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Wodrow's News: Correspondence and Politics in Early 18th-Century Scotland*

ALASDAIR RAFFE

This article examines the creation and consumption of scribal news by the early 18th-century Scottish Presbyterian minister Robert Wodrow (1679–1734). It argues that Scottish news culture depended on the interaction of printed newspapers, professionally produced newsletters from London, personal letters and oral communication. For Wodrow, at least, personal letters were the most important source. No widely circulated commercial newsletter was produced in Scotland, and personal letters were vital for communicating information about the Scottish parliament, the church courts and the Westminster parliament after the Anglo–Scottish Union. News provided as a gift, rather than a commodity, served social functions. The article explores two moments at which Wodrow paid particular attention to parliamentary news: the ratification of the Union in 1706–7, and the passage of the Episcopalian Toleration, Patronage and Yule Vacation Acts in 1712.

Keywords: news; letters; Scottish parliament; British parliament; Church of Scotland; Robert Wodrow

Around the end of January 1707, Robert Wodrow, minister of Eastwood, Renfrewshire, received a letter from Edinburgh. After acknowledging receipt of a letter from Wodrow, his correspondent gave a detailed account of the previous day's business in the Scottish parliament. Having recently ratified the Treaty of Union with England, parliament had proceeded to consider how Scotland's towns would be represented in the British legislature when the Union came into force on 1 May. The burghs were to be classed into single-member districts, and parliamentarians discussed several possible schemes. Acknowledging that he could not remember how the burghs were grouped, the writer referred Wodrow to the printed minutes of parliament. Wodrow's correspondent then discussed rumours that the Stuart claimant of the throne ('the P[retended] K[ing] J[ames]') planned to invade Scotland. Mentioning the 'great deal of talking here about it', he summarised a report on Jacobite preparations from another source, the London newsletter of John Dyer.¹

*I am grateful to Adam Fox and the editors for their helpful comments on drafts of this article.

¹NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 180: John Maxwell to Robert Wodrow, 30 Jan. 1707. Cf. *Minutes of the Proceedings in Parliament* (1706–7), no. 67, 29 Jan. 1707. On the projected invasion, see: Daniel Szechi, *Britain's Lost Revolution? Jacobite Scotland and French Grand Strategy, 1701–1708* (Manchester, 2015), 176–80.

The writer, John Maxwell, was not a professional newsmonger, but rather a friend who wrote as a favour to Wodrow. His residence in Edinburgh allowed him to converse with members of parliament and other eyewitnesses to its business, though in principle he was not entitled to observe sessions himself.² He sent his letter via Glasgow, where it was opened by Wodrow's father, James Wodrow, professor of divinity at Glasgow University. In a note to his son, written on the letter, Professor Wodrow explained that he 'opened this for newes'. He said that he had heard similar reports in a letter to his academic colleague, Principal John Stirling, which was read out in his company. Because there was 'no newes in the prints' – printed newspapers – Professor Wodrow had nothing to add.³ By opening his son's letter, he demonstrated his anxious interest in the passage of the Union, and the contemporary habit of sharing personal correspondence containing news. As James Daybell has remarked, it was common throughout the early modern period 'for letters to be read by persons other than the addressee'.⁴ Indeed, in October 1706, Robert Wodrow had sent a similar letter from Edinburgh on to his patron, the judge Sir John Maxwell, Lord Pollok, adding a note containing information derived from Dyer's newsletter and from 'privat letters' concerning the business of the commission of the general assembly.⁵ Wodrow and his correspondents cited manuscript newsletters in conjunction with printed and oral sources, using their personal letters to summarise and assess stories drawn from the range of media making up the period's news culture.

The papers of Robert Wodrow allow us to explore the production and consumption of scribal news, and its interaction with other media, in early 18th-century Scotland. Wodrow (1679–1734) was born in Glasgow and studied at that city's university. After completing the divinity course under James Wodrow (1637–1707), Robert served as the university's librarian. Following a short period as chaplain and tutor in the household of Lord Pollok, he was ordained to Eastwood in October 1703. He remained in this small rural parish, a few miles south-west of Glasgow, for the rest of his life.⁶ Wodrow is best known as the author of *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution* (1721–2), an extensively documented chronicle of Presbyterian dissent under Charles II and James VII and II.⁷ His letters and journals reported on Scotland's ecclesiastical affairs throughout the first third of the 18th century.⁸ Wodrow also collected accounts

²The orders of parliament sought to limit those observing its proceedings to noblemen's sons, senators of the college of justice and a few other specified officials and servants: *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. K.M. Brown et al., <http://www.rps.ac.uk/>, 1662/5/6, 1685/4/13, M1689/3/16, 1693/4/15, 1698/7/14, 1705/6/20 (accessed 10 Dec. 2020).

³NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 180v: Maxwell to Wodrow, 30 Jan. 1707, undated postscript by James Wodrow.

⁴James Daybell, 'The Scribal Circulation of Early Modern Letters', *HLQ*, lxxix (2016), 365–86, at 371.

⁵NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 78v: Robert Wodrow to Lord Pollok, n.d.. On ministers as communicators of news, compare Sheila McIntyre, '“I heare it so variously reported”: News-Letters, Newspapers, and the Ministerial Network in New England, 1670–1730', *New England Quarterly*, lxxi (1998), 593–614.

⁶W.J. Couper, 'Robert Wodrow', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, iii (1927–9), 112–34; *Oxf. DNB*, s.v. Robert Wodrow (1679–1734).

⁷Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution*, ed. Robert Burns (4 vols, Glasgow, 1828–30). On Wodrow as historian, see: A.M. Starkey, 'Robert Wodrow and the History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland', *Church History*, xliii (1974), 488–98; W.J. Couper, 'Robert Wodrow and his Critics', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, v (1933–5), 238–50.

