

Scattered about the Streets: George Thomason's Annotations and Ephemeral Print during the English Revolution

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On 24 March 1658, George Thomason signalled his determination to stop gathering the pamphlets that have made him famous, and to 'put an end' to his 'pains and charges'.¹ Fortunately, Thomason did not – yet – give up the habit that he first developed as Britain descended into crisis and civil war in the early 1640s, otherwise we would know so much less about the tumultuous months either side of the Restoration. This chapter focuses upon one of the key ways in which the Thomason Tracts assist historical understanding, and one of most significant of his 'pains and charges': the habit of annotating pamphlets and newspapers. Annotations, of course, have become an increasingly important field of scholarship, more obviously in terms of contemporary responses to learned texts than in terms of the reception and consumption of cheap print, where scholars have been struck by how often readers *failed* to record evidence of reading practices.² Indeed, since Thomason was not alone in amassing large quantities of cheap print, the assiduous way in which he recorded information about, as well as reflections upon, specific items ought to be regarded as being of primary importance. However, these scribbled notes, while widely noted, have received insufficient attention, even though they are recorded – somewhat erratically – in Fortescue's familiar catalogue of the collection, as well as on the English Short Title Catalogue.³ They have certainly been used to contextualize individual pamphlets and authors, and yet Thomason's practices have not been subjected to rigorous examination.⁴ Here, therefore, the aim is to survey and scrutinize his notations, and to establish what they mean for historians, in terms of understanding not just Thomason's personal response to the English Revolution, but also the times in which he lived, and the nature of the 'print revolution' that he witnessed. In no small part, Thomason's importance lies in his careful approach to contemporary print culture, and his apparent determination to comprehend the changes that were taking place, and this chapter argues that historians need to be more sensitive to the phenomena that helped to inspire his collecting habits. What evidently struck Thomason were dimensions of the print revolution that have received insufficient attention and that raise important questions about the nature of publishing and publication during this period. What fascinated Thomason was not just the rise of 'cheap' print, but also the availability of *free* print, and texts that were posted around

¹ E.936[8*].

² Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (eds.), *Owners, Annotators and the Signs of Reading* (London, 2005); Joad Raymond, 'Irrational, Impractical and Unprofitable: Reading the News in Seventeenth-Century Britain', in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds.), *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 185-212.

³ G. K. Fortescue, *Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books, Newspapers, and Manuscripts relating to the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and Restoration*, 2 vols (London, 1908). It is unfortunate that the annotations are sometimes less than entirely visible on Early English Books Online.

⁴ For examples of the good uses to which Thomason's collection, and his annotations, have been put, see, for example: David Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (Oxford, 2018); John T. Shawcross, 'Using the Thomason Tracts and their Significance for Milton Studies', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, xlix (2009), pp. 145-72.

London, and even scattered about the streets. His notes make it dangerous to assume that the material he acquired was uniformly produced for sale, and invariably acquired by purchase, and his comments highlight the contemporary importance of non-commercial print, and of 'ephemera'. Ultimately, paying close attention to Thomason's annotations makes it possible to recalibrate our understanding of the processes and practices that made the revolutionary decades so important, of the dynamics of political and religious debate, and of the enhanced potential for popular participation in public life.⁵ Thomason, in short, provides a guide to the transformation of everyday politics during the English Revolution.

I

The first stage of this analysis involves more or less familiar historiographical territory, in terms of the aspects of Thomason's annotations that have dominated the historiography: the attribution and dating of pamphlets; clues regarding Thomason's network of friends and colleagues; and evidence about his political and religious views.

The first of Thomason's invaluable services involved authorial attributions, where the value of his notes has been widely recognized, although not fully exploited. Given the tendency towards anonymity among authors and stationers, particularly on works of a controversial nature, scholars are clearly reliant upon Thomason regarding the output of many of the period's most important authors – like Henry Parker and John Milton – and only a fraction of his attributions can be verified from other sources. These ranged from bishops to merchants, royalists to parliamentarians, and from the famous to the poor and obscure, including many familiar names from civil war pamphleteering and propaganda. He identified petitions by men like William Chillingworth, and decoded anagrams to reveal the work of John Lilburne, and he frequently expanded initials, and cross-referenced within his collection to build up authorial profiles.⁶ Thomason is also an invaluable assistant in the difficult task of identifying journalists like Durand Hotham and Henry Walker 'the ironmonger', as well as Marchamont Nedham, 'author of *Politicus*', and John Berkenhead, 'author of *Aulicus*'. Frequently, he also recognized the handiwork of individual printers and publishers, as well as the products of provincial presses in Oxford and Edinburgh.⁷ Even here, however, there is more to learn, not least about those obscure individuals who turned to print fleetingly but purposefully in the circumstances of civil war. These include Captain John Cockayne and the London feltmaker, John Greene, as well as John Grant, 'a comfit maker in Bucklersbury', who apparently 'went himself to Oxon' with his pamphlet, and 'presented it to the king'.⁸ Even here, in other words, Thomason provides a means of exploring the social depth of print culture, and the new participatory opportunities that the revolution opened up.

Such attributions, of course, need to be handled with care. Thomason ought to be regarded as informed rather than authoritative, and the same also applies to the second familiar aspect

⁵ Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2014); Ann Hughes, *Godly Reformation and its Opponents in Warwickshire, 1640-1662* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1993), p. 22.

⁶ *The Petition* (Oxford, [6 Jan.] 1642[3], E.244[39]); Lionel Hurbin, *A Plea* (London, [17 Mar.] 1648, E.432[18]). For Thomason's expansion of initials, see 669.f.10[39]; E.50[27]; E.104[2]. For examples of Thomason's attributions, see E.10[32]; E.15[5]; E.17[7]; E.23[15]; E.24[8]; E.45[3]; E.49[2]; E.67[16]; E.108[28]; E.265[6]; E.438[15]; E.539[10]; E.550[16]; E.1144[6]; E.1656[1]. For authorial profiles, see Edward Bowles, *The Mysterie* (London, n.d., E.76[25]).

