Communicating with authority: the uses of script, print and speech in Bristol 1640–1714

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This essay seeks to forward the themes of this collection in a number of ways. It challenges the assumption that specific forms of the media (script, print, oral) determine processes of communication, preferring a model in which types of media are seen as both contingent and contested and in which the more important questions relate to the 'authority' which a particular communication could command, a matter in which media form was significant but not determinant, and in which the local context of social and political relationships between the parties to the communication was the principal factor. In that context, it emphasises the complex interplay between different forms of communication in a local setting, and the dangers of isolating a particular mode of communication, both for understanding what that specific message might mean and for our overall picture of the nature of communication in that period and place. This, in turn suggests caution about the influential paradigm which sees a 'public sphere' of print emerging (at some point between the Civil War and the early eighteenth century) that was qualitatively distinct from earlier practices of communication and supported a different form of political culture. Whilst not denying that significant changes were occurring, the essay argues for considerable continuity in forms of authority in communication, but that these took on new meanings due to the intensification of a contested civic culture of communication, subject to the pressures of more intense and more overt ideological division.

In arguing this case, I am reinforcing many recent studies which have emphasised the dangers of polarised cultural models and the complex interplay between different forms of communication. Most of these accounts, however, have either been national surveys or have focused on the very particular case of London (especially studies of news and political debate). The interplay between oral and literate culture has largely been examined as it affected 'popular' culture, through the study of traditions, ballads, rumours and the like, while the relationship between manuscript and print

has been of interest to historians of 'elite' culture, but mostly in a literary or ideological context.[1]

This essay seeks to complement that excellent work by looking more broadly at the full range of communications in the context of a specific provincial town, Bristol, during the period most commonly identified with the emergence of this new public sphere, namely 1640–1714.[2] I will try to sketch a picture of the different types of communication available to Bristolians, both in their dealings with the wider world and within the city. However, I will focus on the disputes caused by political and religious divisions and their interplay with the spread and manipulation of 'news'. This is the best documented aspect of the subject and also the one which bears most immediately on the notion of a public sphere. I will also argue that it was these ideological disputes, and the way they were mediated by institutions such as the Bristol corporation and the churches, both established and dissenting, which tended to shape the use of new forms of communication, as well as determining the authority of old ones, rather than the utilitarian demands of trade and industry, which were still well served by traditional

[1] H. Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993); S. Pincus, '"Coffee Politicians does Create": Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture' *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (1995) 807–34; C. J. Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England* (Oxford, 1996); J. Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper* (Oxford, 1996); H. M. Weber, *Paper Bullets* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1996); D. Freist, *Governed by Opinion: Politics, Religion and the Dynamics of Communication in Stuart London 1637–45* (London and New York, 1997); A. Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Printing and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London, 1998); J. Raymond (ed.), *News, Newspapers and Society in Early Modern Britain*, special issue of *Prose Studies* 21 no. 2 (1998); B. R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago and London, 1999); M. J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore and London, 1999); D. Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, 2000); A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000); B. Dooley and S. Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (2001); T. Harris, 'Understanding Popular Politics in Restoration Britain', in A. Houston and S. Pincus (eds.), *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration* (Cambridge, 2001) pp. 125–53; A. Fox and D. Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, 2002).

[2] This study builds on my earlier work and fuller accounts and references can be found in: 'Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century Bristol', in B. Reay, (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (1985), pp. 59–90; 'The Parish in Civic Life', in S. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People* (1988), pp. 152–70; 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', in T. Harris *et al.* (eds.), *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 163–90; 'The Press and the Politics of Culture in Bristol, 1660–1775', in J. Black and J. Gregory (eds.), *Culture, Politics and Society in Britain 1660–1800* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 49–81; 'Cultural Patronage and the Anglican Crisis: Bristol c.1689–1775', in J. D. Walsh *et al.* (eds.), *The Church of England c.1689–c.1833* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 191–208; 'Bristol Pride', in M. Dresser and P. Ollerenshaw (eds.), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), pp. 25–47 and a forthcoming essay, 'Begging, Swearing and Cursing: Politics of Religion in Bristol 1689–1715' in J. Barry, *Religion in Bristol c.1640–1775*. The other major studies of this period are D. H. Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy* (Berkeley, 1991) and his 'Bristol's "Wars of Religion"', in R. C. Richardson (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 100–29.

methods. That said, there is an urgent need to ground our sense of communication firmly in the forms of daily life and also in relation to the economic and social pressures faced by those involved, especially those whose trade was the communication or mediation of knowledge. As we shall see, it is impossible to separate the ideological authority of communications from the social authority of those engaged in communication, but in turn, their authority depended in part on the authority that forms of communication could command. Thus clergymen and booksellers, as well as churches and forms of media, were in a state of mutual interdependence and potential competition. For the clergy, in particular, whose own authority depended heavily on their superior investment in the interpretation and ownership of printed material, the use of print by others, to challenge the message they could offer from the pulpit, was a complex challenge to which to respond.

