History The Journal of the Historical Association History

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Robert Harley as Secretary of State and his Intelligence Work: 1702–1708

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Abstract
This article seeks to reassess Robert Harley's role as Secretary of State (1704–10) and especially his work in the intelligence and espionage fields of his day. It examines not only his reputation in such affairs but his skills and techniques in early eighteenth-century espionage, and also his failures. It sets out the important administrative background of Harley's espionage work, and how he handled and processed secret material through his secretarial office. It also explores the cases of some of his secret agents, especially that of the notorious William Greg, who was later exposed as an agent of the French government and cost Harley not only his reputation for astuteness, but his post as Secretary of State. Above all, however, Harley's secretaryship of state shows how by the early eighteenth-century, espionage had become an essential part of the routine of the early modern state.

I

'No person since the time of secretary Walsingham ever had better intelligence, or employed more money to procure it', wrote auditor Edward Harley of his brother Robert.[1] This is a heady comparison, if indeed one believes, as Edward Harley evidently did, in the myth of Francis Walsingham and his superior espionage skills. Another contemporary compared Robert Harley with the shrewdness of Oliver Cromwell by stating that he 'spends more in spies than Cromwell ever did'.[2] Certainly, Robert Harley had a personal reputation for the values that might well be thought essential to any early modern intelligencer: he was devious, full of trickery, and all too fond of secrecy. Yet, Henry St John, his former client, disagreed, remarking that Harley was actually 'a man of whom nature meant to make a spy, or at most a captain of miners; and whom fortune, in one of her most whimsical moods…[had] made a general'.[3] Even so, as Lord Strafford commented: 'Harley is

[1] *Historical Manuscripts Commission* [hereafter *HMC*], *Portland Papers* (10 vols; London, 1891–1931), V, p. 647.
[2] John Matthias Schullenburg in a letter to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, in J. M. Kemble (ed.), *State Papers and Correspondence Illustrative of the Social and Political State of Europe from the Revolution to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (London, 1857), p. 491.
[3] St John to Swift, 17 March 1719, in J. Hawkesworth (ed.), *The Works of Jonathan Swift* (18 vols; London, 1781), XV, p. 231.

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generally allowed as cunning a man as any in England, and has been always employing spies and inspectors into every office to have a general information of everything.'[4]

This article will examine Harley's role as Secretary of State between 1704 and 1708, and in particular his work in the world of intelligence and espionage. By probing Harley's motives and practices, it will link these to the important administrative developments within the Secretary of State's office that were already taking place in the era, how such secret material was handled, and how office practice worked, and how this dictated the practices and the use of intelligence material. This article will also examine Harley's personality and how his agent, Daniel Defoe, interpreted this area of government. Lastly, this article will briefly examine some of the activities of Harley's agents; in particular the affair of William Greg which caused great damage to Harley's reputation. What Harley's secretaryship of state does reveal is that by the early eighteenth century, espionage, however well or badly handled it was, had become an essential part of the routine administration of the early modern state.

II

In 1704, Robert Harley's most favoured and tame journalist, Daniel Defoe, sought to offer him some direct proposals which were christened 'A Scheme of Generall Intelligence'. On one level, as we shall, see this sort of secret document was of a common pattern with previous attempts to create a foundation for intelligence work in the English state proposed since at least the 1640s, if not before.[5] By Harley's day there had been a trend for passing on such memorials on intelligence matters as guides, and this document was also a clear signal from Defoe to Harley as to how he should use the Secretary of State's office, with all of its intelligence apparatus, as a stepping stone to become a premier minister of the state.[6] The document however placed the current theoretical ideas on intelligence

[4] 'Caracteres des plusieurs Ministres de la cour d'Angleterre', in J. J. Cartwright (ed.), *The Wentworth papers, 1705–1739* (London, 1883), p. 132.

[5] 'Memorials' on how to undertake such covert matters in government can be found appearing as the Secretary of State's office practice began to be more structured. For the mid-seventeenth century reference to this practice as a potential policy for an incoming 'intelligencer', see Thomas Scot's comments: The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA], SP 29/445, fo. 82. For a fuller history of this practice from the Elizabethan period onwards, see A. Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the English Republic c.1600–1660* (Manchester, 2023), chapter 2. Defoe seems to have been influenced as much by his reading of Cardinal Richelieu's supposed skills as by his reading of a serialised novel about a Turkish spy in Paris; G. H. Healey (ed.), *The Letters of Daniel Defoe* (Oxford, 1955), p.38. For these novels, see Giovanni Paolo Marana, *The Eight Volumes of Letters writ by a Turkish spy, who liv'd five and forty years at Pari undiscover'd: giving an impartial account of the most remarkable transactions of Europe from 1637 to 1682* (8 vols; Dublin, 1736). Defoe was impressed enough to try to write a continuation himself at a later date: D. Defoe, *A Continuation of Letters written by a Turkish spy at Paris: Giving an impartial account to the divan at Constantinople of the most remarkable transactions of Europe, … continued from the year 1687, to the year 1693* (London, 1718). See also J. Crane, 'The Long Transatlantic Career of the Turkish Spy', *Atlantic Studies Global Currents*, 10 (2013), pp. 228–46.

[6] Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 28. The document is dated from 1704.

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and espionage activities at its centre and as such it presents us with a glimpse of the theory and the purpose of state intelligence-gathering and espionage matters as they stood in the early 1700s.

In Defoe's 'Scheme of Generall Intelligence', we can in fact see the coming of the modern world of intelligence and espionage in British history.[7] Historically, we can break the contexts of intelligence and espionage within British polity into three main periods: an early modern period (from around 1500 to c.1720); a pre-modern period (from around 1720 to c.1909); and the modern period, which dates from c 1909 with the establishment of the Secret Service Bureau into the present day.[8] The first, early modern, period was what could be called a developmental stage for this area of government. Continuity had often been difficult to achieve in such matters, and major personalities did loom large.[9] Such activities also became valued by the state however, and they increasingly tended to be measured by the protection they gave, the promotion of personal authority, and by the needs of the political structures of their day. Again, as we shall see here, there were distinctive connections between early modern intelligence-gathering and general contemporary developments in administration in the early modern state. It was not all just about spies. In reality, the use of new forms of physical handling of official correspondence, the creation of textual constructions, textual analysis, and the use and storage of official documents in archives within the early modern administrative world were all to prove significant. An exploration of some of these attributes here therefore allows us to more fully understand the real role of intelligence and espionage in government as it was used by Robert Harley.

One element was very clear: state intelligence-gathering in government was to be naturally centred within the office of the Secretary of State and the days of other, over busy, ministers dabbling in intelligence were mostly over by Harley's day. To Defoe, 'Intelligence is the Soul of all Publick business', and secrecy was just as important.[10] This being so, he now argued for a well-placed 'Private Office for Conducting Matters of this Nature', a sort of proto 'deep state', that was to be vital in politics and located within the office of the Secretary of State. This private office was to be wrapped up in absolute secrecy and 'So Directed as Neither in

[7] G. F. Warner, 'An unpublished political paper by Daniel de Foe', *English Historical Review,* 22 (1907), pp. 130–43; Healey (ed.), *Letters*, pp. 29–39. For a sound reading of the eighteenth-century history of intelligence and espionage, see P. S. Fritz, 'The anti-Jacobite intelligence system of the English ministers, 1715–1745', *Historical Journal*, 16, (1973), pp. 265–89, and the sources therein. See also P. S. Fritz, *The English Ministers and Jacobitism between the Rebellions of 1715 and 1745* (Toronto, 1975), chapter 10; D. Szechi (ed.), *The Dangerous Trade, Spies, Spymasters and the Making of Europe* (Edinburgh, 2010).

[8] For the history of the Secret Service Bureau from 1909, see C. Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London, 2010); and K. Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909–1949* (London, 2011).

[9] For a fuller history of these personalities from the Elizabethan period onwards, see Marshall, *English Republic,* chapters 2–5.

[10] Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 36.

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General to be Suspected of what it should act'. It would certainly exclude the public from its methods and its results and even the 'Very Clarks Employ'd [in such a world should, he remarked,] Not kno' what Thay are a doeing'.[11] While Defoe advocated notions of secrecy with some force, it might actually be seen as nothing more or less than the old long-standing ideas of the *arcana imperii*, although now somewhat newly modelled.[12]

His main aim, however, was to promote things of use that could make his patron 'Prime Minster' and could give him access to the secret tools of state.[13] One certain means of ensuing such success, or so Defoe thought, was reform.[14] Put simply, he wished to engineer a reform of the old state intelligence system, which had been around since at least the time of the civil wars if not before, in order to enable the 'Secretaryes office…[to become nothing less than] an Abrigem[en]t of all Europe'.[15]

How could this be achieved? First of all, Harley had to act to 'Keep a Sett of Faithfull Emissarys Selected by your Own Judgement. Let them be your Constant Intelligencers of Private Affairs in the Court.'[16] A second essential issue was money, for there was never enough of it and invariably it had been badly used. Defoe thought the amount of £12,000 a year, which he claimed was now being spent on the matters of intelligence by the state, was currently being wasted.[17] Certainly Harley's predecessors had found out that the world of intelligence and espionage was expensive. Even the famed Walsingham, noted Defoe,

> Tho' Not a Prime Minister, yet if We read his Story The ablest statesman… [and] The most emply'd in difficult cases and the Greatest Master of Intelligence of the Age… [had eventually] Dyed Poor.[18]

If more money was needed, what were to be the actual principles with which to run this newly modelled intelligence system? They were to be

[11] Healey (ed.), *Letters,* p. 28.