⁷ For journalists, see E.814[4]; E.258[14]; E.34[15]; E.18[3]. For publishers, printers and presses, see E.13[16]; E.530[31]; E.240[26]; E.49[2]; E.76[25].

⁸ J. C., *Englands Troubles Anatomized* (London, 1644, E.12[15]); J. G., *The First Man* (London, 1643, E.55[15]); J. G., *A True Reformation and Perfect Restitution* (London, by TB for SB, 1643, E.55[10]).

of his annotations: his habit of dating individual items. Here, it is noteworthy that Thomason's notes – which reflected the unusual organizing principle of his collection, 'time', and which were not necessarily followed in Fortescue's catalogue – reveal a determination to correct new style dating, to point out when title page dates were misleading, and to note when newsbooks appeared earlier or later than advertised.⁹ However, while Thomason would later boast of his pamphlets that 'the very day is written upon most of them that they came out', his annotations actually provide a guide to *acquisition* rather than *publication*. On certain occasions he obtained items significantly later than other contemporaries.¹⁰ Nevertheless, such information certainly makes it possible to contextualize tracts that would otherwise be difficult to situate with precision. This occurred most strikingly when the rediscovery of lost Thomason volumes helped to resolve long-standing debates regarding individual authors and their intellectual development.¹¹ More generally, Thomason's dates help us to plot production trends with much greater accuracy, in terms of identifying publishing peaks and troughs, and of gaining a better sense of how quickly authors and printers could respond to events – within days – and of how well contemporaries understood the value of a well-timed publication.¹² From Thomason, in other words, we gain crucial insights into the dynamic of contemporary print culture.

The third aspect of Thomason's annotations to intrigue scholars has been the assistance they offer in reconstructing his ideological identity and his social and professional networks. Among his attributions, therefore, some names crop up sufficiently frequently to suggest the existence of a strong personal connection, and his friends probably included the poet Thomas May, and the London educationalist and divine, Hezekiah Woodward, as well as Henry Parker, John Milton, and Samuel Hartlib, not to mention Edward Reynolds.¹³ More importantly, Thomason's annotations prove revealing about his personal opinions, and about his involvement in London's civilian and religious politics.¹⁴ His religious views and activism emerge not just from the parliamentary fast sermons that he professed to have attended, but also from hostile comments about Independent authors, and from the knowledge he revealed about Presbyterian petitioning campaigns.¹⁵ They also underpinned his attempts to demonstrate the Machiavellian techniques of his enemies, and one pamphlet regarding the iniquities inflicted by Scottish Presbyterians in the north of England was attacked as being entirely fraudulent, since the letters it contained were 'made at London by the

⁹ Lois Spencer, 'The Professional and Literary Connexions of George Thomason', *The Library*, 5th series, xiii (1958), p. 103; Stephen J. Greenberg, 'Dating Civil War Pamphlets, 1641-1644', *Albion*, xx (1988), pp. 387-401; Michael Mendle, 'The Thomason Collection: A Reply to Stephen J. Greenberg', *Albion*, xx (1990), pp. 85-93; S. Greenberg, 'The Thomason Collection: Rebuttal to Michael Mendle', *Albion*, xx (1990), pp. 95-98. For dating of pamphlets, see *The Devilish Conspiracy* (London, 1648 [11 Apr. 1649], E.550[16]). [J. Goodwin], *Innocency* (London, 1645 [corrected to 1644], E.24[8]). For newspapers, see E.458[10]; E.460[29]; E.468[35]). The other great collector who dated his pamphlets was Narcissus Luttrell: Stephen Parks, *The Luttrell File* (New Haven, 1999).

¹⁰ Spencer, 'Professional', p. 114; Jason Peacey, 'Sir Thomas Cotton's Consumption of News in 1650s England', *The Library*, vii (2006), pp. 3-24.

¹¹ Keith Thomas, 'The Date of Gerrard Winstanley's *Fire in the Bush*', *Past and Present*, xlii (1969), pp. 160-2. See F. B. Williams, 'Five Lost 'Thomason Tracts' Come Home', *The Library*, 5th series, xix (1964), pp. 230-4.

¹² See the exchange between David Jenkins and Henry Parker: David Jenkins, *The Vindication* ([London, 6 May 1647], E.386[6]); H[enry] P[arker], *An Answer* (London, [12 May] 1647, E.386[14]).

¹³ Spencer, 'Professional', pp. 102-18; E.27[3]; E.154[51]; E.46[7]; E.47[18]; E.76[23]; E.16[29]; E.107[29]; E.87[5]; E.652[14]; E.603[14], p. 40; E.62[17]; E.50[12]; E.578[5]; E.87[15]; E.16[18].

¹⁴ Lois Spencer, 'The Politics of George Thomason', *The Library*, 5th series, xiv (1959), pp. 11-27.

¹⁵ E.130[3]; E.130[4]; [John Sadler], *A Word in Season* (London, 1646, E.337[25]).

Indep[endents]'.¹⁶ Thomason's attributions, moreover, were often followed by fairly barbed comments. He amended the initials of the pro-army press licensor, Gilbert Mabbott, so that 'G. M.' became 'G. Madman', and he described the republican Henry Stubbe as 'a dangerous fellow, Sir Henry Vane's advisor', elsewhere describing the latter as 'a vaine knight'.¹⁷ A 1653 tract attacking John Lilburne was attributed to 'Cann[e] the sectary', while a congregational declaration from 1659 was ascribed to 'Philip Nye and his confederal crew of Independents'. A tract by George Fox was amended so that its title became a Quaker guide to *The Way to the Kingdome* 'of Satan'.¹⁸ On late-1650s tracts by William Prynne, meanwhile, Thomason described their author as 'loyall' and 'honest', thereby indicating his sympathy for the country's leading Presbyterian royalist.¹⁹

II

Such avenues of inquiry are clearly important, and yet it is necessary to look much deeper into Thomason's collection to fully appreciate the significance of his annotations. Rather than merely enabling us to contextualize individual pamphlets and newsbooks, his comments also shed valuable light upon contemporary reactions to the press, in terms of its complexity, uncertainty and power, and upon the practices which individual readers developed for coming to terms with the print revolution.