In a brief essay it is only possible to sketch an account of communication over more than seventy turbulent years in a city whose population probably rose from some 12–15,000 in 1640 to about 25,000 in 1714. At one level, almost all the surviving records could be pertinent to this topic. On the other hand, there are major limitations on our understanding posed by the nature of that evidence. In 1683 a Bristol informer urged that his letter not be shown to any Bristolians 'for they tell every man his friend, so that in a day it will be public'[3], but we have very few personal papers of Bristolians and no records such as diaries that might allow us to recreate flows of communication on a daily basis. Some letters of merchants, gentry and other leading figures survive, but even these are limited in scale and duration. Bristol is also poorly supplied with depositions from court records which might offer some systematic coverage of social interchange. There are many more records which allow us to monitor the flow of people or goods – through migration, marriage, trade or financial connections – and enough historical work has been done on these to enable one to conjecture on their implications for communication. But most of the extant evidence that bears directly on communication as an issue is produced by institutions such as the corporation or the churches, or survives in the form of the products of those media that have proved durable, notably printed material collected into libraries and now easily accessible to all scholars through online facsimiles. Given the themes of this essay, there is clearly a danger that the nature of such evidence will predetermine the outcome. One of my arguments will be that historians have been unduly

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[3] *CSP Dom. 1683–4*, p. 97.

influenced by the historical visibility of print culture and its growing accessibility, but paradoxically much of my argument will depend on using those very sources to show how they, themselves, reveal the secondary importance of print within civic culture. However, my own argument for the centrality of a civic culture and of political and religious aspects of communication is vulnerable to similar criticism that I have allowed the records of bodies central to such a civic culture to shape my view of the whole topic.

The main institutional records are those of the city corporation, which had the legal status of a chartered incorporation wielding, among other things, the legal powers of a county, as Bristol had been since 1373 a county of itself outside the jurisdiction of Somerset and Gloucestershire, on whose borders it sat. The corporation had a mayor and aldermen who acted as the city's JPs and a wider common council of forty-three members from whom they were chosen. The city was also divided into twelve wards, each the special responsibility of one alderman. The city also had seventeen parishes and an extra-parochial area, the Castle, which was developed for building after the Castle was demolished in the 1650s. Some of the parishes stretched outside the city boundaries. The parishes were subject to the deanery of Bristol, one of two deaneries of the diocese of Bristol (the other, oddly, being Dorset), whose seat was the cathedral on College Green, although the bishops and diocesan government divided their time between the two parts of the diocese. Many of the city parishes were in the gift of the city corporation, although some belonged to private patrons, the crown or the church. As JPs the city magistrates held considerable power over the parishes, and from 1696 the parishes also lost one of their major powers, that of relief of the poor, to a statutory Corporation of the Poor, which emerged as a body partly responsible to both corporation and parishes and partly an independent body elected by local ratepayers. All of these bodies have left extensive records except for aspects of diocesan government lost in fires in 1731 and 1831 and the Corporation of the Poor, destroyed by bombing in the Second World War. At the national level the correspondence between the central government, notably the secretaries of state, and various groups in the city (see below) as deposited in the State Papers Domestic, form the major evidence, not just for the interchange of information between Bristol and the state but also for the concerns of all parties about the nature and impact of that communication, and much of what follows will draw on that evidence. It is worth noting that the higher standard of calendaring and indexing of these papers before 1700 than afterwards has undoubtedly reinforced historians' tendency to see these records as central for that period

but not later, when printed evidence is used more often to establish the nature of local/central interaction.

In 1640 Bristol already had a well-established book trade, which led to a steady stream of sermons and the occasional pamphlet being published in London, while Bristol stories and ballads with a Bristol seafaring theme quite often featured in ballads and chapbooks.[4] The Civil War saw the start of Bristol printing, as the king's printers had a press in the city during the royalist occupation from 1643 to 1645, while news of Bristol's military and political actions were of sufficient national importance to both sides that there were numerous printings of petitions, official notices and rival news items and justificatory statements about events in Bristol during the civil war period. By the 1650s this was replaced by London publication of a series of interlocking controversies between rival religious groups, with disputes between Presbyterians and independents/Baptists then overlaid by disputes between Quakers and all the other groups, often involving clergy and others from neighbouring counties and from London, and with close connections to the evolving politics of the corporation, various parliamentary committees in the region and military garrisons. This set the pattern for the post-Restoration decades when the same topics dominated publications about and from Bristol, which had to be of sufficient wider interest to be published in London or Oxford, even if sponsored and sold locally by booksellers or local interest groups. The main subjects are political and religious, with elections, the persecution of dissenters and Bristol input into the Popish Plot and subsequent crises until 1689, as the most frequent topics. Most other items, such as almanacs, reports of prodigies or literary publications, turn out on closer inspection to have more or less overt ideological overtones, often being prompted by public events such as elections, anniversaries or public occasions.

It was not until 1695 that Bristol regained its own printing press, after fifty years, when the lapsing of the Licensing Act led the blind William Bonny to leave London to set up the first provincial press of the new era. Sometime between 1700 and 1702 he then established one of the first provincial newspapers, the *Bristol Postboy*. By 1714 he had for some years been facing a rival paper, the first of many run by members of the Farley family, a West Country dynasty whose papers were generally opposed to the Whig regimes of the next half-century. For some decades after 1695 Bristol authors and material remained as likely to be published nationally

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[4] E. R. N. Mathews, *Bristol Bibliography* (Bristol, 1916) remains the starting point, but I have compiled a much fuller bibliography based on the short-title catalogues, on which the analyses here are based.

as locally, but gradually a local market grew, just as the newspapers began to develop a larger local content. But even in 1714 it remains the case that the products of the press in and about Bristol must be understood largely as a record of aspects of Bristol life that interested a wider audience or informed Bristolians about external events (as the early newspapers largely did), not as a sample of the communications of Bristolians between themselves or about their own affairs.

