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# A royal court in all but name? The protectoral Household of Oliver Cromwell (1653-1658)

*Alec Ewing*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1655, Swedish ambassador Christer Bonde had an audience with the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, where they spoke at length about trade, the Dutch, and Protestantism. In letters to his superiors he also gave an impression of the Protector's court:

The audience took place in the great chamber which is here called the Banqueting House, having been built by the late king for banquets and ballets. [...] I confess that when, on my withdrawal, I reflected that this place, which had been built for the king's pleasure, and later had been the place from whose windows he went out to be beheaded, was now hung with the most costly tapestries and was now the scene of the splendid triumph of one who had been a main agent in that deed, I could not look on it without emotion and compassion for the mutabilities of this world.<sup>1</sup>

Roy Sherwood, possibly the foremost historian on the protectoral court, also noted the regal setting in which the Lord Protector lived, coining the famous phrase 'a king in all but name'. In his two influential monographs Sherwood strongly argued that protectoral rule was closely modelled on the monarchy that preceded it, characterized by an ever growing tide of monarchical splendour. Regal tradition and iconography were apparent in a variety of protectoral ceremonies, including Cromwell's inauguration in Westminster Hall, a building that emanated regality, ironically being both the traditional location of the secular enthronement of monarchs as well as the location of Charles's trial five years prior. A large number of regal traditions were also maintained by the Protectorate, visible in, for instance, the protectoral heraldry, Cromwell's portrayal on the Great Seal, the opening of the House of Parliament and the reverence with which the Protector was treated.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Swedish diplomats at Cromwell's court, 1655-1656. The missions of Peter Julius Coyet and Christer Bonde*. Translated and edited by M. Roberts (London 1988) 125.

<sup>2</sup> A. Barclay, 'The Lord Protector and his court' in: P. Little ed., *Oliver Cromwell: New perspectives* (Basingstoke 2008) 195-215: 195; B. Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester 2002) 33; R. Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell: King in all but name 1653-1658*

For Sherwood, however, this resemblance to the Stuart Kings was nowhere more apparent than in the establishment of a protectoral court.<sup>3</sup> Situated in the palaces of Whitehall and Hampton Court, the protectoral court progressively started to resemble its royal predecessor, which was not only clearly evident at two events in November 1657, when Cromwell's youngest daughters married, but also in the observance of diplomatic protocol.<sup>4</sup>

At the time, relations with foreign emissaries were managed through a complex body of rules and procedures, and through its very nature this remained a distinctly regal process. Due to its precarious characteristics, Cromwellian international relations were handled no differently, and in that sense certainly followed royal precedent. By doing so, any confusion about Cromwell's position in the English government was immediately dispelled from the ambassadors' minds. Swedish diplomat Bonde was not the only one who perceived this court to be so distinctly regal. Sherwood argues that the talks that preceded peace with the Dutch Republic and with France in 1654, and the festivities that followed, completely followed protocol and were identical to similar receptions under Charles I. The reception given in honour of the Spanish ambassador in May 1655 showed similar continuity. As Sherwood put it, 'the Protectoral regime seems to have observed the whole gamut of royal diplomatic protocol practically to the letter.'<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, he argues, the years that followed would be characterized by a progressive restoration of regal ceremonies, and before long both the outward presentation of the Protectorate, as well as its court life, mostly returned to the 'normality' of the Stuart monarchs, which is not an entirely unjustified statement. In a letter from May 1654, Sir Edward Hyde remarked that 'Cromwell has moved with his family to Whitehall, but

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(Frome 1997) 7, 12, 44-45. Also see R. Sherwood, *The court of Oliver Cromwell* (London 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 196-197; Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 28, 30-32.

<sup>4</sup> Sherwood, *The court of Oliver Cromwell*, 141-144; Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 108, 113-119.