⁸*The Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Wodrow*, ed. Thomas M'Crie (3 vols, Wodrow Society, 1842–3); Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: or, Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences* (4 vols, Maitland Club, Edinburgh, 1842–3).

of special providences, his contribution to the defence of Christianity against scepticism.⁹ Especially in the early part of his career, he had wide-ranging antiquarian, geographical and philosophical interests.¹⁰ Throughout his life, he was an enthusiastic reader and writer of news.¹¹

Historians have not yet assessed the place of scribal communication in 17th- and 18th-century Scotland's culture of news. Existing works largely neglect professionally written newsletters and personal letters in favour of tracking the emergence of printed news. Some scholars of print have incorrectly assumed that manuscript newsletters were superseded soon after the appearance in 1699 of the first enduring Scottish newspaper.¹² Elsewhere there are only brief comments on newsletters in Scotland.¹³ There has been no systematic search for them in Scottish archives, though it is clear from published correspondence that noblemen received newsletters.¹⁴ Nicola Cowmeadow has discussed the circulation of news in personal letters, but other social historians have assumed that news in the 18th century came in printed papers.¹⁵ There is much to be discovered about scribal news in early modern Scotland.

In mapping a course through this uncharted terrain, this article proceeds in three parts. It first surveys the news media available in Scotland around the start of the 18th century, their distribution and consumption. It then examines two short episodes in Wodrow's life of news, concentrating on his interest in parliaments and the church courts. It first considers the passage of the Union through the Scottish parliament in 1706–7, and then the adoption in the British parliament in 1712 of the Episcopalian Toleration Act, the Patronage Act and the Yule Vacation Act. These case studies suggest that Wodrow relied largely on personal

⁹Wodrow, *Analecta*. On this aspect of Wodrow's work, see: Martha McGill and Alasdair Raffé, 'The Uses of Providence in Early Modern Scotland', in *The Supernatural in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Julian Goodare and Martha McGill (Manchester, 2020), 160–77.

¹⁰A.J. Mann, 'A Spirit of Literature – Melville, Baillie, Wodrow, and a Cast of Thousands: The Clergy in Scotland's Long Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies*, xviii (2004), 90–108, at 101–4; C.W.J. Withers, 'Reporting, Mapping, Trusting: Making Geographical Knowledge in the Late Seventeenth Century', *Isis*, xc (1999), 497–521, esp. 504–5; Thomas Ahnert and Martha McGill, 'Scotland and the European Republic of Letters around 1700', in *Scottish Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Oxford, 2020), 73–93, at 78–9.

¹¹Wodrow's communication of news across the Atlantic is discussed in David Parrish, *Jacobitism and Anti-Jacobitism in the British Atlantic World, 1688–1727* (Woodbridge, 2017), 144–9.

¹²See esp. W.J. Couper, *The Edinburgh Periodical Press* (2 vols, Stirling, 1908); A.J. Mann, *The Scottish Book Trade, 1500–1720: Print Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton, 2000), 20, 103, 147–8, 174, 218; S.W. Brown, 'Newspapers and Magazines', in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, vol. 2: 1707–1800, ed. S.W. Brown and Warren McDougall (Edinburgh, 2012), 676–702; Karin Bowie, 'Newspapers, the Early Modern Public Sphere and the 1704–5 Worcester Affair', in *Before Blackwood's: Scottish Journalism in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alex Benchimol, Rhona Brown and David Shuttleton (2015), 9–20. The fullest account of cheap print (including newspapers) in early modern Scotland is now Adam Fox, *The Press and the People: Cheap Print and Society in Scotland, 1500–1785* (Oxford, 2020).

¹³Couper, *Edinburgh Periodical Press*, i, 71–6; Alasdair Raffé, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660–1714* (Woodbridge, 2012), 20.

¹⁴E.g., *HMC Hamilton Suppl.*, 11–12; *Seafield Correspondence from 1685 to 1708*, ed. James Grant (Scottish History Society, 2nd ser., iii, 1912), 68–9.

¹⁵N.M. Cowmeadow, 'Scottish Noblewomen, the Family and Scottish Politics from 1688–1707', University of Dundee PhD, 2012; R.K. Marshall, *The Days of Duchess Anne: Life in the Household of the Duchess of Hamilton, 1656–1716* (1973), 118; Katharine Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2011), 61–3.

letters, which in turn sometimes drew on professionally written newsletters, to understand parliamentary and ecclesiastical developments.

1

Scotland's news culture around 1700 depended on the interaction between four sources of news: printed newspapers, professionally authored newsletters, personal letters and oral communication. Scotland's first domestically produced printed newspapers were short-lived. A single issue of *Ane Information of the Publick Proceedings of the Kingdom of Scotland, and their Armies* appeared in August 1648. *Mercurius Scoticus* started in July 1651 and ran for almost six months. *Mercurius Caledonius* (1661) reported for three months as parliament determined the character of the Restoration settlement in Scotland. The first *Edinburgh Gazette* – unlike the *London Gazette*, a privately run paper – was published in at least four issues in late 1680.¹⁶ Before the end of the century, however, the main printed newspapers circulating in Scotland came from London. After the *Edinburgh Gazette* was relaunched in 1699, there was an almost continuous succession of Scottish titles. From 1705, there was sometimes significant competition between Edinburgh papers.¹⁷ Like the London press, the Scottish newspapers gave more attention to foreign news than to domestic occurrences; they were often frustratingly brief or evasive about sensitive political matters.

In Scotland as in England, manuscript newsletters continued to supplement and sometimes to contradict printed newspapers during the early decades of the 18th century.¹⁸ Edinburgh postmasters, keepers of the letter office and other agents wrote newsletters from the Scottish capital to provincial towns. But there does not seem to have been a professionally produced Scottish newsletter on anything like the scale of John Dyer's London newsletter. The reasons for this must have included the small size of the Scottish market for news and the fact that, even after 1689, the Scottish parliament's sessions were shorter and less frequent than those of its Westminster counterpart. After the Union, the most influential commercial newsletter in Scotland was that of Dyer, which furnished fuller accounts of parliamentary debates than appeared in printed papers. As a country minister of modest means, Wodrow did not himself subscribe to this expensive product. But he saw copies of Dyer's newsletter in Glasgow and Edinburgh; his correspondents in those towns regularly communicated stories from Dyer to Wodrow at Eastwood.¹⁹

¹⁶David Stevenson, 'Scotland's First Newspaper, 1648', *The Bibliothek*, x (1981), 123–6; Couper, *Edinburgh Periodical Press*, i, 166–9, 174–87, 188–9; R.S. Spurlock, 'Cromwell's Edinburgh Press and the Development of Print Culture in Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review*, xc (2011), 179–203; J.M. Buckroyd, 'Mercurius Caledonius and its Immediate Successors, 1661', *Scottish Historical Review*, liv (1975), 11–21; Fox, *The Press and the People*, 99–100.

