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John Harris, the Oxford Army Press, and the radicalizing process

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reconstruct the life, networks, and experiences of the Caroline actor-turned-printer and journalist, John Harris, the pen behind *Mercurius Militaris*, the most radical newsbook of the civil war period. It provides the first extensive biography of Harris's life, shedding new light on the role of his 'Oxford Press' in New Model Army politics in the crucial summer of 1647. The analysis of Harris's experiences in this paper supports the growing body of scholarship which has sought to redefine the interpretation of 'radicals' and 'radicalism' during the British civil wars; it stresses the importance of fluidity, uncertainty, and compromise in terms of both ideas and allegiances. But it also argues that Harris did undergo a *radicalizing* process, one which was anchored to his broader experiences and his engagement with print in particular. The collaborative and creative processes of producing printed texts, the amalgamating, compromising, and finessing of different ideas, as well as refining positions in response to other printed texts, forced Harris to think creatively about his own intellectual and political outlook. Harris's experiences, at least, drove him to adopt more and more extreme solutions to the political crises which he perceived to be afflicting the body politic.

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On 3 September 1660, John Harris prepared to perform the fifth and final act of his life; he had played the wayward youth, the travelling actor, the radical revolutionary and treacherous spy, and now, 'carried from Newgate, with his coffin, in a cart', he adopted his departing role: that of the penitent sinner. 'Exceeding[ly] faint and weak', he stepped upon the scaffold at St Mary's Ax and faced the crowd which had gathered to witness his execution. Briefly, he presented his 'confession': 'having something in Arrears, as he said, and falling into Poverty, Necessity invited him to use his wits once more'. Assuming the guise of a Captain, he came to the house of 'one Mr De Noy, a merchant, with a guard of soldiers' and 'pretending the Lord Chancellors Warrant, he caused the doors to be broke open ... and carried away about 12 pounds'. At 'about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning' he proceeded to the house of Captain Halls in Redriff and 'in a like manner' managed to steal 'a very considerable sum'. After giving his soldiers 30 shillings of drinking money, he

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fled back to his house in Lambeth Marsh where, within a few hours, he was apprehended, committed to Newgate and ‘received Sentence of Death’. With the formalities of confession over, he turned, ‘wringing his hands’ to ‘addresse himself to the People’. ‘Christian friends’ he said – or was purported to have said – ‘I hope God will forgive me my sins, since I conceive it is very much his pleasure to bring me to this place for the sins that I have committed. It is the Lords affliction’. ‘I beseech you’, he cried to the crowd, ‘pray for me, and joyn with me in this, my last prayer’. Harris performed his final speech ‘a little before his death’ and then, ‘pulling his Cap over his Eyes’, he began – as would any great actor – to perform extempore. He ‘prayed again fervently, putting up divers Ejaculations; As, Father into thy hands I commend my Spirit, for thou hast redeemed it; O God, thou God of Truth; Lord Jesus, receive my Soul; Sweet Saviour into thy hands I commit my spirit; and so he yielded to Death’.¹

Sitting atop his coffin on his journey towards death, Harris no doubt had time to reflect upon a remarkable life. He had experienced the bloodiest fratricidal conflict in British history, the end of the theatre, bishops, Lords, even the Church itself, and, allegedly, was on the scaffold to witness Charles I’s execution. To historians he has left a small but extremely colourful bequest of pamphlets and perhaps the most radical newsbook of the civil war period, *Mercurius Militaris*: the works of an eminently theatrical literary mind.

The details of Harris’s life, however, remain largely unknown and, like many of his fellow printers and writers, he might have fallen into obscurity were it not for the work of two historians, whose research has been crucial to this present study. Margot Heinemann was the first to resurrect Harris in her analysis of the relationship between Caroline theatre and the ‘Leveller’ style.² More recently, Michael Mendle has placed Harris back at the heart of army politics: a fully formed figure with aims and agency of his own, whose Oxford Press is now rightly regarded as central to the political machinations unfolding in the summer of 1647. Mendle’s investigations into the personal background of this article’s protagonist have also been deeply instructive.³ Harris continues to make frequent, if short-lived, appearances in the historiography of civil war radicalism and yet, in spite of the excellent research aforementioned, he is all too often reduced to the ‘radical’, or more specifically ‘Leveller’ ‘radical’, canonized by Barbara Taft and Robert Zaller in 1983.⁴

This categorization of Harris is, of course, unhelpful. As Conal Condren has pointed out, radical ‘as a political noun...is a modern invention’, an anachronism reflexive of a broader process whereby historians have assimilated the political terminology of the present into the civil war landscape.⁵ The use of our own ‘entrenched classifications’ has, Condren argued, created ‘a grid of political oppositions which we have reified and yet into which the evidence does not happily fit’: the phenomenon of civil war ‘radicalism’, in short, as Condren, J.C Davis, and others have argued, is one of the ‘mythologies’ which have emerged as a result of

¹J. Harris, *The Speech of Major John Harris* (London, 1660). Where specific dates of publication have been provided, they come from Thomason’s handwritten notes.

²M. Heinemann, ‘Popular Drama and Leveller Style – Richard Overton and John Harris’ in M. Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes* (London, 1978), pp. 69–93.

³See, in particular, ‘Putney’s Pronouns’ in M. Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647* (Cambridge, 2001) and Mendle’s paper entitled ‘The Oxford Army Press of 1647’ given at St. Anne’s College, Oxford, on 21–23rd July 2006.

⁴See R. Greaves, R. Zaller (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol.II: G – O (Harvester Press, 1983), pp. 59–60.

⁵C. Condren, ‘Radicals, Conservatives, and Moderates in Early Modern Political Thought: A Case of Sandwich Islands Syndrome?’ *History of Political Thought*, Vol.10, No.3, Autumn 1989, p.532.

this semantic laxity.⁶ There are problems with Condren's purgative approach, semantic, practical, and historical, but it has nonetheless forced historians to be more mindful of language and its implications for historical analysis.⁷ This article, thus, will use the adjectival form of radical as a modifier, denoting extreme, and will attempt to avoid the term 'radicalism', construed 'as a distinct, unified complex of ideas or programs, of a progressive (even proto-leftist) nature'.⁸ It will instead prefer the term 'activist', itself somewhat anachronistic but nonetheless a more neutral term to denote being politically engaged, without applying a political slant to that engagement.

Whilst Condren and Davis have been largely successful in cleansing the historical lexicon, their rejection of 'radicalism' *en tout* has been less readily accepted. For as Rachel Foxley writes in her analysis of *The Levellers*, the civil wars did give public prominence to ideas which seem 'suspiciously, unhelpfully modern'.⁹ It has been the task of a more recent generation of historians, who might perhaps be grouped under the equally unhelpful label of 'post-Revisionists', to rehabilitate 'radicalism' into civil war historiography and to find new ways of conceptualizing it which more closely adhere to the evidence and which are less reliant on the binary dynamics of *left* and *right*, *radical* and *conservative*. Perhaps no other radical 'group' has undergone more significant revision, in light of recent scholarship, than the 'Levellers'. As Elliot Vernon has noted, the term 'Leveller' itself was a pejorative, invented in late 1647 to attack those individuals who rallied around the first *Agreement of the People*.¹⁰ Rather than the proto-democratic party of Whig historiography or contemporary polemic, the 'Levellers' were an ill-defined and fluid grouping of individuals; De Krey's most recent study defines them as 'a heterogeneous loose following with divergent and even contradictory ideas', whilst Jason Peacey argues that they were 'a broad church...part of a broad and fluid radical network' and certainly 'not a self-contained movement or party'.¹¹ Even Rachel Foxley, who has afforded the Levellers a greater degree of intellectual coherence and retains the term 'movement', has acknowledged that they were nonetheless 'a shifting group of people gathered relatively informally around core writers and organizers'.¹² In their analysis of the *Agreements of the People*, Elliot Vernon and Philip Baker have further emphasized the collaborative nature of the documents around which such networks gathered, and the intersection between them, convincingly undermining the traditional army-civilian

⁶C. Condren, *The Language of Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Macmillan, 1994), p.165, 141. The debate concerning radicalism is much wider than can be restated here, but J. C. Davis's seminal article, 'Radicalism in a Traditional Society: the Evaluation of Radical Thought in the English Commonwealth, 1649–1660' (*History of Political Thought, Vol.3, No.2, Summer 1982*) warrants mention, as does G. Burgess, M. Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism, 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 2007).

⁷For a thought-provoking rebuttal of Condren's argument in particular, see A. Hessayon, D. Finnegan, 'Introduction: Reappraising Early Modern Radicals and Radicalisms' in Hessayon, Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism in Context* (Ashgate, 2011).

⁸D. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (Oxford, 2018), p.6 fn.13. For an excellent discussion of the broader historiography of radicalism, its problems, and solutions, see pp. 1–20.

⁹R. Foxley, *The Levellers* (Manchester, 2013), p.1.

¹⁰E. Vernon, "'A Firme and Present Peace; Upon Grounds of Common Right and Freedome": The Debate on the *Agreements of the People* and the Crisis of the Constitution, 1647–1659' in P. Baker, E. Vernon (eds.), *The Agreements of the People, the Levellers, and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹¹G. De Krey, *Following the Levellers, Volume One: Political and Religious Radicals in the English Civil War and Revolution, 1645–1649* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.2, J. Peacey, 'The People of the *Agreements*: The Levellers, Civil War Radicalism and Political Participation' in Baker, Vernon (eds.), *The Agreements*, p.51.

¹²Foxley, *Levellers*, p.5.

divide.¹³ The point here is to demonstrate that the recent thrust of historiography has been to recognize and describe the fluidity and instability of individuals, ideas, and allegiances which constituted the radical civil war dynamic, rather than superimpose constrictive and misleading categories upon it.

