

*'This Infamous, Scandalous, Headless Insurrection': The Attack on William Laud and Lambeth Palace, May 1640, Revisited**

When in March 1641 William Laud, archbishop of Canterbury, was committed to the Tower, his committal was angrily celebrated on the streets of London. Trouble had clearly been expected since James Maxwell, Black Rod in the House of Lords, chose to escort Laud for 'privateness' by coach at midday, while the citizens should have been 'at dinner'. But at Cheapside the coach, spotted by an apprentice who 'halloed out', gathered a growing crowd of apprentices. With their 'shouting ... exceeding great' and their numbers still growing, they jeered Laud's coach until it entered the Tower. As Laud later complained, '[T]hey followed me with clamour and revilings even beyond barbarity itself'. With teasing calls of 'little Will art thou there?' and threatening cries of 'traytor, traytor', the apprentices showered Laud with 'dirt' and, since it was St David's Day, mockingly pelted him with leeks 'to make him pottage this Lent'. According to one report, some 'vowed to kill him in the Coach and soe prevent ye farce (as they terme it)' of his trial by parliament; according to another, they 'wellnigh kild him'.¹

As one of the king's leading ministers during the period of Personal Rule, and responsible as archbishop of Canterbury for policies in the Church that were condemned as a return to popery, Laud was by 1641 deeply unpopular. But the apprentices' hostility had an added edge. Laud's committal on a charge of treason had given them an opportunity for revenge. In May 1640 an attack on Laud and Lambeth Palace by a large crowd, with apprentices to the fore, had ended in the killing and imprisonment of some apprentices and the sacrificial hanging and quartering of a youth, Thomas Benstead, on a forced charge of treason.

* I am grateful to Alastair Bellany and the two readers for this journal for their comments on an earlier draft of this article, and to Richard Cust, John Morrill and John Watts for helpful discussions.

1. *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud*, ed. James Bliss (7 vols, Oxford, 1847–57) [hereafter Laud, *Works*], iii, pp. 240, 243–67; Bedford, Bedfordshire Record Office, J1378; *Calendar of Salisbury Correspondence, 1553–c.1700*, ed. W.J. Smith (Cardiff, 1954), p. 120; Cambridge University Library, Buxton MSS, box 102/11; *Trevelyan Papers, Part III*, ed. Walter Calverley Trevelyan and Charles Edward Trevelyan, Camden Society, 1st ser., cv (1872), p. 208; Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Wynn of Gwydir MSS, 1677.

Jeered on the streets, Laud was also mocked in verse. Facing the threat of his own execution, Laud was advised, in a macabre pun that played on the judicial dismembering of the bodies of traitors:

When y^e yonge ladds did to you come
 yo^u knew their meaning by their drum
 yo^u had better y[i]elded then:
 yo^r head[,] yo^r Body then might have
 one death on[e] burial & on[e] grave
 by Boys but [now] two by men.
 But yo^u y^e by y[ou]^r Jud[ge]m[en]t cleare
 will make five quarters in a year
 and hang them on y^e gate:
 That head [i.e. Benstead's] shall stand upon y^e bridge
 when yours shall under Traytors bridge
 & smile at yo^r Just fate.²

S.R. Gardiner was the first historian of the Lambeth attack, offering a succinct one-page narrative of the actions of what he chose to call 'the mob'.³ Since Gardiner, the event has become a staple of histories on the period, receiving a little more attention (and sometimes colourful interpolation)⁴ in the specialist literature.⁵ While this literature has fleshed out the sources originally used by Gardiner, it has largely drawn on his treatment. For Gardiner and for those who have followed his narrative, the attack on Lambeth served as an illustration of the political crisis that the policies pursued in the period of the Personal Rule of Charles I had created.

More recently, two studies have advanced our knowledge of the event. Chronologically the first of these, Keith Lindley's 1997 study of popular politics and religion in civil war London offered a more analytical account of the attack.⁶ Lindley drew together and significantly

2. San Marino, CA, Henry E. Huntington Library [hereafter HEHL], HM 39466. I am grateful to Steve Hindle, Director of Research, and Joan Redmond for their help in accessing material held by HEHL. Copies of this poem seem to have circulated freely; see, for example, Kew, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], SP 16/506/35; London, British Library [hereafter BL], Harleian MS 4931, fo. 104.

3. S.R. Gardiner, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603–1642* (10 vols, London, 1899), ix, pp. 132–5.

4. C. Carlton, *Charles I: The Personal Monarch* (London, 1983), p. 213, has Benstead trying to force open the gates of Lambeth Palace with a crowbar.

5. For examples, see C. Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 129–30; K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, CT, 1992), pp. 906–7; A. Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625–1660* (Oxford, 2002), p. 140; M. Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (2008), pp. 93–5. Earlier works are: V. Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution: City Government and National Politics, 1625–43* (Oxford, 1961); H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud, 1573–1645* (2nd edn, London, 1962), pp. 388–9; R.B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509–1640* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 217–18. B. Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution, 1640–1649* (London, 1976) does not discuss the episode.

6. K. Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (London, 1997), pp. 4–9, 26–8.

extended the sources for writing its history and broke fresh ground in his research into legal and other records to restore an identity to a small group of the faces in the Lambeth crowd. In his 2006 work, *England on Edge*, David Cressy devoted a chapter to what he dubbed 'the Lambeth Disturbances' or 'insurrection', offering a lively, extended narrative of the attack.⁷ Both works draw in wider material, Lindley detailing successive episodes of political activity in the capital, Cressy setting it in a context of wider disorder nationally. Both see the event as illustrative of more general trends. Lindley treated the attack as the first example of what he saw as the rise of a 'mass politics' of riots, petitions and demonstrations in mid-seventeenth-century London. Similarly, Cressy also sees 'a widening political involvement, an expanding interest in public affairs, and an increase in popular militancy'. By contrast, however, compared with what he calls the 'politicised crowds' of later 1640 London, Cressy finds that 'the militants of May' were 'relatively amorphous and undirected', a conclusion that suggests his previous statement draws also on his citing of non-London-based, provincial political activity. While Lindley saw anti-episcopacy as an important part of the May protests, Cressy doubts that there was 'any discernible religious element' beyond anti-popery.⁸

Building on the work of Lindley and Cressy, this article revisits the Lambeth attack, offering a re-evaluation of the political importance of the episode, its aftermath and consequences. Reconstructing the full extent of crowd actions in May and paying attention to the way the crowds *shaped* their protest, it emphasises the political nature and form of the crowds' actions and explores the evidence these provide of key mobilising concepts in popular political thinking. It places the attack in the context of a tradition of self-activating popular street politics and its interrelationship with the capital's political culture. The Lambeth attack was triggered by and in turn triggered a litter of libels, mobilising the crowds and extending their targets to include Catholic members of the court and royal family, and ministers unpopular because of their association with the royal regime during the Personal Rule of Charles I. Drawing on my discovery of the examination of Thomas Benstead, the sacrificial victim of royal repression,⁹ the article emphasises (and then qualifies) the severity of the royal government's judicial revenge. It seeks to explain this discrepancy in terms of the balance of power between royal government and popular politics in London in 1640. Examining how political violence in May came close to the court and to the royal family in 1640, the article argues that Charles I's fear of popularity and his family's experiences of the ferocity of popular violence on the

7. D. Cressy, *England on Edge: Crisis and Revolution, 1640–1642* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 114–22.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 125.

9. Benstead's deposition, unfortunately missing its opening page, was part of the uncatalogued papers of Lord Chief Justice Sir John Bramston deposited at Essex Record Office [hereafter ERO], Chelmsford. It has since been catalogued as ERO, D/Deb 94/20.

Continent inflated his reading of the threat that the attack posed. In conclusion, the article suggests that the Lambeth attack was of greater consequence than has hitherto been allowed for subsequent events in the capital and for the fate of Charles I.

I

The attack on Lambeth Palace did not come without warning. In the week preceding the attack, an invitation to hunt ‘William the Fox’ had been issued in libels posted and scattered around the City. These had urged ‘every class to preserve their ancient liberty and chase the bishops from the kingdom’. A date for the ‘hunt’ had been announced in a further libel addressed to ‘Gentlemen Prentises’ and publicly posted at the busy site of the Exchange only two days before the attack.¹⁰ It invited them to meet at St George’s Fields in Southwark, close to Lambeth Palace, on the morning of Monday, 11 May, a choice of day perhaps intended to exploit the pattern of leisure preferences in pre-industrialised rhythms of work that encouraged the taking of an unofficial ‘holiday’ in celebration of ‘St Monday’.¹¹

Rumour provided the immediate prompt for the Lambeth attack. Reports had circulated that ‘the Archbishop was the chief cause of breaking the Parliament’, responsible for the dissolution on 5 May of the Short Parliament, a body whose recall many had hoped would signal the beginning of reformation in Church and state, but which had lasted for only three weeks.¹² Laud had noted, the very next day after the dissolution of the parliament, the appearance of libels proposing to hunt ‘William the Fox’ for ‘breach of the Parliament’.¹³ Even before its dissolution, a Chancery Court clerk’s servant had been examined for telling others that ‘if ye parliament should be dissolved’, he had heard that ‘his Grace’s house of Canterbury at Lambeth should be fired, & yt they woulde keepe his Lo[rds]hip in until he shuld be burnt’. Reporting this as ‘flying speech’, he claimed that ‘thousands would say as much’.¹⁴ The accusation was well enough known for a man in conversation with a woman in her chamber at the time of the Lambeth attack to tell her, ‘my lord of Canterbury a pox on hym for he was the cause of the dissolution of the parliament, but they [the attackers] will have him ear [ere] they leave’.¹⁵ Laud’s emphatic promotion of the king’s power and challenging of parliament’s authority had generated

10. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice* (38 vols in 40, 1864–1947) [hereafter *CSPV*], 1640–1642, pp. 47–8; TNA, SP 16/451/81, 16/458/110; Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 284; BL, Harleian MS 4931, fo. 8.

11. For the custom of St Monday, see E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, no. 38 (1967), pp. 72–6.

12. *The Oxinden Letters, 1607–1642: Being the Correspondence of Henry Oxinden of Barham and his Circle*, ed. D. Gardiner (London, 1933), p. 174.

13. Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 284.