First, Thomason supplemented details regarding individual items with information about the general state of the print trade, not least the occasions when the authorities sought to clamp down on the newspaper industry, in October 1642, October 1655 and January 1660. That these measures were not all successful reminds us that the transformation of contemporary print culture probably seemed a lot less inevitable to contemporaries than it may sometimes seem to modern scholars.²⁰ Secondly, and more importantly, Thomason was not merely an obsessive *collector* but also an assiduous *reader* of pamphlets and newspapers. He recognized when new books were merely repackaged versions of older works, identified the tracts to which particular authors were responding, and distinguished between different editions. This could be done to identify the expansion or contraction of texts, as well as the occasions when authors played subtle tricks upon their readers, by copying a particular title and format in order to convey messages that were more or less subtly different.²¹ Occasionally, he even annotated particular *stories* in the diurnalls, such as by commenting that the banishment of two 'sectaries' from Newcastle in 1649 had been done 'most justly'.²² Thomason's reading was driven by a determination to understand apparently confusing productions from London's presses, and to comprehend civil war print culture, rather than merely by his own political and religious interests, although these things sometimes went hand-in-hand.

Moreover, two further points flow from this habit of close reading. Thomason realized, for example, that the date upon which tracts appeared was potentially significant, and he recorded such dates not merely for the purposes of efficient collection and cataloguing, but also in

¹⁶ *A Declaration* (London, [24 Oct.] 1646, E.358[18]).

¹⁷ *The Desires* (London, [8 May] 1648, E.441[2]), p. 6; Henry Stubbe, *A Letter* (London, [26 Oct.] 1659, E.1001[8]); *Retired Mans Meditations* (London, [2 July] 1655, E.485[1]).

¹⁸ John Canne, *Lieut. Colonel John Lilb. Tryed* (London, [22 Nov.] 1653, E.720[2]); *A Declaration of the Faith* (London, 1659, E968[4]); G. Fox, *To all that would know* ([London, 1655], E.732[8]).

¹⁹ *Six Important Quaeres* (30 Dec. 1659, 669.f.22[43]); *A Plea* (19 Jan. 1660, 669.f.23[1]).

²⁰ E.240[45]; E.854[8]; E.1013[23].

²¹ E.936[3]; E.47[18]; E.102[19]; E.47[22-3]; E.1179[5].

²² *Perfect Weekly Account* (14-21 Feb. 1649, E.544[15]), p. 396; Spencer, 'Politics', p. 21.

order to place individual works within their local political context. On a 1649 pamphlet by John Lilburne, for example, he noted that this was 'published before his triall six days', recognizing what had become a familiar tactic for both prosecutors and defendants: mobilizing the press to sway the opinions of judges and jurors.²³ Similarly, when he acquired verses regarding the death of Oliver Cromwell, in February 1661, Thomason noted that '[t]his poem was printed the 3rd day after that Cromwell, Bradshaw and Ireton were hanged at Tyburn and their bodies turned into a hole under the gallows'.²⁴ On more than one occasion, Thomason monitored efforts to enforce censorship and punish sedition, identifying works that were suppressed by the authorities. These included Lord Digby's parliamentary speech in 1641, a royal declaration produced at Cambridge in 1642, and pamphlets 'burned by the hand of the hangman', such as Sir Edward Dering's controversial Kentish petition.²⁵

Beyond this, Thomason recognized the need to interrogate forgeries and deceptions. On many occasions he not only added information where it was absent, but also corrected misleading title pages, and although these comments sometimes seem pedantic they are often vitally important.²⁶ From as early as 1641, therefore, he recorded fraudulent claims made by authors and publishers. A tract claiming to contain the text of Archbishop Ussher's December 1641 parliamentary sermon was described as 'a disavowed and most false coppie'. A 1642 pamphlet entitled *A True Relation of the Apprehension of the Lord Digby* was described as 'false'. And *A Worthie Speech* in Parliament was apparently 'not spoken in ye Howse'.²⁷ Some such comments reflected Thomason's personal involvement in Presbyterian campaigns, as when he exposed as 'false' a petition that had neither been published nor presented.²⁸ Others, however, reflected his broader outlook, and in July 1649 he recorded that a tract relating the miraculous healing powers of a handkerchief soaked in the blood of Charles I, and which had apparently healed a blind maid in Deptford, was 'very true'. When read alongside his other comments, however, these examples surely also indicate that Thomason was attempting to confront the so-called 'crisis of truth-telling' that emerged as a result of the print revolution.²⁹ This is not to say that Thomason always succeeded in distinguishing truth from falsity. In June 1645 he dismissed as 'false' a published letter from Oliver Cromwell – adding that the final paragraph advocating 'liberty of conscience' was 'added and not his owne' – having been fooled by an official pamphlet which contained a doctored version.³⁰ Here, Thomason was wrong, and the 'false' letter was in fact the accurate one. However, what such episodes do suggest is that, while Thomason was anxious about the possibility of lies prevailing, he did not despair of interrogating the pamphlets he encountered, and of testing their veracity.

Thomason's determination to understand his own rapidly changing industry, to sift truth from falsity, and to comprehend political tactics and power relationships, probably explains his passion for attributing and dating individual works. Well-connected though he was within

²³ *Strength out of Weaknesse* (London, [Oct.] 1649, E.575[18]). See also 669.f.12[63].