This article aims to probe this approach at an individual level; by attempting to reconstruct the lived experience of one individual operating in the midst of this dynamic, it will further seek to highlight the deficiencies of conceptualizing 'radicalism' as defined by groups with clear, coherent, aims and agendas. In analysing John Harris's specific networks, influences, and ideas, it will aim to bring into focus the themes of the formidable body of scholarship outlined above: ideas and allegiances, in Harris's case, were highly contingent, mutable, and inchoate, and which, at any one moment defy simple categorization. They were dependent as much upon personal connections, circumstance, and the necessities of survival as they were upon any sense of ideological uniformity.

Nonetheless, this article will argue that Harris underwent a process of radicalization: that is, the adoption of increasingly extreme solutions to the problems which, as he conceived, confronted the English state. As we shall see, Harris's earlier experiences of the sharp edge of Caroline theatre and his potential religious affiliations were and remained important points of reference throughout his life, but it was not until the outbreak of the civil wars that Harris was forced to fully engage with his own political views. Central to this process was print. As a printer, which carried practical value, and as a receiver and transmitter of intelligence, a greater intangible currency, Harris found himself at the epicentre of a nexus of ideas, interactions, overlapping allegiances and interests, which constituted the unstable dynamic of the radical civil war milieu. His involvement in the Oxford Army Press in particular was a pivotal point in Harris's own intellectual development. His partnership with 'army' and 'civilian' activists, Edward Sexby and John Wildman, encouraged Harris to think imaginatively about the problems and possibilities posed by the civil wars: Harris's *Antipodes* (1647), a product of this press, was, it shall be argued, an important precursor to the radical constitutional documents propagated in late 1647 and 1648, and was emblematic of this creative environment. His later interactions with soldiers, statesman, and activists, further sharpened Harris's political perspective and it was again in print, through the newsbook *Mercurius Militaris*, that Harris arrived at his ultimate, radical political agenda in the closing months of 1648.

The 'radicalizing process' is not, of course, a new idea and nor is this particular reading of it. The idea that radicalism can best be understood as a series of moments of collaboration and imaginative production, anchored around the power and creative potential of print, and shaped by the wider experiences of the civil wars, was put forward by Michael Braddick in 2008.¹⁴ Jason Peacey and David Como, amongst others, have built upon these ideas since, laying emphasis upon the importance of print, and in particular stressing the significance of the relationships between printers, publishers, writers and the world of 'traditional' politics.¹⁵ The aim of this article, therefore, is not to

¹³P. Baker, E. Vernon, 'What was the first "Agreement of the People"?' *The Historical Journal*, Vol.53, Issue 1, 2010.

¹⁴Perhaps the clearest summary of Braddick's argument is given in 'Mobilisation, Anxiety and Creativity in England during the 1640s' in J. Morrow, J. Scott (eds.), *Liberty, authority, formality: political ideas and culture, 1600–1900* (Exeter, 2008).

¹⁵See, for example, Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013) and Como, Como, D., 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 51, Issue 4, (2012), pp. 820–857, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (Oxford, 2018), and 'Secret Printing, the Crisis of 1640, and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism', *Past and Present*, No. 196, (2007), pp. 37–82.

propose a new way of imagining this process, but rather to use the unusually twisting path of Harris's life as a useful medium for viewing these ideas and processes in action.

I – Early lives and careers

Reconstructing the life of John Harris is a problematic project. Few archival sources survive and those that do are, at best, fragmentary. The historical detective is rarely digging completely in the dark, however. Three contemporary sources, written between 1648 and 1651 by Harris's nemeses in the newsbook trade, provide us with some clues. The first comes via George Wharton, a Yorkshire-born astrologer and future baronet who, in 1648, took it upon himself to unveil the man behind *Mercurius Militaris*. 'John Harries', he wrote, was 'sometimes a Players Boy, a Rogue by Statue; and since the Suppression of Play-houses, hath betaken himself to the Profession of a Printer'. Wharton promised in his next instalment to 'give a further character of him' but was discovered and arrested before being able to publish it.¹⁶

John Crouch, aka *The Man in the Moon*, echoed Wharton's characterisation of the man 'knowne by the name of Jack of Oxford, a Villaine so principl'd in Knavery that the world hath not his Fellow'. 'Let all men whom it concerns...be carefull of this Strowler, for be it very active to betray, because what he practised formerly on the Stage, that was a Judas, Faux, or Ravailac, hee now intends to act really, and as formerly he betrayed and killed his Brethren in jeast, so now he will doe it in earnest'.¹⁷ The third, the author of the *Royall Diurnall*, concurred. Once 'of the Company of the Revells...and is become one of the Company of the Rebels...' Harris was, he added, one of the 'Sisters of the Separation'. He 'professeth himself a kind of Sollicitor to the Councell of State but his chiefe employment is to betray people'.¹⁸

Our first impression of Harris is, unsurprisingly, negative. In the eyes of his royalist adversaries, he was an atheist, criminal, and fervent anti-Monarchist, a separatist, players' boy and a treacherous agent of the state. We also gain from these accounts several vital pieces of information: he was from Oxford, he had formerly been an actor, and had become a printer. Despite the evident bias in these reports, we shall see that much of the charges they contained can be partly or wholly corroborated.

'Jack of Oxford' was indeed from Oxford, baptised at St.Martin's Church, Carfax, on 16 June 1607, the eighth child and fourth son of Katherine and Francis Harris. The family were highly visible in the social life of the city. Francis, a former bookseller's apprentice, ran the Swindlestock tavern in the centre of Oxford and frequently served in municipal office, rising to become city chamberlain. A socially aspirational and politically orthodox family, John's sisters were married off to an Oxford mercer and a gentleman of Gloucester respectively, whilst his eldest brother Thomas, who had matriculated from Exeter College aged fifteen, was admitted as one of the first fellows of Wadham College. He died of a sudden illness in 1614. By the time John turned sixteen, both his parents were dead too, leaving him £100 in trust and an assortment of feather pillows and linens to remember them by.¹⁹

¹⁶G. Wharton, *Mercurius Impartialis* [No.1] (London, 1648), pp. 2–3.

¹⁷J. Crouch, *The Man in the Moon* [No.48] (London, 1650), pp. 374–375.

¹⁸Anon., *The Royall Diurnall* [No.1] (London, 1650), sig.A1v.

¹⁹The will of John's mother, Katherine, survives: see *TNA*, PROB 11/142. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Stephanie Jenkins, whose research on the mayoral history of Oxford I have relied upon here, and to Dr Michael Mendle, who shared his own research on John Harris which I cited earlier. For Stephanie Jenkins' research, see http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/mayors/1603_1714/harris_francis_1633.html. The ideas, assertions and mistakes which follow, however, are entirely my own.

Aged eighteen and under the custody of his eldest brother Francis, John was sent to be apprenticed to a non-descript London stationer of Oxfordshire origin, Peter Paxton, whose name is attached to only one printed work.²⁰ There is no evidence to suggest that Harris completed his apprenticeship nor is there any further record of him for the next nine years.

On 10 March 1635 we find John Harris amongst a list of actors in a touring company which was brought before a court in Norwich and ‘absolutely forbidden to play any longer in this city’.²¹ In an early indication of his character, it seems likely that, at some point between 1626 and 1635, Harris rejected the authority of both his master and brother, abandoned his dreary apprenticeship, and sought instead the excitement and drama of the stage.

As Harris’s later writings show, replete as they were with Shakespearian allusions and satirical verse, his experiences as an actor were formative. The touring company in question has been identified as *The King’s Revels*, who predominantly performed at the private Salisbury Court theatre on the northern banks of the Thames.²² Far from being the obsequious incubator of nascent royalist values of popular conception, the Salisbury Court in particular was at the forefront of an ‘oppositional theatre’ which, Martin Butler and more recently Matthew Steggle have argued, produced drama that was deeply ‘sceptical, critical, and levelling’.²³ Butler has identified the theatre’s most prominent playwrights, Richard Brome, Thomas Rawlins, and Nathaniel Richards, as part of a wider literary circle including Robert Davenport, Humphrey Mill, and Robert Chamberlain, who were heavily critical of the court and its values. Their patronage reflected their anti-court affiliations. Richard Brome’s most frequent sponsor was William Seymour, the Earl of Hertford, a longstanding critic of Caroline court culture; Nathaniel Richard’s *Messalina* was dedicated to John Pym’s close associate, John Carey, whilst Humphrey Mill’s *The Nights Search* was dedicated to that ‘great pillar’ of the godly community, Robert Rich, the Earl of Warwick.²⁴

The impact of the theatre upon Harris should not be over-stated. His exact involvement is uncertain, nor we should too readily conceive of drama in narrowly ‘oppositional’ terms. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that Harris was at least exposed to a form of drama which directly engaged with, and was critical of, contemporary social and political issues. Richard Brome’s works in particular adopt a style which Matthew Steggle has termed ‘place realism’: setting plays in readily identifiable contemporary London locations and addressing highly charged current events.

If we accept the information of John Crouch, that Harris was known by the stage name ‘Jack of Oxford’ and was renowned for playing stock stage villains like Judas, Faux, and

²⁰See R. McKerrow (ed.), *A Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of foreign printers of English Books, 1557–1640* (London, 1910), p. 212.

²¹D. Galloway (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama, 1546–1642: Norwich* (Toronto, 1984), p. 218.

²²The history of the company is murky at best: for more information on the Company’s formation, composition and activities, see G. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, Vol.II (Oxford, 1941), pp. 283–301.

²³M. Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 185. See also M. Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester, 2004). For an earlier appraisal of the subversive potential of Caroline drama and its relationship to later radicalism, see M. Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre* (Cambridge, 1980), in particular pp. 237–257.

²⁴For an example of Richard Brome’s dedications to William Seymour, see R. Brome, *The Antipodes* (London, 1640), sig.A2r. For the others, see: N. Richards, *The Tragedy of Messalina* (London, 1640), sig.A4r, and H. Mill, *The Nights Search* (London, 1652), sig.A4r.