<sup>5</sup> For quote, see Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 19. For diplomatic relations, see *ibidem*, 15-16, 19-23, 52.

takes no further state upon him than the mere using the rooms, which are more richly furnished than ever they were in the King's time [...].<sup>6</sup>

Can the same be said for the 'inner' court? That is, the court in a narrow sense, denoting the domestic or household setting of the court, that was 'off limits' for many courtiers. When speaking of the household, I refer to the whole court system, consisting of the household above stairs, usually known as the chamber, the household below stairs, as well as a number of sub-departments and offshoots of these two, most notable of which are the stables.<sup>7</sup> Sherwood and others never systematically compare the Cromwellian Household established in 1654 to its Caroline predecessor; instead the general focus seems to be placed on some features of the Protectoral court at the time of Cromwell's death in 1658. From such a vantage point, several ceremonial aspects of the Protectorate do indeed seem to have been based on monarchical precedent and historians generally conclude that, like Andrew Barclay states, the court did 'display this same envious, begrudging respect for the traditions of the English monarchy'.<sup>8</sup>

However, I feel that such a conclusion would require a systematic comparison with Charles's court. Did the protectoral Household follow royal precedent as well? To answer this question, I will compare the Household structure of the Cromwellian court, as well as its financial organization, to its Stuart antecedent. Were these organised through comparable lines, and did they function similarly? However, to do so, I must first reflect on the constitutional basis of the Protectorate, not just as it provides a description of the context in which the court functioned, but also as it provides a useful distinction between a 'first' and 'second' Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell.

### **'Though not a King by title, yet by Power...'**

In 1649 a play was published, entitled *The famous tragedie of King Charles I*. Sadly the author remains anonymous, but the play itself makes it blatantly

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<sup>6</sup> *Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers preserved in the Bodleian Library. Vol. II: From the death of Charles I, 1649, to the End of the Year 1654.* W. D. Macray ed. (Oxford 1869) No. 1881, 351.

<sup>7</sup> G. Aylmer, *The King's servants: the civil service of Charles I, 1625-1642* (London 1974) 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 196.

obvious that the writer didn't have much sympathy for the Roundhead cause. The first three pages, which are addressed to the future Charles II, present Cromwell and his cronies as 'holy miscreants, and Religious Fiends'.<sup>9</sup> The piece is a wonderfully entertaining comedy centred on Cromwell, who is portrayed as a crafty and ambitious degenerate, simultaneously lusting after the throne and the wife of the Lord-General John Lambert. His ambitions are shamelessly obvious, especially when wooing Mrs. Lambert: 'Which once perform'd [the King's execution], then I am Lord alone, though not a King by title, yet by Power...'<sup>10</sup>

This is a compelling prediction, as the year in which this play was printed was marked by political chaos, in which the future was all but certain.<sup>11</sup> I shall not delve deeper into these political difficulties, but it should be clear that the Protectorate was not a premeditated goal of those men who went to war in 1642, and likely neither for those men who sent the King to the block in 1649. Instead, it seems that its establishment was a reaction to the political tensions of 1648-1653.<sup>12</sup>

The Protectorate was established after the forceful expulsion of the politically inept Barebone's Parliament<sup>13</sup> on December 12th, 1653. Four days later, Oliver Cromwell was installed as Lord Protector through *the Instrument of Government*, a constitution penned by John Lambert and other political and military allies of the new ruler. In the first article, a new head of state was appointed, in whom resided 'the supreme legislative authority of

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<sup>9</sup> *The famous tragedie of King Charles I* (1649).

<sup>10</sup> *The famous tragedie of King Charles I*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> For these years of political chaos see, for instance: G. Aylmer ed., *The Interregnum: The quest for Settlement 1646-1660* (London 1972); G. Aylmer, *Rebellion or revolution? England 1640-1660* (Oxford 1986) 148-159.

<sup>12</sup> B. Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester 2002) 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> The Barebone's Parliament, also known as the Little Parliament, was a short-lived assembly that came into being in July 1653 in a final attempt to establish stable, parliamentary rule. All of its members were nominated by Cromwell and the Council of Officers, chosen for their religiosity. Within months, however, it succumbed to internal troubles and was forcefully dissolved on 12 December of that same year. Though traditionally characterized as an assembly of fanatics unfit to rule – for which the London nominee Praise-God Barebone, from whom critics derived the institution's derogatory name, is often used as example – historians have since rectified this image. For more on this short-lived institution, see A. Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (Oxford 1982).

