



I

Summoning an assembly

The ‘Assembly of Divines’, known to foreign observers as the ‘Synod of London’, was summoned in the summer of 1643 to reform the English church. In the midst of last minute changes to the ordinance calling the assembly in late June 1643, parliamentary scribes gave notice to over a hundred theologians that they were to appear at Westminster Abbey.¹ The nation was then urgently called to prayer.² Days later, William Twisse, the gathering’s prolocutor, preached a sermon to members of parliament, the public, and the assembled theologians.

While the crowds on 1 July exceeded expectations, the organizers must have realized that it was an inauspicious start. Only just over half of the invited theologians made it to the opening ceremony. And while Twisse was sometimes witty and creative, he did not seem to rise to the occasion. A friend of Sir Simonds D’Ewes, MP, who heard the sermon, considered it ‘a very mean or ordinary’ address and, contrary to public expectation, it was never printed.³ After the sermon, the assembly processed into Henry VII’s chapel where the two houses of parliament admitted that they had not yet fully decided what the gathering was supposed to do.

The Westminster assembly, as the gathering came to be known, had a clear start date but no obvious terminus. Members were eventually to discover that the Long Parliament would never seriously entertain ending the assembly’s meetings, and it went on to hold approximately 1,385 plenary sessions, and to produce no end of documents, certificates, and papers.⁴ Many members found it necessary to move their families to London and find ministerial livings in and around the city as the assembly stretched out from 1643 to 1653. The pace was exhausting, doubtless a strain on marriages and families, with the assembly consuming members’ working hours from Monday to Friday, and sermon preparation requiring spare hours and Saturdays. The assembly’s records reveal the range of responses to the situation in which the members found themselves. Enough members were enjoying themselves that rules

¹ *Die Sabbathi. 24. Junii 1643. It is this day ordered by the Lords and Commons in parliament assembled, that the meeting of the assembly of divines, together with some members of both houses of parliament, shall be on Saturday the First of July 1643* (London, 1643).

² *Die Sabbathi 24. Junii 1643. It is this day ordered by the Lords and Commons in parliament that all ministers in their severall churches in Wednesday next at the publike fast, and at all other times afterwards in their prayers before their sermons, shall earnestly and particularly pray for the speciall assistance and blessing of God upon the assembly of divines* (London, 1643).

³ For comment on the sermon, BL Harl. MS 165, fo. 105r; for expectation that the sermon would soon be in print, *Certaine informations from severall parts of the kingdome*, Issue 35 (London) 3 July 1643, p. 193.

⁴ The minutes indicate that there were 1,333 sessions, but these records stop in March 1652, after which the assembly continued to meet weekly, it seems, for another year.





were made about laughter in the assembly. Others began to complain under the strain of the many hours of work behind the writing, editing, submission, and too frequent rejection of assembly documents.

Perhaps the most interesting of all assembly documents is the one which members did not labour to produce—the one that recorded their labours. The minutes of the assembly, an extraordinary record by any account, is the centrepiece of this edition, and is the only major assembly text not listed in the calendar of papers. The surviving minutes of the assembly's gathering is an almost unique text in the history of ecclesiastical synods, for it is at once an official record and, for many hundreds of pages, a sort of corporate diary or journal for the assembly as a whole. As it happens, although this record covers much of the synod's history, some of it in great detail, it lacks the minutes for the assembly's first months and its final year. And so for the story of the assembly's slow start and eventual demise, the first and last parts of this introduction, respectively, it is necessary to rely on the private diaries of members of parliament and assembly members, and on public newspaper accounts of the assembly's activities, along with other sources.

A 'LONGE & SAD EXPERIENCE'

From these sources it appears that the temporary paralysis of the Lords and Commons on 1 July 1643 was caused by the sheer scale of the work that needed to be done, and the difficulty of knowing where best to start. Thankfully the assembly had just been called and was ready to help. Members immediately offered to call a fast at which the assembly could publicly address the leading problems of the nation. It was the first opportunity to flex the muscles of the synod, and members offered to take a leading role. Both John Selden MP and William Pierrepont MP, with forty members of the Commons and many peers looking on, immediately objected that any such attempt would exceed the authority of the gathering as detailed in the assembly's summoning ordinance. The proper posture for the assembly to adopt was that of a petitioner. The gathering promptly petitioned for ten immediate reforms to deal with 'the brutish ignorance' of the people, the pollution of the Lord's supper, 'corrupt doctrines', careless observance of the Lord's day, 'blind guides and scandalous ministers', as well as all manner of popish superstitions and immoral acts.⁵

None of these were new problems in the kingdom. As the assembly later explained in the preface to its directory for worship, there was a 'longe & sad experience' of decline and abuse following 'the blessed Reformation'. Wise and pious fathers of the faith had redressed many erroneous and superstitious ideas, but not all. As a result, the English church was in poor health, and the assembly's diagnosis for the malaise which afflicted Protestant England was, predictably, an over-exposure to 'papists'.⁶ King Edward VI's reformation was in the midst of its attempt to remove the most poisonous remnants of popery when its spiritual physicians were removed from the

⁵ Document 1.

⁶ Document 42.





theatre of operation by Mary Tudor. The passage of time, even during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James VI and I, had revealed the extent to which a relapse to the Roman Catholic Church was still possible, or at least plausible, to British puritans.

During the reign of Charles I, the plight of the godly, which was never good, took a turn for the worse. Strict Sabbatarianism was considered subversive, anti-Calvinists won positions of influence at court and in the church, and creative attempts to secure positions for godly ministers were shut down, with the funds seized by the authorities. Some ministers who would become members of the assembly spent time in prison, some in exile, and, in many localities, official efforts to control and subdue dissident godly only strengthened their conviction that church reform was desperately needed. Of course, ecclesiastical law was unevenly enforced, and some of the godly tasted limited freedom of conscience on a local level, usually under the protection of godly patronage. Nonetheless, this too often gave reform-minded ministers a hunger for further change, one that would help their brethren who had fled abroad, or were still suffering under William Laud, archbishop of Canterbury and the public face of opposition to puritanism.

Change for good seemed well out of reach during the long 1630s. Charles' and Henrietta's court was almost impervious to godly influence or political reform. Parliament was not summoned, nor did it appear likely that it would be, since it had previously placed demands on the king that far outweighed its benefits to him. Convocation could only meet when parliament was in session, and was under the control of bishops in support of Laud anyway. Meanwhile, the king made up for the loss of voted subsidies by parliament through creative fiscal policies which rankled businessmen and landed gentry alike.