Ravaillac, we might expect Harris to have had some experience of the more raucous public theatre too. There, the subtle allusions and critiques of Brome's drama were paralleled in far more transparent and challenging displays. *The Valiant Scot*, for example, landed the actors of The Fortune theatre in serious trouble, played as it was 'for five dayes with great applause' just as the king's armies were losing the Bishops' War in Scotland. In the same year, The Fortune produced *The Cardinal's Conspiracy*, scandalously depicting 'Alters, Crosses [and] crucifixes' on-stage in a direct attack upon Laudian innovation.²⁵ Whether Harris was indeed involved in such productions or not, he was undoubtedly aware of them. In 1641, Harris was living in Whitecrosse street, no more than a few minutes' walk from The Fortune playhouse.²⁶

Harris's life as an actor at the sharp edge of Caroline drama stood in stark contrast to the trajectory of his brothers. Whilst Harris was on tour, his brother Francis was elected the youngest ever Mayor of Oxford at the age of just thirty-three. In 1636, his other surviving brother Lewes appears in the historical record as under-Sheriff of the city, struggling in the face of considerable resistance to collect the Ship Money tax.²⁷ As the nation descended into civil war, Francis's further political involvement suggests his views were increasingly antithetical to his brother's own allegiances and he was ultimately removed from office in 1651, having refused to subscribe to the Oath of Engagement, a test of political loyalty to the Republican regime. As a travelling actor, free from the traditional confines and rhythms of parochial structures, intermingling with people who might both by nature and statute be considered as outcasts, and then as a stage player, exposed to critical discourses of power and authority, Harris's lived experience may help to explain how two brothers, from the same orthodox background, followed two radically divergent political trajectories. It does not deliver all the answers, but it does at least provide a contextual layer to the puzzle of how John Harris became the regicidal revolutionary *Militaris*.

It also serves in many ways to justify and corroborate our initial sources. George Wharton, *Mercurius Elencticus*, was certainly in a position to know the Harris family. He had studied at Oxford in 1633, the year Francis was elected mayor, and returned to the city around 1642 when he joined the king's court. By 1645, when Wharton began acting as a propagandist for the Royalist court, he and his fellow writers held weekly meetings at the Harris family's tavern.²⁸ It was perhaps there where John Harris's association with Wharton began, for he was, we are told, 'wel acquainted with Cap Wharton'. It was Wharton too who, in 1649, wrote a glowing elegy to Harris's late wife, Susanna, that 'lively patterne of true pietie, and unstain'd loyaltie'. He described her, in what the historian might deem paradoxical terms, as 'a Leveller in folio' but 'a royalist besides'.²⁹

Wharton's rather confusing elegy nonetheless provides us with our next clue: Harris's wife, Susanna. She was, so Wharton informs us, an 'Independent, as they are that be/The Servants of One-God', a characterisation which tallies with the depiction of Harris as 'a Babe of Grace' and one of the 'Sisters of Separation'.³⁰ Harris's surviving writings

²⁵Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 234–236.

²⁶TNA, E179/147/574. The Fortune was still holding illicit performances until at least 1649: see Wickham, Berry, Ingram (eds.), *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 642–647.

²⁷SP 16/329 f.95.

²⁸J. Booker, *No Mercurius Aquaticus* (London, 1644), p. 3.

²⁹G. Wharton, *In Memorie of ... Mrs Susanna Harris the virtuous wife of Capt. John Harris* (London, 1649).

³⁰*Ibid.*

certainly suggest a sympathy toward Independent church governance, a pronounced antipathy towards Presbyterianism, and a profound hope that the civil wars would herald greater religious toleration. In his *Antipodes*, Harris attacked the current path of ‘a Reformation with the heeles upward’, arguing that ‘sufficient care be taken for the liberty and protection of those which cannot submit unto the externall worship of this nation’.³¹ The most insightful evidence, however, lies in the previously unknown record of his marriage to Susanna, née Hopkins, on 10 March 1642.³²

The marriage took place at St. Stephen’s, Coleman Street, and was conducted by the parish minister John Goodwin. This is potentially significant. St. Stephen’s was the focal point of radical puritanism in London.³³ Its minister John Goodwin was, in 1642, an influential and increasingly controversial clergyman who would, in the following year, visibly form his flock into a congregational church within the parish. He was not the straightforward ‘puritan’ of popular imagination, famously enjoying the heathenish sport of bowls, and was later accused of Arminianism, but two things are clear: he was an advocate of *independency*, in the sense that he placed a heavy emphasis on individual spiritual discovery, and he was very much an enemy of Presbyterianism.³⁴

Neither Harris nor Susannah appear in the comprehensive 1641 assessment of Coleman Street taxpayers and it seems likely, therefore, that the pair travelled to the parish specifically to be wedded by John Goodwin himself.³⁵ This was technically an illegal act but, like gadding to sermons or attending conventicles, it formed a popular practice amongst godly parishioners whose religious sympathies clashed with their own minister. The vicar of Harris’s parish of St. Giles Cripplegate, William Fuller, had indeed aroused the fury of his flock. In October, his parishioners presented a petition and articles to the House of Commons accusing Fuller, a royal chaplain, alongside his curate Thomas Hutton, of being a ‘Popish innovator’ who ‘broacheth very pernicious &c dangerous’, that is to say *Laudian*, ‘Doctrines’.³⁶ Whether Harris’s decision to remove to Coleman Street is sufficient testimony of his faith or not, it does allow us to place him within the orbit of a godly religious sphere, and in particular that of its minister, Goodwin. Harris likely heard Goodwin preach and may have read his best-selling publications.³⁷

In September 1642, just six months after he married, a parliamentary ordinance ordered the suppression of the London playhouses, robbing Harris of his livelihood. In response, he made a transition from the public stage to the printed page. ‘But a while agoe’, Crouch tells us, Harris ‘liv’d upon Pamphlets, and was beholding to Fossetts presse for a piece of bread to eat’.³⁸ *Fossett* referred here to the printer, Thomas Fawcett who operated a press from ‘a dwelling in Grub Street neere the lower Pumpe’, just beyond the

³¹Anon [John Harris], *The Antipodes, or Reformation with the heeles upwards* (Oxford 1647), p. 10.

³²London Metropolitan Archives, P69/STE1/A/002/MS04449/002.

³³See D. Kirby, ‘The Radicals of St. Stephen’s, Coleman Street, London, 1624–1642 (*Guildhall Miscellany*, Vol. III, 1969–1971), pp. 98–119.

³⁴For a detailed analysis of Goodwin’s life and career, see J. Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Boydell, 2006).

³⁵TNA, E179/252/5. The assessment lists the heads of households as well as their wives, children, and servants. The tenants of the tenements adjoining Coleman Street are not listed individually, so it is possible (though, I think, unlikely) that Susanna lived in one of those.

³⁶Anon., *The Petition and Articles exhibited in Parliament against Dr Fuller* (London, 1641), sig. A2r. See also *Journal of the House of Commons*: Vol. 2, 1640–1643 (London, 1802), pp. 294–295 (hereafter, *JHC*).

³⁷This, of course, is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty, but it is possible to detect the influence of Goodwin’s religious vision upon Harris in the (albeit fleeting) glimpses of his religious outlook provided in his later newsbooks.

³⁸J. Crouch, *The Man in the Moon* (London, No. 48, 1650), p. 374.

city walls and very close to Harris's residence.³⁹ Fawcett's business partner, the master printer Bernard Alsop, was also John's neighbour, living just six doors down on Whitecrosse Street.⁴⁰

That Harris should find himself in the employ of these two printers is unsurprising. Alsop and Fawcett had long-standing connections to the theatre, regularly publishing play texts, but they were also two of the most irrepressible veterans of Grub Street's trade in scandalous print. The pair had been engaged in illicit activities since the 1620s.⁴¹ In the unconstrained air of the early 1640s, they found themselves in their element, printing numerous scandalous works, satirizing speeches, falsifying letters, and denouncing authority-figures. They also produced pro-Parliamentarian newsbooks whilst regularly bouncing in and out of various London prisons. Alsop and Fawcett were brought before the Lords in early 1641 for printing a variety of anti-Laudian material.⁴² The following year, the pair were again summoned by the Lords for printing *His Majesty's propositions to Sir John Hotham*, this time attacking the 'malignant spirits, altogether devoted to the service of the divell' who sought civil war, and for affixing the clerk of Parliament's name to it.⁴³ On January 7, Fawcett was again committed to The Fleet prison for 'printing and publishing false and scandalous Pamphlets, and under the Title and Name and Order of the Parliament'.⁴⁴ Finally, later that year, Fawcett was sent to the Compter in Southwark to be 'tried by martial law' for 'printing pamphlets in justification of the cessation with the rebels'. His press and materials were given to Joseph Hunscomb, the Stationers' Company beadle, who 'hath taken great Pains in the Discovery of their Abuses'.⁴⁵ Even a brief overview of the illegal activities of Alsop and Fawcett demonstrates that illegal printing was rarely a straightforward case of *propaganda*. Alsop and Fawcett printed works representing a variety of often contradictory positions, united only by a unilateral criticism of authority. At once flexible and principled, this attitude was to permeate Harris's printing career too.

Although the extent of Harris's involvement in these illegal activities was unclear, his role in the Alsop-Fawcett press was clearly important and multi-functional. With his background in printing, Harris no doubt assisted in the press room. A number of works bearing the signature 'John Harris, gent' or simply 'J.Harris' suggest at least part of his role was to act as a 'scribbler' of satire and polemic.⁴⁶ We need not dwell on the irony that Harris's first identifiable work, *The Puritans Impietie*, gleefully mocking the hypocrisy of puritans so-called, was written by a man who would shortly be married to a 'puritan' woman by one of London's most recognizable 'puritan' ministers. It was a reflection of the difficult compromises which had to be made to survive in highly uncertain circumstances and, perhaps, an indication that Harris himself eschewed simplistic

³⁹See the imprint of *A Discourse Touching the Drayning the Great Fennes* (London, 1643).

⁴⁰TNA, E179/147/574.

⁴¹For a deeper investigation of the Alsop-Fawcett press in the 1620s and 1630s, see my doctoral thesis, *Illicit Printing in Early Modern England, 1588–1637* (University of East Anglia, unpublished PhD thesis, 2022), pp. 95–209.