14. TNA, SP 16/451/81.

15. TNA, SP 16/457/3.

a fractious relationship with Charles's parliaments that made plausible the accusation that he was responsible for parliament's dissolution.¹⁶ As a solicitor was reported to have told a London widow, '[A]s long as the Archbishop of Canterburie & [John Finch] the lord Keep[er] lived Hee & she should not live to see a parliament'.¹⁷

In religion, Laud's promotion of ceremonialism and prosecution of his puritan critics had made him a figure of popular suspicion and hate. An earlier libel posted on Cheapside Cross in 1637, one of a flurry attacking Laud for his part in the bodily mutilation of the puritan triumvirate of Bastwick, Burton and Prynne, had denounced him as 'the Arch-Wolf of Canterbury' for 'persecuting the saints and shedding the blood of martyrs'.¹⁸ The 1640 attack also drew on the hostility of puritans who, like the godly London woodturner, Nehemiah Wallington, held Laud to be 'that grate enemy of God and his people'.¹⁹ The Exchange libel, godly in tone, denounced Laud as a 'ravening wolf ... which daily plotteth mischief and seeks to bring this whole land to destruction by his popish inventions ... who savours of nothing but superstition and idolatry and daily more and more infecteth the flock of Christ'.²⁰

From early in his career Laud had attracted accusations of being a secret Catholic sympathiser.²¹ In the year before the attack, talk in a Southwark alehouse had seen Laud rechristened 'the pope of Lambeth'. Conversations between apprentices and their neighbours about the Lambeth attack revealed claims to have witnessed a crucifix and popish pictures at Lambeth.²² Though far from the truth, such accusations had only grown over time with the belief that Laud's vigorous prosecution of ceremonial conformity, centred on raised and railed altars, was in effect part of a secret popish plot to return the English Church to Rome. Asked after the event why the apprentices did rise, a Berkshire husbandman had reported, '[T]here was a noise in the Countrey that it was thought it was because my lord of Canterbury was turned papist'.²³ The attack on Laud was therefore also a product of puritan retaliation and the fierce anti-popery that periodically prompted disorder and violence on London's streets.

16. A. Milton, 'Laud, William (1573–1645)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

17. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bankes 18/2, fo. 3v.

18. Laud, *Works*, iii, pp. 228, 229, and vii, pp. 371–2; A. Bellany, 'Libels in Action: Ritual, Subversion and the English Literary Underground, 1603–42', in T. Harris, ed., *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 110–16. Unsurprisingly, in godly Coventry the Lambeth attack was attributed to Londoners' resentment of Laud's severe proceedings against puritans: F. Bliss Burbridge, *Old Coventry and Lady Godiva: Being Some Flowers of Coventry History* (Birmingham, n.d.), p. 245.

19. *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618–1654: A Selection*, ed. D. Boys (Aldershot, 2007), p. 253.

20. TNA, SP 16/423/83; *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ii, p. 711; Cressy, *England on Edge*, p. 115.

21. D. Freist, *Governed by Opinion: Politics, Religion and the Dynamics of Communication in Stuart London, 1637–1645* (London, 1997), pp. 163–9; TNA, SP 16/247/59; 16/248/93; 16/250/58–9; 16/254/50, 52; 16/260/79; 16/267/89; 16/327/140; 16/361/117; 16/417/97, i–iii; 16/421/21; 16/422/113; 16/423/83; 16/429/30.

22. TNA, SP 16/453/96–7; 16/456/36.

23. TNA, SP 16/461/46.

In the face of an unpopular war with their fellow protestants, the Scots, of which popular sedition made him the author,²⁴ Laud had been singled out for responsibility for the policies the king's government had pursued in 'the eleven years tyranny' initiated by the suspension of parliaments in 1629. That the offences for which Laud was hated ranged from promoting new taxes and fining City companies to persecution of the godly and plotting the reintroduction of popery may help to explain the otherwise hyperbolic accusation in the Exchange libel that the bishop 'would faine kill us, o^r wives & children'. As a ballad circulating 'at ye Parliam[ent] 1640' declared, 'little Lawd will pay for his fraud / And cunning Innovation: / ffor Service-booke, & the eares that he tooke / And the Scottish Proclamation'.²⁵ The Lambeth attack therefore reflected a widely shared assessment of Laud's responsibility for unpopular policies in state and Church. In doing so, it confirmed the potency of the tendency within early modern political culture to use the *topos* of heroes and villains to think politically.²⁶

II

Forewarned, the authorities had beat up the drums and mustered the Southwark trained bands on Monday, 11 May.²⁷ But after they were stood down, late in the evening, a large crowd assembled. Around midnight, the crowd marched 'with drums beating' from St George's Fields to Lambeth Palace.²⁸ Others were thought to have come by boat from the Thameside communities of Ratcliff, Blackwall and Wapping.²⁹ Laud put the crowd's number at 500. Others offered mounting estimates. Thomas Coke, in a letter to his father Sir John Coke, reported 800 'or thereabouts'; the newsletter writer John Castle estimated 1,200, and the Venetian ambassador 2,000.³⁰

24. See, for example, TNA, SP 16/422/113; 16/423/83; 16/461/46.

25. BL, Harleian MS 4931, fo. 8; Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poet 26, fo. 123v. The reference here is again to the puritan 'martyrs', Bastwick, Burton and Prynne, who had their ears cropped as a part of their punishment urged by Laud.

26. P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn, Farnham, 2009), pp. 201–54.

27. TNA, SP 16/452/110; *The Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637–1641*, ed. J. Fielding, Camden series, 5th ser., xlii (2012), p. 353; *Lambeth Churchwardens' Accounts, 1504–1645, and Vestry Book, 1610*, ed. C. Drew, Surrey Record Society, xx (1950), p. 157.

28. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 115r–v; *CSPV, 1640–1642*, p. 47.

29. TNA, SP 16/453/81. A contemporary print of the attack is labelled 'The Rising of the Prentises and Sea-men': BL, *All the Memorable & Wonder-Striking, Parliamentary Mercies Effected & Afforded unto this our English Nation, within this Space of lesse then 2 Yeares Past 1641. & 1642* (London, 1642; Thomason Tracts, E.116[49]), fo. 2.

30. TNA, PRO 31/3/72 (Baschet transcripts of French ambassadors' despatches, Archives Nationales, Paris), p. 149; Laud, *Works*, vi, pt 2 (1857), p. 604; *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord de L'Isle and Dudley, Preserved at Penshurst Place* (Historical Manuscripts Commission; 6 vols, 1925–66) [hereafter HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley*], vi, p. 267; *The Manuscripts of the Earl Cowper, K.G., Preserved at Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire* (Historical Manuscripts Commission; 3 vols, 1888–9), ii, p. 255; HEHL, EL 7833; *CSPV, 1640–1642*, pp. 47–9.

The sources do not describe in any detail what then happened. The crowd were said to have made ‘many threats to his [Laud’s] person’, while ‘their tounge ceased not to utter reviling of all bitterness’ against him.³¹ The French ambassador reported that one of the libels posted at the Exchange had called on those assembling to come armed. Some had done so. According to the ambassador, individuals in the crowd had fired on those defending the palace.³² In a conversation in Essex about the attack, one man said that the attackers had spoiled the garden or orchard and significantly, as we will see, would have pulled down the house, ‘if one had not come & fell downe upon his knees to pacifie them’.³³ According to Castle, the crowd had knocked on the palace gate and said ‘they must needs speak with His Grace of whom they would ask (as they termed it) but one civil question and it was who was the cause of the breaking up the Parliament?’³⁴

If, as the libels had announced, the crowd intended to make an attempt on Laud and his Lambeth residence, they were unsuccessful. Laud had slipped across the Thames to Whitehall by boat some two hours before the attack.³⁵ On the announcement of the intended attack, an attempt had been made to fortify Lambeth Palace and the attackers were repelled by the defenders firing on them (though not perhaps with shot, since one of those at the head of the crowd had only his clothes scorched with brown paper and gunpowder).³⁶ Nevertheless, defying attempts by local Justices of the Peace to disperse them, aided by only a scratch force of constables and others, the crowd continued to shout and mill about the house. A woman later referred to ‘the Blunder and Hubbub’ at Lambeth.³⁷ Finally, accepting that Laud was no longer there, the crowd dispersed a little over two hours later, but with threats to return and not then to leave until they had spoken with him, ‘either by hook or crook, sooner or later’.³⁸

Employing the language of ‘the many-headed monster’, the Tory Anglican clergyman John Nalson, in his later (anything but) *Impartial*

31. HEHL, EL 7833; HMC *De L’Isle and Dudley*, vi, p. 267.

32. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 149. The contemporary print (‘The Rising of the Prentises and Seamen’, see n. 29 above) depicts a few men carrying muskets among those armed with pitchforks, bills and staves.

33. TNA, SP 16/468/139. The editors of the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* for 1640–1641 assign this undated document to September, but the reference to the calling of the trained bands suggests an earlier date.

34. HEHL, EL 7833.

35. Laud, *Works*, iii, pp. 235–6; BL, Additional MS 35331, fo. 77r; TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 149. Some £50 was spent on watchmen, musketeers, gunners, two pieces of ordnance and powder and shot; some of this must have happened after the initial attack in response to rumours of a further attack: *The Household Accounts of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1635–1643*, ed. L. James, Church of England Record Society, xxiv (2019), pp. 160–62. Laud was also reported to have sent all his plate to Westminster Abbey to be kept with the royal regalia: HEHL, EL 7835; BL, Additional MS 2800, fo. 16r.

36. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 114v.

37. ERO, D/Deb 94/20.

38. HEHL, EL 7833.

Collection, suggested that ‘the Rabble’ would doubtless have made Laud ‘the Sacrifice of their Rage could they have got him into their Power’.³⁹ According to Clarendon too, the crowd made ‘open profession and protestation’ that they would tear Laud ‘in pieces’.⁴⁰ The libel posted at the Exchange had been addressed to ‘All Gentleman Prentises yt desire to kill the B[isho]p’,⁴¹ and doggerel verse in another warned that ‘Laud shall die like Dr Lambe’, a reference to a notorious victim of London street violence from the 1620s.⁴² Benstead in his examination talked of, but did not name, an apprentice who, after the attack, on seeing him wounded, had clapped him on the shoulder and boasted, ‘that somebody else [i.e. Laud] should have Received as much if hee could have holpen [helped] it’.⁴³

Outside episodes of major protest, early modern English crowds usually targeted property, not persons, and attacks on people did not usually result in their death. However, although the rhetoric of violence was almost always, and often deliberately, more extreme than the reality of crowd actions, the protocols of early modern protest do not rule out the possibility that the attackers might have sought Laud’s death or that he might have died as the result of a severe beating had the crowd been able to get hold of him. Large crowds are complex in composition, mixed in motives, and dynamic in motion. Crowds grant anonymity and, importantly, a diffusion of responsibility that can permit ordinary people to do what is not ordinarily done.⁴⁴

Indeed, the language used in the libels might have been thought to encourage the killing of Laud. Strikingly, references to hunting ‘William the Fox’ and invitations ‘to destroy this subtle fox and hunt this ravening wolf out of his den’ were to animals considered ‘outside the terms of moral reference’, vermin for whose killing early modern law offered financial reward.⁴⁵ The dehumanisation implicit in the animalisation of Laud might, as in other periods and places, have led to homicidal violence.⁴⁶ And implicit too in the accusations against Laud was the charge of being a traitor. Medieval rebellions had

39. *An Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State*, ed. John Nalson (2 vols, London, 1682–3), i, p. 344.

40. Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England Begun in the Year 1641* (6 vols, Oxford, 1888), i, p. 188.

41. BL, Harleian MS 4931, fo. 4931.

42. A. Bellamy, ‘The Murder of John Lambe: Crowd Violence, Court Scandal and Popular Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, no. 200 (2008), pp. 37–76, and see below, n. 157.

43. ERO, D/Deb 94/21.

44. See the revealing analysis in D.H. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, CA, 2001).

45. Lambeth Palace Library [hereafter LPL], Laud Misc. 943, pp. 717–18 (cited in *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ed. J.F. Larkin and P.L. Hughes [2 vols, Oxford, 1973–83]); K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1983), p. 148. An anonymous verse written shortly after the attack labelling Laud a fox (and the Earl of Strafford a wolf) talked of ‘vermine lately hunted by the route’: TNA, SP 16/487/48.

46. See, for example, A. Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. pp. 69–70.

claimed the right of the commonalty to execute justice on traitors to king and realm (including in 1381 Laud's predecessor as archbishop of Canterbury). According to the Venetian ambassador, placards in May 1640 appealing for the people to assemble had called for action to 'secure in union the death of many leading ministers, reputed enemies of the commonweal'.⁴⁷

III

The day after the attack, the Privy Council, with Laud as first signatory, issued detailed orders to prevent any further 'tumultuous assemblies'. The mayor of London was to have the trained bands in readiness to suppress any 'disorderly riotous and like tumultuous meeting'.⁴⁸ He was to provide a guard to prevent people crossing the river into the City, and the Middlesex authorities were to keep boats ready to transport horse and men to Lambeth should there be further disorder. Double watches were to be held nightly in the City, Westminster and Southwark, and any vagrants found wandering were to be arrested. The Surrey authorities, responsible for the maintenance of order in Lambeth, were to appoint a provost marshal and to provide him with well-armed horse and foot. Anticipating further trouble and suggesting the threat had been made, at Southwark the trained bands were to be put in arms to stand guard at St George's Fields the following Monday, day and night.⁴⁹

But this was not the end of Laud's troubles. The following days were to bring the reappearance of crowds and more libels threatening further violence. On the day after the attack, the Northamptonshire attorney and puritan Robert Woodford, then present in London, noted, 'we hear of diverse other libels, and the state of things in the Kingdome is very doubtfull and uncertaine'. According to John Rushworth, 'Informations came every hour of more Libels posted up'.⁵⁰ The day after the attack, 12 May, another libel appeared at the Exchange promising that the crowd would reappear on Thursday. According to the French ambassador, verses full of menace threatened to destroy ('that is the term they use') the archbishop.⁵¹ Fresh placards were also affixed to the royal palace at Whitehall promising that all the efforts and authority of the king and queen would not save the archbishop, and other ministers they named, from being killed.⁵² Two days later, yet more libels against

47. *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. R.B. Dobson (London, 1970), pp. 172–5; *CSPV, 1640–1642*, p. 47.

48. TNA, PCR 2/52, p. 490; SP 16/453/43.

49. TNA, PCR 2/52, pp. 482–4; SP 16/453/16, 18, 19; London Metropolitan Archives [hereafter LMA], COL/RMD/PA/01/08, fo. 126r.

50. *Diary of Robert Woodford*, ed. Fielding, p. 354; John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*, III: 1639–40 (London, 1721), p. 1176; Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 235.

51. 'c'est le terme dont ils se servent': TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 148.

52. *CSPV, 1640–1642*, pp. 47–9.

Laud appeared. One issued an invitation to ‘come and help us that we may destroy this subtle fox and hunt this ravening wolf out of his den’.

Yet another libel proposed to chase out the Pope and the devil from St James. This was a perhaps a reference to the papal nuncio, Count Carlo Rossetti, who had complained on 4 May of a plot to fire his house and sought shelter on 12 May at St James’s Palace. It was certainly a threat against Charles’s unpopular French mother-in-law, Marie de Medici, who had been lodged there with her French retinue.⁵³ Part of the reason for the hostility towards the mother of the queen, Henrietta Maria, was the belief that, as an accomplice in a popish plot to do away with parliaments, Marie had used her influence with her daughter to secure the dissolution of the Short Parliament.⁵⁴ These threats prompted courtiers hastily to mount an overnight guard at St James and nightly guards thereafter to be kept there.⁵⁵

Thursday, 14 May, brought renewed alarms. An even larger crowd—some said 4,000, others 8,000—was reported to have assembled at Blackheath.⁵⁶ According to the Venetian ambassador, a crowd some 7,000 strong was said to have utterly destroyed Laud’s house at Croydon.⁵⁷ Both reports proved false. In the end, instead of renewing the attack on Laud, a crowd, reputed to be several thousand strong, had come up to town that night and on their return had proceeded to tour the prisons searching for their imprisoned comrades. From the Clink, the rescuers went to the White Lion prison, both in Southwark, and to the King’s Bench, eventually visiting five prisons in all. Despite one of the rescuers being killed and a couple of others injured, they succeeded in freeing those arrested for their part in the attack on Lambeth Palace, also releasing other prisoners they found there, including some imprisoned by Laud for religious nonconformity.⁵⁸ They also released one of the four London aldermen imprisoned for refusing the king’s request for a loan from the City. When the alderman proved reluctant to be rescued, his rescuers were said to have forced him to leave with the threat otherwise to pull down the prison.⁵⁹

53. G. Albion, *Charles I and the Court of Rome* (London, 1935), p. 338; TNA, SP 161/453/112; LPL, Laud Misc. 943, pp. 717–18 (cited in *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ii, p. 711); L. von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, tr. Dom Ernest Graf (29 vols, London, 1938), xxix, p. 327.

54. Gardiner, *History*, ix, p. 134. Complaining of the absence of parliament, one woman told another in a conversation at the time of the Lambeth attack that Charles allowed the Queen Mother £1,000 per week, which ‘the poore Subbiects p[ai]d’: ERO, D/Deb 94/20.

55. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 157; TNA, PCR 2/52, pp. 493–4.

56. HEHL, EL 7834; BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 110r; TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 155.

57. TNA, SP 161/453/81; CSPV, 1640–1642, p. 48.

58. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, pp. 155–6; HEHL, EL 7834; Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 235, and vi, pt 2, p. 604; *Diary of Robert Woodford*, ed. Fielding, p. 355; BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 110r; HMC *De L’Isle and Dudley*, vi, p. 272. Among those released was a Colchester clothworker imprisoned by Laud for attending conventicles: TNA, KB 29/289, m. lxxxix; ERO, D/5/Sb2/7, fo. 281v.

59. *Winthrop Papers*, IV: 1638–1644, ed. A.B. Forbes, Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, MA, 1944), p. 248; Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 236; Pearl, *London*, pp. 96–103. In Cheshire, resentment at the king’s imprisonment of the aldermen was singled out as the cause of the attack on the prisons: *Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties by Thomas Malbon*, ed. James Hall, Record Society of Lancashire & Cheshire, xix (1869), pp. 15–16.

The list of targets now widened.⁶⁰ The Venetian ambassador reported that both the Earl of Strafford and the Marquis of Hamilton had been named in libels. The Spanish ambassadors too had been threatened, since it was believed that it was their offer of a subsidy to Charles that had hastened the dissolution of the parliament.⁶¹ The prison attackers were reported to have said that they would not give over until they had caught 'the Fox [Laud], and little birde [Sir John Finch, the Lord Keeper]' and 'some what they have to say at St James, and to the swarmes of French'.⁶² Yet more libels appeared, threatening an attack on the night of the Friday, 15 May. These prompted talk in Southwark that the apprentices would pull down the Queen Mother's house and chapel and also the chapels at Somerset House and Arundel House because they were 'houses of popery'.⁶³ The papal nuncio Rossetti later reported that crowds had assembled at both St James and the Capuchin convent at Somerset House.⁶⁴ That the May libels turned quickly to threatening Catholics and Catholic chapels reflected the rumours that the dissolution of the Short Parliament was part of a popish plot. They exposed the anti-popery that lurked just below the surface of everyday life in London.⁶⁵

The threat of further attacks saw a ratcheting up of the response by the authorities. A proclamation for punishing and repressing what were now called 'traiterous and rebellious assemblies' was drawn up on 15 May with an order for it to be proclaimed in the market places and chief streets of the City, Southwark, Westminster and suburbs 'as soone as ... [it] shall come unto their hands'. On the same day, orders were given for the authorities now to suppress and slay any persons 'tumultuously assembled'. Detachments of the Middlesex and Westminster bands were now to provide guards night and day for St James's Palace and men were to be drawn from the trained bands of the City and Middlesex and stationed in Southwark. The defence of the Tower of London was to be looked to and arms were to be sent from there to Whitehall and St James. London's mayor was reported to have ordered the drawbridges on London Bridge to be repaired and the portcullises and chains to block the streets put in order.⁶⁶

60. Sharpe (*Personal Rule*, p. 907) suggested that the house of Sir John Lambe, the enforcer of Laud's policies in the church courts, was attacked, but I have been unable to confirm this from the sources there cited.

61. *CSPV, 1640–1642*, p. 48.

62. HEHL, EL 7834.

63. HEHL, EL 7834; TNA, SP 16/267/89 (the editors of the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* for 1634–1635 dated this to May 1634, but see SP 16/453/78, 80, 96); SP 16/453/96–7, 112.