It was Charles's determination to enforce his religious policies on the Scots and the potential expense of armed conflicts that finally forced the king to call a parliament in the spring of 1640. The revival of demands for reform caused him to dismiss the gathering only a few weeks later. Unusually, convocation was permitted to continue meeting even after the Short Parliament had been prorogued. For those already provoked by royal policy of the past decade, or still stinging from the activities of convocation in 1604 (whose canons were not approved by parliament), the move only confirmed the downward drift of both church and state. Unfortunately for Charles, the Scottish occupation of north-east England forced him to call parliament again in November 1640. Parliament was in a position of strength, with a longer list of complaints and fears than at any time in recent history, and with the greater number of MPs confident that a major synod of theologians was needed to address abuses of power and the underlying problems in the Church of England.

‘A FREE AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY’

In early 1641, the Commons led the two houses down the legislative path toward a synod. Amidst fractious debates, the house was given an additional push by strong petitions, especially the remarkable ministerial petitions offered on 23 January 1641





and 20 December.⁷ A group of five ministers offered testimony in support of the first petition. Cornelius Burges spoke alone in defence of the second, which called for ‘a free synod’. Days later, Edmund Calamy uttered his call not only to reform the Laudian church, but to ‘reform the Reformation it self’.⁸

The larger part of the Commons was ready to offer a synod to reformers in 1641. Speeches calling for a ‘free’ assembly were uttered in the House of Commons throughout the year, one of which was given by Sir Edward Dering, who in November 1641 insisted that he had seen a bill for an assembly five months earlier and demanded that it be brought forward the next morning, or else that a committee be appointed to draw up a fresh one.⁹ In August 1641, a call for a synod was included as Article 185 of the Grand Remonstrance. The article did not state how the synod would be summoned or governed, but it clearly called Charles to consent to ‘a general synod of the most grave, pious, learned and judicious divines of this island; assisted with some from foreign parts, professing the same religion with us’—a vision which looked much like the international synod held in Dordrecht in 1618–1619. Although the determinations of the synod would then be delivered to the English parliament, and with its ‘stamp of authority’ would ‘find passage and obedience throughout the kingdom’,¹⁰ the reference to ‘this island’ included England and Scotland, and implied a reform that would suit both countries. The Remonstrance was passed in the House of Commons by eleven votes, and was sent to the king on 1 December 1641.¹¹

In early January 1642, Charles attempted, and failed, to arrest five members of the Commons who were planning the arrest and trial of the queen for treason.¹² In the turmoil that accompanied the attempt, the Commons assembled as a grand committee, meeting in the city Guildhall and the Grocers’ Hall to discuss the king’s ‘breach of privilege with other particulars’.¹³ Those particulars included ‘the want of due reformation in church government and the liturgy’ and a proposal was made that ‘a free and national assembly may be chosen by the king with consent of parliament’.¹⁴ International representation at the synod was no longer part of the proposal.

Details about the synod were hammered out between 20 and 24 January 1642, a discussion captured by overlapping accounts in private journals of MPs John Moore, Sir Thomas Peyton, Roger Hill, Framlingham Gawdy, and Sir Simonds D’Ewes.¹⁵ Three questions were on the table: whether the gathering would be called an

⁷ See C. Russell, *The fall of the British monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 188–91.

⁸ Edmund Calamy, *Englands looking-glasse* (London, 1642), p. 23. For sermons and pamphlets calling for reformation by way of a synod, see L. J. Holley, ‘The divines of the Westminster assembly’ (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1979), pp. 45–75. For an account of parliamentary fast sermons, see J. F. Wilson, *Pulpit in parliament: puritanism during the English Civil Wars, 1640–1648* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 36–59. For other pressures on parliament earlier in the year to reform, see W. Abbot, ‘The issue of episcopacy and the Long Parliament’ (unpublished D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1981), pp. 157–205.

⁹ Holley, ‘The divines of the Westminster assembly’, pp. 46, 48–9.

¹⁰ S. R. Gardiner, ed., *The constitutional documents of the puritan revolution* (Oxford, 1889), p. 152.

¹¹ Holley, ‘The divines of the Westminster assembly’, pp. 50–2.

¹² For the plot against the five members, see S. K. Roberts, ‘Five members (*act.* 1641)’, *ODNB* and K. Lindley, *Popular politics and religion in civil war London* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 117–23.

¹³ *PJ* 1:135. ¹⁴ *PJ* 1:139, 141–2. ¹⁵ See *PJ* 1:132–42.





‘assembly’ or a ‘synod’, whether its members ‘should be chosen by the clergy of each county or by the parliament’, and ‘how many should be chosen out of each county’.¹⁶ D’Ewes, at least according to his own account, spoke to each question in a parade of etymological derivations and citations from manuscripts in his possession. The first issue was insignificant: since ‘the word “synod” hath been so long abused in the church’, he preferred to call the body an ‘assembly’. The second and third issues were more substantive. With respect to the calling of the divines, D’Ewes thought that laymen had always joined the synods or at least joined in nominating divines for synods. Dropping the references to clerical participation in the selection process, D’Ewes argued that parliament should nominate the candidates for the assembly.¹⁷ Sir Ralph Hopton, a future royalist, opposed the idea and joined with others in lobbying for a synod selected by clergy.

It was almost impossible to find a winning proposal. MPs were in no mood for a committee dominated by members or appointees of the upper house of convocation. But the king and significant portions of the population would consider it ludicrous to accept a synod called by parliament with a membership selected by parliament. The selection process would be controversial in the Commons too. There were those who wanted bishops to constitute or select the participants of the assembly, and those, like Ralph Hopton, who at least wanted to follow the historical precedent of clerical involvement in the nomination of synod members. Some MPs simply wanted to keep the Commons from the divisive debates which they thought would attend the nomination process; a few felt that theological matters were best left to the clergy.¹⁸ A range of arguments was used by Dering, if his published speeches on religion can be relied upon,¹⁹ but MPs supporting a self-selecting synod were defeated.²⁰

With the benefit of hindsight, Richard Baxter wryly observed that ‘the Parliament not intending to call an Assembly which should pretend a Divine Right to make obliging Laws or Canons to bind their Brethren, but an Ecclesiastical Council to be Advisers to themselves, did think that they best knew who were the fittest to give them Advice, and therefore chose them all themselves.’²¹ But then Baxter had no complaint about parliament’s nominations, seeing that in retrospect he considered the divines ‘Men of Eminent Learning and Godliness, and Ministerial Abilities and fidelity’ and judged that the church ‘since the days of the Apostles, had never a Synod of more excellent divines (taking one thing with another) than this Synod and the Synod of Dort’.²²

The most awkward question for the Commons in January 1642, prior to the flight of the bishops from the House of Lords, was the role of the peers in selecting divines, a matter to which D’Ewes alleges that he ‘spake several times’. The Commons had

¹⁶ *PJ* 1:133. At no point did parliament seriously consider appointments according to diocese, a point which did not go unnoticed. See Thomas Fuller, *The church-history of Britain* (London, 1655), XI.ix.1.

