

‘Many byllys were sett up by nygth’:The Commons, Political Discourse and Treason in the Rebellions of Warwick and Clarence, 1469-70.

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‘Many byllys were sett up by nygth of the duke of Claraunce & of the sayd Erle [of Warwick] as soom upon the standard In chepe some upon the Stokkis & othyr placys of the Cyte by ther enemys, and many Sedicious tydyngys and ffals talys were areysid upon them’.¹

This entry in *The Great Chronicle of London* for 1470 recounts the very height of a political crisis that was ‘without parallel in English history since 1066.’² Edward IV had ruled for a decade, but the promise of his earlier reign had waned and two of his most important noblemen, the earl of Warwick and the duke of Clarence, had turned from him. Between 1469 and 1470, the king’s cousin and brother rose up in political opposition twice against him, firstly by means of inciting a ‘popular’ rebellion in Yorkshire in an attempt to seize control, and secondly (after being implicated in a second rebellion in Lincolnshire), by fleeing to France to make an accord with Margaret of Anjou’s exiled Lancastrian court. The chronicler here alluded to much that characterises this series of rebellions: the physical form of writing in the fifteenth century facilitated the spread of thoughts and ideas – of ‘Sedicious tydyngys and ffals talys’ – which were highly-charged with political overtones. People outside the traditional political circles of the nobility were engaging in a discourse that debated the events of high politics and were forming opinions and loyalties. Like in the uprisings of 1381 and 1450, and in the clashes of the 1450s, the written word was an essential factor in the incitement and justification of rebellion, and a series of bills, letters, manifestoes, petitions and chronicles form a corpus of manuscript ephemera that illuminates the frenetic political actions of this remarkable period.

John Vale’s book provides copies of the majority of the documents produced by Warwick and Clarence throughout these rebellions, in addition to a letter sent to them by Edward, which is also copied into the *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*.³ The earliest manifesto of July 1469 survives both in whole and in part in four different locations. A copy is found in Vale’s book;

¹ A.H Thomas and I.D Thornley, eds., *The Great Chronicle of London*, London and Aylesbury 1938, p. 209.

² C. Ross, *Edward IV*, London 1975, p. 126.

³ M.L. Kekewich, C. Richmond, A.F. Sutton, L. Visser-Fuchs, J.L. Watts, eds., *The Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale’s Book*, Stroud 1995, pp. 212-22; *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire, 1470*, Camden Society, *Miscellany*, vol. 1, London, 1847, pp. 5-28.

another survives in The National Archives, SP46/123; and a copy of the introduction is in the Latin *Abbreviata Chronica*.⁴ It also exists in the Bodleian Library, Ashmole Roll 33, and this is the only version which is accompanied by an associated open letter, purportedly written by the nobles themselves.⁵ The only other document for which a copy survives outside of Vale's book is *Tharticles of the proclamacion of the duc of Clarence and erle of Warrenwic*, published according to Vale on the return of the nobles from France, which exists as a shorter version in the British Library Cotton Charters.⁶ The *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* is the only chronicle source that deals exclusively with the events, and can be accompanied by the confession of Sir Robert Welles as documents issued by Edward for wide consumption.⁷

Historians have naturally been interested in the proliferation of these contemporary documents, but their primary concern has been to use them to establish the chronology of events.⁸ As germane as this has been, however, there is much to be said for alternative interpretive methods as a means of shedding light on wider political practices. Despite the prominence of the 'linguistic turn' in the political history of the late middle ages written in the 1990s, these documents and the ways in which they were produced have generally not been viewed in terms of what the language can reveal to us beyond a play-by-play chronological account.⁹ Likewise, in Wendy Scase's

⁴ British Library (BL), Add MS 48031 A, ff. 140-141v, printed in *Vale's Book*, pp. 212-215; J.J. Smith, ed., *Abbreviata cronica ab anno 1377 usque ad anno 1469*, Publications of the Cambridge Antiquarian Soc., vol. 1, no. 2, Cambridge 1840, p. 13; The National Archives (TNA), SP46/123, ff. 19v-22r.

⁵ The Bodleian Library, Ashmole Roll 33, printed in *A Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of Edward IV by John Warkworth*, Camden Society, Old Series 10, London 1839, pp. 46-51.

⁶ *Vale's Book*, 220-22. BL, Cotton Charter, XVII, 11.

⁷ BL, Harley Manuscripts, 283, f.2; printed in *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 22.

⁸ For the most relevant to this article, see: Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 126-52; C. Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England, c.1437-1509*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 173-78; R.L. Storey, 'Lincolnshire and the Wars of the Roses', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 14 (1970), pp. 64-83; K.R. Dockray, 'The Yorkshire rebellions of 1469', *The Ricardian*, vol. 6, no. 83 (1982-1984), pp. 246-57; P. Holland, 'The Lincolnshire rebellion of March 1470', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 103, no. 409 (1988), pp. 849-69; T. Westervelt, 'Manifestoes for rebellion in late-fifteenth-century England' in B. Thompson and J. Watts, eds., *Political Society in Later Medieval England: A Festschrift for Christine Carpenter*, Woodbridge 2015, pp.184-98.

⁹ For the 'linguistic turn' and its use in medieval historiography: Q. Skinner, 'The principles and practice of opposition: The case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole' in N. McKendrick, ed., *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society, in Honour of J.H. Plumb*, London 1974, pp. 93-128; C. Carpenter, 'Introduction: Political culture, politics and cultural history', in L. Clark and C. Carpenter, eds., *The Fifteenth Century IV: Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*, Woodbridge 2004, p. 4. Watts has been a notable exception in using the documents of 1469-70 in this way, although they are not his primary concern: 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; J. Watts, 'Popular voices in England's Wars of the Roses, c.1445-c.1485' in J. Dumolyn, J. Haemers, H. Rafael, O. Herrero and V. Challet, eds., *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe: Communication and Popular Politics*, Turnhout 2014, pp. 107-22.

seminal article on bill casting and political discourse, which places much emphasis on the physicality of writing, no mention is made of the documents that survive from these years.¹⁰ In her later book, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272-1553*, the period is reduced to a half-page discussion of only two of the documents concerned.¹¹ There is therefore a lack of scholarship examining the political crisis of 1469-70 in light of the many fields of interpretation that explore the involvement of the public, the physical forms of writing, and notions of language in political discourse. This article seeks to examine the physical state of the surviving evidence as a means to illuminate the role it played in the discourse of these politically-important years, and to uncover the way it, in turn, was shaped by the events of the rebellion, with particular emphasis on the language of treason.

The Commons: Real and Imagined

The decades after Cade's rebellion of 1450 have been described as being marked by the 'politics of the common weal'.¹² By this, it was meant that those in positions of traditional political power, such as Warwick and Clarence, sought to frame and legitimise their actions according to an accepted template of acting for the good of all people of the realm, regardless of their social status. For the present argument, it is taken as axiomatic that late-medieval England had a forum in which the events of politics could be discussed and debated by all manner of people, facilitated by spaces such as the marketplace and a culture of political bill-casting.¹³ The combination of a notion of the common weal and the existence of a public sphere is integral to the course of the rebellions of 1469-70. In this light, a variety of questions about the politics of the late fifteenth century can be raised: who exactly were the commons whose weal was so important, and can they be recognised as a public engaged in political discourse? How did this affect the ways in which politicians behaved? And how did this manifest itself in written political discourse?

Throughout the series of documents produced by Warwick and Clarence in the course of their rebellions, there are allusions to the commons and to the

¹⁰ W. Scase, "'Strange and wonderful bills': Bill-casting and political discourse in late medieval England", *New Medieval Literatures*, 2 (1998), pp. 225-47.