64. Von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, xxix, p. 327. A section of the trained bands was ordered to gather privately and to meet at Arundel House: *Diary of Robert Woodford*, ed. Fielding, p. 354.

65. C.M. Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1983), p. 151; R. Clifton, 'The Popular Fear of Catholics during the English Revolution', *Past and Present*, no. 52 (1971), pp. 23–55.

66. TNA, SP 16/453/61–5; PCR 2/52, pp. 491–4. LMA, COL/RMD/PA/01/008, fo. 126; BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 112v.

Dependence on the City's trained bands, however, added to royal fears in 1640.⁶⁷ The king had called for watch and ward to be made up only of substantial citizens, but the use of deputies by householders may have added to the problem. Keith Lindley cites the example of an apprentice who, after the attacks, said that if he was forced to serve on the watch he would 'turn rebel with the rest of my fellow apprentices'.⁶⁸ Household discipline was meant to be the bedrock of order in the City.⁶⁹ In a customary City response to disorder on the streets, a night-time curfew was also imposed on apprentices and servants after the attack. But, as was to become even more apparent in subsequent political demonstrations, shared fears between masters and their apprentices of a popish plot, and later royal coup, made even this less dependable.⁷⁰ Reliance on a citizen army could then be compromised by the political loyalties and religious sensibilities of a good part of London's trained bands, and this at a time when the king was bullying the City's rulers and wealthy merchants for their refusal to advance a loan and parishes for refusing to contribute coat and conduct money for troops assembled to fight in Scotland.⁷¹ Reporting that after the attack on the prisons the trained bands had 'rushed' ('accourrent') to the prison only as the crowds were retiring, a sceptical French ambassador suggested that, despite the noise the attacks must have created, 'they did not wish to hear it'.⁷² Significantly, it was to be courtiers and gentlemen pensioners who provided guards both for Marie de Medici and for Laud when eventually he returned to Lambeth.⁷³

In a sign of the anxiety it felt in the face of threats of further disorder (and doubts perhaps about the reliability of trained bands), the Privy Council re-appointed a provost marshal for the City and drew together an army of some 6,000 from the forces of the surrounding counties. Stationed at Blackheath, this was to be ready to suppress any further insurrections.⁷⁴ Despite these measures, the newsletter writer John Castle reported that neither the arrests nor raising the trained

67. For a general assessment of problems in the City's trained bands, see K. Lindley, 'Riot Prevention and Control in Early Stuart London', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., xxxiii (1983), pp. 119–24.

68. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, pp. 155, 156; Lindley, *Popular Politics*, p. 7. Woodford records that the summons for the trained bands to assemble was given 'uppon payne of death as it was s[ai]d', suggesting the authorities were worried that others might prove reluctant: *Diary of Robert Woodford*, ed. Fielding, p. 498.

69. Benstead's examination provides evidence of masters calling home their apprentices, but after the attack: ERO, D/Deb 94/19.

70. Lindley, *Popular Politics*, pp. 13–35, 92–157; Manning, *English People and the English Revolution*, pp. 1–20, 71–98; J. Walter, *Covenanting Citizens: The Protestation Oath and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 51–7, 68–79.

71. These included the constables and defaulters from parishes close to Lambeth Palace: TNA, SP 16/453/27.

72. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 156.

73. HEHL, EL 7836.

74. HEHL, EL 7835; BL, Sloane MS 1467, fos 110r–111v, 115v. TNA, PCR 2/52, pp. 518, 526–7; SP 16/454/12, 15, 102.

bands 'have struck any greater terror into them or procured any great security'.⁷⁵ There were to be yet further libels and fears of renewed attacks, with talk of reviving the attack on Laud during the Whitsun holidays. Reporting these to the Earl of Leicester, whose own house had also been put under guard, a London correspondent told him, 'I never knew the subjects of England so much out of order, what with the disorders of some and feares of the rest'.⁷⁶

IV

Predictably, the authorities spoke of the 1640 crowds in the language of the 'many-headed monster'.⁷⁷ They were 'a Company of unrueilly Rogues', the 'unruly multitude', 'a rabble', the 'rascality of Southwark'.⁷⁸ Laud dismissed them as 'rascal routers' and their attack as 'a barbarous commotion'; the Privy Council denounced the 'traiterous insolency of some base people'.⁷⁹ Such familiar disparagements of the social and moral qualities of those who engaged in riot were of course intended, consciously or otherwise, to deny the crowd a political voice. The reality was rather different.

Valerie Pearl suggested, without citing a source but perhaps on the basis of the geography of occupations, that the glovers and tanners of Bermondsey and Southwark had joined with sailors and unemployed dockworkers. In his examination, Thomas Benstead reported that the 'Captayne' at Lambeth was a silkweaver and that 'it was Generally sayd amongst the Company that most of the silke weavers were foremost in the Ranks of the Prentecess'.⁸⁰ But the Council's failure to capture or charge any but a few of the hundreds said to be involved in the attacks on palace or prisons means that most of the faces in the crowd remain unknown. Laud's household accounts record payment for boat hire to carry an unrecorded number of unnamed 'rebells' to the Gatehouse at Westminster.⁸¹ According to the French ambassador, on the night of the Lambeth attack five or six of the crowd had been arrested; in the attack on the prisons only one. But further arrests had subsequently been made, and the Venetian ambassador reported that 'quite fifty' had been taken.⁸² If so, we know the names of very few.

75. HEHL, EL 7834.

76. HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley*, vi, p. 267.

77. C. Hill, 'The Many-Headed Monster', in id., *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1974), pp. 181–204.

78. HEHL, EL 7833, 7834; TNA, SP 16/454/9; BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 111v.

79. Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 284, and vii, p. 603; TNA, PCR 2/52, p. 493.

80. Pearl, *London*, pp. 106–7; ERO, D/Deb/94/21.

81. TNA, 31/3/72, p. 150; BL, Additional MS 2800, fo. 16r; *Household Accounts of William Laud*, ed. James, p. 160.

82. HEHL, EL 7834; *CSPV, 1640–1642*, p. 48. Some of those for whom we do have names were (or were allowed to claim that they were) spectators, not participants in the attacks: BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 111v; TNA, SP 16/459/86.

Three men were named in the proclamation as principal actors and identified by their trades: John Archer, glover and drummer to the crowd,⁸³ George Searles, poulterer, and William Seltrum, shoemaker.⁸⁴ Thomas Benstead, the youth wounded in the attack at Lambeth, was said to be a 16-year-old sailor from Rochester (but he was to be indicted as a tailor from Lambeth).⁸⁵ Keith Lindley's analysis of the only slightly larger group for whom we also have names from their appearance in the records of the King's Bench suggests that they too were drawn from generally modest crafts and trades: glazier, blacksmith and perfumer. Others—cordwainer, waterman and labourer—were perhaps less fortunate.⁸⁶ But the French ambassador's top-down disparagement of them as 'men of the basest part of the people', while perhaps reflecting what was thought of them in court circles, was wide of the mark.⁸⁷ To judge from the dozen or so whose names we do know, the crowds included those with some skill and a settled status in their parishes.

Contemporary comment offered an age-related and gendered description of the crowds' composition—the attacks were seen as a rising of the apprentices.⁸⁸ If, outside the realms of fiction,⁸⁹ early modern England lacked the formal groupings that were said to be characteristic of continental early modern urban youth subcultures, there is nevertheless plenty of evidence to suggest that in London patterns of work and sociability, reinforced by commonalties in dress, culture and address, underwrote the apprentices' ability to act collectively. Apprenticeship might conceal important differences in social origins, levels of skill and expectations of future success or experience of likely poverty, but recognition of a shared identity given expression in the resonant concept of fraternity gave apprentices their collective identity.⁹⁰ Representing a significant section of the working population and ever-present on the city streets, their ability quickly to raise a crowd by their watchword of 'Clubs!' gave expression to their agency. The rescue of fellow apprentices imprisoned for their part in the attack at Lambeth, by a crowd reputedly much larger, offers a telling demonstration of the

83. Archer was not poor; he had been left a legacy of some £50: TNA, SP 16/454/81.

84. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ii, p. 711.

85. TNA, KB 29/289, m. lxxxix, dorso.

86. Lindley, *Popular Politics*, pp. 8 and n., 26–8.

87. 'hommes de la plus basse partie du peuple': TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 150.

88. BL, Additional MS 35331, fo. 77r; TNA, SP 16/453/96, 97, and 16/454/43; *Oxinden Letters*, ed. Gardiner, p. 174; *Winthrop Papers*, IV, ed. Forbes, p. 248; TNA, SP 16/487/48; Truro, Cornwall Record Office, AD 1239/1.

89. B. Capp, 'English Youth Groups and the *Pinder of Wakefield*', *Past and Present*, no. 76 (1977), pp. 127–33; N.Z. Davis, 'The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, no. 50 (1971), pp. 41–75.

90. M.T. Burnett, 'Apprentice Literature and the "Crisis" of the 1590s', *Year Book of English Studies*, xxi (1991), pp. 28–33; S.R. Smith, 'The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents', *Past and Present*, no. 61 (1973), pp. 149–61, at 155–7, 161; S.R. Smith, 'The Ideal and Reality: Apprentice–Master Relationships in Seventeenth Century London', *History of Education Quarterly*, xxi (1981), pp. 449–59, at 455–6; I.K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), pp. 14–20.

cardinal importance of notions of fraternity in mobilising the apprentice crowd.

V

London's apprentices had long enjoyed a well-earned reputation as a notorious source of disorder on the capital's streets.⁹¹ The evidence of those arrested shows that the apprentices were joined by others in the crowd, but the title of apprentice was so synonymous with disorder in the city that it was frequently used as a blanket term for others in the crowd. Several of those recording the attacks reflected an awareness of this. In London, Robert Woodford referred to the attackers as 'the Apprentices as they are called', while in Oxfordshire a clergyman attributed the attack on Lambeth Palace to 'prentises or some with their habits'.⁹² If 'apprentices' had become an indiscriminate catch-all description for any crowd disturbances in London, then, as with the language of the 'many-headed monster', here too the identification of the youthful nature of the 1640 crowd might work to deny them any legitimate grounds for their protests. Contemporary wisdom held that youth was a 'slippery age, full of passion, rashness, wilfulness' and 'until a man grow unto the age of twenty-four years ... he is wild, without judgement and not of sufficient experience to govern himself'. Consequently, young men could be represented as being too easily given to anger, violence and disorder.⁹³

There was, however, a politics to the Lambeth attack. It was evident in the libels and reported speech, and it was to be acted out in the crowds' proposed violence. Only one of the many libels survives in its original form. The content of others has to be recovered from contemporary reports, with the additional problem of translation into and out of English in ambassadorial correspondence (and in later editing and publication). However, the striking appeal in the Exchange libel to those 'who desire to keep your liberty'—'ancient liberty' in the report of the Venetian ambassador—is suggestive of the broader political ideas on which the authors of the libels could draw.⁹⁴ Strikingly, the Lambeth attack articulated a popular belief in the role of parliament as the people's protector, voiced in the 'civil' question they had intended to pose to Laud about his responsibility for the collapse of the Short Parliament and, as we have seen,

91. S.R. Smith, 'The Apprentices of London, 1640–1660: A Study of Revolutionary Youth Subculture' (Vanderbilt Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1971).