⁴²D. Freist, *Governed by Opinion* (London, 1997), p. 105; Fawcett was accused of printing Richard Overton's *The Dreame or newes from Hell* ([London], 1640). Alsop was charged with re-printing a tract 'called *Smarts Sermons*', which refers to *A sermon preached... by Peter Smart* ([London], 1640).

⁴³*Journal of the House of Lords: Vol. 5, 1642–1643* (London, 1767–1830), pp. 213–216 (hereafter, *JHL*). Anon., *His Majesties propositions to Sir John Hotham and the inhabitants of Hull* (London, [1642]), sig. A2r–A2v.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 533–535.

⁴⁵*JHC: Vol.3* (London, 1802), p. 307.

⁴⁶See John Harris Gent., *The Puritans Impuritie* (London, 1641) and J. Harris, *Englands Out-cry* (London, 1644).

compartmentalization of his own views. Most evident is how naturally the theatrical and dramatic style of the stage lent itself to polemic. In this, he was not alone. Under examination in 1642, ‘a poor scholar’ Thomas Bond claimed that several pamphlets printed by Alsop, including a fictional letter from the King of France, had been written by one ‘Richard Broome’.⁴⁷ Though there is no way of confirming the identity of this Richard Broome as the playwright, it certainly seems possible. Even renowned playwrights needed bread to eat.⁴⁸

Harris’s early baptism in the world of underground printing was vitally important to his later lives. It provided him with the opportunity to learn the practices and processes involved in the production and distribution of (often illicit) pamphlets, lessons he would put into practice in his short-lived 1645 newsbook, *The Kingdomes Weekly Post*. It further reinforced the value of information and, much like his experiences of the Caroline theatre, Harris’s collaboration with Alsop and Fawcett exposed him to the explosive power and persuasive potential of print: the idea that it could be used to directly engage with politics, hold politicians to account, and present one’s own solutions to the public.

II. Creativity, Collaboration, and the Oxford Army Press

Harris’s early careers were formative. They furnished him with the practical training and personal networks necessary to facilitate his later engagement in the world of print; and his broader experiences provided a framework through which he would interpret the events and ideas of the civil wars. But it was not until 1647 that Harris gained a platform to fully engage with the political crises enveloping the state around him, and develop his own solutions in response to them. The following section will explore how Harris’s role as printer in the Oxford Army press, and his creative collaboration with those closely tied to it, set him on a path towards more and more radical political positions.

By the summer of 1647, the fissures within the parliamentary alliance had broken out into open conflict. The ‘Presbyterian’ faction within parliament had taken steps to secure power and were in the process of negotiating a peace settlement with the king. The New Model Army, seen as the greatest impediment to such a settlement, had become their primary political adversary. Tensions climaxed on March 30 when the House of Lords issued a *Declaration* calling for the army’s immediate disbandment and labelling its soldiers ‘enemies to the state’.⁴⁹ The soldiery, for their part, had already begun to mobilize in defence of their own interests. They had elected representatives, termed agitators (or *adjutors*), out of each troop and regiment ‘to act in the names and behalfe of the whole Souldiery...in the prosecution of their Rights and Desires’.⁵⁰

Print was central to their campaign and it was with alarm that one of the leading agitators, Edward Sexby, reported to his fellow representatives on May 18 that their ‘printer is taken and undone’ and unless a new one was found, ‘wee are undone’.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *JHL*: Vol. 4, 1629–1642 (London, 1767–1830), pp. 679–682.

⁴⁸ For more on this issue and on Broome’s wider life and career, see Steggle, *Richard Broome*.

⁴⁹ *A Declaration of the Lords and Commons* (London 1647). This included the famous statement of dislike issued by the MP Denzil Holles, one of the leaders of the political Presbyterian movement.

⁵⁰ Anon., *A true declaration of the present proceedings of the army* (Oxford 1647), p. 4.

⁵¹ C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Clarke Papers: Volume 1* (London, 1992), pp. 85–86.

Sexby's concern suggests that, even before the 'Oxford Army Press', the agitators had been co-ordinating the production of unofficial pro-army pamphlets with 'civilian' activists in London.⁵² The 'undone' printer in question was possibly Thomas Paine, typically viewed as one of the leading printers of city activists, who had been arrested at some point shortly before Sexby's letter.⁵³ His arrest may have been in connection with the publication of *A New Found Stratagem*, a pamphlet which purported to unveil a wicked Presbyterian plot 'to destroy the Army under his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax, and to inslave all the Free-born of England on a sudden'.⁵⁴ One Captain Styles of Lambert's 10th regiment of foot was questioned for his role in disseminating the pamphlet within the army in late April. The printer had, therefore, presumably been caught in early May.⁵⁵

Sexby, however, was prepared. On May 17 he wrote to his fellow agitators that if there was not 's a presse gott into the Army wee shall be att a losse. There wants nothing but money, therefore tell the Officers they must disburse the money...s will goe if you send him instructions, which doe by to morrowe night...'.⁵⁶ Rather than outsourcing the printing of pro-army materials, Sexby and his fellow representatives devised a new 'stratagem' to secure a press of their own. This idea had been discussed by the agitators in early May. In a policy document, attributed by Clarke to Sexby, the second point '*for the managing of the Councells of the Army*' suggested that the representatives 'keepe a partie of able penn men at Oxford and the army, where their presses be employed to satisfie and undeceive the people'. The 'perfect' workmen, the * in Sexby's letter, was John Harris.⁵⁷ Together with Henry Hills, a former postilion to John Lilburne who had been trained as a printer by Matthew Simmonds and Thomas Paine, Harris removed to Pennifarthing Lane in Oxford where he established a press just ninety-seconds walk from the Harris family's Swindlestock Tavern.⁵⁸

The ostensible purpose of the Oxford Army press, as Sexby had intimated, was to refute the 'many falce and scandalous reports' abounding in the London press about the army's supposed 'vile and wicked ends', to defend the army's actions in response to the 'malice, injustice and tyranny...of our enemies' and, instead, to cast the army as preserver of the safety and liberty of the people.⁵⁹ To this end, the press produced at least nine official or semi-official tracts, in four of which Harris and Hills claimed to be 'printers to His Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax'.⁶⁰

⁵²Leaked army documents continued to be printed in London after Sexby's letter: see, for example, Anon., *Divers Papers from the Army* (London, May 22nd 1647), and Anon., *The Declaration of the Armie* (London, June 4th 1647).

⁵³J. Lilburne, *Rash Oaths Unwarrantable* (London, June 25th 1647), p. 55.

⁵⁴Anon., *A New Found Stratagem* (London, April 18th 1647), title-page.

⁵⁵JHC: Vol. 5, 1646–1648, pp. 152–155. For Styles, actually William Style, see Wanklyn, *Reconstructing the New Model*, Vol. 1 (Helion, 2015), p. 70.

⁵⁶Firth, *Clarke Papers*: Vol. 1, pp. 82–83.

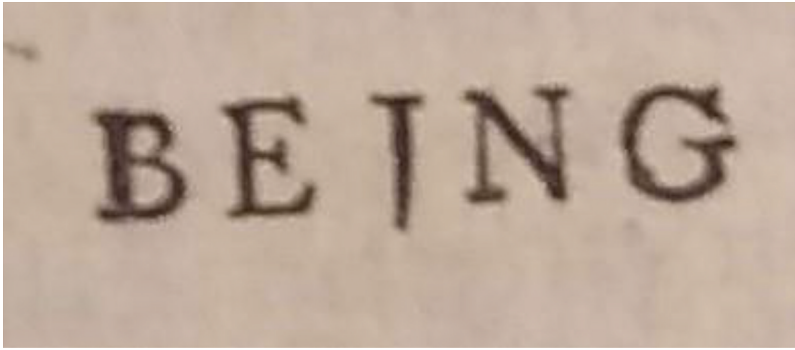
⁵⁷Firth, *Clarke Papers*: Vol. 1, pp. 85–86, pp. 22–23, pp. 85–86. Sexby could, of course, have been referring to Hills here, but the fact that Harris was the senior (and more experienced) of the two, and that the press itself was set-up in Oxford, so close to Harris's family home, suggests that he was the *s referred to here.

⁵⁸See, for example, the imprimatur on *A Declaration* (Oxford, Printed by J. Harris, H. Hills, living in Pennifarthing street 1647). Harris probably knew Paine, whose printing press was housed on Redcrosse Street, a few minutes' walk from Harris's London residence.

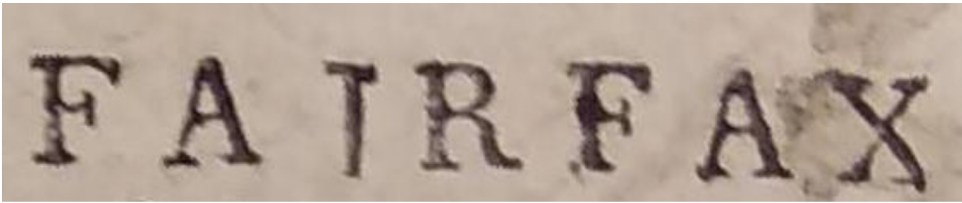
⁵⁹*A Declaration of His Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax* (Oxford 1647), p. 1, Anon., *A true declaration of the present proceedings of the army*, p. 5.

⁶⁰See, for example, the title-page of *A Declaration of...Sir Thomas Fairfax*.