¹⁷ *PJ* 1:134. ¹⁸ *PJ* 1:134.

¹⁹ Holley, ‘The divines of the Westminster assembly’, p. 49.

²⁰ *PJ* 1:134; for Moore’s framing of the final vote, see *PJ* 1:139; for Hill’s, see *PJ* 1:141–2.

²¹ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), pt. 1, p. 73.

²² Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, pt. 1, p. 73. Baxter makes clear that he did not agree with the Assembly on all points of ecclesiology and wished ‘that some words in their Catechism . . . had been more clear’ (ibid.).





carried deliberations about a synod forward without the Lords, but would need to present a coherent package to the upper house if the synod was to become a reality. But should the Commons nominate ministers ‘and then present their names to the lords?’ Or should it ‘leave it indefinitely that the lords and we should nominate them’ together?²³ D’Ewes shrank from the prospect of an immediate contest with the Lords. The process could ‘destroy the whole business’. He also reasoned that MPs could not ‘satisfy the commons and clergy of England that this is a free election unless we leave it to ourselves who are the representative body of them all, whereas the lords are but single persons and represent themselves only’. Other excuses came easily: procedural complications would follow if the Lords were involved too early, for a joint meeting would generate ‘infinite greater confusion of delay’; and ‘besides this the lords, conceiving themselves to be the greater men and to have priority of us, will be ready enough to name men before us, and then it must breed differences and distrusts between us if we refuse them’.²⁴ D’Ewes’s musing indicates that John Morrill’s comment about bills of religion in general was certainly applicable to the bill for a synod: it was delayed not so much for fear of splitting the Commons as for fear of rejection by the Lords. Legislation advocating religious reform could only move forward after ‘the expulsion of the bishops’ from the House of Lords ‘and the haemorrhage of royalist peers to York in the spring of 1642’.²⁵

Charles I marked the formal start to the civil war when he raised the royal standard at Nottingham on 22 August 1642, although the first shots had been fired earlier in the summer, and 11,000 men had faced off near Warwick a few days earlier. The onset of war provided further ammunition for those arguing for an assembly, for an English synod would show the presbyterian authorities in Edinburgh that Westminster was serious about church reform, and serve as an inducement for the Scots to send an army southward to aid the parliamentary cause. At the same time the war also distracted from the work of drafting legislation for an assembly. Understandably, members of both houses were too busy waging war or debating its merits or defining its purpose to deal with underlying causes, including known religious causes. And yet the major reason for the delay in calling a synod after the outbreak of war was a dogged insistence on the part of most members of the two houses that they gain Charles’s assent to an assembly—the very thing he would never grant. For many months the king simply withheld his concurrence. Only when the gathering was finally summoned without his permission did he openly condemn the entire effort and forbid attendance. It was a decision which he might have regretted later in the war when he was forced to negotiate with parliament and members of the assembly; Charles had no members of his own choosing and he scared away those members nominated by the two houses most likely to support his cause or obstruct the gathering’s progress from within.²⁶

While the spark of hope for royal approval was kept alive, the legislative process dragged on, with the Scots providing little nudges, such as pamphlets advertising the

²³ *Pf* I:134. ²⁴ *Pf* I:134–5.

²⁵ J. S. Morrill, *The nature of the English revolution* (New York, 1993), p. 75.

²⁶ For the royalists’ arguments against the assembly, see *Certain quaeres propounded, and sent by the divines of Oxford to the synod now assembled at Westminster* (Oxford, 1643).





names of the theologians which it would send to the synod.²⁷ Finally, in June 1643, after eighteen months of waiting and petitioning, both houses resolved to move ahead, although each first stepped back to look critically at the legislation they had been proposing for the last year and a half. The result was a series of major changes to the document they had presented repeatedly to the king. The confusion and carelessness which attended the final printing of the ordinance (documented in Appendix 1), obscures the intense efforts expended by both houses to keep the nation safe from clericalism. In the days immediately before the synod was summoned, both the Lords and the Commons seem to have awakened to the gathering's potential ability to cause political division, and deliberately attempted to hedge it in. The gathering would obviously carry appreciable clout, not least because the godly of the British Isles and, it was hoped, the international Reformed community, would see the summoning of the synod as a divine answer to prayer.²⁸

SETTLING, VINDICATING, AND CLEARING

The title of the summoning ordinance reiterated both the wording of the petitions to parliament for a 'learned and godly' assembly and the vocabulary used in the House of Commons to advocate a reform by parliament in consultation with divines.²⁹

Of the three main tasks of parliament's assembly, the first two were revolutionary in nature: 'setling . . . the government and liturgy' of the church 'as shall be most agreeable to the Word of God'. The preface of the ordinance reminded the nation that this would be a far-reaching settling: 'many things' remained in the 'liturgy, discipline and government of the church' which required a 'further and more perfect reformation'.

The settling of many things would be sweeping in extent, but the settlement itself was by no means clearly defined. When it came to matters of worship, the two houses sent out conflicting messages about ongoing observance of the existing liturgy and destruction of images and communion rails, until late August 1643, when parliament finally issued an ordinance that sanctioned the removal of rails and images (a decision favouring the House of Commons).³⁰

In contrast to the cloud of ambiguity around liturgical reform, the second task of the assembly, involving the reform of church government, was much more obvious. Lest anyone forget—not least the theologians soon to assemble in Westminster Abbey—the preface of the summoning ordinance informed them that the Lords and Commons had already 'declared and resolved . . . that the present church-government by archbishops, bishops, their chancellors, commissaries[,] deanes, deanes and chapters, archdeacons and other ecclesiastical officers depending upon

²⁷ e.g. *The Lord Strange his demands . . . Also the names of the Scots elders and ministers chosen by the commissioners of Scotland to be sent to the assembly of divines* (London, 1642).

²⁸ e.g. BL Sloane 922, fos. 140r, 141r.

²⁹ For the text of the ordinance, see Appendix 1.

³⁰ Trevor Cooper, ed., *The journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 12–15, 337–44.





the hierarchy, is evil and justly offensive and burthensome to the kingdome'. The hierarchical system was unscriptural and tyrannical. Worse, it proved to be a ball and a chain to progress, 'a great impediment to reformation and growth of religion'. Most importantly for members of parliament, prelacy was 'prejudiciall to the state and government of this kingdome'.

It was true that the ecclesiological system was not yet abolished, but this declaration, in the very act of summoning the divines, was pointing down the road that the assembly was to travel. The expected transformation of church government also shows just how quickly, and how much, the climate of England had changed since the Short Parliament was called. Throughout the 'personal rule' of Charles, the greater part of even his most unhappy subjects would have been content with a change in church leadership without substantial change in church governance. By 1643, the ground had shifted, for parliament had heeded the almost constant calls from its most ardent supporters for a more radical reform.