¹⁷Bowie, 'Newspapers'.

¹⁸A.W. Barber, '“It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition, Much Less to Write It”: The Continued Importance of Scribal News in the Early 18th Century', *Parl. Hist.*, xxxii (2013), 293–316; R.S. King, 'The Manuscript Newsletter and the Rise of the Newspaper, 1665–1715', *HLQ*, lxxix (2016), 411–37; R.S. King, '“All the News that's Fit to Write”: The Eighteenth-Century Manuscript Newsletter', in *Travelling Chronicles: News and Newspapers from the Early Modern Period to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. S.G. Brandtæg, Paul Goring and Christine Watson (Leiden, 2018), 95–118.

¹⁹Barber, '“It Is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition, Much Less to Write It”', 299. On Dyer's newsletter, see also: H.L. Snyder, 'Newsletters in England, 1689–1715: With Special Reference to John Dyer – a Byway in the History of England', in *Newsletter to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. D.H. Bond and W. R. McLeod (Morgantown, WV, 1977), 3–19.

More important than newsletters were personal letters containing news.²⁰ For Wodrow, news was typically a gift rather than a commodity, and this was not only for financial reasons. The exchange of news by personal letters served to strengthen friendships and to affirm relationships of patronage.²¹ Wodrow's correspondents synthesised information from printed, manuscript and oral sources. Printed newspapers contained basic facts, which well-informed Scots could be expected to know. 'I need not suggest to you what is in the prints already', wrote one of Wodrow's friends in 1713.²² Wodrow's personal correspondents sought to add to this elementary information, communicating the contents of letters sent to local magistrates and noblemen, stories they had heard in conversation and their own eyewitness reports on events. Concerning the anticipated results of the general election of 1713, one letter to Wodrow referred both to the coverage in the *Post Boy* and to more detailed testimony about local politicians' manoeuvring before the polls in the Glasgow burghs and Lanarkshire.²³ Moreover, personal letters were a vital source of intelligence concerning the institutions remaining in Scotland after 1707, notably the courts of the established Church. Until the appearance of the *Scots Magazine* in 1739, even the Edinburgh newspapers said little about the business of the general assembly and its commission.²⁴ Personal letters supplied the kind of news that could not be found in print or newsletters.

Much news originated in, or passed through, Edinburgh. The postal route from London to Edinburgh brought printed and manuscript news from England and the continent.²⁵ The keeper of the letter office and postmaster general in Edinburgh were thus essential conduits of information. As keepers during the Restoration period, Robert Mein and his son William supplied Edinburgh's town council with 'news letters and gazets'. In April 1690, the contract to provide the council's news was assumed by John Blair, postmaster general.²⁶ The councils of other royal burghs paid one of these officials or another newsletter writer in Edinburgh to supply regular printed and scribal news. John Nimmo, a writer to the signet (solicitor), provided this service for Glasgow and Dumfries in 1687.²⁷ Councils shopped

²⁰ For various perspectives on early modern letters, see e.g., S.E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009); *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, ed. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (Philadelphia, PA, 2016); Alain Kerhervé, 'A Theory of British Epistolary Sociability?', in *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Valérie Capdeville and Alain Kerhervé (Woodbridge, 2019), 145–62.

²¹ On the newsletter as gift and commodity, see: Heiko Droste, 'How Public was the News in Early Modern Times?', in *Handwritten Newspapers: An Alternative Medium during the Early Modern and Modern Periods*, ed. Heiko Droste and Kirsti Salmi-Niklander (Helsinki, 2019), 29–44, esp. 33–5.

²² NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VII, f. 164: John Williamson to Robert Wodrow, 8 June 1713.

²³ NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VII, f. 184: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 19 Sept. 1713.

²⁴ The *Scots Magazine's* reports on the assembly were collected in *Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, ed. Nathaniel Morren (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1838–40).

²⁵ Nikolaus Schobesberger et al., 'European Postal Networks', in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden, 2016), 20–63, at 46–58.

²⁶ A.R.B. Haldane, *Three Centuries of Scottish Posts: An Historical Survey to 1836* (Edinburgh, 1971), 22–6; Couper, *Edinburgh Periodical Press*, i, 73; Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620–1800* (1996), 6; *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1689 to 1701*, ed. Helen Armet (Edinburgh, 1962), 31–2 (quotation).

²⁷ Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library, C1/1/17, p. 279: Glasgow council minutes, 17 Dec. 1687; Dumfries and Galloway Archives, Ewart Library, Dumfries, WA2/5, p. 219: Dumfries council minutes, 14 Feb. 1687.

around in a competitive marketplace of news: at least three writers of newsletters can be identified in 1689, aside from William Mein.²⁸ Noblemen also employed agents to write the news from Edinburgh.²⁹ If some councils discontinued their contracts with Edinburgh newsletter writers after the reappearance of the *Edinburgh Gazette*, this does not indicate the rapid triumph of print implied by William Couper in 1908. Couper twice narrated that Stirling's town council subscribed to the *Edinburgh Gazette* in 1699 because it was cheaper than the news supplied by John Murray, the postmaster general in Edinburgh. In 1703, however, Stirling was paying for both the *Edinburgh Gazette* and Dyer's newsletter, which cost almost three times as much as the new newspaper.³⁰ Scribal news retained its value, even for cash-strapped Scottish burghs.

There were postal services from Edinburgh to many other Scottish towns, though some correspondents used other carriers, servants and friends. Postal deliveries between Edinburgh and Glasgow usually took two days, and Wodrow objected to news reports sent by slower carriers, 'because by the time they came to your hand they were stale'.³¹ When the news from Edinburgh arrived in other parts of the country it was eagerly consumed. If landowners and burgh magistrates were among the first to read the news, inquisitive clergymen such as Wodrow were not far behind. Newspapers and burgh records refer to shops, coffeehouses and taverns at which papers and newsletters could be consulted.³² 'I was not in the Coffee house yesternight so cannot give you the news', wrote Robert Yuill, a former bailie of Glasgow, to Wodrow in 1712. On this occasion, nonetheless, Yuill passed on information received by post to other members of the town's elite.³³ Because of the importance of scribal communication, contemporaries could learn the news by meeting well-informed individuals on the street or at social gatherings.

