
THE SECRET PRESS

The Puritan printer Robert Waldegrave (c.1554-1603/4) printed the anonymous *State of the Church of England Laid Open*, commonly referred to as Diotrephes' Dialogue, in London during the first two weeks of April, 1588. His house in Paul's Churchyard was searched on April 16, 1588, and his press seized, along with copies of the book. On May 13, 1588, the Court of the Stationers' Company ordered Waldegrave's press destroyed and the books burned.

In *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman*, Leland H. Carlson has suggested, on grounds of style, that Martin Marprelate was the author of Diotrephes' Dialogue (pp. 332-4). If so, the Marprelate tracts take on a new dimension in that Martin's decision to write the tracts may have been motivated in part by the bishops' burning of his book.

The first of the Marprelate tracts, the *Epistle*, was printed by Robert Waldegrave circa October 15, 1588 on a secret press at East Molesey Priory, a manor house just across the Thames from Hampton Court Palace belonging to Elizabeth (nee Hussey) Crane (d.1606?), widow of Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Household, Anthony Crane (d.1583), second son of Robert Crane of Chilton Court, Suffolk. For the history of the manor at East Molesey see:

'Parishes: East and West Molesey', in *A History of the County of Surrey: Volume 3*, ed. H E Malden (London, 1911), pp. 451-456. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/surrey/vol3/pp451-456> [accessed 19 April 2020].

In 1518 the prior and convent demised to Sir Thomas Heneage, kt., the manor of 'East Molesey, with all their land and all their tithes in the precinct of East Molesey and Thames Ditton, and their live stock there; for which he was to pay a rent, partly in money and partly in kind, amounting in all to £26 2s. 2d.' The lease was for a term of sixtysix years. (fn. 13)

Henry VIII, when engaged in making the Chase of Hampton, desired to obtain possession of the manor and estate of East Molesey, and gave in exchange for it to the priory of Merton certain lands, tenements, advowsons, &c., formerly belonging to the suppressed monastery of Calwich, co. Stafford. (fn. 14) Whereupon 'John, Prior of Merton, and the convent by indenture dated 1536 conveyed to the king all their tithes, oblations, and profits in East Molesey, parcel of the parsonage of Kingston, and all their lands, &c., in East Molesey or elsewhere reputed parcel of the said manor.' (fn. 15)

Sir Thomas Heneage was Gentleman Usher to Wolsey and counsel to the Prior of Merton, and resided at East Molesey (fn. 16) in a stately house which he had himself built. The estate which he held on lease from Merton Priory becoming the property of the Crown, as shown above, he appears to have resigned his lease, and to have obtained from the king a new grant of Molesey Prior, with tithes in East Molesey of the annual value of £10, with court-leet and view of frankpledge. He died without issue in 1553; the

renewed lease expired in 1584, but in 1571 Anthony Crane obtained from the queen a lease in reversion of the manor, which included a mansionhouse, with 2 acres and 2 roods of land annexed, and 125 acres and 2 roods of other land, at the same rent at which it was held by Sir Thomas Heneage. (fn. 17)

The second Marprelate tract, the *Epitome*, was printed in November at Sir Richard Knightley's manor of Fawsley in Northamptonshire.

The secret press was then moved to Coventry, to John Hales' property, the Whitefriars, which was empty at the time. Two tracts, a broadside entitled *Certain Mineral and Metaphysical School-points*, and *Hay Any Work For Cooper*, were printed at the Whitefriars during the months January-March, 1589.

In early April, 1589, Waldegrave resigned his post, and the secret press was without a printer until July, when John Hodgkins took on the position, and printed the *Theses Martinianae* and the *Just Censure and Reproof of Martin Junior* at Roger Wigston's manor of Wolston Priory.

The secret press was then moved to Newton Lane near Manchester, where it was seized in a raid by the Earl of Derby's men on August 14, along with the manuscript of the Marprelate tract, *More Work For Cooper*, on which Hodgkins and his two assistants were working at the time. In September, the final tract, Martin's *Protestation*, was printed on a press which had been left behind at Wolston Priory.