¹¹ W. Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272-1553*, Oxford 2007, p. 139.

¹² Watts, 'Public or plebs', p. 251.

¹³ The notion of a public sphere, as 'a realm ... in which something approaching public opinion can be formed', was conceived by Jürgen Habermas, who believed it could not be applied to a pre-modern era: J. Habermas, 'The public sphere: An encyclopedia article (1964)', trans. S. Lennox and F. Lennox, *New German Critique*, No. 3 (1974), pp. 49-50. More nuanced refutations of his argument posit that a similar – although socially different – platform for public engagement in politics existed in the late middle ages: Scase, 'Strange and wonderful bills', esp. p. 247; J. Masschaele, 'The public space of the marketplace in medieval England', *Speculum*, vol. 77, no. 2 (2002), pp. 419-20; and C. Liddy, 'Bill casting and political communication: A public sphere in late medieval English towns?', in J.A.S. Telechea and B.A. Bolumbur, eds., *La Gobernanza de la Ciudad Europea en la Edad Media*, Madrid 2011, pp. 453-4, 460.

common weal. However, it would be unwise for the historian to take this at face value. When attempting to discern exactly who the commons in the rebellions of 1469-70 were, we in fact should consider two connected but different entities. The first is the ‘commons’ cited by the rebel nobles, on behalf of whose ‘weal’ they were apparently acting. They were, as will be shown, a nebulous and vague group, the authority of whom the nobles were attempting to appropriate for the benefit of their own cause. They can be seen as something of a literary construct in the documents produced by Warwick and Clarence, which was itself the product of the series of rebellions since the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381; all of which used this notion to provide legitimacy. The second entity is the *real* people upon whom the carefully-constructed cause of the nobles was founded. Unsurprisingly, it is not in the documents that refer to the imagined commons that these people are revealed. Instead, they have to be sought in other sources. The point is that the relationship between the rebel nobles and the ‘real’ commons (facilitated by the existence of notions of the commons and the common weal) was one of reciprocity in which each stood to gain.

The reality of the first noble rebellion in 1469 was that Warwick and Clarence, supported by Archbishop Neville, felt that they had been alienated from their rightful positions by Edward as the 1460s had progressed. The causes – especially Edward’s impolitic marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, his pursuit of a Burgundian, rather than French, alliance, and his subsequent refusal to allow Warwick the consolation prize of a marriage between his daughter and Clarence – are well-rehearsed.¹⁴ *The maner and guyding bitwene the quene Margarete and of here soone and therle of Warrewi[c] tyme of his beyng in France with the duc of Clarence*, outlining the reconciliation between Warwick and Margaret of Anjou in France, succinctly relays the fact that Warwick’s opposition to Edward was a result of ‘the evul termys that the king hathe kepte hym’.¹⁵ But Warwick was an astute politician, and, if the past hundred years had offered any political lessons, it was that selfishly-motivated action would likely result in a substantive failure to gain support and quite possibly the loss of life. So, instead, Warwick presented himself as a victim, removed (and not of his own volition) from the politics of the 1460s that proved to be ‘the occasions and causes of the gret inconveniencis and myschevis that ... hathe fallen in the Kynges dayes’.¹⁶ His position as a premier but ostracised nobleman, much like the position of the duke of York two decades before, meant that he could ideally place himself to take up the cause of the commons and remedy the misery to which the realm had been subjected.

How, then, did Warwick attempt to portray himself and the other nobles as saviours of the commons? In the earliest of the documents associated with the

¹⁴ For example: Ross, *Edward IV*, p. 115.

¹⁵ *Vale’s Book*, p. 216.

¹⁶ *Warkworth*, p. 50.

rebel nobles, an open letter from Warwick, Clarence, and the archbishop, which is attached to a supposed petition of the commons, dated 12 July 1469, gives justification for their actions as being 'resonabyll and profitable for the honoure and profite of ... the comune welle of alle this his realme'.¹⁷ The introduction to the petition claims to be 'of us treue and feythefulle subjettes and commons of this lond'.¹⁸ A letter sent from France to England by the nobles a year later is addressed to 'the worshipfull, discrete and trewe communes of Englonde', and claims that their actions are motivated by 'theavauncyng of the comen wele of Englonde, and for the reproving of falshod and oppression of the poore peopull'.¹⁹ Upon their landing in England with an invasion force, they portrayed Edward as the 'oppressour and destroiour ... of alle the reaume of Englonde and of the good, trewe communes of the same'.²⁰ The point is laboured. Everything Warwick and Clarence did was supposedly in the interests of a higher purpose, and they acted for and on behalf of the commons of the realm.

The rebellion of 1381 saw the emergence of a politically-charged definition of 'the commons' and the variant terms associated with it.²¹ These rebels created a usage that invoked a sense of belonging to the *communitas regni*, the concerns of whom, representing as it did the realm as a whole, were seen to be the very purpose of government.²² In 1381, the theoretical *communitas* proposed by Wat Tyler's rebels was a distinct political unit, whereby power was to be exercised through the devolution of authority from the crown to the localities without the concurrent exercise of lordly power.²³ Ninety years later, the plight of the commons as supported by the rebel nobles was clearly a different entity – Warwick, Clarence, and Archbishop Neville did not believe that 'no lord should have lordship', nor that there should be 'no bishop but one'.²⁴ In theory, the 'treue and feythefulle subjettes' of 1469 encompassed every person in the kingdom – including the nobility – and that the 'commons of this lond' were included serves only to reinforce the point that the origins of the grievances were not apparently an invention of dissatisfied nobles. Although such wording is vague, it served a political point by creating through omission a group of people who were not 'treue and feythefulle subjettes'. In 1469, these are identified as a small group of people around the king: the Woodvilles, William Herbert, Humphrey Stafford, Lord Audley and Sir John Fogge. By the time of the 1470 invasion, it is Edward IV who is the 'grete rebell and enemye'.²⁵ This proclamation even offers a pardon to 'alle maner of menne of the reaume of

¹⁷ *Warkworth*, p. 47.

¹⁸ *Warkworth*, p. 50.

¹⁹ *Vale's Book*, p. 218.

²⁰ *Vale's Book*, p. 220.

²¹ Watts, 'Public or plebs', p. 249.

²² Watts, 'Public or plebs', p. 250.

²³ S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381*, London 1994, p. 172-3.

²⁴ Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p. 147.

²⁵ *Vale's Book*, p. 221.

Englonde of what estate, degree or condicion that thei be of for 'alle maner threasons, trespasses imagined or doone in any maner wise contrarye to their legeaunce' to Henry VI.²⁶ Indeed, in a letter outlining 'The savegardes granted and geun bi the duc of Clarence and erle of Warrewik to all seintaries and other personel pepull',²⁷ the nobles attempted to secure the support of the commons by offering assurances to protect what they felt were important to the commons. Thus Warwick and Clarence attempted to present the commons of England as a homogenous group, whose concerns could be best represented and addressed by the nobility who remained loyal to them. This is, of course, a gross oversimplification of the complex stratified society that made up medieval England, in which there existed many conflicting interests and loyalties. But this in itself only serves to reinforce the point that, since 1381, there was a form of legitimacy to be gained from appearing to act in the interests of the common weal.

The open letter of July 1469 was 'wretyn undre oure signettis and signe manuell',²⁸ so its authorship can be ascribed to the rebel nobles, while the rest of the document was written in 'a discernibly more common style of speech'.²⁹ Historians have doubted the likelihood of the petition actually originating from the commons, instead placing the responsibility of authorship on Warwick himself.³⁰ Although impossible to actually verify, this may be the case. But, in this dismissal, the true value of this document is missed. Whether or not it was written by Warwick, or reflected the true words of the commons, is irrelevant. What is important is that the language used, whoever wrote it, was seen to be an acceptable framework in which to cite grievances and to incite what was essentially rebellion.