If we examine, for example, all the extant issues of the *Bristol Postboy* and *Sam Farley's Bristol Postman* until 1715 (a few stray issues until 1713 and some reasonable runs for 1714–15),[5] the only Bristol items, apart from advertisements, are a small number of letters with news from ships, one letter from Paris to a Bristol merchant reporting the arrival of a prominent Jacobite (the Duke of Ormonde), a report of the outcomes of the assize trial of those charged with murder following the coronation day riots in Bristol, lists of the Lenten preachers, a prayer to be read in all churches during the Jacobite rebellion, copies of various addresses to the King by the Loyal Society, the Corporation and the sheriffs and Grand Jury, and copies of Grand Jury presentments.[6] There is also a corporation notice regarding a £20 reward for information leading to conviction of the author, writer or publisher of 'several malicious scandalous, false and traitorous libels published and dispersed in Bristol and several written copies thereof put clandestinely at night in and under doors of several houses in city'.[7] Instead, both papers offered an account of 'the most material news both foreign and domestick',[8] laid out in a style borrowed largely from manuscript newsletters. *Sam Farley's Bristol Postman* follows the layout of a letter, starting 'Sir', and abstracting the 'following advices' or 'intelligences' from the post, in which it is not clear which items are from printed sources and which from manuscript newsletters or ordinary letters. The issue for 24 December 1715 typically declares 'since our last we have received the following advices . . . by this day's post we have received two mails from Holland with the following advices'. It is clear that contemporaries did not draw any fixed line between news conveyed in private letters, manuscript newsletters or what we call newspapers. Instead, they viewed them all as products of 'the post', hence

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[5] C. E. Clark, *The Public Prints* (New York-Oxford, 1994), pp. 62–6 discusses the contents of the early Bristol papers, but is unaware of the copies in the Codrington Library, All Souls, Oxford, and so makes several errors: see my 'Press and Politics of Culture'. My account builds on D. F. Gallop, 'Chapters in the History of the Provincial Newspaper Press: 1700–1855', MA thesis, University of Bristol (1954).

[6] *Bristol Postboy*, nos. 808, 791, 706, 668, 718, 802, 705, 794, 798 and 795 and *Sam Farley's Bristol Postman*, nos. 6 and 27.

[7] *Bristol Postboy*, no. 808 (10 December, 1715).   [8] *Ibid.*, nos. 91, 619.

the titles of the early newspapers. In 1683 it was noted that 'almost every private and public letter related a design on the king's life'.[9] In 1702 the mayor was asked to compare the handwriting on the superscription of a Jacobite libel with 'the hand of the public newspapers that are writ to your town'.[10]

Both printers also advertised their own services. Bonny undertakes 'to print any thing in Hebrew, Greek, Latin or English, in Divinity, Physick or Law or any Science or Art, as well and as cheap as in London or any other place. Justices-Warrants and summons and all other usual blanks, Also Polices, Bills of Lading etc and all sorts of advertisements will be printed' while Sam Farley claims 'I shall always have by me ready printed' a whole range of legal and administrative warrants (including for the poor law and for informers against prophane swearers), tax forms, blank appearances for attorneys, and druggists' labels.[11] From this it is clear that the chief customers of the printers were expected to be mercantile or professional and that the local material conveyed was overwhelmingly generated by the public bodies of the town, with the papers reproducing authoritative texts generated elsewhere: precisely the same kinds of documents constitute most of the surviving ephemeral printing of this period (indeed one suspects that the same printer set up the text for a public notice and then transferred it into his newspaper).

We can also approach the nature of communications more structurally (and so hypothetically) by considering the forms of communication, both in and out of Bristol and within the city, that must have flowed from the nature of Bristol's economy, society and governmental position. Rather than operating independently, the media may be seen as operating in the context of the movement of people and goods, and hence of information, through Bristol. News was spread by people in their travels and by the networks and meetings of people involved in the exchange of goods. Bristol's status as the entrepot of the west was made most visible in its two annual fairs, in January (St Paul's) and July (St James) when traders from all over the West Country came as buyers and many Londoners came to sell, including London booksellers such as Benjamin Harris and John Dunton. The authorities knew these events to be crucial to the city's economy (indeed relied on the revenue that their stalls generated) yet also feared the effects of mass migration into the city. Groups such as the Quakers used the fairs as a time to hold their regional meetings and circulated their literature within

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[9] *CSP Dom. 1683 (1)*, p. 341.   [10] *CSP Dom. 1700–2*, p. 490.
[11] *Bristol Postboy*, no. 619; *Sam Farley's Bristol Postman*, nos. 6, 25.

the crowded city, leading a clerical opponent to liken one such publication to a monster exhibited at the fair. But the fairs were merely the most intense expression of the continuous flow of people and goods generated by trade. It has been shown that the patterns of migration into and out of the city mirrored Bristol's chief trading routes, with flows from the immediate hinterlands of South Gloucestershire, west Wiltshire and north Somerset, plus the two coasts of the Bristol channel and the counties bordering the Severn, all of which looked to Bristol both for coastal trade and as their main link into wider trading patterns. Of these, Bristol's most important connections were with London, with Ireland, with southern Europe and, of ever-growing importance over the period, with the Caribbean and American colonies.[12]