²⁴ *On the Death of that Grand Imposter* (London, [2 Feb.] 1661; 669.f.26[57])

²⁵ E.198[1]; E.113[19]; E.142[10]. See also E.294[3]; E.21[10].

²⁶ *Insignia* (Oxford [London], 1643, E.251[5]), p. 8.

²⁷ *Vox Hibernae* (London, 1642, E.132[32]); *True Relation* (London, 1642, E.133[16]); *Worthie Speech* (London, 1642, E.200[9]).

²⁸ *A New Birth* (London, [18 Aug.] 1646, E.350[12]).

²⁹ *A Miracle* (London, [5 July] 1649, E.563[2]); Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Late Stuart Britain* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 6; Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2008), pp. 303, 459.

³⁰ *Three Letters* (London, [17 June] 1645, E.288[27]), p. 3; *An Ordinance* (London, [17 June] 1645, E.288[26]), p.1; *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Wilbur Cortez Abbott, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1937), vol. i, p. 360.

the trade, and within London's civil and religious life, he clearly worked hard to be the well-informed citizen that his annotations reveal him to have been. It is hard to believe that the bulk of the information he recorded was common knowledge, even among London's mercantile elite and his own community of stationers, and rather than merely recording incidental information he probably inquired actively into the backgrounds of specific authors, in the hope of understanding the provenance of individual tracts. It was evidently important to him, for example, to discover the famous parentage of authors like Dudley Digges, Thomas Povey, and Durand Hotham.³¹ Indeed, Thomason occasionally went back through his collection to add newly acquired information, as on a tract by the scrivener, John Blackwell, who 'was at that time mad and put into Bedlam, but about a year after came again to his senses'.³² A royalist pamphlet like *Sacro-Sancta Regum Majestas* is interesting for slightly different reasons. Thomason noted on his copy that it was 'said to be' by James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, but he added that 'I rather think it to be by Leslie [Henry Leslie, Bishop of Down and Connor] or Williams [Griffith Williams, Bishop of Ossory] or by them both together'.³³ This suggests not just that Thomason was well-informed and well-connected, but also that he and his friends discussed the authorship of individual tracts. Indeed, he occasionally identified those with whom such discussions were held. In November 1644, for example, he not only attributed the newsbook *Perfect Occurrences* to Henry Walker 'the ironmonger', but also added that Walker had at one time received a licence to preach from Archbishop Laud, and that such information had been gleaned from the bookseller 'John Partridge and others this 22 June'.³⁴ However unusual Thomason was in having both a political and a professional interest in the book trade, he nevertheless highlights an under-appreciated willingness by contemporaries to interrogate tracts and pamphlets.

The likelihood that Thomason actively analysed the material he gathered, rather than simply picked up details in passing, is increased by undertaking what may seem a counter-intuitive pursuit: scrutinizing the occasions where Thomason's attributions were made less confidently, or indeed incorrectly. Like many subsequent historians, for example, Thomason sometimes found it difficult to disentangle counterfeit and authentic versions of newspapers, and if he got it right with *Mercurius Pragmaticus* in November 1647, he was mistaken with *Mercurius Aulicus* in October 1643.³⁵ Like later bibliographers, moreover, he also had difficulty with the works of William Prynne, one of which he mistakenly attributed to 'a Scots-man', while on others he wrote 'supposed to be Mr Prins', or 'I believe by Mr Prinn'.³⁶ Even a 1651 sermon was only 'said to be for Mr Love', even though it was preached by Thomason's fellow Presbyterian, Edmund Calamy, and published on behalf of Christopher Love, his fellow plotter against the republican regime.³⁷ On other occasions, Thomason's fallibility probably involved his prejudices and opinions clouding his judgment, as with his mistaken claim that a utopian tract by Peter Corneliszoon Plockhoy was by the Puritan preacher Hugh Peter, 'who hath a man named Cornelius, a glover'.³⁸ Even here, however,

³¹ E.29[1]; E.89[21]; E.34[15].

³² I. B., *A Heavenly Diurnall* (London, [13 Sept.] 1644, E.8[32]).

³³ *Sacro-Sancta Regum Majestas* (Oxford, [30 Jan.] 1644, E.30[22]).

³⁴ *Perfect Occurrences*, 15 (15-22 Nov. 1644, E.256[39])

³⁵ E.414[15]; E.71[8-9]. See Jason Peacey, "'The Counterfeit Silly Curr': Money, Politics, and the Forging of Royalist Newspapers during the English Civil War", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, lxxvii (2004), pp. 27-57.

³⁶ E.13[17]; E.253[1]; E.983[6*]. See also E.304[17].

³⁷ E. Calamy, *The Saints Rest* (London, [Sept.] 1651, E.641[19]).

³⁸ *A Way Propounded* (London, [28 May] 1659, E.984[7]), p. 19; L. Harder, *Plockhoy from Zurik-zee*, Mennonite Historical Series, 2 (Newton, KS, 1952). I am exceedingly grateful to Noel Malcolm for information about Plockhoy.

Thomason demonstrated a striking investigative spirit.

Such comments conjure up images of discussion, gossip and debate among Thomason's friends and colleagues, and of a lively face-to-face community to which Ann Hughes has elsewhere drawn attention. They also indicate how, within such communities, contemporaries grappled with the difficult task of comprehending the explosion of political and religious print culture.³⁹ This vibrancy of debate provides valuable and neglected evidence about how contemporaries reacted to civil war print culture with a mixture of fear and fascination, as well as with a determination to impose some kind of interpretative order upon the apparent chaos of cheap print.