The third task of the synod was stated with a sharp difference in tone. The assembly was to 'vindicate' and 'clear' the church's doctrine. Neither the title nor the body of the ordinance suggest that there was anything wrong with the theology of the church as it was presented in the Thirty-nine Articles, the catechisms, or homilies. Rather, the divines were to vindicate and clear 'the doctrine of the said church, from false aspersions and interpretations' or, as the ordinance states in another place, from 'misconstructions'—and always in such a way 'as shall be most agreeable to the Word of God'. The assembly was to demonstrate that the Church of England's theology was in accordance with the Church of Scotland (a phrase to which the Lords had objected) and with the Reformed churches abroad.³¹ But this could easily be a matter of spin rather than reform. Under the guise of 'vindicating and clearing', Reformed divines in England had, in recent decades, argued that the Thirty-nine Articles were *already* Reformed and in conformity with these other churches.³² But then, on another day of the week or another year in the decade, these same Reformed divines could also encourage the supplementation of the Thirty-nine Articles with the aborted Lambeth Articles.³³ Vindicating and clearing were elastic terms even to men of the most rigid principles.

In spite of this background of qualified assent and implied dissent, there is no indication that assembly members were supposed to revise the church's doctrine in any way comparable to the proposed reformation of church government or liturgy, or if they were even to 'revise' its doctrine at all. On the other hand, parliament had clearly declared its commitment to altering the church's ecclesiology and worship and

³¹ W. A. Shaw, *A history of the English church during the civil wars and under the Commonwealth 1640–1660* (London, 1900), vol. 1, p. 127.

³² George Walker argued that the eleventh of the Thirty-nine Articles taught the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. *Socinianisme in the fundamentall point of justification discovered, and confuted* (London, 1641), pp. 96–8. But in revising the eleventh article at the assembly, Walker argued for a change of wording in the article. See e.g. *Minutes* 1:7v.

³³ Calvinists were not the only persons to argue that their position was in accord with a confession while simultaneously pushing for confessional revision: Arminius did the same with the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism. See R. A. Muller, *God, creation, and providence in the thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids, 1991), pp. 41–2.





had partly explained the degree of change that it expected. The fact that the two houses provided an ambiguous declaration about an alteration in doctrine was to prove significant.

Worship, church government, and theology embrace the main themes of the text of the ordinance. But the subtext was equally important. At every possible point in the ordinance, parliament asserted its governing and determining role in the synod. Beyond providing the forceful preamble, the two houses listed the names of the peers and commoners before the names of the divines, set the date of the assembly's meeting and its location, set quorum at forty divines, and chose the prolocutor, William Twisse. If he were to die or 'be letted by sicknesse or other necessary impediment', the two houses would choose his successor. Just as parliament and convocation had traditionally been dissolved at the pleasure of the king, the assembly was to be dissolved at the pleasure of the Lords and Commons.

The power of parliament was directive not only in all matters organizational, but also in setting the agenda. The persons of the assembly were to 'have power and authority . . . from time to time' to 'confer & treat amongst themselves of such matters and things' touching on theology, ecclesiology, and worship, but they were 'enjoyed' to do so only 'as shall be proposed unto them by both or either of the said houses of parliament, and no other'. The theologians meeting in the abbey could also 'deliver their opinions and advises' but only 'touching the matters aforesaid' and only to parliament as 'shall be required'. In fact, silence was enjoined and although note-taking was not forbidden, no information was to be divulged 'by printing, writing or otherwise without the consent of both or either house of parliament'. Finally, 'in case, any difference of opinion shall happen amongst the said persons so assembled, touching any the matters, that shall be proposed to them', then the matter of the disagreement and the position and reasoning of both sides was to be submitted to the two houses so that they could in turn give the assembly 'further direction'. No one was to forget that this was to be parliament's assembly. After all, as Sir Simond D'Ewes so confidently told his journal, the members of the two houses had an advantage in religion: they could make decisions without 'the great passions clergymen are subject to'.³⁴

Nonetheless, the royalist press made much of parliament's control of the assembly, announcing that the assembly was curtailed in the issues it was allowed to discuss, limited in the advice it could give—indeed, with all of the parliamentary observers present, it was hardly a synod of divines at all. The quorum for the assembly set in the ordinance did not even specify whether it could be comprised of members of parliament only.³⁵

The remainder of the ordinance detailed monetary and legal matters, with money coming first. The divines were to be paid 4 shillings for every day in attendance and for the ten days preceding and following the assembly—the same amount paid to a lieutenant in the army.³⁶ The money was to come from 'the Commonwealth', but how

³⁴ BL Harl. MS 166, fo. 267b.

³⁵ e.g. *Observations upon the ordinance . . . for ordination* (Oxford, 1645), pp. 1–6.

³⁶ A colonel received £1 a day, a major 13s., and a captain 8s. C. H. Firth, *Cromwell's army: A history of the English soldier during the civil wars, the Commonwealth, and the Protectorate* (London, 1902), p. 186.





the money would be raised is not stated. One member of parliament noted in his journal that the cash-strapped Commons considered requiring counties to pay for their respective representatives.³⁷ It turned out to be much easier to make full use of the fine print—there was a qualifier in the ordinance stating that parliament would pay ‘at such a time and in such manner as by both Houses of parliament shall be appointed’, a rather ambiguous statement for a body contracted to pay the assembly a total of £21. 1s. per day, beginning immediately.

The legal issues surrounding the calling of the assembly were as complicated and fraught as any major endeavour linked to the Long Parliament. However, only one of these issues is mentioned in the ordinance: absenteeism from livings. The two houses granted the divines indemnity from prosecution on the basis of ‘any law or statute of non-residence’ for ‘reason of any non-residence or absence’ from their livings—a right which was to extend to any divine not named in the ordinance but summoned to the assembly at a later time. The right to all the wages of their living(s) was maintained—‘provided . . . that this ordinance or any thing therein contained, shall not give unto the persons aforesaid, or any of them, nor shall they in this assembly assume to exercise any jurisdiction, power, or authority ecclesiasticall whatsoever, or any other power, then is herein particularly expressed’. Presumably, the divines would have been subject to prosecution if they attempted to exceed the limits of their stated powers. They would test those limits more than once.