More specifically, the fact that the articles of the 'commons of this londe' were appended not only suggests that this added a certain amount of credibility to the assumption of the cause by the nobles, but that the grievances included could *reasonably* be seen as originating from a public source. Only a few months previously, William Belmyn, a mercer from Norwich, had been indicted along with Robert de Ryddesdale for publishing certain treasonous articles.³¹ It is unclear whether this Robert was connected in any way to the Robin of Redesdale who was the leader of the Yorkshire rebellions with which Warwick and Clarence's manifesto is associated, but there was clearly a precedent of humbler people creating and distributing documents which were apparently very similar. If Warwick did compose the document but attribute it to a

²⁶ *Vale's Book*, p. 222.

²⁷ 'Seintaries' here refers to sanctuaries. *Vale's Book*, p. 222.

²⁸ This can be treated separately from the rest of the document, as its only survival is in Ashmole Roll 33.

²⁹ Watts, 'Popular Voices', p. 113.

³⁰ J.R. Lander, *Government and Community: England 1450-1509*, London 1980, pp. 250-1, n.14; Dockray, 'Yorkshire rebellions', p. 248.

³¹ TNA, KB 9/86/28, 59.

common source, it is reasonable to suggest that he deemed it essential both to refer to an acceptable framework of rhetoric and political principles and to place this language within an appropriate (and, crucially, believable) context in order to justify his opposition.³² Therefore the authorship of the manifesto is not of the greatest concern, as the language and its context reveal a much wider contemporary political practice.

By framing their grievances in such a way, Warwick and Clarence were attempting 'to tip the scales within political society' ostensibly in their favour, to achieve their aim of political control.³³ We must question, however, exactly how successful they were. Warwick did enjoy some popularity, and certainly effective political power – *The Great Chronicle of London* claimed that he 'evyr had In grete ffavour of the comonys of thys land', and Philippe de Commynes related that the duke of Burgundy was wary of 'the great influence which the earl of Warwick exercised in England'.³⁴ It is true that the battle of Edgecote in July 1469, in which Yorkshire rebels clashed with royal forces under the command of the earls of Pembroke and Devon, saw a rebel victory and led to the capture of Edward, the removal of the Woodville faction, and the establishment of Warwick and Clarence at the *de facto* head of the polity. However, the Yorkshire rebels were comprised of retainers and allies of Warwick and Clarence,³⁵ suggesting it was quite likely orchestrated by them to give the appearance of popular support onto which they could latch as promoters of the common weal.³⁶ That such a force could be arrayed through the gentry retainers of Warwick and Clarence suggests that Edward may have lacked support in the north,³⁷ but for all the talk of the 'gret grugge of all this lande',³⁸ the success of this rebellion was essentially based upon a private army mobilised by nobles with personal axes to grind. Moreover, once this control had been achieved, even an adept a politician as Warwick could not maintain it. A lack of support from the remainder of the nobility and outbreaks of localised disorder blighted his attempts to govern in Edward's name,³⁹ and he was eventually compelled to restore Edward's liberty. So, despite protestations to the contrary and the perceived authority offered by the common weal, the rebel nobles were not able to rely on their constructed commons and a personal army in disguise. The politics of the situation were more complex, as was the position of the real people on behalf of whom they claimed to act.

³² This idea is most readily found in: Skinner, 'The principles and practice of opposition', p. 111.

³³ Westervelt, 'Manifestoes for rebellion', p. 185.

³⁴ *Great Chronicle of London*, 207; M.C. Jones, ed., *Philippe de Commynes, Memoirs*, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 181.

³⁵ Dockray, 'Yorkshire rebellions', pp. 252-3.

³⁶ The Warkworth Chronicler placed the blame for the rising firmly on their shoulders: *Warkworth*, p. 8.

³⁷ Ross, *Edward IV*, p. 154.

³⁸ *Warkworth*, p. 48.

³⁹ Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 133-4.

As for the commons themselves, many remain nameless, but a few can be identified, and they tend to belong to the diverse ‘mediating class of “commons”’ that included knights, merchants, artisans, landowners, lawyers and even labourers.⁴⁰ William Belmyn was a mercer, and the captains of the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire rebellions – respectively, either Sir John or Sir William Conyers,⁴¹ and Sir Robert Welles – were knights with a modicum of influence in their localities. The so-called *Warkworth* chronicler recorded a list of those of ‘the north party’ (i.e. the rebels) who were slain at Edgecote; most are knights and squires, but ‘many othere comyners, &c.’ are noted, suggesting that a significant number were below the armigerous ranks.⁴² The *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* describes Robert Welles as making proclamations ‘in all the churches of that shire’,⁴³ which is perhaps one of the few places in medieval England that was truly open to all levels of society, and, if true, would have seen a significant attempt to engage with the rural population. In his miscellany, John Vale made a note after the copy of the letter sent by Warwick and Clarence out of France, recording how the mayor of London, Richard Lee, at the time removed copies of the letter from public places because he ‘wolde not suffre theime to be openly knowen ner seen to the commons’.⁴⁴ The fear of the civic authorities revealed here indicates that the rebel nobles targeted the urban environment with an expectation of favourable reception. The commons upon whom Warwick and Clarence rested the authority of their rebellions may have been ill-defined in the language used to describe them, but the circumstantial evidence lends to the suggestion that this was partly due to the wide range of people who were both targeted by the nobles and who ultimately offered (or were compelled to offer) their support.

We have seen how the rebel nobles were able to commandeer the commons, through their use of language, to achieve political goals. Aside from the rhetoric of the common weal, however, which undoubtedly held some currency among the commons, it is apparent that they had real concerns and engaged in political discourse as a means of addressing them.⁴⁵ There is substantial evidence that the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire rebellions were fuelled by real popular anxieties, and were certainly used as vehicles to express them. When the nobility offered to lend their significant political weight to defend the common weal, it was practical to take them up on this in order to give real authority to the cause of the commons. In 1468, according to the Franco-Scottish agent William Monypenny, ‘Robin of Redesdale’ contacted Warwick in the hope for support

⁴⁰ Watts, ‘Popular voices’, p. 115.

⁴¹ Robin of Redesdale is usually identified as one of these two men: Dockray, ‘Yorkshire rebellions’, p. 254.

⁴² *Warkworth*, p. 7.

⁴³ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Vale’s Book*, p. 219.

⁴⁵ Watts gives agency to the commons, claiming that they were not ‘mere dupes’. Watts, ‘Popular voices’, p. 112.

if he rose up in rebellion against the king.⁴⁶ Warwick apparently denied his backing at this time presumably because he was not ready to act. The creation and posting of seditious bills by William Belmyn and Robert de Ryddesdale is similarly indicative of popular discontent that lacked the backing of the nobility. After the battle of Losecoat following the Lincolnshire rebellion in 1470, the confession of Sir Robert Welles claimed that 'the cause of oure grete risinge at this time was grounded upon this noise raisid amonges the people, that the kinge was coming downe ... with grete power, into Lincolnshire, where the kinges jugges shulde sitte, and hang and draw grete noumbre of the comons', in retaliation for local violence which targeted one of the king's retainers.⁴⁷ Regardless of whether or not this 'noise' had any substance to it, if the commons really did fear a brutal retribution from the king, it is hardly surprising that they would instigate some form of resistance.