III

As hinted at the outset, however, Thomason's annotations ultimately pose challenging questions regarding our treatment of the press during the mid-seventeenth century, since one of the most intriguing things to have struck him was the importance of free and non-commercial print. This dimension of the print revolution has been neglected even by those most familiar with his collection, and it is a phenomenon which is only just beginning to receive greater scholarly recognition. Perhaps because Thomason later placed so much emphasis upon his 'great charges' and his old-age poverty, historians have tended to assume that his tracts were overwhelmingly acquired by *purchase*. Nevertheless, as Lois Spencer recognized in passing decades ago, non-commercial items represented 'a valuable if inconspicuous feature of the collection', and close scrutiny of Thomason's annotations makes it possible to draw attention to a fascinating array of items that have been overlooked, and many more that have been misunderstood. Ultimately, these are vital for understanding the nature of seventeenth-century print culture.⁴⁰

First, Thomason acquired pamphlets – or fragments of pamphlets – whose production had been interrupted by the authorities, or else aborted for some reason, as with pages from an abandoned edition of *The Discoverie of Mysteries* (1643).⁴¹ Some of these probably came from colleagues in the industry, as with *Ormonds Curtain Drawn*, written by Sir John Temple 'but not finished', which he probably secured from Samuel Gellibrand.⁴² Others were illicit, and Thomason's acquisition of certain 'Ranter' tracts indicates how unsuccessful the authorities were in recalling items to be publicly burnt. On any number of occasions, however, Thomason also acquired a few sheets that were literally 'taken a printing' by justices and pursuivants.⁴³ Secondly, Thomason preserved books and pamphlets that had been given to him by their authors, including friends like Samuel Hartlib and John Milton.⁴⁴ The mistake with such works, often marked 'ex dono authoris', would be to assume that they were presentation copies of works that were otherwise available for sale. They may instead

³⁹ Ann Hughes, *'Gangraena' and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004).

⁴⁰ Spencer, 'Professional', p. 114; Spencer, 'Politics', p. 11; D. F. McKenzie, 'Printing and Publishing, 1557-1700: Constraints on the London Book Trades', in J. Barnard and D. F. McKenzie (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. iv, 1557-1695 (Cambridge, 2002), p. 562; Peter Stallybrass, 'Little Jobs. Broad-sides and the Printing Revolution', in Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist and Eleanor F. Shevlin (eds.), *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst, 2007), pp. 315-41.

⁴¹ E.104[27].

⁴² E.513[14].

⁴³ E.273[16]; E.25[4]; E.61[14]; E.47[7].

⁴⁴ [Samuel Hartlib], *A New Declaration* (London, 1643, E.520[13]); [Samuel Hartlib], *A Faithfull and Seasonable Advice* ([London], 1643, E.87[14]); John Milton, *Areopagitica* (London, 1644, E.18[9]).

resemble Thomason's many items that were printed 'for the author', only some of which are known to have been generally available.⁴⁵ For one such item Thomason explained that this was done 'because none else would', while for another his is the only known copy to survive. Yet another was clearly 'given out by the Quakers'.⁴⁶ Since we now appreciate that authors were willing to print their works merely in order to distribute them among friends and parishioners, there is no necessary reason to assume that works produced for their authors, or else donated to Thomason, were actually produced along commercial lines.⁴⁷ This logic might be applied to hundreds of other works in Thomason's collection, and as such it opens up new possibilities in terms of the print culture he was documenting, as well as his own motivations.

The most straightforward kind of non-commercial artefacts that Thomason preserved were explicitly designed for free circulation, and were addressed to Thomason personally, either in a private or a public capacity.⁴⁸ He amassed, for example, a variety of 'tickets', his word for single (and often small) printed sheets that summoned him to civic occasions, including militia musters, merchant meetings and sessions in Common Council. Many of these are rare survivals of items that were produced in vast quantities for administrative purposes and logistical reasons, and many of these were addressed by hand to 'Mr Thomason, Paul's churchyard'.⁴⁹ Beyond this, Thomason's collection also draws attention to printed 'lobby' documents, which were intended for more or less discreet circulation among influential individuals, normally those in decision-making positions within the city, its livery companies or Parliament. Some of these were produced from within the political elite, such as the 1642 tract entitled *The Generall Junto*, which was surely a gift from its author, Henry Parker, and which was described by Thomason as part of an edition of only fifty, 'never to be sold but given to particular friends'.⁵⁰ Thomason also acquired tracts offering advice from the Westminster Assembly of Divines regarding the parliamentary catechisms (1647), even though they were printed in editions of only 600, and intended merely 'for the service of both Houses', and even though the printer was ordered not to 'divulge or publish any of them'.⁵¹

Much more common, however, were those lobby documents directed at decision makers, and produced by individuals with cases under consideration. Some of these were presumably acquired in Thomason's capacity as an influential figure within London's civic community.⁵² One 1645 pamphlet regarding the internal politics of the Stationers' Company, and which was intended to agitate among its members, was 'delivered' to Thomason personally.⁵³ Another

⁴⁵ E.590[5]; E.883[4]; E.886[3].

⁴⁶ Thomas Cheshire, *A Sermon* (London, 'for the author', 1642, E.107[17]); R. Carpenter, *The Last and Highest Appeal* (London, 'for the author', 1656, E.1650[2]); *When the lord Jesus* ([London, 1655], 669.f.19[73]).

⁴⁷ Harold Love, 'Preacher and Publisher: Oliver Heywood and Thomas Parkhurst', *Studies in Bibliography*, xxxi (1978), pp. 227-35.

⁴⁸ Spencer, 'Politics', p. 11. See 669.f.5[111].

⁴⁹ *Sir, you are desired* ([London, 1650], E.608[14]); *Sir, you are requested* ([London, 1644], E.6[11]); *It is thought fit* ([London, 1644], E.6[18]); *Sir, you are desired* ([London, 1648], E.435[30*]); *The Committee of the Militia* ([London, 1648], 669.f.12[29]). See also the 1658 notice by highways commissioners, summoning men to the gravel pits near Palmers Green, who were to appear with 'shovell and pik axe': *These are to will and require you* ([London, 1658], 669.f.21[5]).