Indemnity against prosecution for non-residence was considerate. Nonetheless, parliament was vague, in the ordinance and elsewhere, about the status of the canon law and civil statutes (all of which were Elizabethan) which addressed other matters pertinent to the assembly-men. For example, neither the preamble nor the body of the summoning ordinance clarified the legality of doctrinal revision. This was significant, since the fifth canon of the Canons of 1604 specifies that a clergyman differing from any one of the Thirty-nine Articles could be excommunicated, *ipso facto*. But, beyond declaring that the Canons of 1604 and 1640 were of no authority in the civil courts,³⁸ the Long Parliament did not venture to explain the legal position of the canons for the church courts. This was inadequate security for some reformers in Westminster Abbey. Without the civil courts, the church could still fine and imprison a minister. And then there was the issue of conscience. The ordination vow to obey one’s ordinary had been creatively interpreted by ministers who struggled to conform or refused to do so, but for those who had not run seriously afoul of their ordinary, joining the assembly was a big step.

The pressing of the solemn league and covenant some months later was even more difficult and gave active assembly members like Cornelius Burges, Daniel Featley, and William Price cold feet. Featley mentioned his concerns about perjury, specifically

³⁷ See Framlingham Gawdy’s comments in *Pf* 2:298.

³⁸ The House of Commons had ‘passed resolutions . . . against the power of the clergy to make any canons without common consent in Parliament’. Shaw, *History of the English church*, vol. 1, pp. 14–15. For the opposition of parliament to the Canons of 1604, see G. Bray, ed., *The Anglican canons, 1529–1947* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. lvi–lix, lxxiii–lxxviii.





citing his vows and ‘canonically obedience’ in a speech before the assembly.³⁹ Nevertheless, since both sets of canons (in 1604 and 1640) were issued without—or rather in opposition to—the authority of parliament, no canon could be pleaded at common law or lead to common law penalties such as fines, whipping, or execution. Featley’s protest on the basis of canon law was unlikely to garner much support among those who had already dared to come to Westminster against the king’s express command.⁴⁰ Of course parliamentary statutes were another matter and the preface to the assembly’s 1644 Directory for public worship made a point of repealing Edwardian and Elizabethan statutes touching on the issue of worship.⁴¹ Very probably, the divines were to assume that Elizabethan statutes protecting the Thirty-nine Articles would be repealed when the revision of the Articles was completed. And yet until that time, it was technically illegal to alter, let alone expunge, any of the Thirty-nine Articles.⁴² Thus, while indemnity from prosecution for non-residence was incorporated in the ordinance,⁴³ indemnity for ecclesiastical, liturgical, or theological innovation was not likely to be granted until the new Reformation was completed.⁴⁴

If this reading of the summoning ordinance is correct, then it was perhaps an act of carelessness on the part of parliament to have offered the divines so little security. Perhaps it thought that those divines bold enough to meet in the abbey did not need further legal reassurances from the houses that summoned them to Westminster. However, some divines clearly felt they were on the horns of a dilemma: the king disapproved of their meeting, and everyone knew that many of the members of both houses were strongly anticlerical and the marriage between parliament and the assembly was going to be a difficult one. It was also clear that if the relationship was strained, it would not be parliament that would suffer abuse.

The summoning ordinance functioned as a one-sided pre-nuptial agreement that left parliament in complete control of the assembly; for, though the document was not without its ambiguities, in defining the assembly’s place vis-à-vis parliament, there could be no questions. Furthermore, the assembly was watched jealously from the first day of its meeting, with elected parliamentary members of both houses observing the theologians at work. Although dwarfed numerically by more than one hundred theologians, some of them with international reputations, the election of twenty members of the House of Commons and ten members of the House of Lords as members of the assembly was a substantial allocation of human resources in the

³⁹ Anonymous, *Sacra nemesi, the Levites scourge, or, Mercurius Britan. Civicus disciplin’d. Also diverse remarkable disputes and resolves in the Assembly of Divines related, episcopacy asserted, truth righted, innocency vindicated against detraction* (Oxford [London], 1644), p. 50.

⁴⁰ There was real danger in coming to Westminster, although one of the assembly-men who was taken prisoner was later released without harm. See Lightfoot, *Journals*, p. 174.

⁴¹ *A&O*, vol. 1, p. 582. See, for example, 1 Eliz. I, c. 2. All citations are from the *Statutes of the realm* (London, 1819), vol. iv, parts 1–2.

⁴² 13 Eliz. I, c. 12, ss. 1–4, 1571.

⁴³ *A&O*, vol. 1, p. 183. For the long history of legislation on benefices, see 13 Eliz. I, c. 20; 14 Eliz. I, c. 11; 27 Eliz. I, c. 11; 29 Eliz. I, c. 5; 31 Eliz. I, c. 10; 35 Eliz. I, c. 7; 39 Eliz. I, c. 18; 43 Eliz. I, c. 9; 1 Jac. I, c. 25; and 21 Jac. I, c. 28.

⁴⁴ The Elizabethan statutes regarding church government (e.g. 13 Eliz. I, c. 12, ss. 1–3, 1571) are not repealed in the temporary ordinance concerning ordination or in the final ordinance establishing Presbyterian church government.





middle of a civil war, and would actually increase to twenty-two members of the Commons and eleven members of the Lords during the height of political interest in the assembly. Members in both houses, whether nominated to the assembly or not, often took care to maintain contact with ministers in the assembly who enjoyed their patronage. If members of parliament were not always present in the assembly, they seemed always to know when they ought to be, and on more than one occasion MPs arrived en masse at the abbey to steer the assembly in its work.

Parliament was still recovering from what it considered to be an abusive relationship with the Laudian church, and the lower house in particular was wary of any future marriage in which it would not be a dominant partner. The House of Commons had the direct day-to-day charge of the assembly and its finances, and tended to keep the gathering overworked and underfed while it reviewed, and often vigorously debated, all documents emerging from the assembly, sometimes choosing to revise, sometimes to ignore, and sometimes to smile on the assembly's labours.⁴⁵ The Commons was especially wary during debates over church government. While the godly of England arguably privileged the importance of a re-energized pastoral discipline more than any other ecclesiastical reform, the greater part of the Commons was carefully eyeing the assembly to ensure that no new variety of clerical tyranny would so much as get off the ground. Even those MPs most supportive of the assembly must have felt some nervousness when, at the height of the assembly's assertions of church discipline, a contemporary woodcut pictured the assembly of divines as a third house of parliament, and an accompanying poem named the assembly one member of the 'Trinity of State'.⁴⁶

LEARNED AND GODLY DIVINES

The membership of the synod, discussed in the biographical dictionary, had been hand-picked by the two houses in 1642 and 1643, and most of it was English. The Scots exported a handful of delegates to the Westminster assembly after signing the solemn league and covenant (see below). The French stranger churches of London supplied two ministers to the assembly, ostensibly representing the Channel Islands. Dublin was informally represented by Joshua Hoyle, who had taught at Trinity College until the 1641 Irish uprising. Wales, it was decided, had no important theologians, and Englishmen were sent in their place.