Bill Casting and Sedition

If we are to draw conclusions about the involvement of the commons in this political discourse, the practicalities of this should be considered, and this leads us to reflect on the physical manifestations of the documents of rebellion. The ephemeral nature of the documents means that none of the versions that survive can be identified as truly original. There are, however, clues to the format of the originals, and thus to the methods through which they were used to disseminate information. All of the documents produced by Warwick and Clarence in this period were designed for circulation to varying degrees. The open letters to the commons and the manifestos were obviously for public consumption. *The maner and guyding* was likely created as an attempt to justify their actions and to raise support among Lancastrians in England – perhaps sent to individual Lancastrian sympathisers.⁴⁸ Occasionally, these documents can be supplemented by incidental references to them in other texts.

In all of the manifestoes for rebellion from the late fifteenth century, the primary factor identified as causing concern is the failure of good counsel having access to the king.⁴⁹ This was an essential part of the normal political process, as a king could not govern justly and effectively if his actions were not mediated by trusted advisors who listened to the needs of the common weal. Warwick, Clarence, and the archbishop wrote of how 'certeyn billis of Articles' had been delivered to them by 'true subgettes of diverse parties of [the] realme';⁵⁰ apparently directly approaching politicians with bills of complaint was

⁴⁶ A detail missed by most historians, but pointed out by Watts. L.M. Émilie Dupont, ed., *Anchiennes Croniques d'Engleterre*, 3 vols, Paris 1858-63, vol. 3, p. 193; Watts, 'Popular voices', p. 112, n. 26.

⁴⁷ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 22.

⁴⁸ C. Richmond and M.L. Kekewich, 'The search for stability, 1461-1483' in *Vale's Book*, p. 48.

⁴⁹ Westervelt, 'Manifestoes for rebellion', p. 185.

⁵⁰ *Warkworth*, p. 46.

an option when more normal political channels were not available. Likewise, the distribution of rebellious bills and letters was largely a response to such occasions where the usual channels of political communication had been corrupted by private interests, and had thus lost the public and communal aspects of political discourse.⁵¹ Bill casting could provide a means of airing grievances and suggesting remedies in public.⁵² The shorter version of *Tharticles of the proclamacion of the duc of Clarence and erle of Warrewic* in the British Library Cotton Charters, published according to Vale on the return of the nobles from France, is a remarkable paper survival.⁵³ It has been suggested that this particular document may be a contemporaneous copy of the original letter, which was intended to be posted in a public place.⁵⁴ It bears no marks to indicate that it was ever nailed to a door or market cross, so may well have never made it into the public eye, which would account for its excellent condition. Even if it was not posted as intended, the physicality of this document is significant. Although we are aware of a large corpus of bills and their wide distribution in the middle ages, our knowledge of their existence is largely gleaned from copies or circumstantial evidence. The survival of the Cotton Charters document, then, supplements our analysis of bill casting by providing a tangible example of the physical forms these documents may have taken.

The Great Chronicle of London, quoted at the beginning of this article, mentions some of the places bills such as this would have been posted by both the nobles and their enemies. It has been suggested that not enough has been made of the interaction between bill casting and the ‘political landscape of the city’ by historians of late medieval England, and the present example shows how revealing this can be.⁵⁵ Cheapside was inherently public by virtue of being the location of a market, and ‘the standard’ there was a water fountain which had a history of hosting public acts of political discourse.⁵⁶ Vale likewise mentions that copies of the letter sent by Warwick and Clarence from France were ‘sette upon the standarde in Chepe’.⁵⁷ The London chronicler states that some bills were posted on ‘the Stokkis’; if this was referring to a pillory, it would likely have been too in a marketplace.⁵⁸ The ambiguity of the description suggests that the author assumed a general knowledge of his meaning from the reader, and that it would not seem out of the ordinary for such documents to be

⁵¹ Scase, ‘Strange and wonderful bills’, p. 237.

⁵² Scase, ‘Strange and wonderful bills’, p. 238.

⁵³ *Vale’s Book*, pp. 220–22. BL, Cotton Charter, XVII, 11.

⁵⁴ *Vale’s Book*, p. 222.

⁵⁵ Liddy, ‘Bill casting and political’, p. 452. In Liddy’s brief survey, he draws attention to some of the locations given here, and examples when they were subverted on different occasions.

⁵⁶ *Great Chronicle of London*, p. 209.

⁵⁷ *Vale’s Book*, p. 219.

⁵⁸ Masschaele, ‘The public space of the marketplace’, p. 400.

posted there.⁵⁹ Vale adds that documents were posted 'upon the stulpes on London brigge and uppon divers chirche doris'.⁶⁰ The point to be drawn from these references to the sites of bill casting is that they are all ostensibly public and highly-visible, in places where such activity was not uncommon,⁶¹ but also where the act would hold some symbolic value. The Cheapside standard, after Tyburn, provided a favourite location for the execution and maiming of criminals,⁶² and, according to Stow, Henry IV symbolically burned blank charters of his predecessor here.⁶³ In contradistinction, it also had a history of being commandeered to make statements *against* royal authority: it provided the location of the executions of a merchant by the 1381 rebels, and of Lord Say during Cade's rebellion. Stocks and pillories were likewise sites associated with traditional authority, specifically of public punishment and humiliation,⁶⁴ and the stulpes (low stone posts in front of the gate) on London Bridge provided the symbolic entrance to the City. In all these instances, the locations of traditional public authority were being subverted to incite popular discontent.

It is hard to say in real terms how much of an effect the posting of bills and letters had in raising genuine support for the causes of Warwick and Clarence. That these methods were employed suggests some expectation that they would do so, and it is possible to get a sense of their impact from reactions to them. The authorities were concerned that the seditious content of the written word would cross over into spoken conversation and thus spread further and reach more people.⁶⁵ This lent itself to an oral culture in which participants could freely discuss and debate a text, even if they were illiterate.⁶⁶ The casting of bills in places that were notable symbols of authority or of subversion would certainly afford an emblematic significance to the documents, which was bound to generate conversation.

In a letter to the city of Coventry, written soon before the Yorkshire rebellions, King Edward complained of the spreading of 'vnfittyng and sedicious tales and langage' and the dangers associated with them.⁶⁷ The mayor of London clearly apprehended the spread of sedition when he ordered the bills to be removed. It has already been noted how the commons of Lincolnshire were incited to rebellion through the rumour that Edward was coming with the intent to punish them; in this case it was not information spread through

⁵⁹ C.D. Benson, *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture*, University Park 2010, p. 229.

⁶⁰ *Vale's Book*, p. 219.

⁶¹ See Scase, 'Strange and wonderful bills', p. 238, on the practical side of the location of bill-casting.

⁶² A.R. Myers, *London in the Age of Chaucer*, Norman 1988, p. 63.

⁶³ John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. C.L. Kingsford, 2 vols, Oxford 1908, vol. 1, p. 265.

⁶⁴ Masschaele, 'The public space of the marketplace', p. 405.

⁶⁵ Scase, 'Strange and wonderful bills', p. 238.

⁶⁶ P. Strohm, 'Writing and reading', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, R. Horrox and W.M. Ormrod, eds., Cambridge 2006, p. 461.

⁶⁷ *Coventry Leet Book*, 340.

written documents but through word of mouth. The Pastons, with their close connections to central politics, offer some insights on this subject. During the period between the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire rebellions, when Edward was free from captivity and had established a momentary and uneasy reconciliation with Warwick and Clarence, John Paston II wrote to his mother that:

‘the Kyng hym-selffe hathe good langage of the lordys of Claraunce,
of Warwyk ... seying they be hys best frendys. But hys howsolde men
haue other langage’.⁶⁸

Not only does this indicate that John Paston himself was discussing the political situation, he noted that Edward’s ‘howsolde men’ were talking amongst themselves, forming their own opinions on the relationship between their master and his kin. The Pastons also offer a glimpse into the murmurings of the population at large: on the rumour that Warwick would accompany Edward into Lincolnshire, ‘Som men seye þat hys goyng shall do good, and som seye that it dothe harme’;⁶⁹ and later that ‘The peple heere feerythe it soore’ that ‘the worlde ... is ryght qwesye’.⁷⁰ This culture of gossip, comment and opinion could often lead to confusion: upon Edward’s return to England during the Readeption, John II was told that there ‘be many tales and non accorth with other’.⁷¹ If the accusation of William Belmyn and Robert de Ryddesdale suggests a fear of the potential danger in the written word, then the reaction to seditious documents in London and the culture of rumour and gossip revealed in the Paston Letters shows us why. Seditious writing could be exacerbated by rumour and gossip as the public engaged in high political discourse.