⁵⁰ Henry Parker, *The Generall Junto* ([London], 1642, 669.f.18[1]); Jason Peacey, 'The Politics of British Union in 1642 and the Purpose of Civil War Pamphlets', *Historical Research*, lxxx:210 (2007), pp. 491-517.

⁵¹ *The Humble Advice* (London, [1647], E.411[16]); *The Humble Advice* (London, [1647], E.417[2]); *Perfect Weekly Account*, 47 (24 Nov.-1 Dec. 1647, E.418[9]), sig. Xv.

⁵² [*The Government of the Fullers*], ([London, 1650], E.568[11]).

⁵³ *To all printers* ([London, 21 June 1645], E.288[44]).

fascinating example is a lengthy *Breviate*, to which Thomason added the note 'ex dono authoris', and which was printed by Jerome Alexander 'for the satisfaction of his friends'. This was clearly intended as a lobby document, which detailed Alexander's case and his attempts to secure justice from Parliament, and it was evidently given to Thomason as a member of the City committee that dealt with the case.⁵⁴ In June 1648, moreover, Thomason also became the target of a more concerted and politicized form of lobbying, when he and other common councillors were presented with a printed sheet containing the aggressive demands of London's Presbyterian citizens, who sought peace and demilitarization, the reduction of taxes, and 'an account [of] what (as our proxies) you have done to these ends'.⁵⁵ In the light of such items, questions inevitably arise regarding how many other texts of a similar nature – produced for more or less limited circulation, rather than for widespread distribution, let alone public sale – Thomason acquired without noting their provenance.⁵⁶

Beyond the printed sheets, forms and pamphlets that were addressed to him personally, Thomason also acquired items that were intended for posting on doors, posts and noticeboards. From his friend Edward Reynolds, therefore, he acquired a broadside containing *Questions* that had been 'extracted out of the ordinance' regarding the Lord's Supper, together with the biblical passages where answers and elucidation could be found. This text was 'printed only for the use of his own parish', and was doubtless intended for public display in church.⁵⁷ Similar items appear to have been removed from the posts and doors to which they had been attached, in order to be preserved within Thomason's collection. One volume contains a single printed sheet that exposed to scrutiny London ministers who had subscribed the republic's Engagement oath, and that had been 'pasted upon divers church dores' across the capital on 11 November 1649, 'being Sunday'.⁵⁸ What is interesting about this kind of document, however, is that there are many other items within the collection that Thomason did not indicate had been displayed in a similar fashion, but that share many of the same characteristics. Thomason's collection may thus contain many more items that were designed as notices for public display, and that were acquired in a similar fashion.

In part, such items reveal Thomason's fascination with the invention of printed advertisements, for anything from learned public lectures (by the likes of Sir Balthazar Gerbier and Christian Ravius), to quack remedies for common ailments.⁵⁹ These were not exactly novel, although they may have become much more common during the revolutionary decades, and it was occasionally made clear that they were designed to be posted in public places, not least so that customers could find the shop 'where one of these bills shall stick'.⁶⁰ More common – and significant – are the many notices that Thomason collected – *unannotated* – relating to the organization of public meetings, whether official or otherwise. These could be targeted at members of particular livery companies, but they could also be

⁵⁴ *A Breviate* (London, 1644, E.1066[2]), pp. 86, 97-8, 103.

⁵⁵ *The Humble Desires* ([London, 1648], 669.f.12[39]). This was addressed to 'all the honest freemen', who were 'required to underwrite and send it forwards to their common-councill-men, with effect'. Another similar lobby document which was sent to Thomason to be presented to the Common Council was quickly printed by the authorities in London: *A Narrative* (London, [6 July] 1647, E.396[26]).

⁵⁶ Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, ch. 9.

⁵⁷ *Questions* (London, 1648, 669.f.12[56]).

⁵⁸ *Be it known* ([London, 1649], E.579[6]). Thomason subsequently added an updated version of this blacklist, 'posted upon the Church doors the last day of November 1649': *Be it knowne* ([London, 1649], E.584[7]).

⁵⁹ *To all fathers* ([London, 28 June 1648], 669.f.14[46]); *To all fathers* (London, [31 Oct.] 1649, 669.f.14[87]); *Sir, You are intreated* ([London, 14 Aug. 1647], E.401[41]); *A Most Excellent and Rare Drink* ([London, 1650], 669.f.15[47]).

⁶⁰ *All Gentlemen* (London, [Dec.] 1656, 669.f.20[41]).

addressed to anyone with an interest in the Irish Adventurers scheme or in purchasing crown lands, to people with grievances against parliamentary privileges, or to those who were curious about proceedings at London's Common Hall. They could also be produced to enlist soldiers for the parliamentary forces under Edward Massey, with the promise of 'entertainment' at The George in King's Street, Westminster.⁶¹