In the spring of 1642, the House of Commons had, as planned, used county committees to nominate two divines for each English shire, one for each Welsh shire and four for the city of London, reflecting parliamentary representation for those districts. Also in 1642, John Cotton, John Davenport, and Thomas Hooker were informally invited by five peers and thirty-four members of the Commons. The

⁴⁵ The Commons delegated the care and provision of the assembly to the committee for plundered ministers. See BL Add. MS 15669, fo. 2r; order dated Saturday 21 October 1643.

⁴⁶ *Englands miraculous preservation emblematically described, erected for a perpetuall monument to posterity* (London, 1646). See frontispiece.





theological character of these peers was well-known and varied, ranging from Robert Greville, second Baron Brooke (1607–1643), William Fiennes, first Viscount Saye and Sele, and Philip Wharton, fourth Baron Wharton (1613–1696), to Edward Montagu, second earl of Manchester, and Robert Rich, second earl of Warwick. The majority of the thirty-four MPs on this list were, by 1642, thoroughly opposed to episcopacy, and many leaned toward congregationalism or something more radical. The signatories included seven future members of the Commons committee for the Westminster assembly.⁴⁷ The New Englanders did not come.

As there were informal invitations to the assembly, there may also have been an informal screening process for nominations. A bitter exchange between Bishop John Gauden and an anonymous respondent, possibly a member of the assembly,⁴⁸ reveals Gauden angry that he was first nominated for Cambridge and then replaced by Thomas Goodwin.⁴⁹ The bishop alleged that Sir Dudley North, Thomas Chicheley (who had nominated Gauden), and his friend Sir Thomas Barrington all agreed that ‘some close committee’ served as ‘scrutineers of the elect’, and the committee excluded Gauden for preaching an episcopalian sermon before the ‘Commons at their first sitting’.⁵⁰

The Lords reviewed the list in June 1643 and nominated additional divines not designated by county. Even the divines appointed by the Commons for one county sometimes held their living(s) in another. Thomas Case had a London lectureship but represented Cheshire; Richard Heyrick had a Cheshire living but represented Lancashire. There may have been some formula for even these choices: Case had temporarily retreated to the north-west in the late 1630s to avoid Bishop Matthew Wren, and Heyrick was a pluralist with a second living in Lancashire. Most often the choice was more straightforward, and English members, at least, usually represented their own county.

Selection criteria are often difficult to establish. The choice of some divines was obvious. Popular preachers before parliament with influential patrons in one or both houses, like Stephen Marshall and Edmund Calamy, had been linked to calls for a synod since the beginning of the parliament. With future assembly members Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, and William Spurstowe, they had anonymously penned protest pamphlets against episcopacy under the acronym Smectymnuus, one of a number of subversive tracts to appear in the early years of the Long Parliament. Others were invited as leading theologians, polemicists, or puritan patriarchs—men like Joshua Hoyle, Thomas Gataker, Edmund Staunton, Thomas Temple, and the

⁴⁷ The New England ministers erred in thinking the list of signatories included the names of ministers. For the letter, see T. Hutchinson, *The history of the colony of Massachusetts Bay* (London, 1765), p. 116.

⁴⁸ Gauden’s respondent refers to evidence in the ‘Books of the Assembly’, which suggests inside knowledge. See *The anatomy of Dr. Gauden’s idolized non-sence and blasphemy* (London, 1660), p. 10. On the other hand, if the author of this pamphlet was a member of the assembly he should have known that members did not necessarily need to be benefited in the county which he represented (*ibid.*, pp. 8–9).

⁴⁹ The fact that the prolocutor congratulated new members upon their entry suggests that divines were cognizant of the privilege of election to this reforming synod (e.g. Minutes 3:197v–198r).

⁵⁰ John Gauden, *Anti Baal-berith* (London, 1661), pp. 88–9; see also Gauden’s original complaint in his *Ecclesiae Anglicanae susprisia* (London, 1659), p. 377, and the anonymous rebuttal to *Ecclesiae Anglicanae susprisia* in *Anatomy of Dr. Gauden’s*, pp. 8–10.





assembly's oldest member, Henry Wilkinson the elder (1566–1647). Further choices were more politically strategic in nature: Episcopalians with parliamentary patronage like Daniel Featley, Ralph Brownrigg, Henry Hammond, George Morley, Samuel Ward, and James Ussher may not have been expected to attend—indeed only Featley participated meaningfully—but the inclusion of their names on the summoning ordinance would give the assembly credibility and some appearance of fairness. But, for many others, the reason for their appointment is unclear. Most of the appointees had gritted their teeth and held on to their livings in the church or university during William Laud's tenure as archbishop. Many had been cited before the ecclesiastical courts and an appreciable minority had been deprived of their livings, with some men fleeing to the continent and one to the American colonies. Most held at least an MA. Yet these things are better viewed as component parts of a godly minister than distinctive marks of a future Westminster divine.

Surviving evidence suggests that personal contacts and patronage probably proved most significant to the knights and burgesses of each county. Thus Thomas Wilson may have been named because of his popular market day lectures in Kent or simply because he was godly, unemployed, and Sir Edward Dering's friend. Many in the circle of the educational reformer Samuel Hartlib were summoned in 1643, including congregationalists like William Carter, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, William Greenhill, and Joseph Caryl, as well as presbyterians like Simeon Ashe, Jeremiah Whitaker, William Price, John Ley, Daniel Cawdrey, Thomas Hill, Anthony Tuckney, George Walker, and Thomas Valentine. Sir Cheney Culpeper actually asked Hartlib to get John Durie elected to the synod when he saw that Durie was not mentioned on the summoning ordinance.⁵¹

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Equal mystery surrounds the selection of the thirty initial parliamentary appointees, but the tenor of the group is significant. Of the ten peers who were first appointed to the assembly and actually attended—including Edward Montagu, second earl of Manchester; Algernon Percy, tenth earl of Northumberland; William Fiennes, first Viscount Saye and Sele; and Robert Rich, second earl of Warwick—all were radical war-party men. The more moderate Robert Devereux, third earl of Essex, was not invited until later in the assembly's history.

The overwhelming majority of the members of the House of Commons named in the ordinance were prominent men whose political and ecclesiastical affiliations were widely known, such as John Pym, Francis Rous, Sir Benjamin Rudyerd, and Oliver St John. Many had links with the peers appointed to the assembly. Their perspectives on the political crisis are identifiable and covered the whole spectrum from men insisting on negotiation to those who demanded total war. Their positions on the church are

⁵¹ SU Hartlib MS 13/307A–308B.





also definable: most were presbyterians, leaving the congregationalists better represented in the two houses than in the assembly. No geographical pattern emerges, although there are fewer members from the North. Significant in retrospect is the fact that only one of the Commons appointees became a regicide in 1649.