Much of the news collected in Bristol of greatest interest both to Bristolians and others was of events in these places, with economic issues not easily distinguishable from military and political news, since trade was not only affected by these other matters but also provided the carriers by which such news travelled. Much of the unpublished state correspondence reflects the passing-on of such news to London (with customs officials as key correspondents), and so does a steady stream of printed news items reproducing letters received in Bristol from merchants or others. In 1689, for example, a London publication reproduced news of the deposed King James's landing in Ireland from a Bristol merchant's eyewitness letter.[13] However, until the 1690s there is little direct reflection of mercantile activity in Bristolians' printed output: a few navigational works, a gauging handbook, and a letter regarding the East India Company, though after 1695 there is some growth of trade literature, largely from the pen of John Cary.[14]

In assessing the importance of such communications, we must realise that the economy both of the port and of the traders, especially the merchants, was largely determined by the accuracy of their information, or, in contemporary parlance, by the 'credit' of their networks.[15] In the absence of impersonal financial systems, and with their profits depending largely on judging relative price movements in unstable trading highly dependent

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[12] See Sacks, *Widening Gate*; K. O. Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993); D. Hussey, *Coastal and River Trade in Pre-Industrial England* (Exeter, 2000).

[13] *A Full and True Account of the Landing and Reception of the Late King James at Kinsale* (1689), Wing F2306.

[14] S. Sturmy, *The Mariner's Magazine* (1669 and later editions), Wing S9096–8; H. Turford, *The Merchant's Aid or a Help to the Unskilful Accomptant* (1674), Wing 3261A; R. Collins, *The Countrey Gaugers Vade Mecum* (1677), Wing C5383; *An Answer to Two Letters concerning the East-India Company* (1676), Wing A3457; Cary's works are discussed below.

[15] See J. Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism', in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 84–112; C. Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation* (Basingstoke, 1998).

on external factors, many of them political but others natural, merchants rose or fell (and many failed, itself a key piece of news) on the strength of their knowledge of multiple markets and on the basis of other people's estimation of the credit of their knowledge. Hence the authority invested in their letters in the eyes of the wider world, but also, paradoxically, the value to them of keeping such knowledge to themselves. Thus the exchange of Bristol, as in London and elsewhere, was simultaneously the key locus of communication, where one went to hear the news and read letters from elsewhere, but also a place where communication had its most obvious price, excluding many. During the eighteenth century, the growth in printed information about all aspects of trade as well as the rise in banking and other means of assuring credit, served to lessen this impact, while making the trading community the obvious target audience for newspaper editors or coffeehouse proprietors eager to trade on the news they could offer. But in 1714 these media were still more dependent on the traders for news than the traders were on them. As a consequence, within Bristol it was through family, social circles, associations and churches that traders simultaneously acquired information of credit, since it came from trusted sources and also established their own credit economically and socially. On a smaller scale, the same story might be told of craftsmen and small retailers, and of their search for both credit and knowledge through guilds, societies and often through neighbourhood. Equally, although advertisements began to appear in the papers, and printers presumably produced ephemeral items to serve business, this seems to have been very small-scale until the 1730s, at least, and to have related to housing, luxury and service retailing, rather than commercial or industrial activity.[16]

The other main structural determinant of the flow of information was the governmental structure outlined above, which was in part a hierarchy intended to ensure the flow of information up and down the network. Among the early examples of the uses of print were a range of materials generated by such processes, including visitation articles designed to elicit both written responses from parish officers and clergy and to structure discussions at visits, and petitions sent from Bristol to parliament or the crown presenting information and requesting action.[17] The 'presentment', in which an authorised body provided information to another and sought

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[16] Some examples of early Bristol printed ephemera are found in BL, 816 m.16 and Bristol Archives Office [hereafter BAO], 04217.

[17] Printed articles survive for 1640 (*STC* 10145.3), 1662 (Wing C4018), 1673 (see n. 19), 1678 (Wing C4019A), 1682 (Wing C4020), 1686 (Wing C4020A). The parish presentments to the church courts are in BAO, EP/V/3.

action in return, might indeed be regarded as the paradigmatic form of communication in early modern government, underlying all kinds of courts and administrative processes. The most authoritative form within city government was the Grand Jury presentment to quarter sessions or assizes, and interestingly a whole series of these were published in the 1670s and 1680s as rival party groups sought to represent the city interest. In such cases it is clear that the Jury was itself carefully chosen by the sheriffs to ensure that its members would communicate certain facts and draw certain conclusions. These presentments may be preserved in written and sometimes printed form, but of course their primary expression was in speech, and speech given to a specific audience on a specific occasion, from which its authority was drawn.[18] The 1673 visitation articles make this interpenetration of the media very clear: the clergyman is instructed to read the articles of enquiry 'distinctly' to the churchwardens, suggesting some might be illiterate (very few churchwardens still were in Bristol), but the relevant articles were also printed within the text in black letter, the form of print used for proclamations and other notices, perhaps for their air of authority, or perhaps because the less educated found this lettering easier to read than the italic form. Emphasis is laid on the sacred duty of the laypeople to present their answers fully and truthfully, with the warning that failure to do so would subject their parish to God's judgement.[19]