[12] E. H. Kantorowicz, 'Mysteries of state: an absolutist concept and its late mediaeval origins', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 48, (1955), pp. 65–91.

[13] On the way Defoe remarked that, should Harley hesitate at taking on the role of 'Prime Minster', mainly for fear of its many dangers, then 'you Can Not be Secretary of State' either, for as he noted the 'Secretaryes office' when it was '*Well Discharg'd Makes* a man Prime Minister [as a matter] of Course.' Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 31.

[14] For Defoe's ideas, see J. Richetti, *The Life of Daniel Defoe* (Oxford, 2005); M. E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions* (Oxford, 2001).

[15] Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 36. The Secretaries of State were frequently proclaimed as the 'compasses of the State', *The Observator,* 10–14 April 1708.

[16] Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 32.

[17] Defoe exaggerated the state budget; it was only £5000, but then he also believed that King Louis XIV spent some 11 million pounds a year on the same matter—'he never spares money on that head', he noted, Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 36.

[18] Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 30; the standard money for 'secret service', a phrase that could cover a multitude of sins and destinations, was in fact: £3000 for the southern secretary and £2000 for the northern secretary, a trend set in the 1660s. For an example of the division, see *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* [*CSPD*] *Anne, 1702–3* (London, 1916), p. 44; P. Finch, *History of Burley-on-the-Hill Rutland* (2 vols; London, 1901), I, pp. 194–6. By 1707, both secretaries were in receipt of £3000 each and other sums could be added: M. A. Thomson, *The Secretaries of State, 1681–1782* (London, 1968), p. 150.

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centred on administration and especially upon the creation of a state orientated gathered information system that was to be centrally located in a series in what he called 'Tables' to be held by the secretariat. Such collated papers were now to become the essential registers of intelligence for the Secretary of State's private use. With such documents to hand, he would be able to gain secret knowledge and as everyone knew, in government secret knowledge was secret power.

Defoe divided his secret tables into social and political subjects, all of which could in some way assist the Secretary of State in the creation of policy and decision-making. One such list was to be made up of the names of 'all the gentry and familyes of rank in England, their residences, characters, and interest in the respective countyes'. A second list was made up of 'all the Clergy of England, their benefices, their character and moralls, and the like the dissenters'. Another list was a table of 'all of the leading men in the cittyes and burroughs, with the partyes they espouse'. At the same time, there could also be complied a 'table of partyes and proper callculacions of their strength in every respective part'.[19] Such general intelligence was to be mostly obtained by secretly searching through the electoral poll books. A fifth table, however, was to be kept of all the 'names of all of the men of the great personal estates, that they may kno' how and when to direct any occasional trust'. And the Secretary of State should also have notice of all 'the special characters of all the justices of the peace and men of note in every county, to have recourse to on all occasions.' Additionally, Defoe wanted to create a list of

> all [of] the ministers of state, lists of households, the privy councils, and favourites of every court in Europe, and their characters, with exact lists of their forces, names of officers, state of their revenue, methods of government etc., so just and authentick and regularly amended as alteracions happen.

Lastly, he recommended that there be initiated a full 'correspondence of friendship' with 'all courts with ministers of like quality'. Creating a useful knowledge bank of state intelligence and then having reasoned and good awareness of how such knowledge could be used in government was central to Defoe's reforming ideas of what an effective intelligence system of his day should be.

This was hardly, however, that much of an original idea. Indeed, others had already done this for the French government, for example.[20] Even in English government Defoe was not the first into the field. In May 1692, for example, the busy pen of Hans Willem Bentinck, earl of

[19] We may compare this with ongoing trend observable at the time in the science of oeconomics or the 'science of good husbandry', see for example R. Bradley, *The Science of Good Husbandry, or, the Oeconomics of Xenophon* (London, 1727).
[20] For a comparison, see J. Soll, *The Information Master: Jean Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor, 2011); J. C. Rule and B. S. Trotter, *A World of Paper: Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy, and the Rise of the Information State* (Montreal, 2014).

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Portland had suggested a very similar scheme.[21] He had recommended this for the 'convenience [of] compleat intelligence', and, if the other part of Portland's plan had been fully carried out, it would have taken the Williamite regime far further than any previous English government had ever gone before in intelligence matters; effectively creating what amounted to an incipient police state. He had argued for someone to be employed in central London to keep a good account of all the streets and lanes within the bills of morality, and within ten miles of London itself, in 'an alphabeticall manner'. The results could then be divided into eight parts, with a single agent appointed ('of prudence and good affection') in each area. This organization would then be able to provide very detailed lists of the inns and livery stables in their areas, as well as their visitors, and would take a count of the numbers of horses that were currently in their area and all would be sent directly to the Secretary of State.[22] Also to be closely watched were places in which the disaffected might gather in crowds; especially 'cock fights [and] bowling-greenes'.[23] Moreover, the London gunsmiths and powder-makers were to be especially forced to make returns of all their sales to the government.

Portland also suggested that state propaganda itself should be turned over to a 'good penn'. This individual could then proclaim, 'in a concise manner', the government's own case, with free prints being sent around all of the great towns. As a matter of course, regular inquiries were to be made of all lodgers in private dwellings, as well as of political and social clubs and their affections thus creating a wide network of intelligence. Justices of the Peace were also to be drawn into this system via a state correspondence network. Portland wanted such people to be told to keep a very careful eye on any 'disaffected persons' in their area, especially in the Border region, where the roads were to be closely watched.[24] This was in fact redolent of the much older system of government newsletters that had been previously set up by Sir Joseph Williamson in the 1660s.[25]

In Defoe's gathered body of information, meanwhile, continual updates were to be arranged by the Secretary of State's employment of two special

[21] Nottingham University Library, Portland MSS, Pw A 2087/2; Pw A 2088; Pw A 2089; Pw A 2090; Pw A 2094 1/2. The usual networks, secret agents, and invisible inks, were all part of Portland's trade and invaluable both before and after the 1688 invasion; see D. Onnekirk, 'Mynheer Benting now rules over us': The first earl of Portland and the re-emergence of the English favourite, 1689–99', *English Historical Review*, 121 (2006), pp. 704–05; and for further details on Portland's networks, see D. Onnekirk, *The Anglo-Dutch Favourite: The Career of Hans Willem Bentinck, 1st Earl of Portland (1649–1709)* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 41–2; 169–73.

[22] Horses, of course, were the main mode of transport in the era, and they were a potential cavalry force for any rebellion; they featured regularly in the document. Portland thought that Smithfield Market should be closely watched, given its prominence in the horse trade, although he thought the other horse fairs round the country were also worth looking at.

[23] Denis de Lafuye had been hired to get information about criticism of the government in 'public places' by Secretary Trenchard in 1695; see *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Downshire Papers* (6 vols., London, 1924–1988), I, 'Papers of Sir William Trumbull', p. 603.

[24] *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Finch Papers* (5 vols., London, 1913–2004), IV, pp. 160–1.

[25] For Williamson's work, see Alan Marshall, 'Sir Joseph Williamson', *ODNB*; Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, 1994).

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'agents'. Tapping into Harley's well-known humour for close secrecy, these agents were not even to be aware of why they were undertaking the tasks set for them, or for whom, for 'How many Miscarriages have happen'd in England for want of Silence and secrecy!'[26] Defoe also considered the considerable sum of £100,000 a year, spent for three years on this 'might be the best money ever this nacion laid out'.