Most members of parliament had little involvement in the day-to-day running of the assembly. Theological debate remained a spectator sport, albeit a relatively popular one. On the first day of the assembly forty members of the Commons came to watch.⁵² Another day saw eight peers arrive during the sermon of an unfortunate probationer, followed by ‘some other Lords’.⁵³ Still another session experienced overcrowding on account of visiting parliamentarians, most of whom spoke only to urge the assembly to hurry its work. Undoubtedly there were some days when the assembly was left without observers, such as the morning when the assembly decided that it would help them prepare for a fast if they first detailed the sins of parliament.⁵⁴ The summoning ordinance is ambiguous about the purpose of parliamentary members; perhaps English parliamentarians could vote, as Bulstrode Whitelocke asserted, but there is no record of them ever doing so.⁵⁵ On occasion they were asked to participate in ad hoc committees,⁵⁶ but there is no evidence that they played a part in the standing committees in which they were, at least in theory, members. The parliamentary contributions to the assembly differed from those of the divines both in quantity and in their character, for, on many occasions, the members of the House of Lords or Commons simply wrote to the assembly or delivered orders or messages from the two houses. Yet, the contribution of parliamentarians was not insignificant. The minutes contain over a hundred references to members of the English and Scottish peerage and dozens of references to members of the Commons. Francis Rous brought reports or participated in some way two dozen times, Zouch Tate fifteen times. One politician who uniquely engaged more actively in the assembly was John Selden, lionized by Bulstrode Whitelocke for his defence of Erastian ecclesiology.⁵⁷ Indeed, Selden was at the head of the list of MPs in the summoning ordinance, followed by Francis Rous. Both men had an exceptional grasp of biblical languages, and would have extensive involvement with the assembly—Rous because he wanted his translation of the Psalter to receive official sanction; Selden, because he was confident that he could be a part of the conversation in the assembly in a way that his peers could not. Selden was the only MP whose writings and speeches were quoted in the assembly, and who held the floor with speeches as long as those of the theologians. While most members of parliament urged the assembly to speed its progress, Selden never did. In fact he would expostulate at length on any subject about which he had expertise. On one occasion he expounded a subject ‘very largely’, and John Lightfoot recorded that ‘Sir Robert Pie, with a great deal of vehemence, did urge us to hasten, and blamed our long debates’.⁵⁸

⁵² BL Harl. MS 165, fo. 105a.

⁵³ Lightfoot, *Journals*, pp. 127–31.

⁵⁴ Session 28r.

⁵⁵ Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English affairs* (London, 1732), p. 71.

⁵⁶ Lightfoot, MS Journal, fo. 4v; Minutes 3:109r.

⁵⁷ For a speech allegedly delivered by Bulstrode Whitelocke, see his *Memorials*, pp. 99–100. There is no record in the minutes or Lightfoot’s journals of Whitelocke delivering this speech, although there is record of his two other speeches (Minutes 1:326r–v; 2:19r; Lightfoot, *Journals*, p. 170).

⁵⁸ Lightfoot, *Journals*, p. 109.





When other peers and MPs spoke in the assembly, they would often apologize, profess that they had rather hear and learn than speak, or even ask if they were permitted to speak. Selden never apologized, and clearly felt in his element, enjoying the distinction of being something other than ‘the previous speaker’—he was the assembly’s ‘learned gentleman’, to ministers and MPs alike.

ASSEMBLY OFFICERS AND SCRIBES

As part of an endeavour to establish control of the synod, parliament elected the assembly’s ‘prolocutor’, a term chosen to reflect the leadership of the Lower House of Convocation, rather than a ‘moderator’, which had a Scottish Presbyterian flavour.⁵⁹ William Twisse was the first chair to be appointed by parliament; Cornelius Burges and John White of Dorchester were elected by the assembly as assessors and deputies. Twisse was an internationally respected theologian and parliament’s most obvious choice as the gathering’s speaker, but since he was ill, and since White was crippled by gout and could attend only intermittently, for several years Cornelius Burges was placed in the odd position of almost perpetually serving as the prolocutor *pro tempore*. Twisse finally died in the summer of 1646 and White resigned that autumn. Parliament replaced Twisse with Charles Herle and the assembly replaced White with Herbert Palmer, who had already been functioning as assessor *pro tempore* since January that year. Unfortunately Palmer too was unwell and died in November 1647; William Gouge was chosen as his successor. Of the six men, only Burges and Herle were strong moderators, calling the gathering to order and carefully guiding its discussions.⁶⁰

These were the elected leaders of the gathering, but there were other leaders as well. The surviving minutes record an approximate total of 8,000 references to members of the assembly, both lay and clerical, including speeches and elections to committees. Twelve members account for over 55 per cent of those references (see Appendix 13). These men were acknowledged by their frequent appointments to committees, and the willingness of the assembly to listen to their speeches. All were well-educated and most enjoyed prominent careers following the assembly.

Like the parliamentary observers, the assembly’s scribes were non-voting members appointed by parliament. Adoniram Byfield was the chief scribe. His companion at the writing table, first in Henry VII’s lady chapel and then in the Jerusalem Chamber, was Henry Robrough. John Wallis, later Savilian professor of geometry at Oxford, was added to the scribal team late in 1643.

For the history of the assembly, one man stands out above all the others. As assessor from 1643 to 1649, Cornelius Burges was the man who ran the Westminster assembly and was arguably its most important member. Burges himself tried to tread the thin line of respectable reform but he is often perceived as a radical.⁶¹ After petitioning

⁵⁹ *CJ* 3:119, 7 June 1643.

⁶⁰ See Appendix 10 and Appendix 3.

⁶¹ e.g. Lindley, *Popular politics*, p. 23.





the Commons in January 1641, Burges and some colleagues were asked to advise a committee on religion required to respond to the petition. In May 1641 he represented the anti-episcopal elements of the church (against Bishop John Hacket) in a high-profile debate in the Commons.⁶² In December 1641 he was willing both to present a forceful mass-petition to the Commons for a reforming assembly of clergy and to speak to the issue in the house. His leadership was not without its critics and at least one member of parliament complained that he ‘could have gott moore hands’ to sign the petition.⁶³ Nonetheless Burges was asked to preach to the Commons almost as often as Stephen Marshall, but carefully avoided the unofficial and often incendiary sermon series ‘preached to sundry of the House of Commons’ in the spring of 1641. Prior to the assembly Burges was a leader of the moderate puritan clergy, working closely with the earl of Warwick, Lord Saye and Sele, and Lord Brooke in the House of Lords, and John Pym and John Hampden in the House of Commons, and drawing on the patronage of William Russell, fifth earl of Bedford. Burges later proved to be the most popular preacher in the opening years of the Long Parliament and the happy minister to be granted the living of St Paul’s Cathedral at £400 per annum. Burges’s happiness was marred by parliament’s tardiness in producing his salary, coinciding with criticism for having accepted such a lucrative post.⁶⁴ The criticism must have been especially galling as Burges spent years attempting to evict squatters he found in his new home, trying to obtain keys for rooms he could not access, and in desperation even trying to charge rent to those who would not leave.⁶⁵

