifically targeted ministers, the primary agents of the Covenant’s administration to the general populace. Furthermore, the previous campaign and, in particular, his experience on *Britanicus* provided training for another *de facto* theorist, Marchamont Nedham. Nedham showed his appreciation of both the pamphlet and newsbook genres by first publishing his *The case of the Commonwealth of England, stated*, then plagiarizing his treatise for the editorials of his journal, *Mercurius Politicus*.⁹²

Promoting the Solemn League and Covenant in England during the first civil war was an unrewarding task for pamphleteers and newsbook editors alike. As a test of public opinion, universal engagement was, by and large, unsatisfactory, both in terms of geographical spread and the sincerity, or lack of, of engagers. The Covenant nonetheless provided an opportunity for the nascent popular press to attempt a pioneering mission, a sustained campaign in print that was aimed at a universal audience to encourage or force engagement in a political process. That such an enterprise was considered both necessary and desirable by the political and clerical leaders who endorsed the Covenant, coupled with the introduction of universal engagement to be enacted in very public surroundings, implies the emergence of an open environment, a public sphere, in which lively debate on the merits and shortcomings of the Solemn League and Covenant could take place at a crucial moment in the history of the nations that would eventually unite to become Great Britain.

⁹¹ *Mercurius Britanicus*, li, 30 Sept. 1644, 403.

⁹² E.548.(29.), John Dury, *A case of conscience resolved concerning ministers . . .* (1649), pp. 15–18, 23–30; E.584.(12.), *Considerations concerning the present Engagement* (1649, 1650), pp. 1–11; E.589.(10.), *The grand case of conscience concerning the Engagement stated and resolved. Or, A strict survey of the Solemn League and Covenant in reference to the present Engagement* (1650); E.600.(7.), Marchamont Nedham, *The case of the Commonwealth of England, stated* (1650); *Mercurius Politicus*, xvi–lxix, 26 Sept. 1650–29 May 1651, *passim*.

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