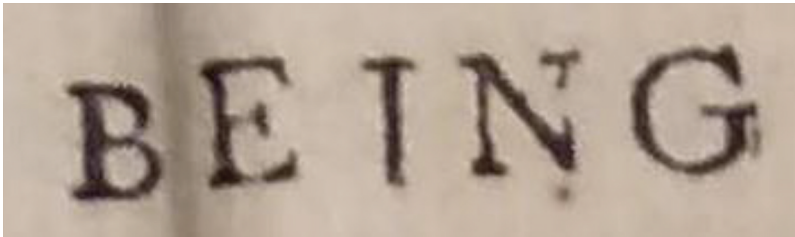
The press itself, clearly antiquated, relied entirely upon worn Roman type and its workmanship was poor. Crucially, the press lacked a standard-sized capital 'T' which Harris and Hills substituted with a distinctive broken over-sized 'T' (as shown below):



[Huntington Library, *Grand Informer*, title-page]



[Huntington Library, *Plaine Truth*, title-page]



[Huntington Library, *Antipodes*, title-page]

Through this typographical quirk, we can trace another dimension of the press's operations. It produced a further four pamphlets (at least) which went well beyond its commissioned aims and which demonstrate, to a much greater degree than has previously been assumed, the close cooperation and alignment between army and civilian activists in the summer of 1647.

The first, *Plaine Truth without Feare or Flattery* 'or a true DISCOVERY OF the unlawfulness of the Presbyterian government', reached London on July 2. As its subtitle suggests, it detailed the malevolent plots of the 'confederacy of a haughty trayterous Party

in the Houses of Parliament', led by Manchester, Stamford, Stapleton, and Hollis, in a bid to seize power and 'erect their new formed Monster of presbyterie'.⁶¹ The pamphlet appealed as much to the king's sympathisers as it did to civilian and army activists. For in seeking to manipulate the king and disband the army, the Presbyterians sought the subjection of both: 'as you do...deale with us, so yee deale with him [the king]...yee do unjustly imprison and oppress, rob, and spoyle, destroy our Liberties, take away our estates, and undoe our Families, and shew us no Law, Cause or Reason, but a tyrannicall, unjust, illegall, or treasonable Vote, Order or Ordinance...' 'Your Arbitrary wills are become Englands Lawes'.⁶² Like the aforementioned *New-Found Stratagem*, it appealed to a broad base of readers both within and without the army; to civilians, it aimed to demonstrate the shared range of issues which linked the citizens and soldiery in common interest (and a shared enemy), whilst at the same time it aimed to politicize the soldiery, to encourage them to think beyond their own narrow material interests and envision for themselves a greater role in shaping the future struggle.

The pamphlet was penned by the as yet unidentified 'Amon Wilbee'. Contemporaries suspected that its author was John Lilburne: a copy of the pamphlet was reprinted in London the next day bearing the initials 'I.L.' but this was a false lead.⁶³ Amon Wilbee certainly made liberal use of Parliament's *Book of Declarations* to highlight Presbyterian hypocrisy, a frequent reference point for Lilburne, but the style, far more crisp and concise, would suggest alternative authorship: a fact confirmed when another civilian pamphlet distinguished between 'Lieutenant Colonell Lilburne and Amon Wilbee'.⁶⁴ The author(s) also referred their readers to '*Cooks Instituts*' and two earlier civilian-Army collaborations, *Warning for all the Counties of England* and the aforementioned *New Found Stratagem*.⁶⁵ All of which might point to straightforward 'Leveller' authorship, but the 'us' is used flexibly throughout the pamphlet; in its opening paragraphs it seems to apply to the army, in its later pages it refers more generally to 'Wee the free Commons of England'.⁶⁶ The tract pays close attention to the interests of the soldiers and it was, of course, printed on an army press. Like *The Case of the Armie Truly Stated*, it seems therefore to have been a composite document, drawn together by two writers representing both army and civilian interests (if, indeed, the two can or *should* be separated). It seems, therefore, that one way to decode the Wilbee riddle is to read it as a pseudonymous anagram: a composite of two potential authors, John Wildman and Edmund Sexby (([I]Am[]on Wil[dman & Sex]bee), both of whom were with the army at the time, and both of whom would later collaborate together and with Harris.⁶⁷

⁶¹Amon Wilbee, *Plaine Truth without Feare or Flattery* (Oxford 1647), p. 4.

⁶²*Ibid.*, sig. C3r.

⁶³The reader of the copy held at Union Theological Seminary added 'John Lilburne' to his title-page and was probably not alone in making this assumption.

⁶⁴T. R gent., *A Two Inch Board for M.Prynne to Peep thorow* (London 1647), p. 16. Rees has suggested that Richard Overton was a possible candidate, see J. Rees, *The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in London, 1640–1650* (London, 2016), p. 189. For Lilburne's use of parliament's Book of Declarations, see A. Sharp, 'John Lilburne and the Long Parliament's Books of Declarations: A Radical's Exploitation of the Words of Authorities' *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 1988, pp. 19–44.

⁶⁵*Plaine Truth*, sigs. B3r–B4r. See Anon., *A Warning for all the Counties of England* (London 1647).

⁶⁶*Plaine Truth*, sig. C3r–v.

⁶⁷For a persuasive argument for Wildman and Sexby's joint authorship of *The Case of the Armie*, see J. Morrill, P. Baker, 'The case of the armie truly re-stated' in *The Putney Debates*, pp. 103–125. Michael Mendle has proposed an alternative (and, I would argue, less persuasive) solution to the 'Wilbee' riddle, see 'Putney's Pronouns', p. 135.

The very next day, Amon Wilbee appeared on London bookstalls again as the author of *Prima Pars, De Comparatis Comparandis*.⁶⁸ It was, its title-page claimed, printed at Oxford but it was not a Harris-Hills work. Thomason himself replaced it with ‘London’ and probably recognized it as coming from one of the civilian-activist presses. Nonetheless, its appearance was neither coincidence nor forgery. Like *Plaine Truth*, it attacked the ‘false, ambitious, deceitfull, covetous, heady, high minded-men’ of the Presbyterian faction as the source of the woes of soldiers, civilians, and the king. Parliament’s role, it argued, was ‘to doe *right* to their *King*, and to discharge their trust to the *Kingdome*’.⁶⁹ It repeated, almost point for point, the grievances highlighted in *Plaine Truth*, from soldiers’ arrears to the gross misconduct of Henry Wollaston, the gaoler of Newgate, and presented to its readers a union of interests between the army rank-and-file, the urban population, political Independents and the vast swathe of neutrals who supported the institution of monarchy. Its sentiments were replicated in the second unofficial product of the army press, *Englands Appeale to its Own Army*, likely published on July 4.⁷⁰ Framed from the perspective of the ‘people’ and ‘published at the earnest desire of some wel-affected Gentry and Commons of this Kingdome’, it was directed both to the ‘gallant soldiery’ and more specifically to the army leadership. Clearly intended for internal distribution – Thomason himself never acquired a copy – it lauded the army and implored it to resist disbandment and continue on its political trajectory in support of ‘all the free-borne People’ of England. ‘If you will stand by us in those iust and impartiall things you have declared to us’, the people promised, ‘wee are resolved to stand by you, and own you in them, to the utmost of our abilities and last drop of blood’.⁷¹ On July 15, a third pamphlet, *The Grand Informer*, issued from the press.⁷² Aside from the title-page, it was identical to *A Cleere and Full Vindication of the late Proceedings of the Armie* which had been printed three days earlier by the future ‘Leveller’ printer-in-chief, William Larnier.⁷³ The difference in title-page may be attributed to the fact that Harris had not seen the original, but he had clearly been working from the same text. Like *Plaine Truth* and *Prima Pars*, the dual publication was evidently intended to have worked in unison.

In the space of just under two weeks, thus, the Oxford Army press had issued three pamphlets in direct co-ordination with civilian printing houses in the capital. Two, possibly three, works had been the sole or joint efforts of a leading agitator, Edmund Sexby, and the civilian activist John Wildman.⁷⁴ Other surviving pamphlets suggest that civilian activists (most of whom were currently in prison) were well aware of the campaign. On July 17 Richard Overton himself ostensibly denied any knowledge of *Plaine Truth*, writing that ‘I was till I read it as ignorant of the writing composeing printing publishing or Author thereof as the Child that is unborne’ but this was a lie: on the next page, Overton indicated that the pamphlet should ‘bee *pictured with the Heeles*

⁶⁸Amon Wilbee, *Prima Pars, De Comparatis Comparandis* (Oxford [London], July 3rd 1647).

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, sigs. A2r-v.

⁷⁰Anon., *Englands Appeale to Its Own Army* (Oxford 1647). The tract is not dated but references the *Humble Remonstrance* of the army as having been published ‘ten daies’ previous, sig. A4v. Since the *Remonstrance* was printed on the 25th, we may assume the pamphlet was written around July 4th.

⁷¹*Englands Appeale*, sig. A4v.

⁷²Anon., *The Grand Informer* (Oxford 1647).

⁷³Anon., *A Cleere and full vindication of the late proceedings of the army* (London, July 12th 1647).

⁷⁴Michael Mendle suggests that Edward Sexby may also have been the author of *The Grand Informer*: Mendle, ‘Putney’s Pronouns’, p. 130.

upward', a reference to the Oxford press's next pamphlet, *The Antipodes, or Reformation with the Heeles upwards*, which was not printed until almost a week later.⁷⁵ The timings of the pamphlets themselves, coming within days of publication in either London or Oxford, point to a highly organized and orchestrated effort: an effort which required resources, constant communication, and access to the books which fill the texts of the pamphlets. Irrespective of the degree to which Sexby and Wildman may have collaborated as Amon Wilbee, the collective output of the Oxford Army press demonstrates the close co-operation between civilian and army activists to outwardly present a unified anti-Presbyterian agenda to the public, and internally mobilize the political support of the soldiery at a moment of immense importance. It further testifies to the centrality of print within the narrative and, as we shall see, demonstrates a degree of intellectual harmony between army and civilian activists which preceded the supposed influx of civilian agitators into the army in the winter months of 1647. It shows, furthermore, that John Harris, printer, stood somewhere at the centre of these fluid overlaps between the army and the metropole.

Indeed, it was Harris who wrote perhaps the most remarkable product of the Oxford Army press. On July 22 he published *The Antipodes, or Reformation with the Heeles Upward*, a nod to the anti-world of Richard Brome's 1640 play of the same name. It began, much like the other pamphlets, as a direct attack upon a Presbyterian party who 'intended Slavery, both to the King, His Posterity, and People'. Outlining the list of grievances which he believed had instigated the war, Harris argued that the present parliament had done nothing but replicate and, in many instances, exceed the crimes of the king and his 'evil Councillours'. The war and the reformation it represented (at least in Harris's eyes) had been perverted.