There has been a tendency among historians, in their interpretations of late-medieval bill casting, to reduce ‘the city to an empty space, a passive subject, for the stage of the performance of high politics in which the urban inhabitants were simply the spectators.’⁷² This point is pertinent here, as there is a danger that such an incomplete historiographical reading of the nature of rebellious literature might be applied to the events of 1469-70. If the analysis in the current article was to be restricted to considering the language used by the rebel nobles to legitimise their actions within the framework of ‘the commons’, then this use of physical manuscript ephemera could only be interpreted as an imposition of top-down politics on a ‘passive’ audience. It has been demonstrated above, however, that this is a far too simple rendering of the dynamic between the nobles and the commons. Firstly, the nobles, in the

⁶⁸ N. Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 3 vols, Oxford 2004, vol. 1, p. 410.

⁶⁹ *Paston Letters*, part 1, pp. 412-15.

⁷⁰ *Paston Letters*, part 1, p. 438.

⁷¹ *Paston Letters*, part 2, p. 405.

⁷² Liddy, ‘Bill casting and political communication’, p. 451.

locations of their bill posting,⁷³ were clearly utilising a vibrant arena of politics which was not used exclusively by them. There is also agency on the part of the civic body of London in reaction to bill posting. The removal of seditious bills by the mayor is a clear example, but Vale's collection of documents (which encompasses much more than the documents relevant to 1469-70) is likewise revealing. Being the 'man of affairs' of Thomas Cook, a prominent alderman in the middle decades of the century, and mayor in 1462-63, Vale was able to use the archives of his master to construct his book.⁷⁴ Rebellious documents posted in London would have been of great interest to Cook, and that he obtained copies (perhaps versions that were posted on church doors, the Cheapside standard or the stulpes of London Bridge) is indicative of a reciprocal engagement on the part of the city with noble bill casting. The concern that the city has been a neglected agent in bill casting can be extended much more widely. The concerns of the commons more generally, both urban and rural, and their attempts to have the nobles act on their behalf, as well as the use of public space to make proclamations (particularly the churches in Lincolnshire), illustrate how this process was not simply the rebel nobles using the commons as a passive audience. There were multiple levels of engagement with various aspects of the cause of the nobles, in a range of spaces, by diverse groups of people.

Constructed Narratives of Treason

Much of what has been discussed about the role of the written word in political discourse can be further explored through the lens of the law of treason in the fifteenth century. It offers suggestions relating to the final problem posed in the introduction: how were the language and physical documentation that constituted political discourse shaped by the events of the rebellions? The interpretative framework of the 'linguistic turn' has been used to reconsider the events of Cade's 1450 rebellion to conclude that, 'regardless of what actually happened ... [t]he causes and events of the rebellion were contested during the decade',⁷⁵ and that the dominant version of events, as we understand them today, was something of a Lancastrian narrative. To apply an interpretation along these lines to the events of 1469-70 makes sense – we certainly have a contested narrative of events, as presented conversely by the documents issued by Warwick and Clarence and those by Edward. In each, we see alternate, but purposely constructed, narratives of whose actions were treasonous. Equally,

⁷³ It is worth pointing out that the nobles were unlikely to have posted the bills themselves, but unfortunately, as far as I can tell, this truth remains unknowable to us.

⁷⁴ A.F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs, 'The provenance of the manuscript: The lives and archive of Sir Thomas Cook and his man of affairs, John Vale', in *Vale's Book*, p. 73.

⁷⁵ D. Grummitt, 'Deconstructing Cade's rebellion: Discourse and politics in the mid fifteenth century' in L. Clark, ed., *The Fifteenth Century VI: Identity and Insurgency in the Late Middle Ages*, Woodbridge 2006, p. 122.

the format and timing of political statements and manifestos was of utmost importance for both parties. These two factors regulated how and why high political discourse played out in the way that it did in 1469-70.

The medieval law of treason in England was a precisely-defined thing, and phrases associated with it (i.e. 'traitor' and 'traitorous') were carefully used.⁷⁶ The era-defining statute on treason came in 1352,⁷⁷ and fifteenth-century monarchs were more or less happy to let it stand as such, finding that it needed little reinterpretation.⁷⁸ Extensions to the law, however, included that of *scandalum magnatum* in 1378, which 'assumed that great men could be materially harmed by hostile words', emphasising the detrimental nature language could have, and the supposition of Parliament in 1414 that heresy and treason were so intimately linked that one conviction would naturally lead to the other.⁷⁹ The role that language and writing played in the spread of Lollardy in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries bound these two concepts together. This was supplemented by the creation of 'treason by words' in the reign of Henry IV. For Warwick and Clarence, then, not only was it necessary to employ the literary device of the common weal to give their cause legitimacy, it was also essential to ensure that their words would not cast illegitimacy on their actions.

There were two clauses of the 1352 statute in particular that recurred in indictments of treason. The first was 'when a man attempts or plots the death of our lord the king', and the second 'if a man levies war against our lord the king in his realm'. The statute was consistently used thanks to the fairly broad range of offences that these two clauses could cover, and could, for example, be applied equally to Cade's rebels of 1450 and to those placed under attainder during the civil wars.

It may seem like a difficult task to remove the treasonous connotations from the phrase '[we] pray you ... to accompayneye us thedir, with as many persones defensably arrayede as y can make'⁸⁰ in the open letter of July 1469, as it sounds very much like Warwick and Clarence were raising men to levy war against the king contrary to the 1352 statute. But it is a recurring theme that Edward is never the subject of the anger of either the lords or the commons. Instead it is the 'certeyne ceducious persones' who surround the king and cause him to 'falle in grete poverte of myserie' through their 'myschevous rule opinion and assent'.⁸¹ This had been a *topos* of rebellious groups for a century or more, and it found permanence as an image that could be used by both writers

⁷⁶ J.G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1970, p. 108.

⁷⁷ A.R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents Volume IV c.1327-1485*, London 1969, p. 403.

⁷⁸ Bellamy, *Treason*, p. 136.

⁷⁹ I. Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England*, Oxford 2005, p. 151.

⁸⁰ *Warkworth*, p. 47.

⁸¹ *Warkworth*, p. 46.

of literature and politicians across the social strata.⁸² In France, much of the rhetoric they had used a year previously was recycled.⁸³ There is still talk of the 'commen weele' and 'certeyne covetious and sedicious personnes ... aboute thastate roiall'. The most significant point of departure, however, is that the duke and earl omitted any mention of Edward himself, stating only that they had 'tendir zelis, lovis and affecciions ... to the wele of the crowne'. Here they emphasised their duty of supporting the office of kingship as noblemen, but not necessarily the person in whom it was invested. Although this letter bears no date beyond the year, that it is copied in John Vale's miscellany after *The maner and guyding* suggests that by this time they had already reconciled with Queen Margaret, and thus the ambiguous wording is an attempt to lay a groundwork of support for their ultimate return to reinstate Henry VI.