92. *Diary of Robert Woodford*, ed. Fielding, p. 355; Bodleian Library, MS Top. Oxon. C.378, p. 306.

93. K. Thomas, *Age and Authority in Early Modern England*, Raleigh Lecture on History (London, 1976), pp. 15–18, at 15; S.R. Smith, 'Religion and the Conception of Youth in Seventeenth-Century England', *History of Childhood Quarterly*, ii (1975), pp. 493–516, at 497–9; P. Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996); Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*.

94. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, fo. 149; CSPV, 1640–1642, p. 47.

in neighbourhood conversations about the protesters' motivations. An examination of seditious words spoken at the time of the attack provides a further example, in a conversation between two women in which one told the other 'that the King would not heare any of the Councill of ye p[ar]lam[e]nt Butt would undoe all his poore Subiects'. She had also expressed the wish that now the apprentices were gathered together they would go on to destroy the king.⁹⁵

There might have been a more radical political presence. John Lilburne, the Leveller leader and sometime London apprentice, was named by Nalson as the author of the 1640 Exchange libel.⁹⁶ Characteristically, Lilburne had boasted that a letter of his distributed among the apprentices had seen 'many thousands ... got together with an intention to go to Lambeth' and was 'like to have occasioned the Bishop of Canterburies ruine'. The printed letter hardly fits the bill since it calls on the apprentices peacefully to appeal to the Lord Mayor on his behalf. On its later printing, Lilburne dated the letter to 10 May 1639, and it was in June 1639 that the Lord Mayor was thanked for his part in the discovery of 'a mischievous practise sett on foote by one Lillborne ... who had caused sondry seditious papers to be lately scattered in the City, and directed to the Apprentices, animating them to an insurrection, & to assault my Lo: of Cant: house'.⁹⁷ Lilburne's authorship of the 1640 libel, though plausible—he was to play an active role among the apprentices in London street politics in the year after the Lambeth attack—must therefore remain unproven.⁹⁸

Lilburne's address—'To all the brave, couragious, and valiant Apprentices of the honourable City of London'⁹⁹—nevertheless serves as a reminder that in London there was a tradition of seeking to employ the associations of youth with those qualities of courage and rashness celebrated in ballad and popular culture to induct young men through licensed 'riot' into the values of the moral community as arbiters and enforcers of its rules.¹⁰⁰ Celebrated in cheap print and popular

95. ERO, D/Deb 94/20.

96. *Impartial Collection*, ed. Nalson, i, p. 344.

97. M. Braddick, *The Common Freedom of the People: John Lilburne and the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2018), p. 3; John Lilburne, *Innocency and Truth Justified* (London, 1645), p. 74; id., *The Prisoners Plea for a Habeas Corpus* (London, 1648), sigs B2v–B3r; *The Humble Petition and Appeal of John Fields of Kingston Miller, to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England* (London, 1651), p. 18. Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 232; Bodleian Library, MS Clarendon 16, fo. 174r–v.

98. Walter, *Covenanting Citizens*, p. 50. Nalson may have confused the two episodes to tar the 1640 protests, retrospectively, with the taint of Leveller radicalism, or Lilburne himself may have conflated the two episodes, confusing both Nalson and later historians. Dagmar Freist (*Governed by Opinion*, p. 111) dates the letter to 1640, while John Rees recognises it was printed in 1639, but follows Pauline Gregg (*Free-Born John: A Biography of John Lilburne* [London, 1961], pp. 77–8) in accepting Lilburne's claim that it prompted the apprentices to assemble in 1639, for which there is no evidence, and goes on to draw a direct influence from it to the 1640 attack: J. Rees, *The Leveller Revolution* (London, 2016), pp. 32–3. I am grateful to Mike Braddick for discussion on this point.

99. Lilburne, *Prisoners Plea*, sig. B2v.

100. J. Walter, 'Faces in the Crowd: Gender and Age in the Early Modern English Crowd', in H. Berry and E. Foyster, eds, *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 103–8.

drama intended to flatter their heroic self-image as defenders of civic liberties,¹⁰¹ the London apprentices had long had a tradition of acting as defenders of the City against enemies, both domestic and foreign. Drawing on what Alexandra Shepard has called ‘the exuberant appropriation of regulative authority’,¹⁰² the apprentices acted as defenders of the moral economy in policing London’s markets and of civic liberties in defending freemen’s privileges against foreign artificers. They also acted as upholders of the moral community, famously in the Shrove Tuesday ‘riots’ attacking the brothels. When xenophobia and anti-popey combined with appeals to young men to act, apprentices were to the fore in policing the confessional boundaries of the city and active in iconoclastic attacks on Laudian innovations in City parishes.¹⁰³ As in other times and places, the apprentices’ youthful reputation for disorder could then be mobilised on behalf of their communities. The paper posted at the Exchange was addressed to ‘Apprentices who desire one day to be masters’, while that appealing to ‘Gentleman Apprentices’ was from householders promising that ‘we & o[u]r wives will pray for you’.¹⁰⁴

Given this context, the language used in the libels and by contemporaries to depict the intended action at Lambeth is suggestive. Laud described the libel posted at the Exchange as ‘animating prentices to sack my house’, while others, such as Robert Woodford, reported that the apprentices intended ‘to pull down the Archbishops house’.¹⁰⁵ As we have seen, threats were also made to *pull down* Catholic chapels.¹⁰⁶ This was how the diarist Walter Yonge understood the attack on Lambeth, writing that the apprentices ‘began to uncover the house’.¹⁰⁷ Here the language is even more suggestive. In the Shrove Tuesday and May Day apprentice attacks on brothels and later on Nonconformists’ meeting houses, unroofing in particular or pulling down a house was intended to be a literal acting-out of the cleansing of the community, a desire physically to remove those considered to have broken or threatened its norms and values. Significantly, the shoemaker William Seltrum, named as a principal actor in the proclamation against the Lambeth

101. Burnett, ‘Apprentice Literature’, pp. 28–33; Smith, ‘London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents’, pp. 155–7, 161; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 14–20; *A Collection of Songs and Ballads Relative to the London Prentices*, ed. C. Mackay, Percy Society (London, 1841); M. Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 203–5.

102. A. Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 99.

103. P.S. Seaver, ‘Apprentice Riots in Early Modern London’, in J.P. Ward, ed., *Violence, Politics and Gender in Early Modern England* (New York, 2008), pp. 17–40; Lindley, ‘Riot Prevention’, pp. 109–26; J. Walter, ‘“A Foolish Commotion of Youth”? Crowds and the “Crisis of the 1590s”’, *London Journal*, xlv (2019), pp. 17–36; id., *Covenanting Citizens*, p. 222.

104. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 149; BL, Harleian MS 4931, fo. 8.

105. Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 234; *Diary of Robert Woodford*, ed. Fielding, p. 353; *Winthrop Papers*, IV, ed. Forbes, p. 248; TNA, SP 16/453/97.

106. TNA, SP 16/453/96.

107. BL, Additional MS 35331, fo. 77r.

attackers, had earlier that month played a similar role in attempting to pull down a bawdy house.¹⁰⁸

In performing reformation, the Lambeth attackers were also able to demonstrate their moral purpose. A report noted that when the apprentices attacked the prisons they released all ‘but the Murtherers’. Their discretion suggests, as in other forms of protest involving the London apprentices,¹⁰⁹ that they were concerned to distinguish their actions from common criminality. In demonstrating discipline within disorder, they sought to communicate and to confirm their ability to tell right from wrong.¹¹⁰

The libel posted on the Exchange on 9 May appealing to the apprentices had ended ‘Vivat Rex’, deliberately mimicking the performance of royal proclamations, while one of the libels calling for the further appearance of the crowd declared that it was ‘Published by authority this 14th day of May 1640’.¹¹¹ Their intention may, as Cressy suggests, have been satirical. But this mimesis of the communicative practices of the authorities, as in earlier episodes of popular protest, might also be seen as a claim to legitimate agency in reforming the commonwealth. A placard at the Exchange was addressed to ‘lovers of liberty and the commonwealth’.¹¹² Commonwealth was a protean concept that continued to carry notions of popular agency in early modern political society.¹¹³ Like their peers in protests over the politics of subsistence, the apprentices (and others in the crowd) could claim a right to act in defence of the commonwealth.¹¹⁴ The protest at Lambeth against the corrupting and evil counsel of a minister, accused in popular sedition of subordinating the king and usurping his power,¹¹⁵ needs to be seen in this political context. The pseudonymous titles said to have been adopted by the leaders of the 1640 attackers—‘Captaine

108. Lindley, ‘Riot Prevention’, p. 110; TNA, SP 16/455/7.

109. Seaver, ‘Apprentice Riots’; Walter, ‘Foolish Commotion of Youth’.

110. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 110r.

111. BL, Harleian MS 4931, fo. 8; LPL, Laud Misc. 943, pp. 717–18, cited in *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ii, p. 711n. I am grateful to Chris Kyle for advice on the public performance of proclamations.

112. Gardiner, *History*, ix, p. 153 (apparently citing and translating a letter from the Dutch ambassador to the States General: BL, Additional MS 17677 Q, fo. 190).

113. Early Modern Research Group, ‘Commonwealth: The Social, Cultural and Conceptual Contexts of an Early Modern Keyword’, *Historical Journal*, liv (2011), pp. 663–77; J. Watts, ‘The Pressure of the Public on Late Medieval Politics’, in L. Clark and C. Carpenter, eds, *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain, The Fifteenth Century*, IV (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 159–80; J. Watts, ‘Public or Plebs: The Changing Meaning of “the Commons”, 1381–1549’, in H. Pryce and J. Watts, eds, *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 242–60.