The key to understanding these notices is that, unlike items directed to Thomason personally, these were non-commercial but highly public, since they can be presumed to have been targeted at, and read by, large numbers of people. The same is probably also true of another kind of printed document that survives in Thomason's papers: printed sheets intended to promote petitioning campaigns. Once again, some such items were sent to Thomason personally, while many others were not annotated by him, and can only be tentatively identified as having been distributed freely. In 1645, therefore, Thomason acquired a single sheet printed 'blank petition' – a printed petition with a blank for a place name to be filled in by hand – which promoted a Presbyterian settlement of the church, and which was 'sent to Mr George Thomason to get hands'.⁶² It is only by means of the hand-written annotation, and extremely close inspection of the printed text, that this emerges as something other than a commercial copy of a contemporary petition, produced for sale to capitalize upon popular fascination with the latest political developments. Once again, many other similar items would probably repay similar scrutiny, their origins open to doubt. It is certainly possible to find other examples of 'blank' petitions, as well as any number of other broadsides, quarto sheets, and pamphlets that encouraged citizens to sign petitions, attend meetings, or join crowds outside Parliament.⁶³ London Baptists produced a printed broadside calling for petitions on their behalf, explaining where copies could be obtained, 'one for every parish', and produced in order 'to get in their several parishes as many hands as they can'.⁶⁴ A 1648 petition in support of Sir John Maynard encouraged its supporters to 'repair to Wesminster' on 18 February, ahead of Maynard's indictment before the House of Lords.⁶⁵ And a 1649 Leveller petition encouraged people to offer their subscriptions, 'to the women which will be appointed in every ward and division to receive the same', and then to 'meet at Westminster Hall' on 23 April, between 8am and 9am, when the petition would be delivered.⁶⁶ Another single sheet, issued on 18 July 1643, encouraged 'all sorts of well-affected persons' who sought a 'general rising' to attend a meeting the following day at Merchant Taylors' Hall, in order to sign a petition to Parliament.⁶⁷

To achieve their desired result, such works must have been distributed more or less widely and without charge, and once again Thomason may have obtained them by removing flyers from the posts to which they had originally been attached. Perhaps this was how he obtained a printed sheet that promoted a meeting at Grocers' Hall and the lobbying of a parliamentary committee (July 1644). This document bore the instruction: 'shew this to your friends. If it be stuck up, let none presume to pull it down'.⁶⁸ Thomason presumably ignored this injunction, as he also appears to have done with another organizational device – his copy of the printed

⁶¹ *All such persons* ([London, 1641], E.197[4]); *At Grocers Hall* ([London], 1644, E.7[28]); *To all printers* ([13 June] 1645, E.288[9]). *The contractors* ([London, 165], 669.f.15[17]); *All gentlemen souldiers* (London, [26 June 1645], E.289[13]); *All worthy commanders* ([London, 1648], 669.f.12[81]). See Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, ch. 10.

⁶² *The humble petition of [blank]* ([London, 1645], 669.f.10[37]).

⁶³ *The Humble Petition of Divers Inhabitants of the county of [blank]* ([London, 1649], 669.f.13[89]).

⁶⁴ *The Humble Request* ([London, 1643], 669.f.8[27]).

⁶⁵ *The Humble Petition of Many Wel-Affected Citizens* ([London, 1648], 669.f.11[126]).

⁶⁶ *The Humble Petition of Divers Wel-affected Women* (London, [24 Apr.] 1649, E.551[14]), p. 8.

⁶⁷ *All sorts of well-affected persons* ([London, 1643], E.61[3]).

⁶⁸ *All that Wish Well* ([London, 1644], E.61[10]).

slip that sought to rally the apprentices to gather in Covent Garden piazza in January 1643, 'in compleate civill habit, without swords or staves'. This certainly looks like it has been torn from the post or door upon which it had been set up.⁶⁹ This last example introduces yet another category of non-commercial printed works to which Thomason's annotations draw attention: single sheets that were literally scattered about the streets, and which Thomason presumably picked up where they fell. Such items included *Proquiritatio*, which 'was scattered up and down London the 14 and 15 Sep. 1642', and which Thomason cross-referenced to a story in one of the newspapers.⁷⁰ In later years he acquired countless similar items, including texts produced by Independents against dilatory commanders such as the Earls of Essex and Manchester ('scattered about the streets in the night'), flyers used to publicize portions of Cromwell's letters that had been censored by Parliament, and texts that were attributed to the army agitators and Levellers.⁷¹ The most infamous and inflammatory of these was the *Charge of High Treason* against Cromwell (August 1653), which sought to orchestrate a nationwide rebellion, and which caused considerable consternation at Whitehall.⁷² The acquisition of such texts suggests that Thomason was something of a magpie, whose morning routine involved picking up scandalous items that had been 'scattered abroad' and 'cast about', almost invariably 'in the night tyme', and in order to avoid detection and arrest.⁷³

IV

Thomason's annotations permit not just a revised interpretation of his motives in creating the collection, but also the re-evaluation of mid-seventeenth-century print culture. Thomason's zeal for collecting reflected a determination to get to grips with the print revolution, and to understand the nature of the bewildering number and variety of texts that were being produced by London's presses, in terms of the circumstances in which they appeared and the motives of those responsible. Thomason recognized that the nature of contemporary pamphlets, newsbooks and ephemera could only be grasped through careful analysis, and this process of investigation-through-collection was anything but an easy or a solitary pursuit. Indeed, he worked hard at interpreting individual works, to provide whatever fixity we now have about authorship and dating, and he did so through discussion and debate amongst friends and colleagues from London's book trade and civic community. What such investigations revealed was a wealth of material that was designed for non-commercial distribution, to more or less discrete audiences, but potentially to a very large cross-section of the population, and Thomason's annotations force us to adopt a much more rigorous and sceptical attitude towards the material in his collection. It would be fundamentally dangerous to assume that Thomason's collection represents the body of work which was commercially available during the 1640s and 1650s, and the challenge is how to be sure what proportion of the unannotated or minimally commented upon items was commercial, and what proportion was produced privately, even if for public consumption.

This in turn prompts a further question, regarding how easy it is to determine whether

⁶⁹ *You that are Subscribers* ([London, 1643], E.83[46]).

⁷⁰ *Proquiritatio* ([London], 1642, E.240[1]).

⁷¹ *Alas pore Parliament* ([London, 1644], E.21[9]); *The Conclusion* ([London, 1645], 669.f.10[38]); *A Copy of a Letter* ([London, 1647], E.413[18]); *All worthy officers* ([London, 1649], E.551[21]).

⁷² *The Charge* ([London, 1653], 669.f.17[52]).