When he found contradictions between different sources, Wodrow did not always accept what he read in printed newspapers. Adjudicating between conflicting accounts of disorderly protests against the Union in late 1706, he preferred to believe parliament's proclamation against the disturbances. The *Edinburgh Gazette* suggested that demonstrations were less widespread than parliament alleged, but Wodrow considered it a 'Private Paper ... not to be put in ballance w[i]t[h] [th]e proclamation'.³⁴ It was in their personal letters that Wodrow and his correspondents distilled the gist of the news and reconciled divergent reports. These letters communicated what was known in Edinburgh to other large towns and, more importantly, rural communities. Knowing that Wodrow had good connections, James

²⁸Dumfries and Galloway Archives, WA2/5, p.291: Dumfries council minutes, 16 Feb. 1689 (William Menzies); NRS, B48/9/4, p.796: Linlithgow council minutes, 22 June 1689 (John Currie); Glasgow City Archives, C1/1/17, p.343: Glasgow council minutes, 29 June 1689 ([blank] Muir).

²⁹In the mid 1670s, James Johnston supplied Edinburgh news to James Hamilton, earl of Arran. See the letters between the men in NRS, GD406/1: correspondence of the dukes of Hamilton, 1563–1712.

³⁰Couper, *Edinburgh Periodical Press*, i, 74–5, 207; *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, A.D. 1667–1752*, ed. Robert Renwick (Glasgow, 1889), 90, 349.

³¹NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 182: John Maxwell to Robert Wodrow, 3 Feb. 1707; cf. f. 119v: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 28 Nov. 1706.

³²Fox, *The Press and the People*, 212–14, 223; Karin Bowie, *Scottish Public Opinion and the Anglo–Scottish Union, 1699–1707* (Woodbridge, 2007), 24.

³³NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 93: Robert Yuill to Robert Wodrow, 29 Jan. 1712.

³⁴NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 138: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 31 Dec. 1706; cf. f. 170: James Wodrow to Robert Wodrow, 27 Dec. 1706; *A Proclamation against All Tumultuary and Irregular Meetings and Convocations of the Leidges* (Edinburgh, 1706).

Rowat, minister of Dunlop, Ayrshire, beseeched him to send news.³⁵ Scribal communication enabled the full participation of men such as Wodrow and Rowat in early 18th-century Scotland's news culture.

2

There was intense public interest in the proceedings of parliament during the winter of 1706–7. Following the negotiation of a treaty of Union with England, parliamentarians met from 3 October 1706 to debate its terms. Other national bodies also gathered in Edinburgh to consider the Union. The convention of royal burghs addressed parliament with its concerns about trade and taxes in the projected United Kingdom. The commission of the general assembly submitted petitions and lobbied parliamentarians for measures to secure Scottish Presbyterianism after the creation of a predominantly Anglican British parliament.³⁶ Men and women across the country engaged in anguished debates about the Union, joining protests and signing addresses to parliament against the treaty.³⁷ Informing their discussions were numerous printed pamphlets, newspapers and broadsides, including the official record of parliament. As in several preceding sessions, the minutes of each sitting were printed at the command of the royal commissioner.³⁸ From 4 November, parliament also sanctioned the publication of voting lists in the main divisions.³⁹ Nevertheless, to understand the debates in detail, and to identify the principal speakers, contemporaries relied on manuscript letters.

In addition to two substantial memoirs concerning the passage of the Union,⁴⁰ the Wodrow papers include at least 58 letters from Edinburgh reporting on the parliamentary session of 1706–7. Wodrow's correspondence also contains letters from writers elsewhere in Scotland, all avidly following the news from Edinburgh. Wodrow later copied a set of more occasional newsletters, written from Edinburgh from October 1706 to January 1707. These were probably the work of his like-minded friend, Robert Wylie, minister of Hamilton.⁴¹

The letters illustrate the value of accounts of parliament from well-connected correspondents in Edinburgh. Before he arrived in the capital on 30 October, Wodrow received letters from his friend Robert Steuart, a regent (philosophy professor) at Edinburgh's town college and nephew of both Lord Pollok and the lord advocate, Sir James Steuart of

³⁵NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VII, f. 185; James Rowat to Robert Wodrow, 22 Sept. 1713.

³⁶*Addresses against Incorporating Union, 1706–1707*, ed. Karin Bowie (Scottish History Society, 6th ser., xiii, 2018), 37–68; Jeffrey Stephen, *Scottish Presbyterians and the Act of Union 1707* (Edinburgh, 2007).

³⁷Bowie, *Scottish Public Opinion*.

³⁸*Minutes of the Proceedings in Parliament (1706–7)*. Serials with this title were published in 1693, 1698, 1700, 1700–1, 1702, 1703, 1704, 1705. Records of the convention of estates and parliament of 1689–90 were published unofficially at London: *An Account of the Proceedings of the Estates in Scotland, 1689–1690*, ed. E.W.M. Balfour-Melville (2 vols, Scottish History Society, 3rd ser., xlv–xlvii, 1954–5).

³⁹*In the Parliament Monday 4th November 1706, a Vôte was Stated in thir Terms* (Edinburgh, 1706). The titles of the other published voting records were in the same form.

⁴⁰John Bell, 'The Most Memorable Passages of the Life and Times of Mr J B, Written by Himself, 1706', ed. Jeffrey Stephen, in *Miscellany XIV* (Scottish History Society, 6th ser., iv, 2013), 139–228; *Addresses against Incorporating Union*, ed. Bowie, 295–334.

⁴¹NLS, Wod.Qu.XL, ff. 27–33; Karin Bowie, 'A 1706 Manifesto for an Armed Rising against Incorporating Union', *Scottish Historical Review*, xciv (2015), 237–67, at 247, n. 64.