What of the figure of the spy and the secret agent in this new scheme? For these too, Defoe had a practical place. He was even able to reach further into the current genre of spy stories at this point, having all too obviously been avidly reading popular espionage literature of the day for clues on this matter. He especially noted the volumes 'Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy &c', as a very good model for such employees: 'a Meer romance… [of course, he said,] but the Morall is good'.[27] For this to happen however Harley would need to set up an 'A Settl'd Person' or two in some strategic places at home and abroad and then to create a 'secret service' network. Such intelligencers would need the obvious qualities of 'Sence and Penetration, of Dexterity and Courage'. Furthermore, Defoe encouraged the idea of placing these individuals covertly in Paris, as well as in the French ports of Toulon, Brest, and Dunkirk, where they could openly ply a trade as merchants and safely communicate with one another and, of course, stay in direct contact with the Secretary of State's office. Secrecy in such matters was vital and keeping 'Our enemyes from Intelligence Among us, is As Valuable a head.' For as Defoe argued elsewhere, 'He that is above informing himself when he is in danger, is above pity when he miscarries.'[28] Lastly, Defoe pointedly remarked on the lack of secrecy in the secretary's own office for

> I have been in the Secretary's Office of a Post Night when had I been a French Spye I could hae' put in my pocket my Lord N—-ms letters…laid carelessly on a table for the Doorkeepers to carry to the Post Office.[29]

Yet, within the later Stuart government, a healthy interest in intelligence matters had already been seen as a fundamental part of the duties of the office of Secretary of State. And this secret history can be detected not just in Portland and Defoe's musings, but also in an earlier memorial that had been drawn up in 1689 by Sir Robert Southwell. While Southwell had referenced the Secretary of State's public and private duties, he also stressed the secret tasks that needed to be undertaken by the

[26] Harley's friend Jonathan Swift commented that one of Harley's faults was 'too much secrecy…[for], he would often…keep his nearest friends in the dark': see J. Swift, 'Some consequences hoped and feared from the death of the Queen, August 9, 1714', in Temple Scott (ed.), *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, DD: Volume V, Historical and Political Tracts – English* (London, 1901), p. 424.

[27] Marana, *The Eight Volumes of Letters writ by a Turkish spy*. For some of the background to this creation: R. Bullard and R. Carnell (eds.), *The Secret History in Literature, 1660–1820* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 89–96.

[28] D. Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726; Guernsey, 1987), p. 3.

[29] 'Lord N—-m' is Nottingham, Harley's immediate predecessor as Secretary of State: Healey (ed.) *Letters*, pp. 38–9.

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secretary whilst in office. This document too was intended for the personal edification of an incoming Secretary of State: Daniel Finch, earl of Nottingham.[30]

After a brief inventory of the more mundane secretarial duties, Southwell recommended the use of specific clerks in the office for some of the most important intelligence tasks. One of these clerks should be a reliable man who could study 'Cyphers' so that he could then begin to decrypt and encipher the secretariat's coded correspondence. Aside from the norms of administrative practice, however, Southwell was also keen to advise that 'Spys and Intelligence, where needful Abroad; and the like more especially at Home' and they needed to be hired. As the Secretary of State's main domestic targets were in London, he also noted that the Exchange in the City was always a prime site to look for such people. By gaining merchants who had good communications already they could easily give the regime reliable information on matters of trade and all its machinations.[31] In conclusion, Southwell recommended, much as Defoe did, keeping various books in the office for recording secrets; if only to ensure that if any blunders were made, blame could be appropriately allotted.

Earlier still in the 1660s, it was that *nonpareil* of intelligencers Joseph Williamson who had pushed the importance of such state intelligence work.[32] Following the Restoration, he had reformed the intelligence system and also laid down rules and regulations to govern it. When he prepared to leave for the Congress of Cologne on a diplomatic mission in 1673, he even wrote a detailed paper that described not only his office practice, but the structure he had set up over a number of years and was now leaving behind him.[33] This too had remained a pattern for some years to come.[34]

Even Harley's immediate predecessor in office, Nottingham, had eventually made some cautious moves towards setting up a new intelligence system post-1688, by seeking out French Protestants in exile in England and the Netherlands to form information networks for regular news and intelligence. He hired men and women to go under cover into France and he hired ships, under the guise of merchantmen, to patrol

[30] Nottingham was the object of numerous memorials. Despite this, one of the main critiques made of him was that he had little or no real intelligence coming in and what did have was generally ineffective; see W. A. Aiken (ed.), *The Conduct of the Earl of Nottingham* (New Haven, 1941), pp. 126–7.
[31] BL, Add MSS 38861 fos. 46–9; F. M. G. Evans-Higham, *The Principal Secretary of State: A Survey of the Office from 1558 to 1680* (Manchester, 1923), pp. 364–5.
[32] See Marshall, 'Williamson', *ODNB*; Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage.*
[33] TNA, SP 29/441, fos. 305–10.
[34] See H. L. Synder, 'Robert Spencer, Third Earl of Sunderland, as Secretary of State, 1706–1710: A Study in Cabinet Government and Party Politics in the Reign of Queen Anne', PhD dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1963), pp. 120, 341. It was used by the second Earl of Sunderland when he became Secretary of State, although it was not drawn up for him specifically, as Snyder argues. The document was created in 1673 for Arlington and seems to have passed down through various secretaries as a guide.

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along the French coast and to enter French ports to gather information.[35] Nottingham mainly employed 'foreigners' for espionage, and he also paid well – so well indeed, that he quickly overspent and then had to use his own money to fill gaps in the regular state intelligence allowance.[36] Despite all these activities, he still despaired and thought that the French were actually far better served in their agents.[37]

III

Early in his political career, Robert Harley had been heavily immersed in backroom dealings, and one might have expected him to have relished Defoe's suggestions. He was a founder of the New Country party in the 1690s and in 1701 was created Speaker of the House of Commons. Thereafter, he remained a very important link with MPs in the Commons, being an able manager of both its business and personalities.[38] In 1704, Harley was finally pressed into taking office as Secretary of State. He held this post until 1708, when he fell from office, only to return in triumph to government in 1710 and then grasp towards prime ministerial status.[39] He ended the war with France, became Earl of Oxford, but on the cusp of real greatness in 1714 his political career collapsed, and he was then driven from power, only just surviving with his head on his shoulders.[40]

Yet 'Robin the trickster' also had a subtle and rooted personality which was generally based on his deeply held ideas of secrecy. Sarah Churchill had noted pointedly that Harley had 'long accustomed himself to much dissemble his real intentions & to use the ambiguous & obtuse way of speaking [so] that he could hardly even be understood when he really designed it or be believed when he so much desired it'.[41] Harley's

[35] New foreign intelligence networks were arranged: notably, those revolving around Pierre Jurieu, author and Protestant controversialist. Jurieu was an exile in Rotterdam. In the early 1690s Nottingham provided substantial funding of £3,000, so that he could create an intelligence network in France. For a detailed background history of Pierre Jurieu and his intelligence work, and some of the documents themselves, see *HMC, Finch*, V (2004), pp. cx–cxv; cxix–cxxiii; R. J. Howell, *Pierre Jurieu: Antinomian Radical* (Durham, 1983), pp. 1, 61, 81; F. R. J. Knetich, 'Pierre Jurieu: theologian and politician of the dispersion', *Acta Historiae Neerlandica*, 5 (1971), pp. 213–42; G. Das, 'Pierre Jurieu als middlepunt van een spionnage –diesnst', *Tijdschift voor Geschiedenis,* 41 (1926), pp. 372–82.

[36] Aiken (ed.), *Conduct*, p. 127.

[37] Aiken (ed.), *Conduct*, p. 127.

[38] D. W. Hayton, 'Robert Harley', in David Hayton et al (eds.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1690–1715*: https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/harley-robert-1661-1724 [accessed 30 April 2023].

[39] See G. Holmes, *The Great Ministry* (Privately Published, 2005).

[40] For Harley's general career: W. A. Speck, 'Robert Harley, first earl of Oxford and Mortimer', *ODNB*; A. McInnes, 'The Political Ideas of Robert Harley', *History*, 50 (1965), pp. 309–22; John H. Davis, *Robert Harley as Secretary of State, 1704–1708* (Chicago, 1934). While now a somewhat elderly authority, Davis is still important as he is one of the few historians to write in detail on Harley's secretaryship of state. Essential, however, for understanding the context of the political system in which Harley operated is G. Holmes *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (2nd revised edition; London, 1987).

[41] In Jonathan Swift's opinion, Harley believed that 'a secret is seldom safe in more than one breast': *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Calendar of the Manuscript sof the Marquess of Bath Preserved at Longleat* (5 vols; London, 1904–80), I, p. 227.

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political ideas are still the subject of much historical debate, yet his deft political skills and his handling of power did engender much fear amongst contemporaries. Nevertheless, those historians who are sympathetic to Harley tend to see him as a moderate man and not just a mere glutton for power.[42]

Yet, Harley's involvement in the world of intelligence and his employment of spies and informers is the real subject here. And it might be thought that this involvement was somewhat inevitable. Even before taking office as Secretary of State as early as 1703, he had sought to establish intelligence networks in both Scotland and France for his own personal use, and he had also created intelligence networks elsewhere, both in and out of Parliament, whose results he had shared with Sidney Godolphin.[43] Furthermore, as Churchill remarked:

> One principal and very expensive piece of his arts in which he seems to have excelled all that went before him, was, to have in pay a great number of spies of all sorts, to let him into what was passing in all considerable families.[44]

The corruption of personal servants located within royal or aristocratic households would naturally prove to be an obvious source of information and useful gossip to him.[45]

Meanwhile, the control of the Post Office and the ability to intercept letters also proved useful when he became Secretary of State. The Post Office had in any case been the central hub of the intelligence-gathering machinery for some time. The literate classes of the country communicated through letters and so the post was well-established. For the government, it became a prime way of understanding society's thoughts. However, so obvious did the interception of letters become that the authors, perhaps inevitably, became ever more wary of putting down their real thoughts on paper.[46] Still, the government continued to

[42] Biographies of Harley include: A. McInnes, *Robert Harley, Puritan Politician* (London, 1970); B. W. Hill, *Robert Harley, Speaker, Secretary of State and Premier Minister* (New Haven, 1988); E. Hamilton, *The Backstairs Dragon: A Life of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford* (Oxford, 1969); Hayton, 'Robert Harley (1661–1724)', *History of Parliament.* See also W. T. Morgan, *English Political Parties and Leaders in the Reign of Queen Anne, 1702–1710* (New Haven, 1920); K. Feiling, *A History of the Tory Party, 1640–1714* (Oxford, 1959). As Geoffrey Holmes astutely noted, 'the twists and turns of that career will remain mysterious, and…something of the man himself will always elude us', see G. Holmes, 'Review of *Robert Harley, Puritan Politician* by Angus McInnes', *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972), p. 127. See also Holmes, *Great Ministry*; Holmes, *British Politics*.

