

The Royal Entry of Charles II

1661

Professor Paulina Kewes in conversation with Professor Ian Archer

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Paulina Kewes: I'm with Dr Ian Archer in the Fellows' Library of Jesus College, Oxford. Ian, what was London's attitude to the restoration of the monarchy in 1660?

Ian Archer: Well I think the first point to make is that London was probably rather crucial to the achievement of the restoration. And the reason that I say that is because the city, over the course of the winter 1659-60, objected to the army and the Rump Parliament: the Rump Parliament given that disparaging term because it was the republican hardliners, the moderate MPs having been purged in 1648. And basically the city staged tax strike and began to call for a free parliament which was guaranteed, almost guaranteed to bring about demands for the restoration of the monarchy. The reason why the city became so hostile to republican regimes was probably because the religious moderates who were in charge of the city's government were horrified by the spectre of religious fanaticism, what they saw as religious fanaticism, as the Army promoted religious radicalism, as new groups like the Quakers were becoming ever more prominent, and these religious radicals are associated in the minds of the citizens with social subversion. So there's a very strong conservative reaction in the city in 1659-60, and the monarchy is seen as the best guarantor of order and stability.

PK: How was the king received in London?

IA: Well I think the best answer is to say rapturously. We have very full accounts of the king's reception in the city on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday, on 29 May. This is his first arrival in London and it's a huge celebration. There are bonfires and bells all over the city. So massive enthusiasm. Indeed, one can see the early months of the reign as constituting a sort of love-in between Charles and the city. He accepts (rather unusually) an entertainment at the Guildhall quite early in his reign, on 5 July, which is a break perhaps from the normal protocols of the succession. It's a sign of Charles's accessibility, interesting enough.

PK: So how long did this honeymoon last? Can we see changes in opinion in the king's first year?

IA: Well I think we have to recognise that Londoners may have been very enthusiastic about the restoration. But they had very different expectations of their new king. They had perhaps a rather different agenda from that of the royalists who came back with the king from exile. One of the chief sources of tension was religion, because Charles had promised in the Declaration of Breda, that was issued before that his reception into England, he promised in that declaration that he would offer his subjects liberty of conscience: that is, I suppose in other terms, religious toleration. So this would mean that dissenting groups who were very prominent in the city would be able to exercise their religion freely. That's what they expected. And perhaps Charles

was sincere in his intentions to do that; but he was derailed by what we could call an Anglican reaction, a grassroots movement in support of the Church of England which gave the bishops, the newly restored bishops, extra leverage. So this increasing prominence of the bishops, and a sense that hardline Anglican policies are going to be followed, that leads to increasing disillusionment in the city. And we can see that already in the early months of 1661 where prominent Presbyterian preachers like Zachary Crofton are 'banging on' (I think that's actually the words used in the documents) banging on against the bishops. The other problem perhaps is that the city has, in the eyes of the royalists, has a very tarnished reputation. The king's chief minister, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, had described London as 'a sink of all the ill humours in the kingdom'. In other words, London had been responsible for the Civil War and indeed Charles I's execution, in the eyes of many conservatives. So London was not to be trusted. So we see over the course of those early months developing mistrust between city and crown. And that's confirmed in the elections to the Cavalier Parliament in March, shortly before Charles's coronation. Whereas the rest of the country was turning in good Cavaliers and good Anglicans, London responded by electing four dissenters (two Presbyterians and two Independents, that means Congregationalists really). So London's electing people to Parliament who are out of step with the mood in the provinces and signalling their disillusionment with the religious position that the regime has taken up.

PK: James I, Charles II's grandfather, had staged an entry into London. Charles I, his father, the Martyr King, had cancelled his. Why was Charles II so keen on having a proper entry in London?

IA: Well, I think that it's very much part of an effort to project a return of order after all the disruptions of the Civil War, in which the social hierarchy had seemed threatened that a number of points. By staging a royal entry and by bringing the whole court and the political elite onto the city streets, Charles was able to project the principles of hierarchy which underpinned monarchy. As his minister Clarendon put it, 'the novelties and new inventions with which the kingdom had been so much intoxicated could be discountenanced and discredited in the eyes of the people'. So it was an attempt to return to business as usual.

PK: So Charles returns to the country in the spring of 1660, and the entry takes place roughly a year later. Who was responsible?

IA: It was essentially the city of London who appointed a committee to oversee the project and to see to its financing. They commissioned John Ogilby for the 'poetical part' of the show. Ogilby was a classical poet and a man with court connections. They needed an architect to oversee the construction of the arches and marshal all the artificers who were involved in putting it together, and that man was Peter Mills, the city surveyor. It's interesting that this at entertainment cost of the city about £11,000, just £100 of that went to Ogilby the poet, which is telling us just how important the material aspect of the shows were: the money paid for the joiners and carpenters and painters was much greater.