The same point might be made about most of the other governmental forms of communication. The city corporation used a wide range of written methods to communicate both within the city and elsewhere, especially to London, and the town clerk with his written archives had been a key figure since the fifteenth century at least. But the corporation invested heavily in a range of modes of communication, while spending only modestly on script and very little on print, even after Bonny's arrival, except in political emergencies when multiple copying of an exact message could be seen as valuable. At first sight the figure of £27 spent by one side on printing in the Bristol election of 1713 sounds impressive, but it seems modest in a total expenditure of £2257, or even compared to the £78 18s spent on 'knots' or party favours.[20] Normally communication still centred on proclamations (given both orally by the bellman and in writing posted up at certain set

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[18] BAO, 04451–2(1) contain the jury presentments for the period to 1700 (1641–56, 1661, 1663 and 1667–75 presentments are missing). There are printed presentments or addresses for 1675 (Wing G1501), April and October 1681 (Wing G1500/A, T3529), April 1682 (Wing P3286A, S3879), March 1683 (Wing P3285/6), Midsummer 1696 (Wing H3591A). See also *CSPD om. 1679–80*, pp. 440–1, 488, 619–20; *CSP Dom. 1680–1*, pp. 250, 277, 681; *CSP Dom. 1683(1)*, p. 95.

[19] *Articles of Enquiry [of Guy Carleton]* (1673), Wing C4019, 'Direction to the Clergy' and p. 5.

[20] W. Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1789), p. 148.

locations around the town) and on the use of rituals and symbols, such as bellringing, public celebrations and regular processions and rounds of meetings to recognise key events and anniversaries. In the 1680 election, supporters of the exclusionist candidate, Robert Henley, complained that the morning before the election the Corporation 'did cause papers to be posted up at several parts of the town purporting, That none but a freeman could be elected, and at the bottom of those papers was written, No Henly; No Henly; and when some of the electors pulled down those papers, they were, for so doing, bound over to the sessions'.[21] In 1667 the customs collector Fitzherbert, who was the central government's chief conduit for news from Bristol (and in return received the official papers), noted that until the proclamation of peace, nobody had really trusted the news and traders had not dared sail, but 'many formerly diffident may now believe'.[22] During the Popish Plot another ultra-royalist informer, Richard Ellsworth, complained bitterly that the Assizes speech of the Whig city recorder, Sir Robert Atkins, in 1679 had 'begotten in all those that heard the same and all others from the report such a real belief in its verity, as well as its notoriously intended villainy, that 'tis a crime . . . to gainsay or question its credit . . . so that . . . they are now thereby strangely confirmed in their beliefs of that which they had before taken up only at trust from printed papers and bare reports and at a great distance too'.[23]

We know very little about what was said on such occasions and how far the visual and aural messages were made explicit in speeches: but such events obviously mattered, as there was often conflict over who did what, where and when. Perhaps the most extraordinary event of this entire period was the charge delivered by Judge Jeffreys at the Bristol assize on 21 September 1685, following Monmouth's rebellion, as reported in a pamphlet. Jeffreys began: 'Gentlemen, I find here a great many auditors, who are very intent, as if they expected some formal or declared speech, but assure yourselves, we come not to make neither set speeches nor formal declarations, nor to follow a couple of puffing trumpeters; for, Lord, we have seen those things twenty times before: No, we come to do the King's business'. He proceeded to lambast the city and its authorities for their inclination to rebellion, especially attacking the 'trimmers' among the elite. He then demanded that each constable be reminded of his duty to bring in his presentment 'or that you present him' before, in an astonishing piece of theatre, himself

[21] *The Case of the Election for the City of Bristol* (1680), Wing C1067A.
[22] *CSP Dom. 1667*, pp. 427, 448.
[23] HMC, *Report on the MSS of Allan George Finch, of Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland*, 4 vols. (1913–65), vol. II, p. 57.

turning to the bench of city magistrates to arrest the mayor and aldermen for kidnapping, 'their Bills [of indictment] being privately preferred to the Grand Jury by John Rumsey [the town clerk] and being found [i.e. found a true bill]'.[24] It is hard to imagine a more effective overturning of civil cultural expectations, nor to be surprised that the next civic speech committed to print from Bristol is that in 1689, when civic dignitaries were dispatched to London with an address of thanks to the Prince of Orange![25]

At the same time, the civic authorities both worked with, and were jealous of, the other official channel of communication, namely the Church. Church processions, attendance and sermons were a crucial part of civic propaganda, but the churches could also send out their own messages. The ringing of bells, for example, was highly contentious: in February 1660 one alderman was reproved by the mayor for having his parish bells rung for the readmission of the secluded members,[26] while in 1683 the vestry of St Philip and Jacob forbad any ringing for public events without their express permission, except on 5 November and 29 May (Restoration Day).[27] Relations between city and cathedral were particularly fraught, but parish pulpits were also fought over. After all, the authoritative commentators on the significance of news and events were the clergy, particularly through their sermons, and such sermons formed the largest single type of printed material, though only a tiny fraction of sermons got into print.[28] Some that did so were printed because of the controversy which their oral presentation had created. A tremendous furore surrounded the claim that Bristol Dean Richard Thompson had preached in the Cathedral, on 30 January 1679, that there was no Popish Plot but rather a Presbyterian one, along with (if his opponents be believed) disparaging remarks on Henry and Elizabeth as despoilers of the church.[29] When a Whig parish clergyman, John Chetwynd, tried to deliver his sermon in the Cathedral on 5 November 1681, calling for Protestant unity against popery, he was unable to deliver

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[24] *The Charge Given by the Lord Chief Justice Jefferies* (1685), Wing J527, pp. 1, 4. Bristol Central Library, Bristol Collection 4502 gives an annalist's hostile response to Jeffreys.