[43] H. L. Snyder, 'Daniel Defoe, the duchess of Marlborough and the 'Advice to the Electors of Great Britain', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly,* 29 (1965), p. 55; H. L. Snyder, 'Godolphin and Harley: a study of their partnership in politics' *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 30 (1967), p. 258.

[44] S. Churchill, *An Account of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough, from her First Coming to Court, to the Year 1710* (London, 1743), p. 262.

[45] The 'watchful and prurient curiosity' of servants in the era was notorious: L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1990), pp. 169–170. François de Calliéres recommended that an ambassador ought to avoid having natives of the host country as servants 'because they are usually spies upon all his actions': F. de Calliéres, *The Art of Negotiating with Sovereign Princes* (London, 1716), p. 172.

[46] For the Post and its secret uses: *Report from the secret committee on the post office* (Westminster, 1844), p. 5. This report contains not only a Post Office history but an extensive collection of

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intercept, copy, and use such correspondence, as a primary source of information.

While Harley in private conversation was thought generally open and familiar, in public business, 'his discourse…[was] always reserved, communicating nothing, and allowing none to know the whole event [sic] of what they are employed to do'. Was this a silence redolent of mere hesitation inevitably leading to delays in action? Or was it far more practical? Some thought the latter. Harley's general rule in politics can be seen as reactive, however. Both Defoe and William Greg later confirmed his reluctance to ever give out *full* instructions to any of his agents and both men were even obliged to write their *own* instructions before they left on their missions. This might have been sheer carelessness of manner on Harley's part, but of course his obvious carefulness in having any potentially odious instructions directly traced back to him was yet another element of his character: 'he scarce ever sent any person abroad, though on matters of the greatest importance, but that he left some of their business to be sent after them'.[47]

Yet for all his cleverness we learn elsewhere that sometimes Harley could be played upon by those of the 'lower form', as Henry St John once called them: lower grade wily agents in his secret work.[48] William Greg was able to pester him for a post in his office and, as we shall see, turned out to be a great liability. Another agent, Valiere, spoke contemptuously of 'Great Men' like Harley, and even boasted that it was 'easier to put upon them' and as for 'Harley… almost anything would serve him'.[49] Nonetheless, there is little doubt that Harley would have agreed that 'Intelligence is the Soul of all Publick Business'.[50] As such, he was forced to take risks with such questionable people mainly because for him it now became far more than just personal secrecy, but what could be called 'the thread of intelligence' in the state: a distinctive art of the *arcana imperii* of government.[51]

Robert Harley, then, did have some of the qualities to be a good 'intelligencer', but how effective was he in practice? Reputation, of course, may well be gathered in public where real substance is actually lacking in private, especially in such secret affairs of state. But in order to answer

documentation on the early Post Office. See H. Robinson, *The British Post Office: A History* (Princeton, 1948); also E. Vaillè, *Le cabinet Noir* (Paris , 1950), pp. 46–91; E. Vaillè, *Historie générale des postes Françaises* (6 volumes; Paris, 1950), III, pp. 322–9; IV, pp. 96–7; 123–5; V, 335–40; A. Boislisle, 'Le secret de la Poste sous le règne de Louis XIV', *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France*, 27 (1890), pp. 229–45; L. Trenard, 'Poste aux lettres' in F. Bluche, *Dictionnaire du grand siècle* (Paris, 1990), pp. 1238–9; L. Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1990), pp. 134–62. See too Midura's article in this issue on postal interception and intelligence-gathering.

[47] N. Mesnager, *Minutes of the Negotiations of Monsieur Mesnager* (London, 1717), p. 49.

[48] G. Parke (ed.), *Letters and Correspondence Public and Private, of the Right Honourable Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke* (4 vols; London, 1798), II, pp. 157–9, 177; *The Observator,* 14–17 April 1708.

[49] *Journal of the House of Lords* (42 vols.; London, 1767–1830), XVIII: 1705–08, p. 527.

[50] Healy (ed.), *Letters*, p. 36.

[51] *HMC*, *Portland*, IV, p. 65.

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this question, we must move with him into his new office in May 1704 and there explore his espionage practices in the context and history of the Secretaryship of State.

IV

'Never any Government has been well manag'd without Good secretaries…some affairs might be manag'd with bad Minsters, but not with a bad Secretary', noted one contemporary.[52] The standards by which any Secretary of State could be measured had been laid down very early in the office's history and they mixed together the Renaissance values of the administrative arts with the humanistic values of secular virtue. At the least, they give us some idea of the many trials and tribulations office holders soon faced, as well as the supposed qualities that were needed and the tasks that were set the occupants. The roots of Harley's style of secretaryship, however, clearly lie in the mid-seventeenth century development of the office under the seminal tenure of Sir Henry Bennet, earl of Arlington, who had set the pattern for those who followed him and who had shown exactly what the office could offer to the able stateman and politician.[53] The administrative patterns once set up in Arlington's office from 1662 to 1674 were to reoccur for the rest of the century and even beyond, as they set a good standard and, importantly, clearly placed the gathering of information at the centre of the office's work. Arlington's tenure proved that if a major politician could grab control of the secretariat, he could then use it to formulate serious foreign and domestic policy through information gathering. In order to gain information that could prove invaluable in politics, the Secretary of State would also have to hand the 'edg'd tools' of the old established intelligence system: the Post Office, domestic correspondents, diplomats, and secret agents.[54]

By Harley's day, the secretaryship had won through the various squabbling ministries to become the nodal point for information in later Stuart government. It had thereby gained immense prestige as a 'post of the greatest trust and importance in any Government'.[55] Its other real power was the almost daily contact with the monarch's person. Such access gave the holder not only the authority to relate the monarch's ideas to others, but the means to interpret their whims and fancies. In an era of personal monarchy, this gave the Secretary of State great opportunities to convert these elements into actual policy. And as a central point of contact for English diplomats abroad, the increasing diplomatic information that

[52] *The Observator*, 17–18 April 1708.
[53] For Arlington, see R. Eagles and C. Dennehy (eds.), *Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington and his World, Restoration Court, Politics and Diplomacy* (Abingdon, 2020).
[54] James VI and I noted that these 'edg'd tools' were 'like that weapon that is said to cut with one edge and cure with the other', but he used them anyway: A. Onslow, *The Life of Dr George Abbot, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (Guildford, 1777), p. 14.
[55] *The Observator,* 14–17 April 1708.

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came with the office enabled the holder to understand the outside world far more than any other government officer and become in effect the eyes and ears of the government.

Still, there were always potential weaknesses. First of all, the office was hampered by its dual nature. There were usually two secretaries of state in government at any one time, and they could sometimes be set up as rivals for power.[56] Second, the office remained highly dependent on personality. While some men accepted the challenge, others remained mere mechanics in office management, content to keep the information flowing in government, take the substantial fees, and use the possibilities of its patronage. Yet, the issue of the dual nature of the secretaryship became increasingly irrelevant by the 1700s as one after another powerful political figures took up one of the posts and then found they could simply dominate both offices, even to the extent of influencing the other appointment.

Harley was appointed to the northern secretaryship of state in 1704, and it was by all accounts a popular move.[57] By this time, the northern secretaryship of state was well worth having. It had not always been the case. The southern department, held by Sir Charles Hedges at this point, covered the regions of France, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey, as well dealing with Irish and some colonial matters which had made it the senior office.[58] But by the 1700s to the northern secretary fell the state's foreign dealings with the various German lands, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, and Scandinavia, alongside some links with Scotland, and most valuable of all: the relationship with Hanover.[59] Harley's occupation of the northern secretaryship was very sensible, and even when Hedges finally vacated his office he significantly stayed put, dropping the by-now well-established convention of seeing the southern region as most important area of control and moving up from the northern office into that place. Instead, Harley preferred to have his finger on the real pulse of English foreign policy in his day: Hanover and the relations with the Queen's heir.