PK: What kinds of message was the entry trying to communicate?

IA: It was trying to project an image of Charles's dynastic legitimacy, of the monarchy's defeat of the forces of sedition, which had been responsible for his father's loss of his throne. It was showing how the monarchy, with a strong navy and army, could project England's power overseas, and lead to the revival of trade: there is a strong emphasis in much of the entertainment on commercial prosperity.

PK: What's the source of our knowledge about the arches?

IA: John Ogilby was very keen to get out a version of the events, and over the course of 1661 there were three editions of Ogilby's account of the entry, which describes the arches and gives the text of the speeches. But it's clear that it always intended a more deluxe production, and in the following year appears a magnificent folio volume which includes the speeches and the description, but also has these wonderful engravings by David Loggun and also depictions of the procession done by Wencelas Hollar.

PK: How much is conventional, and how much is new?

IA: Really, of course a lot of the stuff about dynastic legitimacy and loyalty and the way the monarchy will promote peace and posterity, those were standard themes and we can see them in previous entries. What gives this one more edginess is the fact that the crown has been subjected to a real challenge, that it's faced the forces of sedition. And if we look closely at the first of the arches, we can see these themes being explored. But another theme which is much more prominent in 1661 than it had been in previous entries, was that of commercial prosperity. And this does reflect England's emergence as a global trading power, and also a growing perception of the importance of commerce to the power of the crown, because it's that that commerce which is giving the crown of money that it needs to project power internationally.

PK: Okay Ian, so which arches are we going to look at?

IA: Well I think we can start by at the first of the arches that Charles encountered. And what we see here, the most prominent figure is the image of the king himself in the midst of the royal oak, in which he had sheltered after the Battle of Worcester. And he's flanked by figures representing on the left James I, and on the right Charles I. So there you have the claim to dynastic legitimacy. And in that painting that we see above the entry, that's showing the figure of Charles II driving away usurpation. And if we look at the lower level panels, on the left we've got Charles's entry to his kingdom at Dover, and on the right this very striking image which many contemporaries commented on: the image of the severed heads of the executed regicides.

PK: You mentioned commerce?

IA: Yes, so that's most prominently displayed on what we call the Navigation Arch. And if we look closely this, there is this wonderful painting which shows the launching of the ship *Sovereign of the Seas* by Charles I and his son, the present king, Charles II is shown as a young man in that image. Now if we go down to the lower register, the lower level of the arch, we can see two deities: on the left is Mars, the God of War; and on the right is Neptune who commanded the oceans. And then it's interesting if we just move up a level, you can see images of the Tower of London, representing martial strength, and then above Neptune we can see the Royal Exchange, which was the assembly place for merchants in London. So what we are getting here is a linkage between military strength and commercial supremacy. And in the speeches which accompanied this arch, we have a figure of the River Thames, which links the theme of imperialism to maritime power, and there's also, in a rather popular touch, there's a song performed by the sailors from the Navy, which is full of patriotic attacks on foreigners, celebrating England's military power.

PK: What do we know about contemporary reactions to the entry?

IA: Well we've got quite a lot of accounts from spectators, and rather more than we have for 1604. Among those spectators was Samuel Pepys, the famous diarist. Another one was Thomas

Rugg, a barber in the West End. One of the things that is rather striking is that these accounts same relatively little about the speeches and the iconography of the arches. And they spend much more time on the details of the procession, the order in which people appear and what they are wearing. So another commentator, Peter Munday, is marvelling at the number of ostrich feathers that are being consumed.

PK: So did everyone who saw the entry gets the point?

IA: No, we've got definite evidence of misreadings of this event. If we take the loyalist pamphlet *The City's Loyalty Displayed*. It's a celebration of the entry but it seems to misread the messages. So on that first arch that we were looking at, it gets the point about Charles II in the Royal Oak, but misses entirely the point about rebellion. On the second arch, this tract says nothing about navigation, which is the central theme. So that doesn't seem to have been got across very effectively.

PK: Was everyone equally impressed? Were they all royalists?

IA: No, some of the dissenters who came to look at the arches were not impressed. They saw this as vanity and heathenism; that's a quote from Ralph Jocelyn who was the minister of a parish in Essex. Jocelyn clearly paid close attention to some of the detail on the arches. And he expressed anxiety about one of the inscriptions; it's in Latin, but translated it meant 'I give thee power without end'. And of course Jocelyn referenced that in terms of the experience of absolute monarchy; this was an anxiety about the return of tyranny that he was facing. So there's quite a lot of anxiety. And right at the extreme we've got the real religious radicals, the real nutcases if you like, the Fifth Monarchy man who it seems attempted to burn the arches down a few days before the entry as a sign of their protest against the crown.

Bodleian items featured (by shelfmark): B 6.3. Art (3); Wood 398; Wood 401; Johnson b.56a.