Burges was involved in virtually every assembly debate. He served as chair of the first committee and expressed convictions on the full range of topics discussed in the synod. He had a hand in the formation of every major document—literally, for he frequently wrote the final draft of the assembly’s documents and he forced the scribe to rewrite two of his speeches in the minutes. Though he temporarily fell from grace in 1643 for his initial opposition to the solemn league and covenant, he quickly regained his position in the assembly. In Robert Baillie’s December 1643 description of the assembly Burges emerges as the gathering’s most active officer. With the prolocutor ‘mute’ and assessor White ‘keept in of the gout since our coming’, Burges (apparently in the prolocutor’s presence) ‘supplies, so farr as is decent, the Proloquator’s place’.⁶⁶ Notably, ‘if a man will vaige [or wander], he is quicklie taken up by Mr Assessor, or many others, confusedlie crying, Speak to the order, to order’.⁶⁷ Although Burges signed a July 1643 document as the second assessor, after that point his name always appears first among the assessors in signed assembly texts and, in the absence of the prolocutor—even in the presence of another assessor—it is Burges who always serves as prolocutor *pro tempore*.

⁶² See J. Bruce, ed., *Verney papers: Notes and proceedings in the Long Parliament* (New York, 1845), pp. 9, 10, and 12 for his surviving committee speeches; pp. 76–7 for his debate with Hackett.

⁶³ W. H. Coates, ed., *The journal of Sir Simonds D’Ewes* (New Haven, 1942), p. 325 and note 28.

⁶⁴ A. Hughes, *Gangraena and the struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004), p. 232.

⁶⁵ See HL/PO/JO/10/1/169, MP 15 May 1644; HL/PO/JO/10/1/170, MP 3 June 1644; HL/PO/JO/10/1/174, MP 24 Sept. 1644; HL/PO/JO/10/1/189, MP 26 June 1645; HL/PO/JO/10/1/242, MP 21 Oct. 1647; HL/PO/JO/10/1/271, MP 29 Aug. 1648; see also *LJ* 6:469, 525, 555, 577, 589, 716.

⁶⁶ Baillie, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 108.

⁶⁷ Baillie, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 109.





Burges was at once the man who ordered the assembly and the frequent opponent of the majority. His efforts to control the agenda and behaviour of the assembly were often resisted. Although he aggressively capitalized on reforms outside the abbey, he never accepted payment for his services in the assembly and may well have helped members struggling financially. Nevertheless, Burges was a wealthy doctor of divinity disputing with mere masters of arts, a presbyterian whom neither congregationalists nor Scots fully trusted, an old minister correcting younger men, and, like most of his fellow officers, part of an Oxford minority (matric. 1611) attempting to control a Cambridge majority. The difficulty of his task and the opposition he experienced in the assembly can on rare occasions be heard in his complaints, for he was ‘sorry that it is soe unacceptable that I should be heard by some men’. On the day of that particular outburst, he had ‘spoken once & but once’. Speaking once was the exception, however, and not the rule, for Burges was one of the five most frequent speakers at the synod and the gathering’s most popular committee man, with 120 recorded appointments during the course of the assembly. Burges was a good patristic scholar and one of the few theologians at the abbey to have penned a theological commentary on the Apostles’ Creed. He was an obvious choice when members of the assembly were electing a committee for the confession of faith.

Cornelius Burges appears everywhere in the minutes, but it was Adoniram Byfield who produced them. Little is known of Byfield, whom Zachary Grey once derisively called ‘a broken apothecary’,⁶⁸ but in 1642 he was chaplain to Sir Henry Cholmondeley’s regiment in the earl of Essex’s army.⁶⁹ Byfield was also a hub in Samuel Hartlib’s network of English contacts. Hartlib recorded Byfield’s remedies for kidney stones and the falling sickness (giving Grey’s comment unexpected credence) as well as his tips on brewing beer. Byfield also sent Hartlib the latest news about technology (such as a plough that did not need horses) and information about books in progress and manuscripts in circulation.⁷⁰ The literary connection with Hartlib suggests that while Byfield held a day-job as a chaplain he was also involved in transcribing and circulating theological and practical works. Hartlib despaired of finding men more like him in a world where ‘men will not take paines to transcribe much lesse to translate’.⁷¹

A reader of the assembly’s minutes would have just cause to wonder why Hartlib could be so thankful for Byfield. It is Byfield’s less than elegant hand which dominates the minutes of the assembly, and the only surviving fragment of assembly votes is also in his hand. Probably because he kept track of the synod’s debates Byfield was responsible for carrying the book of the assembly’s votes to the prolocutor when a motion was put to the question.⁷² Byfield also took care of the main debates of the assembly, signed many documents, and was in charge of most business matters, including printing assembly documents. In only one case did he work with Robrough

⁶⁸ *DNB*.

⁶⁹ *ODNB*.

⁷⁰ SU Hartlib MSS 29/4/18A; 39/2/117A; 39/2/17A; 30/4/25A; 29/2/22A; 29/2/18B; 29/2/6A–B.

⁷¹ SU, Hartlib MSS 29/2/6A–B; 29/2/6B.

⁷² Baillie, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 109.





to print an assembly text. During the 1640s Byfield was a special target for satire.⁷³ After the assembly he was disliked for his vigilance as an assistant commissioner in Wiltshire for ejecting scandalous ministers. His unpopularity is displayed in Robert Cooper's small line engraving, probably based on a lost cartoon of Byfield by an unknown artist: Byfield, ostentatiously displaying a pair of fashionable gloves, stands calmly as a devil blows on a windmill attached to his hat. The sails of the windmill are labelled 'Pryde', 'Coveteousne', 'Hipocrysy', and 'Lust'. The fiend announces that 'He do's my business bravely' while Byfield concedes that 'Needs must when the Devel drives'.⁷⁴ Byfield's will reveals a close friendship with Thomas Baylie who, as a token of respect, was made an executor of his estate. He was also bequeathed Byfield's 'best fringed gloves'.⁷⁵

All of the assembly's members (both lay and clerical) and its scribes are discussed in greater detail in the biographical dictionary.

⁷³ See S. W. Carruthers, 'That great gorbellied idol', *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England* 9.1 (1948): 20.

⁷⁴ National Portrait Gallery D9504.

⁷⁵ NA Prob. 11/300, fo. 32r.