the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland'.<sup>14</sup> However, no further reference is made to any monarchical element or institution throughout the Instrument. Instead, the focus of most reforms is on parliamentary restraints. Indeed, even the appointment of such a head of state seems merely to be part of a reaction to the preceding years of executive and legislative chaos, evident in a marked bias against parliamentary power.<sup>15</sup>

The position of the Lord Protector in the government was slightly altered in the summer of 1657 when a new constitution, *the Humble Petition and Advice*, was implemented. For this paper, the most interesting issue in the negotiations surrounding the Petition would be the crown, as certain political figures did discuss the possibility of 'upgrading' the Protectorate to a monarchy. However, this continued to be the one issue that could not be agreed upon, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May Cromwell decisively rejected the offer to become King Oliver I.<sup>16</sup>

The Petition that was eventually accepted, was as void of regal inclinations as its constitutional predecessor, and changed very little of the fundamental elements that Cromwell accepted a few years prior. New were the articles that empowered the Protector to name his own successor, to select a share of the members of the new 'Other House',<sup>17</sup> command the country militias and to declare war. These new articles were indeed reminiscent of royalty, but nowhere does the petition present Cromwell as more royal than before. Instead, Barry Coward feels that the Petition simply resolved issues that sprung up during the first Protectorate.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> G. Aylmer, *The state's servants. The civil service of the English Republic 1649-1660* (London 1972) 42-45; Coward, *The Protectorate*, 7-13, 18-21. For the Instrument of Government, see <http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur097.htm>, last consulted on 22 February 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Aylmer, *The state's servants*, 45-46; Coward, *The Protectorate*, 26-28; P. Gaunt, 'The single person's confidants and dependants? Oliver Cromwell and his Protectoral Councillors', *The historical journal* 32.3 (1989) 537-550: 544-545.

<sup>16</sup> Coward, *The Protectorate*, 87-90; Gaunt, P., *Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford 1997) 196-199.

<sup>17</sup> Replacing the House of Lords. See: Aylmer, *Rebellion or revolution?*, 180-183.

<sup>18</sup> The main issues it touched upon were the influence of the army in government and the religious liberty that the Lord Protector continued to grant to marginal religious communities, specifically the Quakers. See: Aylmer, *Rebellion or revolution?*, 176-177, Coward, *The Protectorate*, 80-87. For the Humble Petition and Advice, see: <http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur102.htm>, last consulted on 22 February 2012.

Though little of value for this article can be found in either constitution, much can be deduced from their implementation. For a strong contrast in visual regality becomes apparent when the two Protectorates are compared. Certainly, Cromwell's first inauguration did have a monarchical undertone. During the ceremony an oath was read to the victor of the Battle of Worcester, who was standing bareheaded next to the chair of State, and upon acceptance he:

sat down covered in the said chair, the Lord commissioners and every one standing bare. After which, they presented Him with the great Seal, the city Sword, and cap of Maintenance, which were returned to them again. The court then rose, and his Excellency returned to White-Hall, the Lord Mayor uncovered, carrying the Sword before the Protector all the way.<sup>19</sup>

While not exactly a royal coronation, some ritualism associated with a crowning of a King had certainly been observed. As with a royal coronation, Cromwell was preceded by the sword of state and the oath taken, too, was much like the coronation oaths of previous monarchs. Interesting is also the removal of everyone's hats, while Cromwell kept his on. At the time it was custom for men to wear their hats both indoors and outdoors; only for a King would they bare their heads.

The clearest sign of regality at this ceremony, however, was the interaction with the Lord Mayor of London. The Lord Mayor was, in effect, sovereign in his own right, with the City sword representing his power, while the Seal was the supreme emblem of civil authority, and the key to the realm. Following royal antecedent, these powers were now granted to Cromwell, for whom support of the City was crucial.<sup>20</sup>

However, the trappings of kingship would be far more apparent at his second inauguration in 1657. This time, the coronation of Charles was even more closely followed. Cromwell was seated on St. Edward's Chair, which had been used in coronations since 1308, built around the Scottish *Stone of Destiny*. Cromwell was presented with a robe of purple velvet, a richly ornamented Bible, a sword and a golden sceptre. Following these,

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<sup>19</sup> R. Wood, *Great Britain's post. Impartially communicating the remonstrance of the members of the Late parliament, concerning their sudden dissolution on the 12<sup>th</sup> of decemb. with the cause and manner thereof. Numb. 151* (Dec. 1653) 1242-1243.