114. J. Walter, ‘The Politics of Protest in Seventeenth-Century England’, in M.T. Davis, ed., *Crowd Actions in Britain and France from the Middle Ages to the Modern World* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 64–73.

115. See, for example, TNA, SP 16/423/83: ‘the pope of Lambeth ... doth pluck the royal crown of his Majesty’s head & trample it under his feet, and did whip his Majesty’s ass wth his own rod’.

Clubb and Captaine Mendall'—laid claim to this tradition of popular reformation.¹¹⁶

VI

If 'Vivat Rex' was an attempt to assert the loyalty, and so claim the legality, of protest directed only against misgovernment and evil counsels, it failed. In the face of threatened further attacks, the Privy Council set in train repressive measures that were to culminate in the condemnation of the protests as treasonable. The proclamation issued on 16 May declared all those who took part in the attacks at Lambeth and the prisons, or any who helped or harboured them, guilty of high treason.¹¹⁷ The speed with which the king's government moved thereafter to investigate and condemn those it chose to prosecute reflected its anxiety in the face of continuing libels and threats of the reappearance of the crowds. As early as 14 May, the Earl of Leicester's correspondent had informed him that some of those arrested 'wilbe made exemplary' and on the same day the French ambassador reported that he had been assured that 'they will all be hanged'. A day later, John Castle reported that a special commission of oyer and terminer was to be issued and the attorney general and judges had been 'much busied' to find precedents of how to proceed against those caught.¹¹⁸

The proclamation had called on 'Loving and Loyall Subjects' to apprehend all those involved in the attacks, but finding the attackers was to prove difficult. In pursuit of their leaders, the newly appointed Provost Marshal reported encountering an unco-operative stationer. Reminded of the proclamation, the stationer had retorted, '[T]umultuous persons God blesse them God p[ro]sp[er] them let them goe on'.¹¹⁹ Investigations after the attacks uncovered evidence of wider support for their actions. Thus, when the companion of a man killed in the attack on the prisons was arrested as he came to view the corpse, it required the mayor and two sheriffs of the City and two companies of the City's trained bands to transport him to the Tower. In the event, a newsletter reported him to be 'a silly fellow and none of that unruly rowt'.¹²⁰

The proclamation had named Archer, Seares and Seltrum as principal actors and called for their capture.¹²¹ Of Seares, nothing more is heard. Seltrum was to be indicted (as William Seltram) with five others at the special commission of oyer and terminer, but nothing more is

116. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 111v.

117. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ii, pp. 710–12; TNA, SP 16/454/54, and 16/453/62; LMA, COL/RMD/PA/01/08, fo. 126f–v.

118. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 150; HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley*, vi, p. 267; HEHL, EL 7834.

119. TNA, SP 16/455/7.

120. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fos 111v, 115r.

121. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, ii, pp. 710–12.

known of his fate or those of three of the others.¹²² Archer had been among those freed when the prisons were attacked. Previously recruited as a drummer for the impending renewal of wars with the Scots, he was subsequently recaptured on 20 May when he wrote, somewhat naively, to his captain to tell him where he awaited the call to arms. Taken to the Tower, he was put to the rack. But, according to a newsletter, he too was found to be ‘a very simple fellow’ who confessed only enough to hang himself.¹²³ It was to be Thomas Benstead, the young boy who had been wounded in the attack at Lambeth—and perhaps only he—who was to be made an example to deter others.

On Thursday, 21 May, Benstead, guarded by two companies of the trained bands, was tried at Southwark by a top-heavy commission that included members of the Privy Council, the two chief justices and most of the judges.¹²⁴ After debating legal precedents and doubtless to facilitate a swift example being made of him, the judges ruled that they could proceed immediately to trial without awaiting a commission of gaol delivery. Controversially, they decided to employ a constructive use of the law of treason. ‘Having made it appeare these late tumults were noe Ryotts but very rebellious’, the judges cited the precedent used in the London apprentice riots of 1595 to find Benstead guilty of treason, making the use of ‘Drums, and a multitude’ proof of the intention to wage war on the king.¹²⁵ Declaring Benstead guilty of high treason, the commission sentenced him to be hung, drawn and quartered on 23 May, two days later.

Feelings ran high and more libels appeared threatening violence against those who were to be involved in his execution.¹²⁶ The gallows were therefore set up overnight, the execution appointed for six o’clock in the morning, and a company of the trained bands and the City’s two sheriffs ordered to provide a guard. In an attempt perhaps to lessen the anger Benstead’s execution prompted, instead of being taken from the gallows while still alive to be disembowelled, he ‘hung halfe an houre before he was cut downe Soe that he was stone dead before they q[uar]ter red him’.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, in accordance with the gruesome treatment of convicted traitors, his head was displayed on London Bridge and his quartered body distributed around the City gates.¹²⁸ According to

122. TNA, KB 29/289, m. lxxxx, dorso.

123. TNA, SP 16/453/41, 42, and 16/454/12, 39; PCR 2/52, p. 490. BL, Stowe MS 1467, fo. 115v.

124. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fos 114–115v.

125. Walter, ‘Foolish Commotion of Youth’, p. 26; *The Third Part of the Reports of Sir George Croke, Late one of the Justices of the Court of King’s Bench* (2nd edn, London, 1669), p. 583; J. B[rydall], *A Compendium of the Laws of England Touching Matters Criminal* (London, 1676), pp. 82–3.

126. TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 151. Given they were spoken on 22 May, the day after the trial, the words for which a Southwark constable was in trouble (‘my Lord of Canterbury is never able to make ye parish of St George’s amendes for ye wronge he hath done us’) may relate to the prosecution of the attackers: TNA, SP 16/454/79.

127. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 108r.

128. BL, Additional MS 37343, fo. 202r; BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 115; [?John Taylor], *Mercurius Message Defended* (London, 1641), p. 19; John Taylor, *A Second Message to Mr William Laud* (n.p., 1641), sig. A2v.

a later account, Benstead had been hanged at St George's Fields.¹²⁹ If true, the selection of this place of recreation for the apprentices and the site of the original assembly represented a familiar piece of provocative state theatre intended to publicise to the apprentices and others the price of challenging authority.

Despite the assurances given the French ambassador that all would be hanged, and despite the alarm the king and Council had shown, it is possible that there were to be no further executions.¹³⁰ Benstead was the only man noted by contemporary commentators (including Laud) to have been hanged, and also in later legal discussion of the case.¹³¹ Archer's execution, recorded by Hugh Trevor-Roper in his biography of Laud, and by those following his account, did not in fact take place. Archer was spared execution and subsequently released.¹³² Between 22 May and 2 June, five others (a pinmaker, a waterman, a glover, a cordwainer and a glazier) were required to enter hefty recognizances to appear on suspicion of being 'a partie in the rebellious muteney at [L]ambeth'. A second trial at Southwark of one or two of the attackers scheduled for 3 June had to be postponed on the discovery of a large amount of gunpowder in a nearby house.¹³³ Of the five bound over, the indictment of one was dismissed as insufficient. The others are thereafter lost from the criminal record, but at least one of them, the glazier Humphrey Landon, later surfaces alive in other records.¹³⁴ To judge from a later appeal for release from a further suspect, others arrested may have been 'forgotten'.¹³⁵ Renewed threats of revenge may well have reminded the authorities of the prudence of balancing 'justice' with mercy. Benstead's death had prompted further scatterings of 'dangerous and desperate libells'. These perhaps added to the list of those threatened.¹³⁶

129. James Heath, *A New Book of Loyal English Martyrs and Confessors* (London, 1665), p. 41.

130. Five other men were apparently indicted at the same special commission of oyer and terminer, including William Seltram, one of the three men named in the proclamation, and John Pye, a Lambeth labourer, whose indictment for 'trayterously [*sic*] escaping' from prison suggests something of the legal straits to which the court was put, was remanded to prison. The indictment was judged insufficient against another, Christopher Hudson, for whose appearance under strong guard the Privy Council appears to have made special provision: TNA, SP 16/454/21. The fate of the other three is unclear: TNA, KB 29/289, mm. lxxvi verso, lxxxx, cxxxix.

131. Laud, *Works*, vi, p. 604; *Impartial Collection*, ed. Nalson, i, p. 344; Dorchester, Dorset History Centre, D531, p. 31; HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley*, vi, p. 276.

132. Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud*, pp. 388–9; A. Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625–1660* (Oxford, 2002), p. 140; Cressy, *England on Edge*, p. 121. Gardiner also presumed that Archer had been executed: Gardiner, *History*, ix, p. 141. As Keith Lindley discovered (*Popular Politics*, p. 27), Archer was granted a special pardon in late November 1640: TNA, C 231/5, p. 415.

133. TNA, SP 16/456/44.

134. TNA, KB 29/289, m. lxxvi. Landon was a signatory to a 1642 petition: Lindley, *Popular Politics*, p. 146.

135. Some two months after the attack, Edward Davis, who had been committed to the Fleet (wrongly, he claimed) for being one of the attackers, petitioned to be released: TNA, SP 16/459/86.

136. TNA, SP 16/455/3; *Oxinden Letters*, ed. Gardiner, p. 175. Pearl (*London*, p. 108) suggests that a further libel called for the death of Rossetti, the papal ambassador, but provides no reference.

A more general distaste may also have helped to curb royal revenge. According to the Suffolk clergyman John Rous, the judge at the summer assizes in Southwark had refused to proceed with the indictment 'of one of the Lambeth tumult, saying he wold have no hand in any man's blood'.¹³⁷ Contemporary comment suggests that even among members of the elite the judges' use of the constructive law of treason had been met with some disquiet.¹³⁸ As the lawyer Bulstrode Whitelocke noted, there was otherwise 'nothing, butt the breach of the peace, & of a few glasse windows, & setting at liberty some prisoners, & none slain or hurt'. In a later addition to an entry in his diary about Benstead's execution, Walter Yonge queried whether he could be guilty of treason since the attack was against the archbishop and not the king.¹³⁹ As the anonymous author of *Rome for Canterbury* bitterly complained, Laud 'could make that a matter of Treason, though he was but a subiect'.¹⁴⁰

VII

On 28 May, the Earl of Leicester's London correspondent, whose earlier letters had talked of 'the subjects of England so much out of order', wrote to tell him that 'all tumults are well quieted since the man was drawne, hangd and quartered'. By 4 June he could write, 'The towne is now quiet and I know not where his Lordship can be so well'.¹⁴¹ Thomas Benstead, however, was not forgotten. As Laud's contemporary biographer, Peter Heylyn, noted, Benstead had been condemned 'for a terror to others'.¹⁴² But memorialising his cruel fate became a means to terrorise Laud.