Meanwhile, in terms of staffing, Harley, alongside his two undersecretaries and five or six clerks, with the usual functionaries of office doorkeepers and office cleaning staff, and the more useful state messengers, as well as others who were to pass through its doors, set about

[56] With the secretary of state for Scotland, there were actually three secretaries: Thomson, *Secretaries*, pp. 29–30.

[57] Davis, *Robert Harley*, p. 4. He had been offered the post at least twice before this, *HMC Portland*, V, p. 646.

[58] Hedges had been re-appointed to the northern secretaryship on 15 November 1700. When Nottingham left office, he switched to the southern secretaryship. He was a moderate Tory and left office in December 1706. For his career, see Henry Horwitz, 'Daniel Finch, Second Earl of Nottingham and seventh Earl of Winchelsea', *ODNB*.

[59] Domestic affairs were handled by both secretaries of state 'equally and indistinctly', as Chamberlayne put it, 'over the Church, the Militia, or Private Grants, pardons, etc.'; see J. Chamberlayne, *Magna Britannia Notitia: or the Present State of Great Britain* (London, 1708), p. 106.

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managing the northern office.[60] This group of men tended not to include those who were employed as informers and spies, for such individuals were usually seen privately elsewhere.[61] Harley's undersecretaries were to be the erudite Welshman and former diplomat Erasmus Lewis and the westcountryman Richard Warre, both of whom were very serviceable and discreet.[62] Lewis had already dabbled in intelligence activities when on diplomatic service in Paris.[63] He proved able although according to Swift, with whom he was friendly, he was in the beginning merely an 'arrant shaver'.[64] Later on, Lewis was deep in Harley's favour, although not always totally in his confidence.[65] Meanwhile, the clerks in the office were to be William Jones, David Eger, Tracey Pauncefort, Nicholas Mann, and William Greg.[66] How they fared in their work routine of 'perfect drudgery', as Greg called it, we will see below.

It had been Nottingham who had originally taken on Warre, and he had proven a most useful catch. Nottingham had made Warre his confidential secretary and Warre had involved himself in the intelligence work on the Secretary of State's behalf. Nottingham thought him a man 'of great experience and ability, most diligent and indefatigable, and of irreproachable fidelity'.[67] In November 1693, he lost office, alongside his master, until Nottingham's return in May 1702. Harley, on his own appointment, simply decided to acquire the useful Warre for his office as well.[68] Warre is a missing figure from most of the 'great men' biographies of the era, yet his backroom work in the intelligence world of the

[60] The actual office was physically located in the Cockpit, one of the few surviving buildings of Whitehall Palace, now converted to office space; see D. Defoe, *A Tour Though the Whole Island of Great Britain* (London, 1986), p. 327; Thomson, *Secretaries*, pp. 156–7. How much time Harley spent there is not clear. He mainly seem to have worked from his home at 14 York Buildings, Buckingham Street, his residence until 1714, and he attended court and parliament; see G. H. Gater and E. P. Wheeler (eds.), *Survey of London 18: St Martin's in the Fields II The Strand* (London, 1937), pp. 63–76.

[61] 'Safe houses' had first been created under John Thurloe and had proved useful given the danger of the secretary's office being an obvious target for foreign agents to watch.

[62] E. Hatton, *A New View of London, or an Ample Account of that City in Two* Volumes (2 vols; London, 1708), II, p.719; N. Luttell, *Brief Historical Relation* (6 vols; London, 1857), V, p. 426.

[63] *HMC, Portland*, IV, p. 97; Stuart Handley, 'Erasmus Lewis', *History of Parliament*: http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/lewis-erasmus-1671-1754 [accessed 30 April 2023].

[64] See Swift's poem 'Horace, Epistle VII, Book I: Imitated and Addressed to the Earl of Oxford', in P. Rogers (ed.), *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 153. Swift also referred here to Harley as a man who 'Loves mischief better than his meat' (p. 153).

[65] J. Pritchard, 'Erasmus Lewis', *ODNB*.

[66] J. D. Alsop, 'William Greg (Gregg)', *ODNB*; Tracy Pauncefort became an MP in 1707; see D.W. Hayton, 'Tracy Pauncefort', *The History of Parliament*: https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/pauncefort-tracy-1683-1723 [accessed 30 April 2023].

[67] *HMC, Downshire MSS*, I, pt I, p.465. Born in 1649, Warre was originally from Somerset. He had come up through the diplomatic service and various ranks of domestic administration and eventually, in September 1676, aged 27, found himself in Joseph Williamson's office. Here, he effectively acted as an 'undersecretary' or 'chief clerk' to Williamson and learnt his trade. Warre then moved on from Williamson's service and subsequently transferred into Viscount Preston's office, where eventually he was found and retained by Nottingham.

[68] J. C. Sainty, 'A public servant of Somerset Extraction: Richard Warre c.1649–1730', *Somerset Notes & Queries,* 30 (1976), pp. 199–203.

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secretariat of his day was actually quite important. He not only kept the various books and papers of the Secretary of State in order, but he generally worked as a confidential secretary to the Secretary of State, and he ordered arrests, undertook many of the crucial interrogations of suspects, and managed some of the secretary's spies.[69]

Both Warre and Lewis, via memos and notes, kept Harley informed and also found themselves acting as intermediaries with agents so they could keep them at a distance from the Secretary of State.[70] This was a sensible enough arrangement, one might suppose, given such people's proclivity for deviousness and betrayal. Yet, Harley himself had a keen personal interest in information of all sorts; he was, after all, one of the great bibliophiles and collectors of old manuscripts of the era. As such, his secret intelligence work has been claimed as both effective and efficient.

Harley certainly had a keen interest in assessing all of the currents of public opinion, which was a major factor of the politics of his day, and in promoting his own part in the government in the press in order to shape it and control it. He regularly ordered the suppression, censorship, and monitoring of the news in what was by now was a thriving 'public sphere' (the old Licensing Act having lapsed in 1695). He maintained an intense interest in the press throughout his career, ensuring the scrutiny of a number of those whom he saw as a threat to the government, while encouraging a number of his own writers to produce government friendly propaganda.[71] As Secretary of State, he also oversaw, or rather signed off, the many routine matters of the office: general paperwork, warrants, committals of suspects, and the seizure of papers by messengers for examination. Interventions in the post were common, although, significantly, the details were often left to Warre and Lewis. Prisoners meanwhile were interrogated and often left deliberately incarcerated for years whilst awaiting their trial.

V

Over the years of his secretaryship, Harley's secret agents and his correspondents grew in number to include various obscure and sometimes not so obscure men and women. A typology of these agents does exist. Henry St John later noted that a basic distinction could be made between agents of a higher social class, who were easily able to penetrate important social and political circles and thus gain information, and those he called of a 'lower form', although they were also those 'whom I know to

[69] *HMC Finch*, II, pp. 197–8; 421; 498–9 for examples of his work; for Nottingham's work as an interrogator, see pp. 462–3; Thomson, *Secretaries*, pp. 150–1.

[70] *HMC, Portland*, IV, pp. 96–7, 109, 140, 153, 175, 177, 182, 194, 207, 240, 236, 338, 343.

[71] H. L. Snyder, 'The reports of a press spy for Robert Harley: new biographical data for the reign of Queen Anne', *The Library,* 5th series, 20 (1967), pp. 328–30. Penetrating the illicit and open dealings of the press was a part of this and Harley used both the Queen's Messengers and members of the trade itself as his informants (pp. 330–2): J. A. Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 2–5.

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be subtle and bold' and clearly 'veteran[s]' of the growing European espionage trade.[72] One of these agents, Pierre d'Elorme, for example, St John described as a 'vain and lying Gascon', yet was still seen as 'a spy of the first class'.[73] Of course, for rougher types of work, one would naturally move lower down the social scale.[74]

Two of Harley's lower-level agents were the Frenchmen Alexander Valiere, alias John Clark, and John (Jean) Bara, 'alias Renew, alias Barrault, alias Monminion, alias Julian', from Stepney, until both were exposed as double agents.[75] Valiere had a drink problem and took to lurking about in pubs and houses of ill repute where he not only 'kept scandalous and frippery company' but got into fights defending France.[76] He was described as a 'leeky fellow, and of a shallow quality' and came to be called 'Clark the spy…from Margate to Rumney Marsh'.[77] Evidently Harley nevertheless thought he was of some use as an intelligence agent, which says something about his judgement. Still, as he wrote 'the quicker the intelligence the better the trade', and the Secretary of State was never averse to putting such men under heavy pressure in order to get results.[78] He remarked that 'Valiere [was] a very active man', which was to him sufficient enough reason to employ him.[79] Valiere also brought in Jean Bara, who wanted not only money but a written protection direct from the secretary's office.[80] Valiere also sub-contracted others to cross the Channel to gather information. Inevitably the pair fell out. Yet, when Captain Lancelot Whitehall, collector of customs at Deal, arrested them he received a blistering rebuke from Harley for interfering:

> in this juncture, it is of great consequence to have intelligence of what they are doing in France. I will not suppose you think yourself proper to judge who is to be employed upon such occasions, nor to know what their business is…the man named Clarke [sic], and the other called Bara, are made use of, upon a sudden exigence, on behalf of the public, they were formerly friends, but since fallen out, and therefore fit to watch each other; and I shall be glad you will have an eye upon them both, and give me direct notice of their motions.[81]

[72] See A. Marshall, '"Secret Wheeles": clandestine information, espionage and European intelligence', in M. Ebben and L. Sicking (eds), *Beyond Ambassadors Consuls , Missionaries, and Spies in Premodern Diplomacy* (Leiden, 2020), pp. 185–216.