Heare oh Heavens, and tremble oh Earth: Oh England stand amazed! Many of your trustees have conceived wickedness, they promised liberty, but behold slavery; they pretended Justice, but behold oppression; they pretended Reformation, but behold deformation; they pleaded law, but have lost conscience; they pretended purity, but behold hypocrisy; Justice is turned backward, Treason is countenanced, and truth discouraged, your oppressours honoured, your friends dispised...though by the free Commons chosen servants, yet by their usurpations become Masters, ney Kings; commanding both King and People without controule...⁷⁶

He exhorted his 'Country-men and fellow Souldiers' to 'remember [that] the end of your taking up armes was to defend the Kings Majesty, and to bring offenders to tryall, let them be of which side they will, without limitation'.⁷⁷

It was an appeal framed in the broadest terms possible, at once moderate and radical, offering both conciliation to the king and a dramatic reinterpretation of who exactly was the tyrant in the story. Harris then proposed several immediate steps to be taken to remedy the present crisis, which followed in much the same vein: the trial of any current MPs accused of crimes, 'that His Majesty be invested in His just power', the removal of 'all great taxes and burthens', the payment of soldiers' arrears, and a 'generall act of oblivion passed for both parties, so farre as law and justice will allow...

⁷⁵R. Overton, *An Appeale from the Degenerate Representative Body* (London 1647), pp. 15–16. J. Harris, *The Antipodes* (Oxford, July 22nd 1647).

⁷⁶Harris, *Antipodes*, p. 5.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 8.

it being a most unmercifull act for the fathers crime to ruine whole families'. What followed was a set of proposals which promised dramatic change for the people: the reformation of courts of justice, an investigation and account given of public spending, unjust revenues to be replaced by a 'generall tax', 'equally laid' upon all people proportionate to their estates, religious toleration and other measures. Perhaps most intriguingly Harris called for a public 'Declaration' whereby the 'just priviledges of the Parliament' would be 'made manifest to the Kingdome, and the Kingdome not inslaved by an unknown and unlimited priviledge'. Harris was, in essence, calling for the public establishment of rights reserved to the parliament, and those reserved for the people, a foreshadowing, no less, of *The Agreement of the People*. His proposals were, like the *Agreement*, to 'be the foundation of your peace if it be lasting'. Almost all of Harris's demands were incorporated into *The Case of the Army* in October (and in all subsequent versions of the *Agreement*).⁷⁸

It would be misleading, however, to label *The Antipodes* either a 'Leveller' or an 'Army' document. It contained measures to address the basic issues of the army and all the demands presented by the agitators to the Council of the Army on July 16, six days before the *Antipodes* was published.⁷⁹ To moderates, it offered the restoration of the monarchy and an albeit-qualified amnesty, and to religious independents and civilian activists like Lilburne it offered the reformation of legal, economic, and religious inequalities. It was neither one nor the other; rather, it was a document which encapsulates the confluence of influences, ideas, and allegiances which had converged upon Harris in 1647. The exchange of ideas between army and civilian activists had influenced his outlook, but it was by no means determinative. As early as 1645 Harris had envisioned the army as a vehicle for reforming both the church and the legal system. Indeed, many of the grievances he drew upon were the subject of sustained criticism in the drama of the late 1630s. One wonders to what extent the conciliatory approach towards the king and his supporters was shaped by the influence of his (supposedly) royalist wife or associations with ardent monarchists like George Wharton. If it is to be characterised at all, *The Antipodes* should be viewed as the product of the fluid and complex milieu of individuals, ideas, and allegiances of which Harris was a part, a network of individuals, furthermore, who, as early as the summer of 1647, were already thinking about, and creating potential solutions to, England's political crises, several months before the celebrated discussions at Putney. Specifically, we may suggest that the *Antipodes* was the first (or one of the first) workings-out of a civilian-agitator collective programme for settlement which would later be refined in *The Case of the Army Truly Stated* and the *Agreement of the People*.

Harris's role in the army had always been deeply equivocal. In August, he received two payments from the Army contingency accounts, one of £12 as 'ye printer for p[ro]clamacons & Declaracons' and another of £4-1s.-8d for 'sev[er]all thinges', but it was not clear whether these payments covered the unofficial activities of the Oxford army press.⁸⁰ Like the pamphlets themselves, it was

⁷⁸Harris, *Antipodes*, pp. 8–10.

⁷⁹Firth, *Clarke Papers*: Vol. 1, pp. 170–172.

⁸⁰*The Thoresby Society*, MS Box SD IX, 'Army Contingency Accounts', p. 4, pp. 26–27 [my pagination].

unclear who authorized the payments or to what extent they were paid for directly by the agitators themselves.⁸¹

Harris returned to London in August, along with the army, and remained in close contact with his agitator associates. On August 21, he published an army remonstrance in which he framed himself 'printer to his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax'. Two weeks later, however, he claimed the same authority to print *The Resolution of the Agitators of the Army*. There followed a brief period of tactical silence; following the forced removal of leading Presbyterians from parliament, agitator and civilian activists had reason to hope that their vision for future settlement might be met. But their hope was misplaced. The army grandees, Cromwell and Ireton, quickly distanced themselves from the soldiery's more radical demands and opened their own negotiations with the king. On October 2 they printed a book of their 'engagements, remonstrances, representations, proposals, desires and resolutions...for setling of His Majesty in his Just rights'.⁸² In response, Sexby and Wildman composed *The Case of the Army Truly Stated*, a document which, as already discussed, incorporated all of the tenets for a much more radical settlement which Harris had presented in his *Antipodes*. Furthering the case for their continued collaboration, *A Cal to All the Soldiers*, typically ascribed to Wildman, was published on October 28 using (what appears to be) type utilised on the Oxford Army Press.⁸³

FIVE

Silence followed once more as the debates at Putney offered another chance for wider-reaching settlement. When it was clear that the army leaders had gained the upper-hand in framing the settlement, agitators and civilians resorted once more to print. A version of *The Agreement of the People* was published on November 3 and on November 12, Harris reprinted an agitator pamphlet which had been scattered 'up & downe ye Streets by ye Agitators' the previous day, which detailed some of the proposals of the most recent *Agreement of the People*.⁸⁴

On November 6, Amon Wilbee (possibly Wildman and Sexby again), 'finding that justice is still driven backward, and that truth cannot yet enter, by reason that the wicked are yet in power', once more returned to the stage, framing the reasons behind its publication in remarkably (or unremarkably, if you accept Sexby and Wildman's authorship) similar

⁸¹The manuscript of the army contingency accounts is itself a fascinating document. It records hundreds of payments to agitators, often vast quantities, for a variety of unspecified or deliberately vague activities. See, for example, the £296 paid to 'severall [] Agentes for extr[a] servic[es]' on November 10 1647, p. 6. Intriguingly, in the original version (which is rarely consulted directly) all references to 'agitator' have been expunged or overwritten by an unknown contemporary hand, possibly Colonel Berkstead.

⁸²Anon., *A Declaration of the Engagements...of the Army* (London 1647).

⁸³J. Wildman, *A Cal to all the souldiers of the Armie* ([London?], 1647).

⁸⁴Anon., *The Resolution of the Agitators of the Army* (London, September 4th 1647). Anon., *A Letter Sent from Several Agitators of the Army* (London, November 12th 1647). The original is *A Copy of a Letter* (London, November 11th 1647).

terms to *The Case of the Army*.⁸⁵ Unlike *Prima Pars*, Amon Wilbee this time turned his ire against ‘the people called Independents’; in an oblique nod to the proceedings of the army grandees, it claimed they were, like the Presbyterians before them, ‘wolves in sheeps cloathing, they look lambs, speak like Innocents, walk like Foxes, but act works of darknesse like the devil’.⁸⁶ In over thirty pages, drawing on detailed inside information provided, Mendle has argued, by sources close to Harris, *Secunda Pars* provided an explosive account of the corrupt practices of various Independent MPs, perhaps one of the most forthright whistle-blowing accounts of the entire civil wars. But it did so to prove the main thrust common to both *The Case of the Army*, the *Agreement of the People*, and *The Antipodes*: drastic reform of the legal system and the institution of equality before the law, ‘without respect of persons’.⁸⁷ ‘Good Friends and Fellow Commoners’, Amon Wilbee argued, ‘rest not, spare no paines, grudge not at cost, nor neglect any opportunity, but improve and imploy all your powers and interests, without wearinesse, untill the King, Parliament and Army do accord and agree, to make up unto you this soveraigne balme’. The ‘balme’ it proposed was left unspecified, but could have been a reference to any number of army-civilian proposals from *The Antipodes* to the *Agreement of the People*.⁸⁸

Baker, Morrill, and Vernon have long since refuted the idea that *The Case of the Army* represented ‘the opening shot in a Leveller campaign to alter the political direction of the army’, and, indeed, Baker and Vernon have made a convincing case for the collaborative nature of its production, and the collaboration of army and civilian activists in 1647 more broadly.⁸⁹ The activities of the Oxford army press and Harris’s involvement in it, fully supports their theory. The collaborative productions of the Oxford Army press, and Harris’s continued association with Sexby and Wildman in particular, illustrate the extent to which civilian and army agitators’ networks, interests, and ideas had been intertwined well before *The Case of the Army* or Putney, to the point that it seems fruitless in distinguishing the two. Men like Harris, Wildman, and (to a lesser extent) Sexby were both *of* the army, and external to it: what bound them together at that point was not allegiance to one or the other, but a shared interest in politicizing an army behind the mutually agreed ideas and changes which they envisioned as underpinning a future settlement of the kingdom. Most importantly, however, the processes of interaction which underpinned the production of these documents – the intersection of ideas, the compromises, and the discussions which surrounded them – were crucial in accelerating the radicalization of those involved. In having to continually define and re-define their positions, and imagine fresh solutions and compromises to the crises at hand, Sexby, Wildman, and Harris were forced towards more and more radical positions. This is, in short, Braddick’s radicalizing process in action.