Upon their landing in England with the support of Louis XI and the exiled Lancastrian court, all pretence of loyalty to Edward was dropped. Instead, the proclamation they issued was clearly an attempt to turn the notion of treason on its head, making Edward the traitor.⁸⁴ Whereas much of the previous rhetoric had been borrowed and lifted from a string of rebellions in the past hundred years, the current situation was unique because malcontent *could* now be aimed at Edward. In this respect, Warwick and Clarence's manifestos and letters could potentially break free of the constraints of linguistic norms, but, upon a careful reading of the documents, it is revealed that this was not entirely the case. This proclamation is still couched in the accepted language of authority, making mention of the 'trewe commones' and how their new enterprise sought to remedy the wrongs inflicted upon the people of the kingdom. This time Henry VI was described as the 'verrey trewe and undoubted king of Englonde and of France', and Edward as 'his grete rebell and enemye ... usurpour, oppressour and destroyour of oure seide souveraigne lorde'. These words are an extension of those in *The maner and guyding*, in which Warwick promised Margaret he would 'devoire with all his mighte to destroye [Edward] and caste hym oute of the reaume', now being an 'enemye unto hym hereaftir'.⁸⁵ Discontent was still not being aimed at the king, because Edward no longer commanded that position.

Until the time came when Warwick and Clarence openly rebelled against Edward, such an adroit approach was especially necessary, mainly thanks to the introduction of the notion of 'treason by words' in the early years of the fifteenth century to legitimise legal reprisal against those who spoke out against the new Lancastrian regime and circulated rumours of Richard II's survival.⁸⁶

⁸² J. Watts, 'Pressure of the public on later medieval politics', in L. Clark and C. Carpenter, eds., *The Fifteenth Century IV: Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*, Woodbridge 2004, p. 169.

⁸³ *Vale's Book*, pp. 218-19.

⁸⁴ *Vale's Book*, pp. 220-1.

⁸⁵ *Vale's Book*, p. 216.

⁸⁶ Bellamy, *Treason*, p. 116.

Such hearsay was a significant concern of the Lancastrian government,⁸⁷ and it was established that speech considered seditious was not simply a part of other treasonous activities which required physical action, but rather the mere articulation of such words itself amounted to compassing the death of the king.⁸⁸ In Edward's letter to Coventry, dated 1 July 1469, just weeks before the first manifesto, the king confirmed his fear of the damage of seditious speech.⁸⁹ He wrote of 'dyvers malicious & ille disposyd persones ... [who] continue dayly, vnfittyng and sedicious tales and langage amongus oure lege people to thentent to store and incens theym to rumour & commocion'. When treason by words was introduced, it was an attempt to combat words which were 'intended to incite the people against their king to the destruction of the realm',⁹⁰ and this is clearly what Edward had in mind when he sent this letter, at a time when the commons of Yorkshire were in revolt and only a few months after William Belmyn and Robert de Ryddesdale had published their potentially treasonous articles. So, the political atmosphere around seditious words was fraught when Warwick and Clarence published their manifesto, but it is notable that Edward was reluctant to brandish them traitors.

Just as the rebel nobles were engaged in a linguistic game, so too was Edward. Indeed, it is evident that he was well aware of the linguistic tricks employed in political discourse when he wryly said of proclamations made by Warwick and Clarence in 1470 that: 'no mencion [is] made of us' but 'How be it we wolfe foryete that to us [it] perteyneth'.⁹¹ After the battle of Edgecote in July 1469, Edward had been captured by Archbishop Neville and subsequently held in custody. Even after his release that October, his authority was severely weakened. He was left with thoughts, 'deeply seated in his mind, [of] the injuries he had received and the contempt which had been shown to majesty'.⁹² But in 1469, he had neither the time nor the power to gain retribution, less so to accuse his cousin and brother of treason. Warwick had executed significant members of his innermost circle, and to openly denounce the rebel nobles as traitors would be to remove another level of the nobility who were wealthy and powerful; instead an uneasy reconciliation was established.

The main sources of information for this period are the *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* and a series of proclamations issued by Edward,⁹³ and it

⁸⁷ S. Walker, 'Rumour, sedition and popular protest in the reign of Henry IV', *Past and Present*, No. 166 (2000), p. 37.

⁸⁸ Bellamy, *Treason*, pp. 119-20.

⁸⁹ *Coventry Leet Book*, pp. 340-1.

⁹⁰ Bellamy, *Treason*, p. 116.

⁹¹ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 13.

⁹² H.T. Riley, ed., *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, London 1908, p. 458.

⁹³ The proclamations are printed in both the *Calendar of Close Rolls* and in the notes of *Warkworth*:

13 March, Stamford: *CCR 1468-76*, pp. 134-5; *Warkworth*, pp. 52-3.

16 March, Newark: *CCR 1468-76*, pp. 137-8; omitted from *Warkworth*.

24 March, York: *CCR 1468-76*, p. 137; *Warkworth*, pp. 53-6.

has been noted that both sets of documents ostensibly originated from the same source.⁹⁴ The reason for two separate formats was that Edward was undertaking a campaign to establish a favourable narrative of events: both at home, contemporaneously with the events; and abroad, a short time later. The proclamations, being essentially a vehicle to relay information to the masses, were written with more brevity than the *Chronicle*, but as the author of the latter was 'at liberty to leave in the descriptive details', it is from here that the events of the rebellion are usually reconstructed.⁹⁵

That the *Chronicle* is a piece of royalist propaganda is indisputable,⁹⁶ but its version of events has largely been taken at face value, meaning that Warwick and Clarence have been seen as orchestrating the events of the rebellion in an attempt to achieve a similar victory as they did the previous year.⁹⁷ This reading of events is hardly surprising when the two most detailed contemporary sources were both royally-issued. But, by viewing the *Chronicle* with the scepticism due to a such a partisan account, an argument can be made that Edward capitalised on a private feud in Lincolnshire (which involved Richard, Lord Welles, the father of the Sir Robert who led the rebellion, and one of Edward's own retainers, Thomas Burgh)⁹⁸ as a means to assert pressure on Warwick and Clarence in an attempt to bring them to heel after their actions the previous year.⁹⁹ The enemies of Burgh may have approached Edward's discontented nobles as part of their feud, but it seems less likely that the nobles themselves orchestrated the uprising.¹⁰⁰ Edward issued commissions of array to deal with the disturbances, initially excluding Warwick and Clarence, from which he raised a substantial army. This display of strength was bound to put fear into the minds of his relatives. When he did issue commissions to them and invited them to join him in suppressing the disturbance, they found that they were not able to muster any kind of substantial force, as the royal commissioners had been there before them.¹⁰¹ They were naturally worried, and thus dithered in joining Edward. As events unfolded, Edward continually apprehended their actions – an impression that is not related in the *Chronicle*. At some point, the

31 March, Nottingham: *CCR 1468-76*, pp. 135-6; *Warkworth*, pp. 56-9.

⁹⁴ L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Wavrin and the English newsletters: the *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 47 (2003), pp. 225-6.

⁹⁵ Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Wavrin', p. 227.

⁹⁶ C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford, 1913, p. 173; A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II, c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century*, London and Henley 1982, p. 252.

⁹⁷ Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 441-42; M.A. Hicks, *False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence*, Gloucester 1980, pp. 65-74. An early exception was: C. Oman, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, London 1891, pp. 196-98.

⁹⁸ Storey, 'Lincolnshire', pp. 71-2.

⁹⁹ Holland, 'Lincolnshire rebellion', p. 867. See also Richmond and Kekewich's view that '[i]t is hard to believe that Warwick could have thought that he would have anything to gain from a repetition of the successful strategy of 1460': Richmond and Kekewich, 'The search for stability', in *Vale's Book*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Holland, 'Lincolnshire rebellion', pp. 864-67.