[73] Another would be Harley's man Adam Francke, who was used as a confidential agent in the Dutch republic at £50 a year; see H. L. Synder (ed.), *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence* (3 vols; Oxford, 1975), I, pp. 160, 241.

[74] Parke (ed.), *Letters*, II, pp. 157–9, 177; G. Burnet, *History of My Own Time* (6 vols; Oxford, 1833), VI, p. 353.

[75] Burnet, *History*, VI, p. 353.

[76] W. Cobbett, *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England* (36 vols; London, 1806–20), VI, p. 720.

[77] Ibid., p. 720.

[78] *HMC, Portland*, IV, p. 246.

[79] Ibid., p. 240.

[80] When a pass for a visit to Holland was required, he even received a secret sign in the shape of 'a hook and a chain for a watch, which was to be a token to one Nerinx, a merchant at Rotterdam'.

[81] Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, VI, p. 683; Harley had given them his written protection: *HMC, Portland,* IV, p. 210.

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Harley peevishly noted that it was unfortunate in arresting these two, when

> at the same time, it is known that scarce a week passes but the enemies of the government have their emissaries land, without observation, and it is more unfortunate that the stopping Clarke, some weeks since, had hindered the discovery of those ships which took the Holland convoy.[82]

Whitehall protested his innocence about such secret matters and meekly remarked that he was merely doing his job.

Bara was then sent up to Harley for a personal interview where he was bluntly offered a direct pardon if he went 'immediately to Dunkirk, and see what naval preparations were there; and … say nothing, and he [Harley] would make use of him'. Bara told Harley to his face that he trusted Valiere far too much, but was ignored. Valiere meanwhile had continued to hire numerous smugglers to go to France to spy but even they were soon suspicious of his actions. Not that much of his intelligence was reliable.[83] As it was, both men were soon becoming far too well known on the English and French coasts as 'Mr Harley's spies'. Moreover, their real connection with French government officials not only allowed them to play a double game but allowed Bara to bring over French officers secretly as spies and give the French much more information than he ever gave to Harley.[84]

Among the more notable figures of higher rank whom Harley engaged as agents were Robert Cunningham, William Paterson, and John Toland.[85] However, possibly the most notable of all of such high-grade employees was Daniel Defoe, who was to be widely used as an agent following his release from prison by Harley in 1703.[86] Defoe was sent off to Scotland, naturally enough without any instructions, but in this case he simply concocted his own, and, as he later put it, went like 'Abraham…cheerfully out not knowing wither he went, depending on him that sent him, so Sir I willingly go on'.[87] Defoe engineered his own suggestions as to what he should be doing in his intelligence-gathering role. These included: informing himself of the parties who were against the Union in Scotland; in conversations there seeking to dispose people towards the Union; and likewise in his writings and other discourses to do the same. He also sought to answer any direct objections to the Union in his conversations, and to remove any private jealousies between the people over 'secret designs against the Kirk'.[88] By October 1706, Harley

[82] Ibid.
[83] Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, VI, p. 695.
[84] When this affair finally blew up in Harley's face, the investigating committee of the House of Lords quickly seized on Valiere's double agent status (to them all too obvious) in order to criticise Harley, who had of course persisted in using him despite the current rumours: *HMC, Portland* IV, pp. 478–9.
[85] Stephen H. Daniel, 'John Toland', *ODNB*; *HMC, Portland* IV, pp. 64–5.
[86] Paula R. Backscheider, 'Daniel Defoe', *ODNB*.
[87] Healy (ed.), *Letters*, p. 126.
[88] Healy (ed.), *Letters* p. 127.

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had finally got round to sending out some actual instructions to Defoe, and provided a cover for their mutual correspondence: ‘You are to write constantly the true State how you find things, at least once a week, & you need not subscribe any name, but direct for me under Cover to Mrs Collins at the Posthouse, Middle Temple Gate, London. For variety you may direct under Cover to Michael Read in York Buildings.’[89]

At around at the same time, William Greg was also sent into Scotland.[90] Greg had just come back from a minor diplomatic post abroad and was keen to pursue a new foreign post, mainly to hold off his creditors. Lacking good references, however, he took to petitioning Harley directly and then to hanging around the Secretary of State’s office seeking employment. Eventually, Harley seems to have carelessly thought that perhaps a little espionage might be suitable: ‘If [Greg] would be willing to be employed in his own Country?’ Greg eagerly replied that ‘He was willing to be sent upon any good Errand.’ Harley duly told him he had a mind to send him into Scotland ‘to give an Account of the Proceedings of the ensuing Parliament, which was to be held under the Duke of Argyle’.[91]

In order to first make a trial of Greg, Harley asked him to ‘give an Account of the Court of Denmark’. Accordingly, ‘in some Time, he drew up a State of that Court; and it was not disapproved’.[92] Once Greg had sufficiently proved himself, Harley then provided him with some cash; mainly it seems in order to pay off his debts and send him on his way. This included both an initial £20, and then £30 when he was sent north. Greg arrived in Edinburgh on 2 June 1705 and remained there until October that year.[93] As to Greg’s actual instructions for his new role, Greg later stated that Harley ‘always amused him, with telling him he should have Instructions for his Directions in Scotland; but at last ordered him to draw up some Queries himself, about the State of Affairs in Scotland; which he did, and they were approved’.[94] Greg was also told to make up a number cipher relating to the ‘great men’ there for his secret correspondence, which was to be sent under cover to Thomas Bateman in Scotland Yard.[95]

[89] For these instructions: Healey (ed.), *Letters*, p. 132. Michael Read was Harley’s own porter, much disliked by Swift, who saw him as a ‘old Scotch fanatic, and the damn’dest liar in his office alive’; Frederick Ryland (ed.), *Jonathan Swift, The Journal to Stella* (London, 1923), p. 224. See also Swift’s directions to porters: ‘If your Master be a Minister of State, let him be at Home to none but his Pimp, or Chief Flatterer, or one of his Pensionary Writers, or his hired Spy, and Informer, or his Printer in ordinary, or his City Sollicitor, or a Land-Jobber, or his Inventor of new Funds, or a Stock–Jobber’, in Jonathan Swift, *Directions to Servants in General* (London, 1746), p. 46.

[90] For Greg’s hiring, see T. B. Howell (ed.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanours from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783* (34 vols.; London 1816–28), XIV, 1700–08, pp. 1381–2; P. Lorrain, *The Whole Life, Conversation, Birth, Parentage and Education of Mr William Gregg, who was Executed on Wednesday the 28*th *day of April, 1708 for High-Treason* (London, 1708), pp. 2–3; *HMC Portland*, IV, p. 159.

[91] *Journal of the House of Lords*, XVIII: 1705–8, XVIII, p. 517.

[92] ibid.

[93] Harley’s client, rival, and later nemesis, Henry St John seemingly paid more when he was a secretary once showing Swift ‘Fifty guineas rolled up, which he was going to give to some French spy’, Ryland (ed.), *Jonathan Swift, The Journal to Stella,* p. 330.

[94] Howell (ed.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, XIV, 1700–08, p. 1381.

[95] *HMC, Portland*, V, p. 481.

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He was not given the names of any contacts in Edinburgh but was promised an acknowledgement of his letters, which, although he wrote three times a week, did not actually happen. Eventually, he came to believe somebody was intercepting his letters. As these included his bold opinions on parliamentary discussions and attempts to 'judge the pulse of this boiling nation', this was naturally worrying.[96] It may well be that Harley was deliberately distancing himself from Greg and merely using the well-tried technique of keeping his agents hungry for any form of personal acknowledgement – a common enough technique of the era.[97]

Defoe had been given much the same duties as Greg. Disguised as a travelling historian intent upon obtaining material for his history of the Union, unlike most historians then and now, he was able to brag that 'I have everything told me'. He did do some first-hand intelligence work himself but mostly sought to sub-contract his own spies to do this task for him, a regular practice of using secret 'pensioners' that could give him important information moderately safely.[98] As it turned out, Defoe found it relatively easy to employ such people.[99] His correspondence back to Harley was by turns both secret and habitually hedged with the usual foibles of contemporary espionage language with various code names and cyphers, use of symbols, and so forth added in. These were adopted into his discourse ostensibly for Defoe's own security or just as likely because he thought such obscure scribblings would secretly impress Harley, and it was the sort of thing, as in the Turkish Spy novels, that he thought spies *ought* to do.[100] As for Harley, he saw Defoe as a useful tool of state to be flattered, but to be used as he saw fit. He was his patron not a friend.