III. *Mercurius Militaris* and ‘the head of the Tyrant’

By December, however, the agitators had been sent back to their regiments and the civilian activists, at least for a time, banished from the centre of political

⁸⁵ Amon Wilbee, *Secunda Pars, De Comparatis Comparandis* (London 1647), p. 1.

⁸⁶ Wilbee, *Secunda Pars*, p. 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26 [18].

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁹ Quotation drawn from A. Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen* (Oxford, 1987), p. 207. For the collaborative nature of the *Case of the Army*, see E. Vernon, P. Baker, ‘What was the first “Agreement of the People”’, *The Historical Journal*, 53 (1), pp. 39–59. They view Sexby as the primary co-ordinator of the *Case of the Army*.

power. In response, Harris returned to print once more under the anagrammatical pseudonym ‘Sir Rahniho’, to launch a blistering attack on those ‘two politicians, Crumwell and Ireton’, who had, in Harris’s eyes, betrayed the people. ‘By their plausible pretences of Liberty, Freedom, Indemnity, Security, and the like’, assumed total power in the army and now, through ‘lawlesse ambition’, sought to ‘take the power [of Parliament] into their owne hands’: ‘thus they have in a full careere posted from the saving, to the Enslaving of the Kingdome’.⁹⁰ From this point on, he became increasingly engaged in political mobilization in London. He was present at a meeting in Wapping in February 1648, designed to promote the *Petition of many thousands of Freeborn people of England*, and became heavily involved in the printed controversy which followed John Masterson’s public account of the meeting.⁹¹ Throughout 1648 he continued to print for Lilburne and Wildman under the pseudonym ‘Jah.Hornish’ and became an important resource following the imprisonment of their main printer, William Larnar, in November 1647.⁹² By December 28, we find Harris as part of a delegation which accompanied Lilburne to lobby the army grandees for a revised version of the *Agreement of the People*.⁹³ He was probably also the ‘one Harris’ who, alongside John Lilburne, paid the bail of William Thompson, a soldier arrested for gathering together a troop to rob several houses in Essex in March 1649.⁹⁴ The *Perfect Diurnall* imaginatively (or, perhaps *truthfully*) recounted the incident, describing how Thompson and his troop had come ‘disguised...with false haire and beards’. This seemingly farcical piece of theatre would share remarkable resonance with Harris’s later (equally dramatic) misdeeds.⁹⁵

Perhaps Harris’s most important contribution to political debate came in October 1648, at the peak of the revolutionary crisis, with the publication of the newsbook *Mercurius Militaris, or the Armies Scout*. It was, in many ways, a revival of the project which had necessitated the Oxford army press: an attempt to unite his readership, a base of rank-and-file soldiers and civilians, behind a vision of a (more) equal society of free-born Englishmen, this time embodied in the latest *Agreement of the People*, and to lay bare the plots and machinations of a cabal of grandees in both parliament and the army arraigned against that vision. ‘This therefore shall be my part’, Harris wrote in ‘the first cast’ of his ‘Office’, ‘to tell you of their [the Grandees] Councils and Designs...and you shall judge whether they Levell right at Freedome’. It aimed also to remind the soldiers,

⁹⁰Sir Rahniho [J. Harris], *The Grand Designe* ([London], December 8th 1647), sig. A3r-B2v.

⁹¹For an account of this meeting and discussion of Leveller political organization, see Rees, *Leveller Revolution*, pp. 223–229.

⁹²See John Wildman, *Truths Triumph* ([London] Printed by Ja.Hornish,1648), J. Howldin, Gent. [John Wildman], *The Lawes Subversion* ([London] Printed for Ja. Hornish, 1648), L. Hurbin, Gentleman [John Lilburne], *A Plea, or Protest, made by William Prynne* ([London] Printed for Jah. Hornish, 1648), Jah: Norris [John Harris], *A Lash for a Lyar* ([London] Printed for J. Hornish, 1648), and Sir Rahnio [John Harris], *The Royall Quarrell* (London, Printed for Ja. Hornish, 1648), E. 426[11]. For Larnar’s arrest, see *JHC*, Vol. 5, 1646–1648 (London, 1802), pp. 366–368. The pseudonyms are both fairly simplistic anagrams. Reading ‘Sir Rahniho’ backwards, it takes little effort to decode it. The latter, ‘Jah Hornish’, is slightly more complex but again features all the letters of Harris’s name. Nor was there any evidence of a ‘Jah Hornish’ working in the print trade.

⁹³See the frontispiece of *A Plea for Common Right and Freedom* (London, 1648), for the names of the petitioners, including John Harris. Harris also printed the former soldier John Vernon’s commentary on the Whitehall debates in favour of the *Agreement*. See J.Vernon, *The Swords Abuse Asserted* (London, 1648).

⁹⁴Thompson was a prominent figure in army activism. He was killed at Burford later in the year whilst leading his troops to a meeting of regiments at Salisbury to discuss the soldiery’s political demands.

⁹⁵*Clarke Papers*: Vol. II, p. 199. *A Perfect Diurnall* [No.273] (London, 1649), p. 2373.

‘now their lives are secured’ that they ‘are to attend to their Work, which we may all remember was, *To Set the People Free*’.⁹⁶

To this end, Harris drew on his considerable network of contacts in the army and in London politics to provide his readers with the latest political intelligence. News of successful army revolts and printed petitions came in from Newcastle, York, Gloucester, St. Albans, Pontefract, and Bristol; there were ‘letters from Edinburgh’, Newport, and elsewhere, and a constant stream of insider knowledge from Westminster.⁹⁷ One of his contacts, the correspondent ‘M.C’, a captain in a Gloucestershire garrison, was almost certainly Matthew Cadwell, a captain in Sir William Constable’s 10th regiment of foot which had been placed in garrisons in the south-west and the Marches in early 1648.⁹⁸ Cadwell was one of the two agitators elected to represent Colonel Lambert’s in October 1647.⁹⁹ Harris’s ‘private friend in Newport’, who provided him with juicy details of the king’s visitors on the Isle of Wight, was Samuel Ross, a captain lieutenant of the same regiment.¹⁰⁰ These residual agitator connections were probably replicated across Harris’s national network: a sign that Harris engaged with his rank-and-file contacts perhaps as much as his new-found Leveller ties.

Above all, Harris’s self-appointed ‘office’ was as both satirist and whistle-blowing journalist, responsible for exposing hypocrisy, inadequacy, and corruption at the highest levels of politics. To do so, Harris drew upon the salacious language of the popular stage: a language with which Harris was familiar, and which was perhaps most readily suited to the task of translating complex and shifting political events into a form intelligible to his readership. He summarised the simpering hypocrisy of those in parliament who unfailingly praised the king thus: ‘His Majestie shall breathe Honour and spit Salve, and piss Aqua vitae, and it may be the Groom of his Stool will in time smell some Divine favor too’.¹⁰¹ Addressing the Lords’ vote welcoming the king to London to negotiate a treaty, he opened his fourth issue, ‘Last week the Court Incubus had actual copulation with the brains of His Majesties Cozens, and begot such a spurious brood of Votes, that my sheet would not serve them all for swadling clouts’.¹⁰² And he gave a sense of the ominous political situation which confronted civilian and army activists alike by drawing on Shakespeare’s Cassius:

What virtue unknown is in his subscription Carolus Rex? Why is this name adored more then another? Write that and Denzil Hollis together, is it not as fair a name? Sound them, doth it not become the mouth as well? Weight them, is it not as heavy? The name alone ‘like richest Alchemy...must set him above his Masters and Conquerors, and permit him to bestride this narrow world like a Colossus, when you victors must walk like petty slaves, and peep about under his huge legs to find your selves dishonourable graves’.¹⁰³

The inner thespian had never deserted John Harris.

⁹⁶J. Harris, *Mercurius Militaris* [No.1] (London, 1648), p. 1.

⁹⁷See for example, Harris, *Mercurius Militaris* [No.1], pp. 2–4, *Militaris* [No. 2] (London, 1648), sig. B2r-B2v, *Militaris* [No.3] (London, 1648), sig. C2r, *Militaris* [No.4] (London, 1648), sigs. D2r-D2v.

⁹⁸*Militaris* [No.1], p. 4. Wanklyn, *New Model Army*, Vol. 1, p. 102.

⁹⁹Firth, *Clarke Papers*: Vol. 1, p. 436.

¹⁰⁰*Militaris* [No. 2], sig. B2r, and *Militaris* [No. 4], sig. D2v. Wanklyn, *New Model Army*, Vol. 1, p. 102. Harris’s precise relationship to the army has always been unclear but, given his close contacts within it and his occasional references to his ‘fellow’ soldiers, it seems likely that he did serve in the army at some point. Intriguingly, one ‘Harris’ was indeed an officer in a Gloucester garrison at some point between 1644 and 1648, likely therefore a member of the same regiment as Cadwell and Ross. See SP 28/129, Part 6, f.2.

¹⁰¹*Militaris* [No. 2], sig. B2r.

¹⁰²*Militaris* [No. 4], sig. D1r.

¹⁰³*Militaris* [No. 1], pp. 5–6.