¹⁰¹ Holland, 'Lincolnshire rebellion', p. 867.

king made a decision to implicate the duke and earl in the hope that it would allow him to re-establish political control. A consideration of Edward's use of language, and especially the nature of his proclamations, furthers this argument.

After the battle of Losecoat, there was no delay in officially accusing the common rebels in Lincolnshire as 'Rebelles and Traitours ... late assembled in grete nombre, leveyng werre ayenst his Highness, contrary to their ligeaunce and duete'.¹⁰² This was on 13 March, the day after the battle. According the *Chronicle*, the rebels had shouted 'A Clarence! a Clarence! a Warrewike!' on the battlefield, and an unnamed servant of Clarence had been found dead in the aftermath with his casket, 'wherinne were founden many mervelous billes, conteyning matter of grete seduccion, and the very subversion of the king and the common wele of alle this lande, with the most abhominable treason'.¹⁰³ Edward had the confession of Sir Robert Welles by the following day,¹⁰⁴ which apparently revealed that Warwick and Clarence had been active in inciting this rebellion, ordering the commons 'to be redy with alle the felaship we couth or might make and assemble of the comons'.¹⁰⁵ Despite this overwhelming evidence of their treacherous behaviour (if indeed it was as overwhelming as the *Chronicle* claims), Edward did not immediately levy charges of treason against the duke and earl. Apparently a more pressing concern was to issue a proclamation (on 16 March) warning once again of 'untrue language' that was being spread claiming he would not honour the pardon he had issued in Yorkshire the previous year.¹⁰⁶ When he did write to his brother and cousin to ask for an explanation, he did not denounce the nobles as traitors, but offered reconciliation. He had not yet decided to directly link their association with the rebellion with treason.

The *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* and John Vale's book contain nearly-identical copies of a letter sent by Edward to Clarence, via the Garter King of Arms, which note that 'a like letre, undre prive seale, was sent to the erle of Warrewike'.¹⁰⁷ The letter in the *Chronicle* is precisely dated as five days after Losecoat, being 'Yeven undre our signet',¹⁰⁸ at Newerke, the xvij. day of Marche, the x. yere of our reign'.¹⁰⁹ Crucially, the choice of language is one of a

¹⁰² *Warkworth*, pp. 52-3. *CCR 1468-76*, pp. 134-5. The version in the Close Rolls mistakenly dates it to 16 March.

¹⁰³ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Holland, 'Lincolnshire rebellion', p. 858.

¹⁰⁵ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ *CCR 1468-76*, pp. 137-8.

¹⁰⁷ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 13; *Vale's Book*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁸ In the French versions of this text, the letter was sent under the privy seal: Jean de Waurin, *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne, a present nomme Engleterre*, eds. W. Hardy and E. Hardy, 5 vols., London 1864-91, vol. 5, pp. 596-97; Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Waurin', p. 223, n. 27.

¹⁰⁹ Vale's book simply says 'Geven et. cet.', but is positioned after *The maner and guyding*, suggesting that it was sent to Warwick and Clarence after they had reconciled with the Lancastrians; i.e. July/August 1470. Despite the chronological discrepancies in these two accounts, 17 March can be considered the correct date. Firstly, Edward had issued a

broken contract, not one of treason. Edward offers forgiveness if the lords would 'com as fittethe a liege man to com to his soveraigne lorde in humble wise', thereby framing their crimes not as compassing the king's death or levying an army against him but as a breach of fealty. This motif is repeated: they were to submit 'upon the feithe and trouthe that ye naturelly owe to bere unto us, and upon payne of your ligeaunce'. Edward urged the cessation of 'that unlefull assemble of our people in perturbacion and contempe of our peas and commandement', or else he would have no option but to punish Warwick and Clarence as an example (which he would 'lothe to doo'). These words, although strong in tone, did not amount to an accusation of treason. If Warwick and Clarence already feared for their future in the uncertain events surrounding the rebellion, it may be that Edward's (apparently reluctant) threat that he would punish them in the event of continued defiance was an attempt to further scare them into submission. As the contractual language urged the swearing of fealty, this would have been both a public and physical display of Edward's dominance over the rebel nobles, in a very obvious reversal of the situation the previous year when Edward had been Warwick's prisoner.

Warwick and Clarence repeatedly offered excuses and assurances that they would come to Edward, on the condition that they would be granted surety and pardons for themselves and all their men.¹¹⁰ On 19 March, Edward repeated his offer, now making it more explicit that Warwick and Clarence would have to prove their innocence, but urged them to trust in his mercy, asking them to remember how forgiving he had been the year before.¹¹¹ He gave them until the 28 March to submit to him,¹¹² but on 20 March, long before this ultimatum expired, the rebels had fled to Manchester in the hope of receiving support from Thomas, Lord Stanley.

The turning point, in terms of the language of treason, was not the moment Edward learnt of Warwick and Clarence's retreat, but after he had travelled to York a couple of days later. He did not act rashly, as might be expected from a king who had just realised the true treachery of men who were not only his most important nobles but also his family. Instead, it was a measured response.

proclamation from Newark the day before (see above, n. 93). The official origin and specificities in the text of the version in the *Chronicle* lend it weight, by presenting it as a response to the confession of Sir Robert Welles and to 'proclamations [that] have be made in your name'. Vale was constructing his book from his master's archives years after 1470 as something of a narrative, so may have arranged his documents in a manner that seemed to create a logical chronological flow, positioning Edward's letter after one sent by Warwick and Clarence from France to the commons of England. He apparently did not have access to copies of these supposed proclamations, which do not survive today. The editors of Vale's book, however, describe Edward's letter as a 'reply' to this proclamation, and refer the reader back to the previous two documents, one of which is *The maner and guyding*.

¹¹⁰ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 14.

¹¹¹ Although it seems as if his patience for their demands was starting to wear thin: 'for his auncent enemyes of France wolde not desire so large a suretie for their comyng to his rialle prensens'. *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, pp. 14-5.

¹¹² We know this from a later proclamation: *CCR 1468-76*, p. 135.

From York Edward set about officially dealing with the rebels as traitors. He wrote to Edmund Dudley, the deputy-lieutenant of Ireland, on 23 March denouncing his relatives as ‘rebel and traitor’, informing him that Clarence had been replaced as lieutenant on account of his actions, and that no aid was to be granted to either of the rebels.¹¹³ The next day, he issued an official proclamation to the city of York saying that, despite his trust in Warwick and Clarence to help quash the Lincolnshire rebellion, they had sought ‘the destruction and subversion of his realm’ and provoked ‘the commons of Lincolnshire to levy war against him’.¹¹⁴ There was now no restraint in his choice of words: Edward was deliberately invoking the 1352 statute of treason. On 31 March, he issued another proclamation, the tenor of which was the same as the last, only having being bulked out with more incidental detail to truly condemn Warwick and Clarence, who were by this time on the run.¹¹⁵

To view the *Chronicle* (including the letter also copied by Vale), Welles’ confession, and Edward’s proclamations as documents of propaganda, not just as literary pieces, can help us place the language of treason in the political discourse with more sense. We have just seen how the language of Edward’s proclamations evolved in tandem with the unfolding political situation. He was using an effective, direct, wide-ranging,¹¹⁶ and conventional method of relaying information to his subjects, in a manner which, by its official nature, framed the events as Edward wanted them to be framed, almost in real time. For the majority of people, these proclamations would have been the first interpretation of the events of the rebellion they were exposed to. That the letter made its way into Vale’s book suggests that, despite being addressed to named individuals, it was intended for a public audience, as the majority of Vale’s documents relating to rebellion were. This would mean that it was circulated as a piece of propaganda by Edward, perhaps as soon as it was written – hardly surprising as it extolls him as a paragon of kingly reason, temperance, and mercy. This in turn placed Edward very much in a position of control, having the power to forgive and to establish his authority over his rebels. Welles’ confession was apparently one of a number taken from captains of the Lincolnshire rebellion, but is the only one that survives and may have been the only one circulated to

¹¹³ CCR 1468-76, p. 138.