<sup>20</sup> Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 9-11.



Cromwell took an oath to uphold the true religion and to preserve the peace and rights of the people. While there certainly were some differences to be seen when compared with a royal coronation, most notably the absence of a crown and the holy oils, no one failed to see how remarkably royal this second ceremony was in comparison to the first.<sup>21</sup>

As such it has become clear that, while the two constitutions themselves hardly show any contrast in 'regality', the outward appearance of the 'second' Protectorate had a far stronger monarchical feel to it than the 'first' government of the Instrument. Can a similar distinction between 1653 and 1657 be found at (the inner) court?

### **Financing the protectoral court**

Though not mentioned in the *Instrument*, the Council of State decreed that the Lord Protector should also occupy the palaces of Whitehall and Hampton Court. Before this, the Protector and his family resided in the Royal Cockpit, on the fringes of Whitehall. In April 1654 then, the Cromwells moved into the King's apartments in the palace, where the Protector would reside until his death in 1658.<sup>22</sup> Was the protectoral court financed differently than the Caroline court? And is there a distinction to be found between the 'first' and 'second' court?

In one respect, this question can be answered by looking at the household expenditure. However, this is not so easily done for the Stuart court, as household expenses overlapped with the costs of day-to-day government and with miscellaneous royal expenses (such as Charles' expensive artistic tastes). Maurice Ashley has suggested that the yearly costs of Charles's entire household amounted to approximately £78,000. Cromwell's court, on the other hand, seems to have managed on a budget of around £64,000 to £70,000 *per annum* before 1657. Following the Humble Petition, the court's budget increased to £100,000, though they only seem to have spent approximately £76,000 in the last year of Oliver's reign.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the expenses are not too dissimilar from the Stuart

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<sup>21</sup> L. Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell: Ceremony, Portrait and Print 1645-1661* (Cambridge 2000) 108-111, 123-124; Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 96-99.

<sup>22</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 197.

<sup>23</sup> M. Ashley, *Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. A study in contrasts and comparisons* (New York 1987) 111-112; Sherwood, *The court*, 36-37, 41.

court. Furthermore, it would seem as though the difference between the 'first' and 'second' court is negligible.

However, this doesn't say much about the nature of the Cromwellian court, for it should be realized that the maintenance of such massive buildings naturally implied a minimum level of expenses, as its many departments and sub-departments were staffed by a large number of servants, including clerks, huntsmen, cooks and so on.<sup>24</sup> Aylmer estimates that the Caroline Household employed anywhere from 1840 to 2660 people, the highest estimate including a considerable number of nameless servants. The chamber alone employed some 600 people. However, only a third to a half of these would be on duty at any time.<sup>25</sup>

Few sources remain to testify to any definite number of people employed at the Cromwellian court, as many documents pertaining to this subject were lost after 1660, but it is assumed that this number would have been considerably lower. The Cromwellian Wardrobe, for instance, employed a mere fourteen people, whereas Charles likely employed over eighty.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, a significant number of servants were still required to keep both palaces hospitable. Furthermore, Cromwell invested heavily in other departments, such as security. Any journey he undertook required a considerable escort, as attempts were made on his life whenever he left the comfort of the protectoral palaces. To prevent an assassination, the Gentlemen Pensioners, or Gentlemen-at-Arms, were revived, while the Life Guard was reorganized in 1656.<sup>27</sup> This means that a minimum level of expenses was unavoidable, regardless of who the inhabitants were. Instead, much more can be deduced from the origin of these funds, and how they were spent.

Before the Civil War, monarchs were expected to 'live of their own', except in times of war. This meant that Charles not only had to bear the expenses of his court, but also the burdens of the government. During his reign, the Household's administrative duties no longer included other branches of the central government, such as the revenue or finance departments, the law courts, as these had long since 'gone out of court'. However, Aylmer estimates that the royal court still accounted for a

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<sup>24</sup> Sherwood, *The court*, 112; Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 197-201.