In handling such intelligence material, however, Harley now had a set pattern of work to hand. While some of these individuals were deliberately foisted off on to his under-secretaries, others were given a more personal interview with the Secretary of State. Interviews were the one means of gaining direct information, and although they could be problematic, they did allow the application of direct pressure on inevitably mendacious personalities. 'Resolve to be open and candid, and then you will find the advantage of it', Harley noted grimly on one occasion.[101] An oral interview could then be re-created in note form as evidence that

[96] *HMC Portland*, IV, pp. 195–6. He took to visiting taverns and sitting 'in corners… [to observe] their various humours'.

[97] For more on this technique, see Marshall, *English Republic*, chapter 5.

[98] Defoe obtained a certificate so as to flourish if he was stopped but this was only to be used at the last extremity: *HMC, Portland*, IV, p. 200.

[99] Healy (ed.), *Letters*, p. 211.

[100] Novak has noted the distinct edge to all of this correspondence and indeed the relationship between the two men turned into not quite that of master and servant, but nor was it something else: *Daniel Defoe*, p. 197.

[101] However, Lewis and Warre both carried out interrogations on his behalf. One such unreliable personality who was subjected to this process was James Le Moine de Brie, a Frenchman who had fallen into English hands, mainly through the information that had been given in by a female informer in Newcastle, whilst he was returning from secret dealings in Scotland in 1704: BL, Add MS 29589 B, fos. 459, 461. He was thrown into Newgate Prison for some months and labelled as an 'alien enemy and spy'.

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could be taken before the Queen and the Lords of the Council. Such material could also be cross-checked by 'Divers other methods', including secret observations and arrests by the messengers.[102] Harley seems to have preferred as much discretion as possible when an informant came calling, and he was ever fearful of leaks to the press. He was however willing to pay, and this reputation for munificence may in the end have played him false, especially with the 'lower form' as they exploited his keenness for information of any sort.[103]

The Jacobite Captain John Ogilvie was another mid-quality agent. A professional mercenary soldier who, 'having no way to live but by his sword,' he became one of Harley's spies. Ogilvie had a wife and children to support and proved ready enough to turn his hand to espionage. He had once served in King James II's army, but on the king's death, Ogilvie had abandoned the Jacobite court and retired to Normandy. From here, in December 1702, he left with his family for England, only on landing to be swiftly sent up to the Secretary of State Nottingham, who promptly threw him into gaol to rot, despite his protests that he had intelligence to offer. Harley however took Ogilvie on and sent him into Europe to get 'a great deal of insight in the thread you are desirous to be informed of'.[104]

Traveling through Germany and the Low Countries, and using his wife as a cover address, Ogilvie then sent regular intelligence back to Harley. His wife would go after dark into Drury Lane to hand over his correspondence to Harley's porter. Ogilvie's intelligence was varied and included political actions and opinions, Jacobite military planning, comments on personalities and their characters, and his associations with those who knew him well and foolishly trusted him. Hiding under his disguise of loyalty to the Jacobite cause his military background helped him make his way in this world, although like many another agents, he was ever in need of cash. Even with the support of his enterprising wife, who herself took many risks, he lived in danger of exposure. Ogilvie had suggested to Harley the cover story that he had 'fled for fear', but fearful of exposure he also made it very clear that he *only* wished to deal with Harley. This was especially useful when one Mrs Richardson, a 'prating lying bitch', as Ogilvie called her, cast aspersions on his loyalty to the Jacobite cause.[105] He also wanted assurances for his family from Harley in case he was caught.[106]

Geoffrey Holmes has noted of Harley's secretaryship that it was one of 'hard-working competence rather than of distinction', as well as one of long-hours and much labour, but he qualifies and even praises Harley's

[102] *HMC, Portland*, IV, pp. 90–2; 114–15, 158. Harley produced an annotated list of the messengers and which ones he could trust, including the designations 'seems honest', 'honest', 'drunken', 'good rider', 'Irish'.
[103] A jeweller named Isaac Bernard, who described himself as 'a German Jew', offered his services to go abroad as a spy: *HMC, Portland*, IV, p. 304.
[104] *HMC, Portland*, IV, pp. 160–1.
[105] For his career: *HMC*, *Portland*, IV, pp. 160–1; 258–60; 276–7.
[106] University of Nottingham, Portland MSS: Pw2984, fos. 1–2.

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intelligence work as one of 'extraordinary success'.[107] Yet having said this, while Harley's first tenure of office would not totally collapse under the cloud of hostility when the security in his office was irrevocably breached by William Greg's treachery, it certainly did not help his case.[108]

VI

William Greg's case enables us to better understand both the inner workings of the practices of administration that had been set up in Harley's office, and his intelligence work as a whole. We find laxity and dangerous carelessness in both cases. Greg illuminates the processes whereby important letters were constructed in the office, who had access to them, and how they were placed in the 'pacquets' of correspondence that were daily sent out from the office to diplomats and others aboard. This process gave him many opportunities to betray state secrets to the French.

As we saw above, Greg had been hired by Harley as one of his intelligence agents in Scotland and was then rewarded for this work by a clerkship in the office on 16 April 1706.[109] Greg seems to have found clerking for Harley not only very boring, with not much chance of meeting Harley personally, but too much hard work, with over long hours that seemed to stretch far into the night and sometimes into the early morning. 'Clerking' was clearly not to his tastes at all, given his outside life of 'sensual pleasures' and 'youthful lusts', drink, and debt.[110] Bored by the work set him, the former spy Greg now became attracted to the idea of selling state secrets. Harley's errors and the general slackness in security in the secretary's office simply made this easy and showed how Defoe's earlier warnings had been ignored.

The real business in the office usually did not actually begin until late at night, sometimes eleven or twelve o'clock, with the clerks themselves often

[107] Holmes, *British Politics*, p. 266.

[108] The general political context for this event should also be noted, for Harley was already under acute political pressure; see G. Holmes and W. A. Speck, 'The fall of Harley in 1708 reconsidered', in G. Holmes, *Politics, Religion and Society in England, 1679–1742* (London, 1986), pp. 57–83.

[109] It just kept him out of debtor's prison and he only reluctantly accepted the post: *HMC*, *Portland*, IV, p. 401. Greg's earlier life is related in Lorrain, *The Whole Life*, pp. 2–3; his early diplomatic letters from Denmark are located in *HMC*, *Portland*, II, pp. 58–9, 61–4. See also *Journal of the House of Lords*, XVIII: 1705–8, pp. 515–42, which has the evidence taken before the Lords committee on the case. For the political fall-out from Greg's case and the attempts to implicate Harley: F. Hoffman, *Secret Transactions during the Hundred Days Mr William Gregg Lay in Newgate under Sentence of Death for High-Treason from the Day of his Sentence, to the Day of his Execution* (London, 1711); F. Hoffman, *More Secret Transactions Relating to the Case of Mr William Gregg* (London, 1711); J. Swift, 'Some Remarks upon a Pamphlet, Entitl'd 'A letter to the Seven Lords of the Committee, Appointed to Examine Gregg' (1711)', in Scott (ed.), *Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, pp. 32–53. Swift, defending Harley to the hilt, was very derogatory about Greg, calling him a 'poor profligate fellow' as well as 'needy and vicious' (p. 37).

[110] Much can be gained about Greg's personal life from his confession and scaffold speech: TNA, SP 34/9, fos. 136–9; SP34/9, fos. 116–17; *A true copy of the paper left by Mr William Gregg, who suffered for high-treason the 28th day of April, 1708* (London, 1708). Burnet later described Greg as 'a vicious and necessitous person': Burnet, *History*, VI, p. 352.

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there until two or three in the morning. Moreover, the general opinion amongst all of them was that 'he thought himself happiest who could get away soonest'.[111] And being the 'youngest clerk ', in terms of service rather than years, Greg was sometimes just left on his own to do all of the hard work: setting up the packets of letters and then delivering them to the official messengers.

He outlined the by now regular clerical methods of dealing with the office correspondence in the office: letters were taken in shorthand, then wrote out 'fair', and only then were they sent over to Harley's house for his signature. After this, they were returned and then laboriously written out again into the office entry books held there in order to keep a record of their contents. Moreover, all of the books of the office were left in a press with the keys readily available, not only to the clerks themselves, but even to the lowly chamber-keepers should they be inclined to take a look. In general, the entry books were those volumes that contained the entire record of the letters passing through the office; the exception to this being those to the Duke of Marlborough, which were instead written up onto loose sheets of paper and then later inserted into the books; Greg admitted to copying many of these letters in the books himself.