Goodtrees.⁴² Stuart of Goodtrees and his son (also Sir James) were members of parliament.⁴³ Robert Stuart's letters combined summaries of parliament's meetings – perhaps communicated to him by one of his uncles or his cousin – with predictions of the outcome of the session. Though it was expected that the Union would be approved, Stuart reported a rumour that members of the opposition would protest and secede from the chamber. Stuart also offered to supply Wodrow with pamphlets relating to the Union debates.⁴⁴

Once in Edinburgh, Wodrow aimed to write to his father in Glasgow by every post. Professor Wodrow urged his son to '[con]tinou a narration of maters of fact ... [tha]t we may know [wha]t to pray for'.⁴⁵ Robert also wrote to inform his ministerial colleagues in the presbytery of Paisley, who he anticipated would call on his father to read his letters.⁴⁶ The correspondence would serve as a record for the future. Wodrow had preserved selected outgoing letters since his early adulthood, and he recognised the significance of those he now wrote. He twice asked his father to 'keep all my letters till I come home'.⁴⁷ When Robert was about to leave for the west of Scotland in January 1707, James Wodrow encouraged him to 'engage some friend' in Edinburgh 'to write an account of things to us after ye come away'.⁴⁸ Accordingly, Wodrow arranged to receive letters from John Maxwell, the correspondent with whom this article began.

Especially in his first weeks in Edinburgh, Wodrow produced copious and insightful commentary on debates in parliament. Two letters discussed parliament's approval on 12 November of an act providing security for the Church's Presbyterian government. This measure responded to the commission of the general assembly's fears for the future of Presbyterianism in the event of union. But the act was couched in general terms, leaving several of the commission's specific concerns unaddressed.⁴⁹ Wodrow narrated the main developments that were recorded in parliament's minutes for 12 November: the failure of an amendment to free Scots from the English sacramental test; a protest by John Hamilton, Lord Belhaven against the act as insufficient; the adherence to this protest of the dukes of Hamilton, Atholl and other members; the vote in favour of the act. But Wodrow added several important details. Not only did he specify the margin by which the amendment was defeated (28 votes),⁵⁰ but he mentioned that it was briefly suggested that Englishmen should be required to subscribe the Westminster confession of faith and accept Presbyterian government before holding office in Scotland. This would have served as a Scottish

⁴²Alexander Grant, *The Story of the University of Edinburgh during its First Three Hundred Years* (2 vols, 1884), i, 262, 272, ii, 348–9.

⁴³*Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. Brown et al., <http://www.rps.ac.uk/>, 1706/10/2 (accessed 10 Dec. 2020); *The Parliaments of Scotland: Burgh and Shire Commissioners*, ed. M.D. Young (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1992–3), ii, 667.

⁴⁴NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 81: Robert Stuart to Robert Wodrow, 21 Oct. 1706.

⁴⁵NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 153: James Wodrow to Robert Wodrow, 6 Nov. 1706.

⁴⁶NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 102: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 2 Nov. 1706.

⁴⁷*Early Letters of Robert Wodrow, 1698–1709*, ed. L.W. Sharp (Scottish History Society, 3rd ser., xxiv, 1937); NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 100v: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 1 Nov. 1706 (quotation); f. 102: same to same, 2 Nov. 1706.

⁴⁸NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 174: James Wodrow to Robert Wodrow, Dec. 1706/Jan. 1707.

⁴⁹Alasdair Raffie, 'Petitioning in the Scottish Church Courts, 1638–1707', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, xxxviii (2018), 323–36, at 334–5.

⁵⁰John Erskine, earl of Mar wrote that the court majority was 39: *HMC Mar and Kellie*, i, 318.

counterpart to the sacramental test, but the court was unwilling to accept such a measure. Whereas the duke of Hamilton's party, which included many Episcopalians and Jacobites, protested and voted against the Act of Security, Wodrow reported that the 'staunchest presbyterians' withdrew from the chamber, so as neither to vote for an inadequate act nor to appear opposed to the principle of security for the Church. Wodrow himself thought that the act was insufficient, and he continued to worry that the Union would undermine Scottish Presbyterianism.⁵¹

As his lengthy discussion of the Act of Security suggests, Wodrow was particularly attentive to religious dimensions of the debate about union. He sometimes admitted that he did not fully understand the treaty's economic provisions or his informants' reports about parliament's discussions of trade.⁵² Like the newsletters probably by Robert Wylie, Wodrow's correspondence commented in detail on the commission of the general assembly, about which printed sources revealed little. In their letters, Wodrow and Wylie, who were both members of the commission, described its principal fault line – between a minority of supporters of union, and a majority with serious doubts. The latter group consisted largely of ministers, while the former was dominated by lay elders, many of whom also sat in parliament. These elders opposed the commission's petitioning parliament for measures to preserve Scottish Presbyterianism beyond those included in the proposed Act of Security. There was thus a significant struggle in the commission before the signing on 8 November of an address to parliament outlining several specific concerns about the Union. These included the complaint that the sacramental test barred conscientious Scottish Presbyterians from public office in the rest of Britain. The debate encapsulates the divergence between those Scots who prioritised settling the Protestant succession to the throne by means of the Union, and those who feared the consequences for the Church of any departure from the constitutional settlement of 1689–90. Many Presbyterians – Wodrow included – could not support a union that they saw as incompatible with the National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643). The commission's reference to the Covenants – in the final clause of the address of 8 November – was strongly opposed by the leading elders.⁵³ By reporting on the commission's activities, Wodrow helped to reassure other Scots who shared his concerns that the highest church court then sitting had protested against the aspects of the Union that contradicted Presbyterian principles.

3

During the first four months of 1712, Wodrow and other Scottish Presbyterians closely followed the news of three bills then passing through the Westminster parliament. The

⁵¹NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 110: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 12 Nov. 1706; f. 107: same to same, 14 Nov. 1706 (quotation); *Minutes of the Proceedings in Parliament (1706–7)*, no. 19, 12 Nov. 1706.

⁵²NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, f. 116v: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 23 Nov. 1706; f. 119: same to same, 28 Nov. 1706.

⁵³NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.IV, ff. 103–4: Robert Wodrow to James Wodrow, 5 Nov. 1706; f. 105: same to same, 7 Nov. 1706; f. 106, same to same, 9 Nov. 1706; NLS, Wod.Qu.XL, ff. 27–8: newsletters probably by Robert Wylie, 4 Nov., 11 Nov. 1706; NRS, CH1/3/8, pp. 271–6, Register of the Commission of the General Assembly, 7–8 Nov. 1706; *Addresses against Incorporating Union*, ed. Bowie, 48–50; Bell, 'The Most Memorable Passages', ed. Stephen, 191–3.