[25] *The Speech of the Recorder of Bristol to his Highness the Prince of Orange* (1689), Wing P3115A.

[26] HMC, *Report on the Manuscripts of F. W. Leyborne-Popham, Esq., of Littlecote, Co. Wilts* (1899), p. 160.

[27] BAO, P/St P and J/V1, 1683.

[28] On this see T. Claydon, 'The Sermon, the "Public Sphere" and the Political Culture of Late Seventeenth-Century England', in L. A. Ferrell and P. McCullough (eds.), *The English Sermon Revised* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 208–34.

[29] *The Report from the Committee of the Commons to Consider the Petition of Richard Thompson* (1680) (not in Wing, but three copies in Bristol Central Library); *The Visor Pluck't off from Richard Thompson of Bristol Clerk* (1680) (Wing V661).

the sermon and had to finish it the next day in his own parish of Temple; he then had it printed in London for sale by Thomas Wall, the Whig Bristol bookseller.[30]

It is very hard to tell how far the normal sermon had the heavy political and immediate relevance one finds in many printed sermons, since it may have been their exceptional ideological content and topicality which led to their publication. We do not have any collection of unpublished sermons to compare them with until the very end of the period when some of the sermon notes of an independent minister (Andrew Gifford) have survived: these are relatively politically charged, but dissenting clergy may have been more explicit about this than the parochial clergy.[31] From the 1640s the latter faced a growing range of rival communicators in the shape both of alternative ministers and groups of laity who decided to do without a professional communicator, such as the Quakers. Much of the debate about the media was fostered by the clerical reaction to this competition, and although it might take the form of a critique of the press as a seditious force undermining the clergy, this challenge was seen as a minor part of the large problem of meetings of people outside clerical control ('hearers' as contemporary sources significantly called them) and their manipulation by preachers.

Many examples of complaints about both the news and the press in the period revolve around the fear and accusation that religious organisations of one kind or another were in fact controlling the flow of information, often through connections to London and other external bodies. In these controversies anxiety about the challenge to established authority posed by people with access to alternative means of communication was the key theme, from which complaints about specific media methods and content took on their force. For example, there are a series of 'Tory' grand jury presentments between 1675 and 1685 (themselves often printed, paradoxically but significantly) which attacked the influence of news spread by seditious groups,[32] including the role played by coffeehouses in providing news, which it was suggested was seducing the ordinary people from their business into 'debating state matters and hearing news which often proves false and yet is glibly swallowed by the credulous' to the detriment of both trade and peace within the city.[33] It is easy to take these attacks as signs of a powerful new influence at work, and the authorities certainly took

[30] J. Chetwynd, *Eben-ezer* (1682), Wing C3796.
[31] Regent's Park College, Oxford, Angus Library, FPC D.21.
[32] See above n. 18, especially *CSP Dom. 1679–80*, pp. 440–1, and presentment of April 1682.
[33] *CSP Dom. 1680–1*, p. 250.

the threats seriously, for example raiding one coffeehouse and sending a newsletter found there up to London.[34] Efforts were made to catch the publishers of 'libels' against the Bristol authorities and correct false claims: in July 1682 they complained of a 'pamphlet printed and set forth' denying a Bristol Quaker had recanted and taken the oaths: he was to take them again 'to give publick satisfaction' and this should be 'made public in the [London] Gazette or otherwise' and one libel was publicly burned at the High Cross.[35]

But it is crucial to note that these occasional attacks, verbal and actual, on dissenting print culture were a minor skirmish in an ongoing battle against dissenting churches and related clubs, which faced the brunt of prosecution. The 1681 presentment of John Kimber's coffeehouse identified its clients as 'many schismatical, seditious and disloyal persons': Kimber's widow was a Baptist.[36] In 1683 a leading persecutor claimed all the disorders and 'seditious contrivances' 'were hatched at that meeting-house' [the Castle Green independent church] and moved from thence into 'coffeehouses and clubs'.[37] The 1675 presentment defined the danger as from 'schismatical, seditious and disloyal seducers and sectaries, who are the very pests and firebrands of our cities and the principal (if not only) disturbers and breakers of the peace therein', their 'heads' being 'diverse strangers' 'pretending themselves to be ministers of Jesus Christ . . . lately come to settle in this city'.[38]

As I have described elsewhere, the heart of this struggle was over the effort of their opponents to identify the dissenters and their allies as outsiders, subverting the civic community, and of the other side to portray themselves as core members of the civic community.[39] In this struggle, the dissemination of news and print was simultaneously a metaphor for the wider problem and a means of carrying on the contest. Hence the Presbyterians were frequently identified, for example by the nearby Beaufort family, as using their London ties to spread news against the Crown and its supporters.[40] Tory satirists also tried repeatedly to undermine the

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[34] *CSP Dom. 1682*, pp. 321, 327.   [35] BAO, 04452 (1), July 1682.

[36] *CSP Dom. 1680–1*, p. 250; BAO, 04434(1), recognizance 13 February 1676 and indictment of Kimber May 1682; Quarter-Sessions Minute Book 1672–81, letter of 2 July 1679 at end, and Minute Book 1681–1705, July 1682 and March 1684; E.P./V/3 St Ewen's, 1680–1 and All Saints, 1684; E.P./J/4 inventories of J. Kimber (1681) and A. Payne (1687). R. Hayden (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol 1640–87*, Bristol Record Society 27 (1974), pp. 204, 252, 297.