Greg also gave a good example of how some of the packets of correspondence were made up.[112] He later noted that the Queen's letters were ones that tended to be especially made up *before* they entered the office, but in general a clerk was generally left to form the package of documents together. Even drafts of the royal correspondence were the task of the clerks in the office and openly available to view. On one occasion, Greg noted that a confidential letter to the Emperor was prepared by Lewis, then 'written in the hand of Mr Thomas', who was Harley's 'domestic clerk'. Godolphin eventually got hold of this and he made some additions and adjustments to the text, but the letter was still left open to view by the other clerks of the office, one of whom (Nicholas Mann) merrily commented that in his humble opinion, the additions made by Godolphin were in fact the 'brightest' part of an otherwise dull letter. By 1:00 AM, the letter was back in the office, and it was then placed into Greg's hands in order that he could put into the outgoing packet. By now, of course, the other clerks had gone off home and had left the unfortunate Greg all on his own to finish off the work.[113] This enabled him to sit down, copy the letter, and then send it off under the separate

[111] Howell (ed.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, XIV, 1700–8, p. 1383.

[112] A packet for Turin, for example, consisting mainly of letters to Sir John Norris, Mr Chetwynd (partially ciphered), Sir Cloudlesly Shovell, and with other letters written by Lord Treasurer Godolphin, was once handed over Greg to package together. One of them was in the cipher of the other secretary's office (Sunderland), who being sick at this time, Harley had taken on his role, but Greg could also read some of these ciphers.

[113] It is entirely possible of course that Greg had encouraged them to do so himself and volunteered to stay behind and clear up.

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cover of the letters of French prisoners, which happily enough for him, he also dealt with, and thereby of course they went to his French contact.[114]

It was these French prisoners' letters that had provided Greg with his first idea of betrayal. For these letters were themselves regularly intercepted at the Post Office and then sent on to the Secretary of State's office to be opened for study. Lewis was the man supposedly designated to look through them, but he seems to have been so hindered by the burden of his other business that he sometimes did not bother and merely delegated this important intelligence task to a junior clerk. Afterwards, Lewis admitted that he had seen some of this correspondence on Greg's desk, although did nothing about it, and the clerk in the case also stated that Greg 'used to come to him and desire him to let [him] have the perusal of these letters, which he said were very entertaining'.[115] The clerks indeed seem to have got into the habit of treating the office correspondence as if they belonged to a literary club solely created to comment on the taste and style of the prose of their betters. The returning responses to the prisoners' letters also went through the office but luckily for Greg, and again a major mistake, they were only occasionally opened.

Greg's main motive was money, for he vehemently disclaimed 'any zeal for the pretender', instead he said it was greed, sin, and drink that had led him into this 'downright madness'.[116] Naturally enough when some of the illicit correspondence was finally intercepted at The Hague actually *en route* to France, the storm burst over his head.[117] He was arrested, and examined on 31 December 1707 before the highest in the land where he broke down and confessed.[118]

In making excuses for Harley's negligence, Swift was to claim that 'a Secretary of State hath little or no intercourse with the lower clerks, but with the undersecretaries, who are the more immediate masters of those clerks and are, and ought to be, as they were gentlemen of worth'.[119] Yet, it is clear that Harley's administrative and management skills were sometimes poor. It was in fact Harley who, asking for trouble, had originally brought Greg into the office in the first place having previously employed him as spy in Scotland. While Harley may have thought himself

[114] Such clerical staff could often, for a price, simply make extra copies for sale to interested parties. See Sir J. Turner, *Pallas Armata, Military Essayes of the Ancient Grecian, Roman, and Modern Art of War, written in the years 1670 and 1671* (London, 1683), p. 263. The diplomat François de Calliéres also wrote that any ambassador, or any spy for that matter, looking for diplomatic intelligence should really look for such 'interested persons', or 'indiscreet persons, who often tell more then they ought', or for the 'discontented and passionate', who to 'discharge their spleen' would often tell all anyway; while yet another target for them should be the older courtier who had been at court for many years and who would tell all so that they could be 'admir'd for their penetration': De Calliéres, *Art*, pp. 89–90.

[115] *HMC*, *Portland*, IV, p. 475.

[116] TNA, SP 39/9 fo. 138v; Howell (ed.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, XIV, 1700–8, pp. 1383–6; *A True Copy of the Paper Left by Mr William Gregg*.

[117] *HMC*, *Portland*, IV, p. 469.

[118] Ibid., p. 469. For his fate and execution, see Luttell, *Brief Historical Relation*, VI, pp. 252, 258, 297. He stood firm against political pressure to incriminate Harley.

[119] J. Swift, 'Some Remarks upon a Pamphlet', p. 37.

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clever enough in doing so – it was after all a cheap reward for the man's services until he could use him again in the same capacity – it was clearly a major misjudgement. All of his predecessors had tended, where rewarding espionage careers were absolutely necessary at all, to assign politely, but firmly, such tarnished individuals to much safer occupations in customs and excise, for example, and well clear of their own offices.

Harley's biographers have tended to seize upon Swift's point and simply blame the poverty of administration in the era for the whole Greg affair, which Harley, or so they have said, could not overcome, for it was his inheritance to blame not him. This will not stand up to that much scrutiny since most of Harley's predecessors had actually worked very hard on their administrative capabilities, or at least had got someone in who was reliable enough to do so for them. The real fault here then lies squarely with Harley's inadequacies in administration, and in the lack of security that he allowed to take place, which given his obvious talents in parliamentary management and his penchant for secrecy does show a surprising lack of control over both his office and its inhabitants.[120]

VII

What can we make of Harley's tenure as Secretary of State from 1704 1708 and his part in the history of intelligence and espionage? Despite Defoe's best-efforts, Harley had in fact not moved very far, if at all, towards reforming the old established intelligence and espionage system that he had found on entering office. Instead, he had retained much the same set of 'edg'd tools' as had his predecessors although in one crucial point was there was certainly a lack of solidity of process in Harley's office practices, as we have seen, which frankly were much poorer all round than some of his predecessors. He was something of a hands-off administrator in this respect. Perhaps we should not be that surprised, for Harley's real interest was less in the daily grind of administration than in the politics of party and court advancement. Moreover, as Swift noted pointedly, Harley generally acted to 'watch incidents as they come, and then turn them to the advantage of what he pursues, than pretend to foresee them at great distance'.[121] With not much foresight and given his reactive nature, his actions in his handling of secret agents or clerks was sometimes reckless: 'I received your letter yesterday of a new way your purpose; I must leave that entirely to your judgement, for I cannot pretend to know that matter, but in this time of action the quicker the intelligence the better the trade.'[122] Secrecy, however, was Harley's one true passion, having been 'taught by experience that secret is seldom safe in more than one breast', but even this could sometimes lead to more complexity than was possibly good for action.

[120] See McInnes, *Robert Harley*, p. 73; Hill, *Robert Harley*, p. 113.
[121] *HMC*, *Bath*, I, p. 237.
[122] *HMC*, *Portland*, IV, p. 246.

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Nevertheless, as Gerald Aylmer once remarked perceptively, men such as Harley were ultimately never that self-conscious or introspective about their secret actions. Instead, they tended to be rather too 'preoccupied with the day-to-day management and manipulation of affairs, with the mechanics and routine of politics'.[123] Such short-termism could certainly give secret intelligence-gathering an immediate part to play, especially in the formation of day-to-day policies, but it is still clear that in the early eighteenth-century intelligence world, as Defoe pointed out, this had now to be matched by some solid administrative skill, and this gives us a new understanding of intelligence work in the era. For now, intelligence-gathering clearly needed to be linked to directly well-established office practice and routine, to note-taking and to ideas of factual evidence. Such adoption of an office 'method' was also concerned with techniques of interrogations, with the production of written transcripts and oral reports. It was also about listening, learning, and positioning oneself. On balance, therefore, by Harley's era, intelligence-gathering had become as much about proper office filing systems, security, and office practice as it was ever about agents on the ground because only by this could such evidence be made comprehensible, and could it be given to the right person in a useable form; otherwise, it would remain somewhat fragmentary and impracticable.

Developments in the world of administration were thus to become ever more obvious in the maturation of the state's intelligence and espionage. This move had actually begun in the 1640s during the course of the Civil Wars and then had continued under the Republic and Protectorate of the 1650s, only to persist after the Restoration. The Secretary of State's office was to continue to be the core hub for state intelligence matters. The connections now being made between early modern intelligence-gathering and the general contemporary developments in administration were also to become ever more obvious under men like Robert Walpole as the eighteenth-century early modern administrative world progressed.[124] Robert Harley's tenure as Secretary of State at least shows us some of the coming developments and the ways forward in this world, and this makes it important for understanding the role of intelligence and espionage in the government of the eighteenth century, even as we can also see its flaws.

[123] G. E. Aylmer, *The King's Servants: The Civil Service of Charles I, 1625–42* (London, 1961), p. 12.
[124] See Fritz, 'Anti-Jacobite', pp. 265–8; J. H. Plumb, *Sir Robert Walpole* (2 vols.; London, 1960), II, p. 41.

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