Episcopalian Toleration Act, a statute reviving the Christmas vacation in the Scottish law courts, and the restoration of the right of lay patrons to present ministers to vacant Scottish parishes seemed to compromise the security for Presbyterianism that had been promised in 1706. At his manse in Eastwood, Wodrow relied on letters for accounts of the parliamentary progress of this alarming legislation.

In this period, Wodrow's main sources of scribal news were again correspondents in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The most important was John Cross (or Corse), a Glasgow merchant and probably the former bailie of that name.⁵⁴ From December 1711 to April 1712, he wrote to Wodrow at least once every four days. Wodrow received more occasional letters from Charles Morthland, professor of oriental languages at the University of Glasgow.⁵⁵ Cross and Morthland saw letters from Thomas Smith, Member for the Glasgow burghs, who corresponded regularly with his wife, the provost and other local magistrates in Glasgow, and sometimes with members of the university and the burgh's clergy. Though Cross supplied Wodrow with much information from Dyer's newsletter and printed newspapers, reports from Smith were his best source of parliamentary news. Cross frequently sent Smith's letters to Wodrow, but expected them to be returned.⁵⁶ Thus Wodrow copied Smith's news onto the letters he received from Cross.⁵⁷ Wodrow also acquired a small number of what appear to be professionally written newsletters from London.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, news about the parliamentary developments that concerned him most came from his personal contacts.

Wodrow's main correspondents in Edinburgh were similarly well informed, though it is less clear how they acquired information about parliament. Matthew Wood was minister of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh, but a native of Glasgow, where he presumably came to know Wodrow.⁵⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel John Erskine of Carnock was a former provost of Stirling, a strict Presbyterian, opponent of the Union and an active ruling elder in the general assembly and its commission, including during the winter of 1706–7.⁶⁰ Knowing that Wodrow had other sources of news, letters from Wood and Erskine supplied private reports and Edinburgh gossip. 'I need not tell you whats publick ... but you shall have whats talked',

⁵⁴ *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow, A.D. 1691–1717* (Scottish Burgh Records Society, 1908), 175, 278, 576; *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 197.

⁵⁵ *Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis: Records of the University of Glasgow from its Foundation till 1727* (4 vols, Maitland Club, 1854), ii, 395–6.

⁵⁶ E.g., NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 58: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 29 Dec. 1711; f. 170: same to same, 25 Apr. 1712; *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 252–3. At 252, the text's reference to 'J.S.' should read 'T.S.'. On Smith's career, see: *HPC 1690–1715*, s.v. Thomas Smith II (*d.* 1716), of Glasgow.

⁵⁷ E.g., NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, ff. 53–4: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 24 Dec. 1711, with addition in Wodrow's hand dated London, 15 Dec. 1711. This is the letter referred to in *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 252. Wodrow practised this habit over several years: David Hayton, 'Traces of Party Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Elections', *Parl. Hist.*, xv (1996), 74–99, at 84, n. 44, 88, n. 61.

⁵⁸ NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, ff. 127, 128, 142–3, 154: newsletters, 1 Mar., 8 Mar., 22 Mar., 5 Apr. 1712.

⁵⁹ Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scotticanae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation* (rev. edn., 8 vols, Edinburgh, 1915–50), i, 46, v, 109.

⁶⁰ *Journal of the Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683–1687*, ed. Walter Macleod (Scottish History Society, 1st ser., xiv, 1893); *Addresses against Incorporating Union*, ed. Bowie, 66, 130, 166, 168; Bell, 'The Most Memorable Passages', ed. Stephen, 200. Erskine should not be confused with his first cousin once removed Lieutenant-Colonel John Erskine of Sand Haven, a supporter of the Union who sat in the Scottish parliament and in the house of commons until 1710: *HPC 1690–1715*, s.v. John Erskine (1660–1733), of Sand Haven, Culross, Fife.

wrote Erskine in January 1712.⁶¹ 'I have no news at this time', admitted Wood, 'only I saw a letter from a p[er]son of good intelligence'.⁶²

As well as including news of the peace congress at Utrecht and criticisms in parliament of the former commander-in-chief, the duke of Marlborough, Wodrow's letters in early 1712 provide a detailed narrative of the three bills' passage through parliament.⁶³ On 29 January, he received from the former bailie Robert Yuill an account, written by Thomas Smith, of parliamentary business on 21 January. That day, Sir Simeon Stewart, Member for Hampshire and part of the October Club of Tory backbenchers, moved for leave to bring in a bill for the toleration of Episcopalian services in Scotland using the English Book of Common Prayer. He was seconded by Sir Alexander Areskine, Member for Fifeshire. The Presbyterian Members John Pringle (Selkirkshire) and George Baillie (Berwickshire) objected, contending that such a measure would contradict the Claim of Right (1689) and the Act of Security. Stewart's motion passed in spite of these arguments. Gloomily, Smith wrote that 'if a motion be made by [tha]t party to over turn our Church establishment it would cary in [thi]s H[ouse] of C[ommons]'. Nevertheless, the ministers William Carstares, Thomas Blackwell and Robert Baillie were in London to represent the Church's concerns about the bill.⁶⁴

Wodrow received a further account of the debate on 21 January from Wood. Wood's letter reported that Stewart, speaking in favour of Episcopalian toleration, had referred to a recent prosecution of an Episcopalian clergyman by the presbytery of Perth. This was probably the case of Henry Murray, whom the presbytery deposed from the ministry on 10 January for intruding on a parish settled with Presbyterian ministers and using the English Prayer Book. A summary of the presbytery's action was printed, helping to make the case for Episcopalian toleration.⁶⁵ Wood's letter went on to describe the bill's presentation to the Commons and its first reading. In response to a suggestion that Episcopalian ministers should swear allegiance to the queen, Wood claimed, the Episcopalian Member for Midlothian, George Lockhart of Carnwath, argued that Presbyterian ministers should have to renounce the Covenants and accept a royal ecclesiastical supremacy in Scotland. These measures would have been unacceptable to the Presbyterian clergy. A letter from Morthland questioned the veracity of this story, attributing it to Dyer.⁶⁶ In this case and others, Wodrow relied on his multiple sources of intelligence to sort fact from rumour. True or

⁶¹NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 73: John Erskine to Robert Wodrow, 8 Jan. 171[2].

⁶²NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 151: Matthew Wood to Robert Wodrow, 10 Apr. 1712.