[37] *CSP Dom. 1683(2)*, pp. 265–6.

[38] *The Grand Jurors of the City of Bristoll, their Address* (1675), Wing G1501, p. 2.

[39] Barry, 'Politics of Religion'.

[40] HMC, *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IX, The MSS of the Duke of Beaufort, K.G., the Earl of Donoughmore and others* (1891), pp. 77–81, 93; *CSP Dom. 1666–7*, p. 273; *CSP Dom. 1667*, p. 389.

respectability of the leading city bookseller, Thomas Wall, by accusing him of drunkenness and adultery, as well as Presbyterian intrigue, as if to undermine his moral claims to trade and publish legitimately within the civic community.[41] The moral attack was the more powerful because 'sobriety' and moral reformation were the watchwords of dissenters and their allies in justifying their own conduct and attacking their persecutors: for example, their printed response to the 1675 presentment is called *A Sober Answer to an Address of the Grand Jurors*.[42] When the Quaker merchant Thomas Speed published his *Reason against Rage* in 1691, responding to a 'late scurrilous libel' prefixed to a reprint of a republican sermon he had given in 1651, intended to smear Quakers and other Whigs with fanaticism during the 1690 election campaign, he defended his appearance 'to the World in print' as purely defensive, faced with a 'libel whose contents are fitter to be turned into a song, to be sung by a crew of drunkards at an ale-bench, than to be exposed to the view and perusal of any judicious and serious readers'.[43]

At the same time, there was a lot of competition and tension between the established authorities about their respective authority and the nature of the messages they had to offer – such divisions were arguably the chief reason why effective control over communication was never established. Neither the lay nor the clerical establishment ever presented a unified message to the people of Bristol at any time after 1640, despite their continued commitment to the claim that such a message should exist, if only the proper authority was respected. This problem equally affected the flow of news out of Bristol to government. Successive regimes found it very hard to know whose information to trust; by 1681 Secretary Jenkins told the Mayor that, while he had to write to all those who complained, it was not 'incumbent to give credit till all are heard'.[44] When Jeffreys left the dramatic scene described earlier, he immediately wrote to the royal court urging that the king not be 'surprised' into pardoning those arrested before he had come in person to tell the full story, but in fact the arrested mayor

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[41] *Advice to a Painter in a Poem to a Friend* (1681), Wing A639, p. 15; E. Phileroy, *A Satyrical Vision* (1684), Wing P1985, pp. 10–11; J. Dunton, *Life and Errors* (1705), p. 316.

[42] *A Sober Answer* (1675), Wing S4407.

[43] T. Speed, *Reason against Rage* (1691), Wing S4906, 'To the honest-hearted impartial Reader', pp. 1–2, 10, 16, 18. The original sermon printed in 1651 is Wing S4907; the reprint is in Bristol Central Library, Bristol collection 9706. For the 1650s controversy between Speed and the clergy see: T. Speed, *Christ's Innocency Pleaded* (1655), Wing S4904/A; C. Fowler and S. Ford, *A Sober Answer* (1656), Wing F1694; W. Thomas, *Rayling Rebuked* (1656), Wing T989; T. Speed, *The Guilt-Covered Clergyman Unveiled* (1657), Wing S4905; W. Thomas, *A Vindication of Scripture and Ministry* (1657), Wing T991.

[44] *CSP Dom. 1680–1*, pp. 628–9.

petitioned successfully, using his connections as a father-in-law of one of the North family.[45] The Duchess of Beaufort urged her husband to stop his servants writing news to those in the country, as things reported from Badminton were given 'authority' by the place. Rumours of a French invasion in December 1678 were, according to her, spread by the machinations of nonconformists and Whigs such as Atkins, but also by the influence of the mayor who, though not ill-intentioned, had given official credence to the report by acting on it.[46] Rival forms of authority could nearly always be deployed to communicate different messages, whether it was different Anglican clergy preaching different political messages, or grand juries in successive quarter sessions offering contradictory views or the inherent ambiguities in the public celebration of events such as 5 November.

It is in this context, I would argue, that we should consider the usefulness, and limitations, of the notion of a 'public sphere'. There is no doubt that concepts of public authority and communication were central to the arguments just noted. The ideal was the virtuous and godly public magistrate, such as alderman Joseph Jackson, as described in his funeral sermon of 1661, who 'knew well the state of this city's affairs and aimed at the publique weal thereof, without self-seeking. He was a man of a very publique spirit, desiring the publique good; and what evil he was not able publiquely to redress, he was wont privately to lament.'[47] The critique of those people, places and times that were used to communicate outside the control of the establishment was that they lacked public authority and so represented the work of factions or parties. These were private and self-interested groups whose claim to represent or communicate within the public sphere of civic culture was illegitimate in motive, form and consequence. Yet in an increasingly pluralist city it was hard to find a stable core of agreed public authority against which to make these accusations of faction last for any length of time or with any lasting effect. And those in opposition to a particular establishment could equally appeal to their 'public spirit' as the motivation for their actions, including their decision to publish their opinions for the information of Bristolians and others. James Holloway, a Bristol merchant executed as a Rye House plotter, presented himself in his printed confession as an ordinary Bristolian who had unluckily 'concerned myself in things

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[45] *CSP Dom. 1685*, nos. 1663, 1767, 1843; R. North, *The Lives of the Norths*, ed. A. Jessopp, 3 vols. (1890), vol. 1, p. 284; J. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century* (1900), pp. 433–4.