Caught after seeking medical attention and handed over to the authorities, Benstead's surviving examination gives little indication that he played any part in the organisation or leadership of the attack. But it does suggest something of the naivety of a 16-year-old.¹⁴³ In it,

137. *Diary of John Rouse, Incumbent of Santon Downham, Suffolk, from 1625 to 1642*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green, Camden Society, 1st ser., lxxvi (1856), p. 101.

138. Ironically, when the Long Parliament investigated the constructive use of the statute of 25 Edward III to convict Benstead, the timing and context suggest this was not (as Lindley suggests, in *Popular Politics*, p. 8), to condemn the injustice of his conviction, but as part of their attempt to use the law of treason to convict Charles's leading minister, the Earl of Strafford, of treason: *Proceedings of the Opening Session of the Long Parliament*, ed. M. Jansson (7 vols, Rochester, NY, 2000–2007), iv, pp. 5, 11.

139. BL, Sloane MS 1467, fo. 114v; Additional MS 37343, fo. 202r; Additional MS 35331, fo. 77r.

140. *Rome for Canterbury, or, A True Relation of the Birth, and Life of William Laud* (London, 1641), p. 3.

141. HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley*, vi, pp. 267, 276, 279; CSPV, 1640–1642, p. 52. TNA, SP 16/454/54, 16/455/3; PCR 2/52, p. 502. The Lord Mayor gave orders to end all double watches on 6 June: LMA, COL/CC/01/01/040, fo. 87.

142. Peter Heylyn, *Cyprianus Anglicanus, or, The History of the Life and Death of the Most Reverend and Renowned Prelate William, ... Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1668), p. 453.

143. ERO, D/Deb 94/2. Benstead's age was given as 19 in *Canterburies Amazement, or, The Ghost of the Young Fellow Thomas Benstead, who was Drawne, Hangd, and Quartered by the Meanes of the Bishop of Canterburie, who Appeared to him in the Tower ... with a Discourse between the Two Heads on London Bridge* (n.p., 1641), p. 7. Cressy (*England on Edge*, p. 122) mistakenly makes Benstead the drummer at the attack.

he confessed that he had been advised by his fellow prisoners to say nothing, but despite being told by them that he would be hanged if not, he had ignored this advice. At his trial, evidence was given that he had ‘boasted to several people that although he was now shot yet he should lead out that Company at the next meeting’, while another report has him saying, ‘come fol[l]owe me s[ince] I am hurte I wilbe Captayne’.¹⁴⁴ This youthful boast was to cost him his life. But it was his youth and what they saw as the unjustness of his sentence that attracted the sympathy of contemporaries. As the anonymous author of the pamphlet *Canterburys Will* told Laud, ‘some say you are a papist, for setting up Altars; others a murtherer for the death of *Thomas Benstead*’.¹⁴⁵ If the intention had been to make Benstead’s body a site for the exhibition of royal power, his hurried execution—‘hardly a compleat day to fit himself for his end’, as one pamphleteer complained¹⁴⁶—suggests a nervousness about how it might be received. In the end, the display of Benstead’s head on London Bridge was to be made a memorial to injustice by Laud’s critics.

While his severed head offered Londoners an everyday visual reminder of his unjust fate, Benstead was brought to life again in manuscript verse and printed pamphlets attacking Laud for his harsh and unjust treatment of him.¹⁴⁷ The anonymous author of *The Bishops Potion* has Laud’s physician tell him, in reply to his request to know what was in the purge that had made him vomit, that it included ‘I scruple of his braines that looked over London-Bridge’, while John Taylor, the self-styled ‘Water Poet’, relayed for his readers the black joke that Laud was ‘afraid of the Ghost of him hee set upon the Citie gates to keep watch’.¹⁴⁸ The 1641 pamphlet *Canterburie’s Amazement* has a woodcut on its title page reminding readers of Benstead’s gruesome death; at its centre is a tableau in which his naked ghost wakes Laud from his sleep while around it are displayed his head and quartered body set out on London’s gates. Over eight pages of this dialogue-pamphlet, Benstead is made not only to condemn Laud to his face for his lack of mercy, but also to ventriloquise the many charges laid against the archbishop.¹⁴⁹ In *The Deputies Ghost*, the anonymous author managed to remind Laud (and of course his readers) of both Benstead and Archer, telling him:

144. BL, Additional MS 35331, fo. 79r.

145. *Canterburys Will with a Serious Conference betweene His Scrivener and Him. Also a Loving Admonition to his Brethren the Bishops* (n.p., 1641), p. 5.

146. *Mercuries Message Defended* (London, 1641), p. 19.

147. See, for example, *Mercuries Message Defended*, p. 19; *Rome for Canterbury*, p. 3; John Taylor, *A Second Message to Mr William Laud Late Archbishop of Canterbury, now Prisoner in the Tower: In the behalf of Mercurie* (n.p., 1641), sig. A2v.

148. *The Bishops Potion, or, Dialogue betweene the Bishop of Canterbury, and his Phisitian* (n.p., 1641), p. 4; [John Taylor], *Old Newes Newly Revived, or, The Discovery of all Occurrences Happened since the Beginning of the Parliament* (n.p., 1641), sig. A3v.

149. *Canterburys Amazement*, title page.

To hang the man, and knew not well for what:
 Hang'd him said I? nay hang and draw and quarter ...
 And others more my Lord you put in danger
 who fear'd the rack, more than they did the manger.¹⁵⁰

VIII

On 8 June 1640, the Earl of Northumberland, commander-in-chief of the king's army against the Scots, wrote to Laud. Telling him that he had only just heard of the disorders at Lambeth, he advised him, '[H]e that feares any head that can be given to any discontented body heer in England will be afraide like boyes and women of a Turnip cut like a death's head with a candle in it'.¹⁵¹ Writing from Newcastle, some four hundred and more miles away, Northumberland could perhaps be sanguine about the disorder in London. In London, those in the Privy Council and at court could not. It was not just proximity that was to explain the extreme sensitivity to the Lambeth attack and its aftermath. Perceptions of the scale of the threat were filtered through and heightened by the place popular violence occupied in the mental world of Charles I.

With libels continuing to appear and placards posted on palace walls, violence came close to the royal court in 1640. Courtiers and other unpopular ministers were said to have abandoned their city residences and retreated to the palace of Whitehall, 'which place was not likewise unthreatened in their seditious meetings and discourses', according to Clarendon. One worrying libel announced that 'the king's palace was to let'.¹⁵² Found scratched on a window in the king's antechamber at Whitehall a little before 29 May were the words, 'God save the King, confound the Queen and her children, and give us the Palgrave to reign in this kingdom'. Charles feared, and some of his puritan opponents hoped, that Charles Louis, the Elector Palatine, would make an acceptable alternative claimant for the English throne. On its discovery, Charles was said to have smashed the glass.¹⁵³

According to the French ambassador, libels brought directly to the king the same night they were posted had greatly astonished ('si grande étonnement') the whole court.¹⁵⁴ Marie de Medici was reportedly unable to sleep the night an attack had been announced for St James. From the fate of her assassinated husband, Henry IV of France, her presence offered an uncomfortable reminder of the dangers of popular violence. If so, this added to the legacy passed on to Charles by a father whose

150. *The Deputies Ghost, or, An Apparition to the Lord of Canterbury in the Tower* (n.p., 1641).

151. TNA, SP 16/451/58.

152. *CSPV, 1640–1642*, p. 49; Clarendon, *History*, i, p. 188; Gardiner, *History*, ix, p. 133.

153. Gardiner, *History*, ix, p. 142, citing (and translating from the Italian) Rossetti's letter of 29 May; T. Pert, 'Divided Loyalties: The Elector Palatine and Charles I, 1638–1649', *Journal of Early Modern History*, xxvi (2022), pp. 311–34.

154. TNA, 31/3/72, p. 157.

'fear of the assassin's knife', it was said, explained James I's sartorial preference for protective padded clothes.¹⁵⁵ And beyond worrying reminders of continental popular violence was the common inheritance of tales of political violence in the classical world. At dinner while sheltering at court and contemplating his return to Lambeth, Laud was reminded of the murder of Julius Caesar, who had slighted warnings of his death.¹⁵⁶

Ambassadors reported the political temperature at court. The Florentine agent reported that the court feared a popular uprising. Noting that problems among the troops raised to fight the Scots had led the king's government to issue orders 'to prevent the peasants revolting about which they are very uneasy at the palace', the Venetian ambassador reported that there had been fresh placards—'regardless of respect'—'affixed to the royal palace stating that all the efforts and authority of the king and queen would not suffice' to save Laud and others from death. The French ambassador's report supplies the wording: 'Charles and Marie do what they will, we will destroy the archbishop of Canterbury like Dr Lambe'.¹⁵⁷ John Lambe, an astrologer and associate of Charles I's favourite George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, had met an ugly death at the hands of a crowd of 'boys', stoned and brutally beaten in 1628. Worryingly, attempts to identify and prosecute his killers had failed.¹⁵⁸ A few months later, Buckingham himself had died, stabbed by an assassin. The reworking in May 1640 of the earlier doggerel verse from the 1620s—'Lett Charles and George doe what they cann / Yet George shall die like Dr. Lambe'—brought therefore a chilling reminder of recent popular violence on London's streets.¹⁵⁹

Richard Cust and others have shown how events in the 1620s had confirmed for the king a fear of 'popularity'. Bequeathed to him by his father James I, this suggested that when located in parliament, puritanism and people, 'popularity' was a source of disorder and rebellion and a threat to monarchical rule. As Cust argues, the concept of popularity was 'a discourse ... through which the king processed political experience and reached his decisions about policy'.¹⁶⁰ Just as Buckingham's

155. J. Wormald, 'James VI and I: Two Kings or One?', *History*, lxxviii (1983), pp. 187–209, at 191.

156. HEHL, EL 7836.

157. Hibbard, *Popish Plot*, p. 150; *CSPV, 1640–1642*, pp. 47–9; TNA, PRO 31/3/72, p. 151: 'One a jetté plusieurs billets en rimes anglaises pleins de menasses, comme celuy-cy: Que Charles et Marie fassent or qu'ils voudront; nous detruirons ... l'archevesque de Canterbury, comme le docteur Lemme [*sic*]. The 'Marie' named here is Charles's consort, Henrietta Maria. I am grateful to my colleague Joan Davies for her skilful help with problems in the translation of the French ambassador's letters.

158. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I* (23 vols, 1858–97), 1628–1629, p. 274; Bellany, 'Murder of John Lambe'.

159. TNA, SP 16/114/32; T. Cogswell, 'John Felton, Popular Political Culture and the Assassination of the Duke of Buckingham', *Historical Journal*, xlix (2006), pp. 357–85.

160. R. Cust, 'Charles I and Popularity', in T. Cogswell, R. Cust and P. Lake, eds, *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 235–58, at 236.

fate had to be read as the work, not just of a slighted suitor for reward and preferment, but of a conspiracy striking at kingly rule, so too might the attack on Laud. The reworking of the Buckingham verses suggested worrying parallels with the 1620s: the dissolution of parliament, political rumours and resentments about the ambitions and power the king's favourite had over the monarch, and fears of a popish plot to take over the Church with the apparent royal patronage of Arminian clergy.¹⁶¹

On 15 May, John Castle informed recipients of his newsletter that 'the K[ing] I am told is extremely troubled both at this, and other Insolences and outrages com[m]itted daily in the country'.¹⁶² On Saturday, 16 May, arms had been brought from the Tower under cover of night to Whitehall. Charles ordered a round-the-clock guard on the royal children at Richmond.¹⁶³ The personal threat that Charles felt, inflated by his fear of 'popularity', doubtless helps to explain his reaction to the Lambeth attack. The language of the king's order to the Lord Mayor to 'suppress, slay, kill, destroy and apprehend' any 'tumultuously assembled' stands in striking contrast to how royal governments had come to negotiate popular disorder. In its ferocity it goes all the way back to Henry VIII's violent repression of the 1517 Evil May Day disorder in the capital.¹⁶⁴ Hitherto unnoted evidence suggest that Charles had wanted the commission to try the attackers to sit even sooner, on Monday, 18 May, less than a week after the attack itself.¹⁶⁵ And the writ authorising the torture of the drummer Archer on the rack was written in the king's own hand.¹⁶⁶ As Conrad Russell suggested, from Buckingham's assassination on, 'Charles had been exceptionally liable to take fright at violent crowds, and this was to be a serious weakness'.¹⁶⁷

Given this context, the attack's legacy deserves better acknowledgement. Cited approvingly in the Long Parliament's Grand Remonstrance in November 1641 as a 'tumultuous rising' that had prevented 'harsher courses',¹⁶⁸ the attack was ultimately to have a very different outcome from the repression that was the king's immediate response. At the trial of the Earl of Strafford, his political opponent the Earl of Bristol testified that the Lambeth attack had made him raise with Strafford the

161. I am indebted to Alastair Bellany and Tom Cogswell for discussing with me the legacy of the political violence of the 1620s.

162. HEHL, EL 7834.

163. TNA, SP 16/453/63; PCR 2/52, p. 491. HEHL, EL 7835.

164. LMA, COL/RMD/PA/01/008, fo. 126v; S. McSheffrey, 'Evil May Day, 1517: Prosecuting Anti-Immigrant Rioters in Tudor London', *Legal History Miscellany*, 30 Apr. 2017, available at <https://legalhistorymiscellany.com/2017/04/30/evil-may-day-1517/> (accessed 17 Jan. 2022).

165. Not recorded in the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, there is a draft of a warrant which assumes the commission was to meet on the morning of Monday, 18 May: TNA, SP 16/453/81.

166. TNA, SP 16/454/39; Pearl, *London*, p. 108.

167. Russell, *Fall of the British Monarchies*, p. 129.

168. *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625–1660*, ed. S.R. Gardiner (3rd edn, Oxford, 1968), p. 218. The reference to 'harsher courses' perhaps relates to fears that were said to be widespread that Charles was pursuing policies that were to see an end to elections and parliaments.

importance of recalling parliament. Writing on 1 June, the Venetian ambassador reported that:

the king seized with serious fears that the discontent of his people may induce him to the straits which overtook some of his predecessors in the past has wonderfully changed in a moment ... and now all his thoughts are turned to conciliating the good will of his subjects once more.¹⁶⁹

But the failure of Charles to achieve a political settlement with his opponents meant that Lambeth had a larger legacy. It was to be the first in a series of large-scale crowd interventions in the street politics of the capital—punctuating moments of crisis in the negotiations between king and parliament—that confirmed Charles I's fear of popularity and drove him, with fatal consequences for his ability to fight a civil war, to abandon a capital in which he no longer felt safe.

IX

Edward Hyde, later earl of Clarendon, dismissed the Lambeth attack as 'this infamous, scandalous, headless insurrection'.¹⁷⁰ Clarendon's dismissal doubtless drew on the Baconian distinction between popular risings and the greater threat posed by risings headed by elements of the elite.¹⁷¹ Predictably, the Privy Council's initial response to the Lambeth attack had been to try to establish whether it had been orchestrated by their political opponents. According to the Venetian ambassador, they made 'great efforts to discover if the rising in London is encouraged by persons of rank', and presumably the decision to torture the drummer Archer was part of the attempt to establish whether Charles's opponents in city and parliament were behind the attack.¹⁷² There is evidence from the circle of the Earl of Warwick that they enjoyed Laud's discomfiture, but the Privy Council found no evidence of elite involvement.¹⁷³

The attack undoubtedly drew on more widely expressed criticism of Laud across both elite and people in city and country. It serves as a reminder of the need to think more expansively of the fluidity between community and crowd in early modern protests and less restrictively of the social mix, including that among apprentices, denoted by the label 'popular'. As the Venetian ambassador reported, one of the May libels

169. John Rushworth, *The Tryal of Thomas Earl of Strafford* (London, 1686), p. 542; CSPV, 1640–1642, pp. 49–50.

170. Clarendon, *History*, i, p. 188.

171. Francis Bacon, 'Of Seditions and Troubles', in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding (14 vols, London, 1857–74), vi, p. 409.

172. CSPV, 1640–1642, pp. 47–8.

173. A letter from Lady Essex Cheeke, one of the Earl's daughters, to the Earl of Manchester, labelled the crowds as 'broome-men and pinne-maekers', the better to mock Laud and to question the 'great c[o]urage' of the courtiers who formed his guard: *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1881), pt ii, p. 56.

appealed to ‘every class’.¹⁷⁴ In the absence of evidence of the leadership and legitimisation afforded the popular demonstrations in the summer and winter of 1641 by the summoning of the Long Parliament and collapse of print censorship, the 1640 attack nevertheless demonstrates the social depth to political awareness in a city where politics was, literally, the talk of the town. As the godly and anti-clerical edge to some of the libels suggested, the attack drew on the same forces that were to underpin the popular-puritan-parliamentary coalition that almost a year to the day later passed the Protestation oath by which to swear and mobilise the nation in defence of parliament, and which later still advanced the agenda of a radical parliamentarianism.¹⁷⁵ But the Lambeth attack was also a demonstration of the strength of the tradition of a politically informed and self-activating street politics in the capital. The early modern London crowd was no mere catspaw acting at the behest of its ‘betters’.

May 1640 represented a high point in the use of libels within the public sphere of the capital.¹⁷⁶ From the first to the last week of May, libels triggering and triggered by the attack on Laud had appeared in volume. Scribbled in form, anonymously authored, easily copied and secretly scattered, they were not subject to censorship and such control as the state had until then been able to maintain over print. Unlike the manuscript commentaries privately circulated, whose importance has recently been emphasised for the development of an oppositional politics, libels were *publicly* posted, ‘continuously set up in all places of note in the city’ as Laud recorded, and their readership was heterogeneous in a civic culture that was also oral and aural.¹⁷⁷ Publicly posted, libels were a highly effective form of immediate communication both with the city’s (and wider) publics and with authority in a city where their appearance became the talk of both town and court. The Lambeth attack demonstrated how libels could contribute to and even claim to constitute public opinion, and their role in mobilising political action. Constituted as the voice of the people, libels assumed a right to intervene in the politics of the kingdom and claimed for the commons a political agency to right wrongs. That these claims rested on the threat of popular violence posed particular problems for a government all too aware of its limited forces of repression, all too ready to exaggerate the propensity of the ‘many-headed monster’ to act violently, and predisposed to elide the distinction between sedition and riot.

174. *CSPV, 1640–1642*, pp. 47–8; TNA, SP 16/451/81, 16/458/110; Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 284; BL, Harleian MS 4931, fo. 8.

175. Walter, *Covenanting Citizens*, pp. 50–79; D.R. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 425–6.

176. There is now an extensive literature on the form and functions of early modern libels, for which A. Bellany, ‘Railing Rhymes Revisited: Libels, Scandals, and Early Stuart Politics’, *History Compass*, v (2007), pp. 1136–79, offers a thoughtful overview.

177. N. Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2016); Laud, *Works*, iii, p. 235.

Edward, Lord Conway, in a letter written shortly after the Lambeth attack, had suggested that ‘the Prentices will make but a Shrovetuesday-busines[s] of it’.¹⁷⁸ But the ‘ritual appropriation of modes of violent correction’ by young males could, as in 1640, provide ready-made text and form for punitive protest that was formally political in its targets and objectives.¹⁷⁹ Apprenticeship was ‘an education in citizenship’, apprentices ‘a City-kernell’.¹⁸⁰ Invited by the libels to identify themselves with those who were ‘faithful to the City and lovers of liberty and the commonwealth’,¹⁸¹ and led by Captains Clubb and Mendall, their role gave them a claim to a political identity which helps to explain the significant part they were to play—and to be invited to play by competing political parties, in print and on the streets—in the politics of the English revolution.

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178. TNA, SP 16/454/33.

179. Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 105.

180. A.M. Dingle, ‘The Role of the Householder in Early Stuart London, c.1603–c.1640’ (Univ. of London M.Phil. thesis, 1975), p. 28; ‘The Wandering Jew Telling Fortunes to Englishmen’ (1649), repr. in *Books of Characters, Illustrating the Habits and Manners of Englishmen, from the Reign of James I. to the Restoration*, ed. James O. Halliwell (London, 1857), pp. 1–72, at 33.

181. Gardiner, *History*, ix, p. 153.