The operations of the secret press were managed throughout by John Penry (1562/3-1593), assisted in the later stages by Job Throckmorton (1545-1601). Penry's own tracts, as well as another Puritan tract, the *Demonstration* of John Udall (c.1560-1592/3), were printed concurrently with the Marprelate tracts.

Penry's involvement provides a clue to the funding and setting up of the secret press. It seems reasonably certain that the secret press was originally set up by Robert Dudley (1532/3-1588), Earl of Leicester, who had urged Penry to write against the bishops and who had assured Penry that he would receive only a token punishment if caught. Information that a nobleman, now deceased, had urged Penry to write against the bishops was in the hands of the government in September, 1589: "It is confesed that Penrie hath sayde before any of these Libells came forthe, that a Noble man deceased did encourage him to write bitterlye against ye Bishops and that he should not be imprisoned by the Commissioners but by some others for a fashion, and so shortly after delyvered." (Wilson 25; Arber 117). Leicester died on September 4, 1588, but he was still alive when the secret press began operation in the late spring or early summer of 1588 with the printing of Penry's *Defence*.

The following passage from Collinson demonstrates that Leicester, whose political power was crumbling in the 1580's as Archbishop John Whitgift's increased, had a powerful motive for encouraging the printing activities of the Puritans, particularly after

Whitgift had succeeded in obtaining a Star Chamber decree which allowed him to silence the Puritan printer, Robert Waldegrave. According to Collinson:

Leicester's death had been preceded by the slow attrition of his political influence, to the advantage of enemies who were diametrically opposed to Elizabeth's old favourite in their religious policy. The evidence of his church patronage suggests that in his prime Leicester lent his support with some consistency to those best described as Grindalians: zealous preaching protestants who were moderate puritans in their attitude to current controversies and not disposed to stand on their ecclesiastical dignity. But in his later years he moved closer to the more extreme, presbyterian fringe. He was friendly to John Field, installed Cartwright as master of his hospital at Warwick, and took Humfrey Fen and John Knewstub as chaplains to the Netherlands during his captaincy-general. A young Oxford puritan left his preaching to become his secretary and both he and Fen sought the approval of the London *classis* for their appointments. That Leicester now made friends of this kind is itself a token that he had lost the effective patronage of major ecclesiastical appointments of which he had once boasted. That was a direct consequence of the rise of Whitgift, which he had not opposed but which he must have lived to regret. The earl and the archbishop confronted each other over church policy in the House of Lords and, if we are to believe a story told by Izaak Walton, in the presence of the Queen herself. During Leicester's absence in the Netherlands, Whitgift was made a privy councillor, apparently by Burghley's means. He was the first prelate to sit on the Council since the death of Cardinal Pole, 'whereat', the archbishop's secretary and biographer tells us, 'the earl was not a little displeased'. Lords Buckhurst and Cobham, both adversaries of Leicester and 'joined in like affection to the archbishop', were preferred at the same time. Thereafter, according to Sir George Paule, 'the archbishop's courses . . . were not so much crossed nor impeded as heretofore; but by reason of his daily attendance and access, he thus oftentimes gave impediment to the earl's designments in clergy causes'. (pp.386-7)

It thus seems likely that Leicester was instrumental in setting up and funding the secret press, installing Penry as its manager, and arranging in advance for the placement of the press in the homes of various of his highly-placed Puritans allies. All the Marprelate tracts with the exception of Martin's *Epistle* were printed within a few miles of Leicester's brother Ambrose Dudley's seat of Warwick Castle and Leicester's own Warwickshire seat of Kenilworth. Moreover, although Leicester had died by the time the press was moved north from East Molesey, plans were afoot to move it into Northamptonshire at least as early as "St. Jamestide" (i.e., 25 July 1588), at which time Penry spoke to Sir Richard Knightley (1533-1615) about the possibility of housing the press at Fawsley.

It seems unlikely that it was anticipated, prior to Leicester's death, that the Marprelate tracts would be printed on the secret press. Leicester and Oxford had every reason to dislike and distrust each other, and their co-operation in a project of this nature seems impossible. It seems more likely that Oxford seized the moment when Leicester died, and by means not yet known to us, succeeded in getting the tracts to Penry, who printed them because of their anti-episcopal content without knowing the identity of their author.

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