⁷³ *Alas pore Parliament; A Short Discovery* ([London, 1655], E.852[3]), p. 8; *An Alarm* ([London] 1654, 669.f.19[1]); *The Humble Petition of the Freeholders* (London, 30 July 1655, 669.f.20[10]); *The Picture* ([London], 1656, E.875[6]).

individual works were, or were not, commercial in nature. Historians certainly ought to pay much more attention to details regarding booksellers (but not necessarily printers) that were provided on title pages, as well as to the presence of words such as 'published', details regarding official imprimaturs, and perhaps also the use of woodcut illustrations.⁷⁴ However, it is much less clear what should be made of works that lack such information, but nevertheless appeared with title pages. The use of a title page is surely not sufficient evidence that a work was published for sale, but neither is the absence of a title page proof that a work was produced privately. Particularly problematic are single sheet items, petitions, and lobby documents, as well as official declarations and proclamations, acts and ordinances. Officially produced works make up a significant portion of Thomason's collection, but it is not entirely clear whether these were distributed freely – they were after all paid for by Parliament and the king – or else produced for commercial sale. With petitions, meanwhile, a fairly high proportion were produced without the names of printers or booksellers. Amongst these there is probably little sure way of isolating items that were produced for sale, and with the purpose of drawing attention to a particular grievance *after* they had been delivered, something to which David Zaret has drawn attention as one of the defining developments of the 1640s. At least some printed petitions were produced to influence decision-makers *before* being presented, or indeed as part of the process of submitting cases to Parliament. The submission of printed petitions had become increasingly prevalent since the 1620s, and Thomason certainly bundled together a great many such items that were delivered to the Cromwellian House of Commons. The only evidence regarding their non-commercial nature was his comment, on the very first of them, that 'these papers came out all in the Parliament which began Sept. the 3rd 1654', but given what we know about the number of printed petitions that were thrust into the hands of MPs during the 1650s, this can surely be taken as evidence that many of Thomason's petitions were produced for distribution rather than sale.⁷⁵

Of course, individual works do not necessarily need to be pigeonholed as being *either* commercial *or* non-commercial, since specific items may have served a double purpose. This may be true of official declarations and proclamations, and it certainly appears to be true of a 1642 petition from 'many thousand poore people'. That this was printed 'for William Larnar and T.B.' suggests that it was available for purchase, but it was also said to have been produced 'for the use of the petitioners who are to meet this present day in More Fields [Moorfields], and from thence go to the House of Parliament with it in their hands'.⁷⁶ Later, it is known that John Canne's *Discoverer* was 'published by authority' while also being 'presented to the members of the House'.⁷⁷ Whatever the prevalence of works that were both distributed freely and sold commercially, it is surely necessary to acknowledge that non-commercial – if very public – print played a much more important part in the output of the press during the civil wars and interregnum than scholars have yet recognized. This will inevitably have a profound effect upon our understanding of individual authors like Henry Parker, a proportion of whose pamphlets may have been produced non-commercially. In addition to the *Generall Junto*, mentioned above, Parker also produced a series of visually distinctive works that have no evidence of authorship, printers, or booksellers, and that also

⁷⁴ For 'published', see *A Letter without any Superscription* ([London], 1642[3], E.86[31]).

⁷⁵ David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, 1999); *The Humble Petition of Richard Tuttle* (London, [Sept. 1654], 669.f.19[10]). This is probably a reference to the following fifty or so items (669.f.19[10-66]). See Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, ch. 8; Chris R. Kyle, *Theater of State. Parliament and Political Culture in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, 2012), ch. 6.

⁷⁶ *The Humble Petition of Many Thousand Poore People* (London, 1642[3], 669.f.4[54]).

⁷⁷ John Canne, *The Discoverer* (London, 1649, E.564[9]); *Perfect Weekly Account* (30 May-6 June 1649), p. 533.

lack title pages, and he also penned a printed petition for the Stationers' Company, which may have been presented to Parliament rather than offered for sale (1643). He also produced lobby documents on behalf of individuals with causes pending before Parliament, as well as two printed statements of his own case, which were almost certainly circulated privately among MPs, and presented to Parliament rather than sold in a conventional manner. According to Thomason, one of them was 'presented May 4th 1647'. That these survive in his collection surely reflects the two men's friendship, rather than their general availability.⁷⁸

Much more importantly, recognizing the importance of non-commercial print culture, and of printed items that were distributed freely (whether selectively or indiscriminately), ought to prompt a reassessment of the nature of public political culture during the mid-seventeenth century. The public domain of civil war and interregnum England was clearly vibrant, but such vibrancy was not entirely dependent upon the expansion of commercial print culture. Indeed, to the extent that this print culture involved free distribution rather than commercial sale, it can be said to have fostered the involvement and participation of an even broader cross-section of the public, and an even greater expansion of the political nation. What evidently struck Thomason during the 1640s and 1650s was not just how much print was circulating, but also how much print active citizens encountered during their daily lives, without necessarily having to purchase pamphlets and newspapers, and whether or not they actively sought to consume the ideas and information on offer. Whatever we might think about the plausibility of detecting a Habermasian public sphere in seventeenth-century England, the structural transformation of the public domain during Thomason's age was clearly not reliant upon forces that were simply bourgeois or commercial.

Author note

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⁷⁸ Michael Mendle, *Henry Parker and the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 15-16, 26-7; Jason Peacey, 'Henry Parker and Parliamentary Propaganda in the English Civil Wars' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1994), pp. 98-9, 104; Henry Parker, *Memoriall* ([London, 1647], BL, 669.f.11[8]); Henry Parker, *Memoriall* ([London, 1648], BL, 669.f.11[110]). For the friendship between Parker and Thomason, see Mendle, *Henry Parker*, pp. 1-2, 13; Spencer, 'Professional', p. 104.