¹¹⁴ CCR 1468-76, p. 137.

¹¹⁵ CCR 1468-76, pp. 135-6; *Warkworth*, pp. 56-9.

¹¹⁶ For example, copies of the last proclamation were sent to the sheriff of York, and also ‘[t]o the sheriffs of London; Coventry; Warwick and Leicester; Wiltshire; Gloucestershire; Somerset and Dorset; Southamptonshire; Surry and Sussex; Essex and Hertford; Norfolk and Suffolk; Lincolnshire; Cambridge and Huntingdon; Salop; Bedford and Buckingham; to the mayor and sheriff of Bristol; to the sheriffs of Oxford and Berks; Northampton; Hereford; Nottingham and Derby; Rutland; Northumberland; Westmoreland and Cumberland; Norwich; the mayor and sheriff of Lincoln city; John Scot knight, lieutenant of Dover’. CCR 1468-76, p. 1356.

accompany and support the proclamations.¹¹⁷ With all of these documents, it can be seen that Edward was attempting to construct a narrative of events in his favour by waging a war of language and propaganda; one that was, in the case of his proclamations and his ostensibly public letters to Warwick and Clarence, contemporaneous with the events as they transpired.

The *Chronicle* was clearly not written in the heat of the moment, but seems unlikely to have been produced long afterwards, perhaps from notes taken at the time of the rebellion. It must have been written after 25 March,¹¹⁸ but does not mention Warwick and Clarence's flight to France the following April. The only English version of the *Chronicle* dates from long after the events it describes, and is probably a translation of an original written in French, but near-contemporary copies survive in the *Recueil des Croniques* of Jean de Waurin and in three other French manuscripts.¹¹⁹ It has been suggested that the original version of the *Chronicle* was prepared as a newsletter for reception in the Burgundian court, and may have arrived there in about mid-April 1470.¹²⁰ Indeed, this quick turn-around would account for its many linguistic parallels to Edward's proclamations – they were based on the same, now lost, source, which could evidently be adapted quickly to suit the purposes for which it was required. Its limited manuscript survival, and the fact that it is not preserved in any official Burgundian archive, implies that it surely cannot have been widely circulated. But this in itself exemplifies how written political discourse was affected by the dynamic and fast-moving events of high politics in the fifteenth century.

An impression of how Edward envisaged the *Chronicle* working as a piece of propaganda is clear throughout. Edward was probably aware of the sophisticated use of chronicles as propaganda by his Burgundian allies, and the *Chronicle* itself reveals an understanding of the power of the written word in its emphasis on the fact that many treasonous documents were 'redy to be shewed'.¹²¹ It talks of the events retrospectively, noting Warwick's 'fals double treason' long before Edward apparently learnt of the deception.¹²² The emphasis placed on the continued evidence against Warwick and Clarence, contrasted with Edward 'yit no thing mystrusting the saide duc and erle', is striking, and was clearly an attempt to portray the king as an inherently virtuous monarch. In addition to his benevolent mercy (towards both his noble and common subjects), his victory at Losecoat had the result of 'saving the lives of

¹¹⁷ Holland makes the point that it was likely to have accompanied the *Chronicle*: Holland, 'Lincolnshire rebellion', pp. 853, 857. The confession is recorded in English, but Visser-Fuch's research has established that the *Chronicle* was not circulated in England (see below, n. 120).

¹¹⁸ The *Chronicle* describes John Neville as a marquis, the creation of which happened on this date: Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, p. 173.

¹¹⁹ Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Waurin', pp. 227-28; Waurin, *Recueil*, vol. 5, pp. 587-602.

¹²⁰ Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Waurin', p. 229.

¹²¹ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 6.

¹²² *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 9.

his poure and wreched commons'.¹²³ In spite of treachery and strife, Edward is portrayed as brave, calm, and fast to act. It could not be a more sympathetic reading of the king. The role of the *Chronicle* as a continental newsletter would have exalted Edward as a monarch and told a heroic story of royal triumph, while equally besmirching his relatives as the worst kind of traitors – ones who unnaturally conspired towards the destruction of a king who had nothing but faith and love for them. This confident tone in fact hid the reality that Edward was by no means safe from the machinations of Warwick, but it must have seemed, at least for a moment, that the respite afforded by the victory at Losecoat and the flight of the rebel nobles was evidence enough that he was meant to sit upon the throne.

But the events of high politics rarely remained still for long, and, by the beginning of October, Warwick and Clarence returned to England at the head of the Lancastrian army, forcing Edward to flee to safety in Burgundy. Any attempt to promote the narrative in *Chronicle* as justification for Edward's right to the throne probably fell by the wayside. As events manifested, however, the *Chronicle* was to be superseded by the better-known story of the re-conquest of his kingdom in 1471; the chronicle of which was composed from a newsletter not dissimilar to the original manifestation of the *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*.¹²⁴ After all, a triumph launched from (and in spite of) a seemingly insurmountable position made for a much better example of divine right to rule than a victory over a group of provincial rebels.

Edward was very much concerned with constructing a narrative that explained and justified his actions, whilst emphasising that it was he who was in political control. His attempts to compel Warwick and Clarence to submit to him were a blend of military force and, more importantly, a deft use of language and publicised letters. They failed probably because Warwick and Clarence were well aware that the king had not forgiven them for 1469 and had realised that Edward's actions in 1470 were purposeful and aggressive. When it was apparent that they had no intention to submit, Edward did not act rashly, but set about formally denouncing them as traitors through a shift in the language he used. He then embarked on a more explicit campaign of propaganda and the written word through the production and dissemination on the continent of the *Chronicle*. As much as his cousin and brother, Edward understood the role that language the forms of writing played in political discourse: both shaped, and were shaped by, the events of 1469-70.

¹²³ *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, p. 10.

¹²⁴ Visser-Fuchs, 'Jean de Wavrin', p. 232.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article has been two-fold. Firstly, it sought to deepen our understanding of the turbulent politics of the fifteenth century by examining the events of 1469-1470 on their own terms. Secondly, it used the language and the physical forms of the surviving evidence to better understand how political discourse was shaped by events and *vice versa*. It has been revealed that both Edward and his rebel nobles were well aware that language could be as powerful a weapon as the sword, and that each used this knowledge with considerable sophistication in the battle for political supremacy. The linguistic frameworks in which they operated – whether of the common weal, or of treason – were not simply the top-down imposition of high politics, but signify a much wider engagement in political discourse from multiple levels of society. The attempts to engage with the public through bill casting in visible and symbolic locations, coupled with the culture of gossip and rumour meant that the commons could meaningfully engage in, and were integral to, political discourse. Likewise, the language relating to treason reveals the temperamental nature of politics, and that the potentially catastrophic consequences of an accusation of treason were deftly manoeuvred through a careful selection of language that sought to minimise the risk to both life and reputation. By adhering to the accepted language of political discourse, Warwick and Clarence were coming out fighting, as it were, in an attempt to deflect any connotations of treason before they appeared. Edward attempted to use language to shape the course of events in order to re-establish his authority; and, when this failed, he used language and propaganda as a means of constructing an official narrative that placed him firmly in a position of control throughout. The evolution of the language used by the Edward and the rebel nobles illustrates the sophistication with which it could be employed – both parties were wary of the rhetorical and linguistic tactics that had become the mainstay of political discourse since 1381. The extraordinary and ever-changing nature of the situation in this period of crisis is sharply revealed by the written discourse associated with it.