⁶³For other discussions, see: Daniel Szechi, 'The Politics of "Persecution": Scots Episcopalian Toleration and the Harley Ministry, 1710–12', in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W.J. Sheils, *Studies in Church History*, xxi (Oxford, 1984), 275–87, at 283–5; Daniel Szechi, *George Lockhart of Carnwath, 1689–1727: A Study in Jacobitism* (East Linton, 2002), 94–7.

⁶⁴NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 93: Yuill to Wodrow, 29 Jan. 1712, with addition in Wodrow's hand dated London, 22 Jan. 1712; *CJ*, xvii, 33.

⁶⁵NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 94: Matthew Wood to Robert Wodrow, 31 Jan. 1712; *The Church of England still Persecuted or The Case of Mr. Murray, Depos'd by the Presbytry of Perth, on the 10th of January, for Reading the English Service* ([1712]); Ben Rogers, 'The House of Lords and Religious Toleration in Scotland: James Greenshields's Appeal, 1709–11', in *The Church and the Law*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick, Charlotte Methuen and Andrew Spicer, *Studies in Church History*, lvi (Cambridge, 2020), 320–37, at 335.

⁶⁶NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 94: Wood to Wodrow, 31 Jan. 1712; f. 99: Charles Morthland to Robert Wodrow, 2 Feb. 1712; *CJ*, xvii, 35.

not, the report was an early sign of the trouble that the Toleration Act would create for the Presbyterian clergy.

Wodrow learned of the bill's second reading in the Commons, on 25 January, in a letter from Smith, passed on by Cross.⁶⁷ Wood then reported that the three Presbyterian ministers in London were petitioning the queen, Lords and Commons against the bill, information he obtained from letters sent by the ministers to the moderator of the commission in Edinburgh.⁶⁸ By 11 February, the provost of Glasgow had received news of how Scottish Members voted at the bill's third reading. Erskine sent Wodrow a note of the voting record on the following day.⁶⁹ In the Lords, the bill was amended to require all Scottish ministers to swear an oath abjuring the Stuart pretender. Knowing that the Presbyterian clergy had expressed scruples about the abjuration oath in use in England, the Lords adjusted its text to make it more palatable. The amendment was an attempt to sabotage the bill, by ensuring that it would provide little benefit to the predominantly Jacobite Episcopalian clergy. Wood wrote that Carnwath and Areskine 'curs'd & blasphem'd' against the amendment, and the bishop of Edinburgh now urged Episcopalian parliamentarians to vote against the bill.⁷⁰ Unfortunately for the Presbyterians, however, the Commons restored the phrasing of the abjuration oath to which many ministers of the Kirk objected. The Lords then accepted the bill as amended by the Commons.⁷¹ Wodrow heard that the October Club threatened to vote against new taxes unless the Commons' version of the bill was accepted.⁷² The Episcopalian Toleration Act required Episcopalian ministers who sought protection and all the Presbyterian parish clergy to swear the abjuration oath.⁷³ As we shall see, this element of the legislation created serious divisions in the Church.

In mid March, Wodrow's correspondents wrote that bills to restore the Yule vacation and lay patronage were expected imminently.⁷⁴ Smith's reports of parliamentary business became briefer, perhaps because he expected the bills to pass without difficulty. He seemed demoralised by the momentum of the October Club and their Scottish allies, whom Cross characterised as 'a party of men in the hous [tha]t will stick at nothing [tha]t will give uneasiness to this Church'.⁷⁵ The fate of the commission of the general assembly's petition to the Lords against the Patronage Bill reflected the Presbyterians' weakness. Scrupulously refusing to acknowledge 'lords spiritual', the document was directed to 'the Peers of Great Britain, In Parliament Assembled'. This error of form prompted a complaint in the Lords, even though the commission's similarly addressed representation against the Toleration Bill

⁶⁷NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 97: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, with addition in Wodrow's hand dated London, 26 Jan. 1712; *CJ*, xvii, 38.

⁶⁸NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 101: Matthew Wood to Robert Wodrow, 8 Feb. 1712; *HMC Laing*, ii, 162.

⁶⁹NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 107: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 11 Feb. 1712; ff. 108–9: John Erskine to Robert Wodrow, 12 Feb. 1712; *CJ*, xvii, 73.

⁷⁰NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 114: copy in Robert Wodrow's hand of letter by ?Thomas Smith, ? 15 Feb. 1712; f. 119: Matthew Wood to Robert Wodrow, c. 26 Feb. 1712 (quotation); *LJ*, xix, 379.

⁷¹*CJ*, xvii, 103–4, 113; *LJ*, xix, 384, 385; NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 121: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 28 Feb. 1712; f. 122: same to same, 3 Mar. 1712; f. 125: John Erskine to Robert Wodrow, 1 Mar. 1712.

⁷²*Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 303; Wodrow, *Analecta*, ii, 28–9.

⁷³10 Ann. c. 7.

⁷⁴NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 129: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 13 Mar. 1712; f. 131: John Erskine to Robert Wodrow, 14 Mar. 1712.

⁷⁵NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 136v: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 22 Mar. 1712.

had been read without demur.⁷⁶ On 17 April, Wood reported that the Patronage Bill had passed in the Lords, with only four Scottish peers voting against.⁷⁷ The Yule Vacation Act, which was approved by both Houses on 12 April, placed no demands on ministers and ceased to be of much concern to Wodrow and his correspondents.⁷⁸ But the Patronage Act was a major blow to the Church's Presbyterian constitution, and the source of recurrent struggles for the next century and a half.⁷⁹

In the spring, Scots awaited the reaction of the church courts to the three bills. As we noted earlier, observers relied especially on personal letters for news of these important bodies. In the absence of reliable reports, the church courts' business could be the subject of speculation and malicious rumours. When the synod of Glasgow and Ayr, meeting at Ayr in April 1712, called a fast day in terms critical of the perceived threats to the Church, some characterised its plain speaking as disloyalty. In Edinburgh, Erskine heard talk that the government would seek to prosecute members of the synod.⁸⁰ Wood was reassured when Wodrow sent him an eyewitness account of the synod, for its actions were 'sadly misrepresented here [i.e., in Edinburgh] by a letter from some p[er]son in Glasgow'. Wood reciprocated by describing the next meeting of the synod of Lothian and Tweeddale.⁸¹