Mercurius Militaris is often described as a ‘Leveller’ newsbook but it was as much an engine for Harris himself as it was for the nascent Leveller network; a testament to his own gradual radicalization, the product of the failed hopes, political back-sliding, and bloodshed of the past two years – and in particular the second civil war.¹⁰⁴ In *Mercurius Militaris*, Harris was in his element; ignoring the rapprochement between Lilburne, the civilian activists, and the army grandees in late 1648, Harris attacked ‘Noll’ Cromwell, Presbyterians, corrupt Independents, ‘horse-leeches’ (the lawyers), Cabs (cavaliers), and rival journalists alike.¹⁰⁵ Particular ire was reserved for the king himself. Having formerly recognized the king as a vital part of any future settlement, and having offered latitude to his supporters, *Mercurius Militaris* represented a decided ideological escalation for Harris. In its five issues, he mocked the idea of divine kingship relentlessly. ‘Why might not Jack Cade be as well beleaved to have been Mortimer and rightful heir to the Crown?’ he asked his readers. ‘Who did God anoint after Henry the Sixth, either *Richmond* or *Richard* the third?’ ‘Who decided the question then, and divers times since, which was the bastard brood, and which was Royal blood?’ William the Conqueror himself was nothing but the son of ‘a common strumpet in Normandy’.¹⁰⁶ The point was, Harris maintained, that there was nothing sacred about the king, nor did his rank make him immune from justice. The king carried ‘the guilt of 100,000 mens blood’; indeed, in light of the deaths of so many good men, Harris concluded, there was ‘no bloud so fit to answer it, as that of the head of the Tyrants’.¹⁰⁷ *Mercurius Militaris*, perhaps the most explicit public demand for the death of the king in print, was the apotheosis of Harris’s radicalization, a logical series of escalations and an ever-increasing aversion to sources of authority which reflects the ideological direction of many of Harris’s associates in the army and the capital; views, furthermore, which foreshadowed his erstwhile collaborator’s Sexby’s 1657 defence of tyrannicide, *Killing Noe Murder*.¹⁰⁸ It represented Harris’s own self-conception too, caught somewhere between journalist, agitator, whistle-blower, and citizen.

IV

Harris was purportedly on the scaffold to witness the king’s execution first-hand, but it did not herald the revolution he had hoped for. He relaunched *Militaris* in April, attacking the ‘politick Insects’ in Parliament, ‘the grandees of Jerusalem’ and the ‘Aristocracie of the Saints’ with ever more vitriol, but it was short-lived, and collapsed under pressure from the Stationers’ Company beadles.¹⁰⁹ Shortly after, the Rump Parliament confirmed its reassertion of control over the London press with a number of strict measures requiring, amongst other things, that printers post a £300 bond to continue in their work.¹¹⁰ This was clearly too much for Harris to afford. An aging revolutionary now without a cause, once again jobless and recently widowed, Harris was forced once more to compromise in order to survive.

¹⁰⁴Rees, *Leveller Revolution*, pp. 256–258.

¹⁰⁵*Militaris* [No. 1], p. 7.

¹⁰⁶*Militaris* [No. 2], sig. B3r.

¹⁰⁷*Militaris* [No. 1], p. 5, *Militaris* [No. 4], sig. D3v.

¹⁰⁸See P. Baker, ‘The Regicide’ in M. Braddick (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2015) for a wider discussion of the matter. See also Silius Titus [Sexby?], *Killing Noe Murder* ([Netherlands?], 1657).

¹⁰⁹J. Harris, *Mercurius Militaris, or the Peoples Scout* [No. 1] (London, 1649), p. 4.

¹¹⁰J. McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Boydell, 2007), pp. 173–174.

On November 7, just a week after his wife's death, warrants were issued to Harris and ten others, authorizing them to 'aid and assist the Master and Wardens' of the Stationers' Company in executing' the September act against seditious printing.¹¹¹ Less than two weeks later, Harris's old acquaintance George Wharton was arrested and committed to Newgate upon suspicion of treason.¹¹² In January, *The Man in the Moon*, John Crouch, claimed that 'a Couple of Beagles, male and female', identified as Harris and the notorious 'Parliament Joan', were hot on his trail. He was arrested shortly afterwards. Just before his own capture, the author of the *Royal Diurnall* likewise cited Harris as his pursuer.¹¹³ In a matter of months, *Sir Rahniho*, the 'utter enemy of tyranny and injustice', had become a dog of the oppressive authority he so abhorred. His actions provide the context to the accusations of treachery levelled against him at the start of this article. More difficult to understand, and perhaps more important to recognize, is that underground royalist writers felt that Harris's actions were a *betrayal*; it suggests an odd sense of fellowship between underground writers, united in a common cause to expose the perceived deceit and hypocrisy of politicians, despite glaring partisan differences. Clearly the boundaries of loyalty and allegiance were not as plainly demarcated as the prevailing historiographical landscape would have us believe.

After 1649, Harris's life is a history now largely lost, but some fragments survive. He was questioned in 1651 for having printed the pamphlet of the suspected Socinian, John Fry, in 1649. Harris argued he had 'been since abroad in service of parliament', though in what capacity is unclear.¹¹⁴ He may have joined the army, then campaigning in Scotland and Ireland, for two petitions survive in which he styles himself 'Captain' Harris. In the second petition, Harris claimed to have spent over £100 of his own estate 'for the advancement of Publique service' but, again, it was unclear what he was alluding too. That Harris's petition related to the misappropriation of John Pym's posthumous debts suggests, at least, that he remained committed to upholding political accountability and exposing corruption.¹¹⁵

His *respectable* career was, however, short-lived. In November 1654, a newsbook reported that 'Major John Harris formerly a Players boy having counterfeited the Lord Protectors [that is, Cromwell's] hand, and defrauded Mr Rich.Ford, Mr Nathaniel Manton, and Mr Thomas Papiion, Merchants, of 900 li. is now fled and escaped'. 'His highness hath granted forth and Order for his apprehension'.¹¹⁶ It was an incident which once more reflected Harris's capacity for bravado, theatre, and the use (or misuse) of intelligence. The following year he wrote to Cromwell's spymaster, John Thurloe, informing him that he had infiltrated a network of Fifth Monarchists and promising once more to play the informant.¹¹⁷ From thence, Harris slips from the historical record,

¹¹¹SP 25/63/242.

¹¹²SP 25/63/294.

¹¹³McElligott, *Royalism*, p. 181.

¹¹⁴*JHC*: Vol. 6, 1648-1651 (London, 1802), pp. 539-540.

¹¹⁵John Harris, *The Second Humble Representation of Capt. John Harris* (London, 1651), p. 8. The first petition also survives. See Bedfordshire Record Office, DDX171/57, 'To the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England: the humble petition of Captaine John Harris'. The printed response to Harris's first petition, which he cites in the second, does not seem to be extant.

¹¹⁶*The Weekly Post* [No. 205] (London, 1654), p. 1654. For further information, see also Sir Richard Ford, *To the High Court of Parliament* (London, 1654).

¹¹⁷T. Birch (ed.), *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Vol.III* (London, 1742), p. 149. Thurloe's response, sadly, does not survive.

only to re-emerge (fittingly) in a pamphlet recounting his closing performance upon the scaffold in 1660 with which this article began.

V

What, then, are we to make of a man like John Harris? Approaching the problem of radicalism from ‘the worm’s eye view’ affords us a fresh perspective of the radicalizing experience of the civil wars; one which eschews the prescriptive labels and categories of earlier scholarship and which, to return to Conal Condren’s critique highlighted at the outset, might more closely adhere to the evidence, at least as far as it allows. There is, of course, an inevitable degree of informed speculation, of gaps, and unanswered questions involved in attempting to reconstruct the networks and experiences of one individual in particular, but this historical uncertainty is perhaps a more authentic reflection of the civil war experience as it was lived. This article has aimed to establish a sense of the complex patchwork of alliances which had to be formed and re-formed, the compromises which had to be made, and the confusion and anxiety of navigating the treacherous waterways of civil war politics: it was perhaps only as John Harris awaited his capture at home somewhere near Lambeth Marsh in 1659 that he could have been certain of his fate. In one sense, then, this article has argued that Harris’s case complements and adds further weight and form to the formidable body of scholarship, addressed in the introduction, which has sought to interpret these men and women without resort to the constrictive and problematic nomenclature of *left* and *right*, *radical* and *conservative*, or the reifying labels that turn loose networks into fully formed groups. Harris certainly does not easily fit into any one particular label at a given moment in time: fluidity, in terms of ideas and allegiances, rather than fixed identities, should be considered the norm.

This essential fluidity, however, does not mean that Harris’s example cannot provide us both with specific insights and a greater sense of the contours of civil war activism more broadly. Harris’s involvement in the Oxford Army press especially sheds greater light on its importance as a vehicle for army-civilian collaboration, and creative constitutional problem-solving, well before more famous ‘moments’ at Putney and elsewhere. And, in the nature of Harris’s own intellectual and political development, we can draw important insights about the processes of civil war radicalization as a whole. The 1640s, in Harris’s case, were not a radical but a *radicalizing* experience, one highly dependent upon the fluid and uncertain conditions highlighted above. Ultimately, then, Harris proves a very useful way of exploring Michael Braddick’s argument that ‘radicalism’ should not be understood as a singular phenomenon but as the sum of *moments* of intellectual interaction, foment, and creativity between individuals, and for demonstrating how some of these interactions worked in practice¹¹⁸ It is a central contention of this article that these ‘moments’ tended to revolve around print: the processes involved in the production of public printed documents, of staking-out and defining political positions, and re-defining these positions in relation to the flow of printed documents published in response. I

¹¹⁸See, in particular, Braddick’s ‘Mobilisation, Anxiety and Creativity’ in J. Morrow, J. Scott (eds.), *Liberty, authority, formality: political ideas and culture, 1600–1900* (Exeter, 2008).

would argue, further, that the creative process was rarely reliant upon one individual, but rather took place as a collective: anonymity was, in one sense, a protective shield, but it also reflected the collaborative nature of the printed document itself. It was precisely the collaborative nature of the production process, the amalgamating, compromising, and finessing of different individual ideas, perspectives, and interests, which further accelerated the process of radicalization, driving participants to stake out more or less radical positions. Harris's involvement with a number of collectives, from the Alsop-Fawcett press through to his work with Sexby, Wildman, and Hills, and later his association with the 'Levellers', is a case in point: each experience in turn forced Harris to think imaginatively about, and develop, his own political stance. By the time Harris had achieved a greater degree of creative autonomy in *Mercurius Militaris*, his views were an amalgamation of all his experiences taken to their most radical extent. As Harris himself promised his readers, nobody could act 'to deceive and enslave the people, but *Militaris* will tell them': so too does John Harris still have much to tell us today.¹¹⁹

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