<sup>25</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 197-198; Sherwood, *The court*, 149.

<sup>27</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 200; Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 58-59.

considerable share of the royal expenditure, reaching a maximum of over 40 percent in peacetime.<sup>28</sup>

The protectoral court, however, was financed through a settlement that slightly resembled the Civil List established in the reign of George III. It was maintained by the budgets mentioned above, which had been completely separated from state expenditure. To Sherwood the protectoral court was, in this sense, ahead of its time when compared to the various Stuart courts,<sup>29</sup> though perhaps this can better be interpreted as a radical change in financial management. Furthermore, while no sources remain to show how this budget was spent, it is clear that all of it was given to the steward of the household below stairs, John Maidstone. Therefore, none of the various departments, including the chamber, had any financial freedom to speak of.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, it was certainly very different.

The way in which this budget was spent, to which Sherwood gives no attention whatsoever, was also radically different. Salaries were usually quite small, and of scarce importance at the Caroline court. The clerks of the Privy Seal, for instance, earned a mere £5 per year. Instead, many offices, especially those attached to royal favour, allowed the holder to greatly supplement his income through such means as pensions and annuities.<sup>31</sup> Those who enjoyed royal favour might also receive property, or be given the opportunity to lease lands or monopolies at very favourable rates. Sir Thomas Aylesbury, for example, received a monopoly on the production and sale of weights and balances, which he leased for £1 a year.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond such a loosely organized system of wages, the court also allowed for a certain level of abuse. Corruption was naturally illegal, but it was generally accepted that courtiers looked after themselves, often through their rank.

The Cromwellian court, on the other hand, was organised far more efficiently, and witnessed extensive reform of administrative system to prevent such abuse. As a rule all those employed at Whitehall and Hampton Court saw their salaries enhanced greatly, but were strictly forbidden to

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<sup>28</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 27; Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Sherwood, *The court*, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Ashley, *Charles I and Oliver Cromwell*, 109-110; Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 160-162; L. Peck, *Court patronage and corruption in early Stuart England* (London 1993) 33-36, 38-40, 45-46.

<sup>32</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 162-163.

accept gratuities of any shape or form. These two measures combined did much to halt venality and corruption at court. For example, a Secretary of State at Charles's court was paid £100 a year, though his actual income would be anywhere between £2000 and £6000. John Thurloe, who occupied this position during the Protectorate, was paid £800 a year, with few perquisites.<sup>33</sup> While it remains unknown if corruption was indeed fully eradicated, both Sherwood and Ashley believe that this might have been the case, as there is some evidence to support this.<sup>34</sup>

The budget for furbishing and repairs of the palaces, which was not included in the household budget, shows a similar trend. During the protectoral reign, starting for simplicity in 1654, until Cromwell's death in late 1658, a total of £54,232 was spent on architectural works. This comes up to an average of a little under £11,000 a year. The Royal Works committee, on the other hand, which was employed in the upkeep at the Stuart court, spent an average of £11,750 *per annum* between 1615 and 1640.<sup>35</sup>

Again, this implies similarities with the monarchical past. However, when taking a closer look at how this money was spent, it becomes obvious that this was not simply lavished on splendour; instead it would appear that the focus lay on restoring the palaces to some of their former glory after long years of neglect during the Civil War and the Commonwealth. The bulk of the spending at Whitehall appears to have concentrated on the restoration of the palace and state apartments. Hampton Court, on the other hand, saw most funds being channelled into the restoration of the long neglected grounds.

Furthermore, 79 per cent of the entire architectural expenditure was spent in the first three years of this five year period. Presumably, the repairs were mostly completed by the end of 1656, after which expenses plummeted. While an hypothesis, it seems that just because Cromwell's

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<sup>33</sup> Ashley, *Charles I and Oliver Cromwell*, 108-110; Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 204-205; D. Hobman, *Cromwell's master spy: a study of John Thurloe* (London 1961) 15-16.

<sup>34</sup> Ashley, *Charles I and Oliver Cromwell*, 109-110; Peck, *Court patronage*, 211; Sherwood, *The court*, 88-89.