[46] HMC, *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part VIII, MSS of the Duke of Athole, K. T., and the Earl of Home* (1891), pp. 76–81.

[47] F. Roberts, *The Christian's Advantage* (1662), Wing R1582, p. 29. See G. Baldwin, 'The "Public" as a Rhetorical Community in Early Modern England', in A. Shephard and P. Withington (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 199–215.

much above me', but there was a definite double edge to his statement that 'it has been my bad fortune to hear too much of public affairs and to have too much a public spirit for one of my capacity', and in more defiant mood Holloway sent the King a long account of the state of public opinion about the plot and the monarchy, clearly believing Charles needed to take account of the public view.[48]

In strict Habermasian terms, Bristol in this period certainly did not see a public sphere of private people coming together in free association by rules of rational debate and information exchange to establish a public sphere separate from the traditional authority structures of society, state and Church. One may question whether sociologically such a sphere is plausible anywhere, but it was not even a conceivable project within Bristol in this period.[49] Instead the ideal was of a civic culture where the public sphere is rooted in the established forms of social and political authority and operates through all sorts of inherited symbolic forms, based on the traditions of civic life, which are the reverse of Habermas's model. However, that does not mean that this civic culture was monolithic and consensual. It never was, and it became less so as pluralistic forces in Bristol grew stronger. That did not, I argue, remove the ideal or many of the practices of a civic culture, but it did make the nature of communication within the city ever more complex and contested.

One final example may illustrate this point. In all the printed material produced in Bristol, one set of publications stand out in character, and might easily serve as an example of the rise of a public sphere dependent on print. These are the writings of John Cary, Bristol merchant and pioneer writer on economics, whose publications on trade and poverty, and proposals to establish a Bristol workhouse, are self-conscious appeals to a universal public based on rational arguments. The fact that Cary had urged his correspondent Locke and others to oppose the renewal of the licensing act, so allowing Bonny to establish a press in Bristol, and that Cary's writings were among Bonny's first commissions, makes the case even more perfect. Yet a closer look reveals that Cary's use of print was only one aspect of a much more complex strategy, in which personal contacts (both in London, where he was a lobbyist for various Bristol interests, and in Bristol, where he had many influential friends among the radical circles of the elite) and use of other media played an equal part: indeed, it could be argued that the

[48] J. Holloway, *A Free and Voluntary Confession* (1684), Wing H2509; *CSP Dom. 1683–4*, pp. 238–41, 366–70, 380.
[49] See J. Barry, 'A Historical Postscript', in D. Castiglione and L. Sharpe (eds.), *Shifting the Boundaries* (Exeter, 1995), pp. 220–34.

turn to print was a strategy of last resort rather than a principled choice. Furthermore, both his trade arguments and his proposals on poverty were clearly understood at the time as reflecting very specific interests, both economic and ideological. In particular, the Corporation of the Poor was designed to remove power from the Anglican parishes and diminish the influence of the city Corporation, or at least its Tory members, and to empower dissenting and mercantile groups. In practice, its establishment and subsequent developments owed more to electoral and corporate politics (including an ill-fated attempt by Cary to stand as MP in 1698) than to his publications. All of this is not to downplay the importance of ideas in the political process, but to note that the printed word is a very partial guide to the nature and complexity of those ideas and how they were both generated and received.[50]

I have argued that it is more useful to interpret all the various types of communication found in Bristol over this period as contingent responses to the complex culture of local society. Uses of the media were debated because of the people, places and times with which they were associated, although those debates certainly addressed the form as well as the content of each communication. It is unhelpful to single out a particular form of the media and see its growth or decline as the main trend, offering both the object and means of explanation of change. So, rather than see the rise of print or the decline of the scribal or oral as the main theme, requiring explanation and suggesting what form such an explanation should take, we should look instead at the wider debates within which the uses of print were situated in actual cases. At the same time we need to be alive to the practical and ideological considerations, for and against, that lay behind the decision to use print or script in some forms of communication and not in others.

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[50] See Barry, 'Parish in Civic Life', pp. 168–9 and 'Begging, Swearing and Cursing' for fuller accounts of Cary and the Corporation of the Poor. Some of his papers are in BL, Add. MSS 5540. His writings include: *An Essay on the State of England in Relation to its Trade, its Poor and its Taxes* (Bristol, 1695), Wing C730; *An Essay on the Coin and Credit of England* (Bristol, 1696), Wing C729; *To the Freeholders and Burgesses of the City of Bristol* ([Bristol?], 1698), Wing C733A; *A Vindication of the Parliament of England* (1698), Wing C734–5; *A Proposal offered to the Committee of the House of Commons* (1699/1700?), Wing C732; *An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of the Poor* (1700), Wing C724A. See also *Proposals for the Better Maintaining and Employing the Poor in Bristol* (Bristol, 1696), Wing P3747 and other notices in BAO, 04217; *Some Considerations Offer'd to the Citizens of Bristol* (Bristol?, 1711), *ESTC*, t127579; *The Case of the Poor within the City of Bristol* (1714), *ESTC*, t188810; *The Case of the Workhouse and Hospital of the City of Bristol* (1718?), *ESTC*, t063579.