The most hotly anticipated response to the legislation was that of the general assembly, which met in Edinburgh on 1 May. Wodrow, who was present, described the assembly's proceedings in letters home to his wife, Margaret Warner, a practice he had begun in 1709 and would continue yearly until 1729. Debates in the assembly made clear that the most immediately problematic component of the recent legislation was the requirement that Presbyterian ministers swear the oath of abjuration. Lengthy conferences at the assembly considered various concerns about the oath, of which the most significant was the perception that, by swearing, ministers would endorse the Anglican conformity expected of successors to the throne, thus contradicting Presbyterian principles.⁸² In March, when it became clear that the Toleration Act would impose the oath on Presbyterians, the commission of the general assembly had addressed Queen Anne, testifying the clergy's support for the Hanoverian succession, but warning that many ministers objected to the terms of the oath. Some members of the assembly thought that the commission's address had misinterpreted the oath, to suggest that it was compatible with Presbyterian values. As these

⁷⁶ *LJ*, xix, 422; NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 101: Wood to Wodrow, 8 Feb. 1712; f. 157v: John Erskine to Robert Wodrow, 15 Apr. 1712; f. 162v: John Cross to Robert Wodrow, 19 Apr. 1712; *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 307. The address was printed in *A Collection of Papers against the Scots Toleration and Patronages* (1712), second pagination sequence, 72–5. The three ministers amended the address and it was presented a second time: *LJ*, xix, 425.

⁷⁷ NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 160: Matthew Wood to Robert Wodrow, 17 Apr. 1712; *LJ*, xix, 427.

⁷⁸ *LJ*, xix, 427; *CJ*, xvii, 184; 10 Ann. c. 13; NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 148: Charles Morthland to Robert Wodrow, 5 Apr. 1712.

⁷⁹ 10 Ann. c. 12; L.A.B. Whitley, *A Great Grievance: Ecclesiastical Lay Patronage in Scotland until 1750* (Eugene, OR, 2013); Richard Sher and Alexander Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party in the Church of Scotland, 1750–1800', in *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland, 1408–1929*, ed. Norman Macdougall (Edinburgh, 1983), 197–220.

⁸⁰ NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 158: Erskine to Wodrow, 15 Apr. 1712. See also: *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 306. The synod's act was published, but probably arrived in Edinburgh after the rumours: *Act of the Provincial Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, for Keeping a Solemn Fast and Humiliation, on the 24th April, 1712* ([Glasgow, 1712]).

⁸¹ NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu.VI, f. 160: Wood to Wodrow, 17 Apr. 1712; f. 167: same to same, 26 Apr. 1712.

⁸² *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 285, 288–9.

critics pointed out, only parliament, as the body imposing the oath, could authoritatively clarify its meaning. When the assembly came to approve the commission's actions regarding the oath, several members voted against and many more abstained, because of their scruples about the address.⁸³ A major split was avoided at the assembly. But it was clear that, as the deadline of 1 November for swearing approached, there would be a great controversy over the oath.⁸⁴ More than the competition of tolerated Episcopalian worship, divisions between Presbyterian jurors and non-jurors weakened the Church of Scotland for the rest of the decade.⁸⁵

4

Like their English contemporaries, early 18th-century Scots who were fascinated by parliamentary developments relied on scribal sources of news. Robert Wodrow read about the Scottish and British parliaments in printed newspapers; he received accounts of Westminster's business deriving from professionally written newsletters. But he learned most about parliament by reading personal letters. Until 1707, Wodrow could ask his associates in Edinburgh to send him summaries of the Scottish parliament's deliberations. That he had access to eyewitness reports of proceedings in the Westminster parliament after the Union was a consequence of his friendships with important men in Glasgow, one of Scotland's leading burghs, to whose magistrates and councillors Thomas Smith was accountable. The letters of the minister Matthew Wood in Edinburgh suggest that he had similar connections, and prove that Wodrow was not unique among the clergy in seeing detailed parliamentary news. If Wodrow and Wood were unusually well-informed ministers, they nevertheless served as conduits of intelligence to clergymen in more remote locations. Further research would be required to establish whether Scotland's noblemen and lairds circulated news in similar ways.⁸⁶

More than for some of his English contemporaries, then, for Wodrow, scribal news came freely from his friends, and was by no means fully commodified. Scotland lacked a widely distributed commercial newsletter comparable to John Dyer's, and Wodrow recognised the necessity of cultivating his correspondence with well-placed figures in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Another advantage of the personal letter was its capacity to filter and compare various sources of news. John Cross and others summarised Dyer's newsletter when it added to what was in the printed papers, but they prioritised Smith's reports whenever they were more accurate or complete. A further reason for Wodrow to rely on personal correspondence more than on newspapers or newsletters was his desire for reliable descriptions of the meetings of the church courts. Wodrow was a prolific reporter on the Kirk's general assembly, but he was not alone. His correspondents in other parts of Scotland sent him accounts

⁸³ *Collection of Papers*, second pagination sequence, 49–51; *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Convened at Edinburgh, the First Day of May 1712* (Edinburgh, 1712), 34–9; *Correspondence of Wodrow*, ed. M'Crie, i, 298–9.

⁸⁴ The deadline of 1 Aug. 1712 set by 10 Ann. c. 7 was extended to 1 Nov. by 10 Ann. c. 32.

⁸⁵ Raffé, *Culture of Controversy*, 90–1, 205–7; Alasdair Raffé, 'The Hanoverian Succession and the Fragmentation of Scottish Protestantism', in *Negotiating Toleration: Dissent and the Hanoverian Succession, 1714–1760*, ed. Nigel Aston and Benjamin Bankhurst (Oxford, 2019), 147–67.

⁸⁶ See the case study of the earl of Wigtown in Robin Eagles, 'Reporting Trials and Impeachments in the Reign of George I', in this volume.

of their synod and presbytery meetings, satisfying his demand for news of institutions that were not much discussed in print or newsletters. Finally, we can conclude that Wodrow's consumption of scribal news was part of his social life. Wodrow valued the sharing of news in personal letters and its tendency to reaffirm his social ties. Whatever the differences that future research might find between Wodrow's news-gathering practices and those of his contemporaries, epistolary sociability was surely at the heart of early 18th-century news culture.