<sup>35</sup> P. Hunneyball, 'Cromwellian style: The architectural trappings of the Protectorate regime' in: P. Little ed., *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Woodbridge 2007) 53-81: 54-56, 74.

architectural expenses are comparable to those of Charles, their spending habits weren't necessarily similar.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, while expenditure might seem similar at first, definite structural changes have clearly been made. First and foremost, it has become apparent that the court no longer prospered on the King's purse, but was put on a budget. Secondly, the entire bureaucracy was reformed and salaries were greatly increased to prevent abuse and corruption, though this is possibly also the reason why the total expenditure of the court is numerically comparable to its predecessor. Furthermore, it appears as though architectural and artistic expenses were mostly concerned with refurnishing and restoring some of that former splendour of the royal palaces, instead of a continuation of monarchical spending habits. It should also not be forgotten that twelve royal houses had been disposed of after the regicide.<sup>37</sup> This seems to suggest that the Protectorate certainly tried to create a regal setting at Whitehall, but never attempted to fully recreate the monarchical setting of the Caroline rule.

### **The court's hierarchical structure**

In 1653 the Cromwell Household seemed barely appropriate for the country's most dominant political figure. In the years preceding his appointment as Lord Protector, Cromwell had already become a very rich man. His Household, however, wasn't any different from other great landowners at the time.<sup>38</sup> When moving into the palaces of Whitehall and Hampton court the Cromwellian household must have expanded greatly. Did it maintain the loosely organised structure that preceded the Protectorate, or did the Protector mirror royal precedent? And did any structural adjustment take place after 1657?

A considerable number of people will remain out of the scope of this article. Most of the people that staffed the lowest functions at court will likely remain nameless in history. For what can be said about the Breadbearers of the Pantry? Instead, I shall focus on the most important structures and most sought after offices.

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<sup>36</sup> Hunneyball, 'Cromwellian style', 54-66.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 55, 66-67, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 197, 200-201.

In the early seventeenth century the royal court remained of some importance and was still, like most other courts in Europe at the time, clearly structured. Present was an explicit division into three different branches; the chamber, the household below stairs and the stables, respectively. These were all organised separately and run by specialized offices. To generalize, the household below stairs provided the necessities of life; the chamber would then consume those in pomp and elegance. The stables, in turn, were partly ceremonial through the great prestige that those posts provided, but was also in charge of transportation as well as of hunting expeditions.

The household below stairs of the Caroline court was characterized by an elaborate administrative hierarchy, presided over by the three main offices: the Lord Steward, the Treasure, and the Comptroller, who mainly concerned himself with the bookkeeping (the rolls). The latter two also presided over the Board of the Greencloth together with the Master of that committee. This board included a Cofferer, two Clerks of the Greencloth and two Clerk Comptrollers. Together they held responsibility for all financial and administrative matters, though obviously assisted by numerous clerks. Financially, the Board was highly centralized and also presided over most of the important sub-departments, such as the Acatry, the Kitchen, the Bakehouse and so on.<sup>39</sup>

The household below stairs that came into existence in early 1654 could hardly be more dissimilar. Until December 1657, it was entirely run by two men, John Maidstone and Nathaniel Waterhouse, whom Sherwood called 'relatively insignificant'.<sup>40</sup> Both carried the title Steward and though little actual evidence remains, it would appear that they were responsible for setting up the protectoral Household and all everyday duties of the bureaucracy, including all tasks previously preformed by the Board. Of course, all those duties didn't disappear after the regicide; the Stewards were undoubtedly assisted by numerous servants who performed the duties of various offices. However, it is clear that the entire formalized hierarchical structure of Caroline Household below stairs was absent.

It wasn't until December 1657 that this structure in the household below stairs was reinstituted. The Board of the Greencloth returned, again assuming control over the expenditure. The Stewards were appointed to

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<sup>39</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 30; Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 199-200; Sherwood, *The court*, 54-55, 64.

<sup>40</sup> Sherwood, *The court*, 33.

new offices as well, with Waterhouse becoming the Master of the Board and Maidstone Cofferer. They even met in the same room previously used by the royal Board of the Greencloth.<sup>41</sup>

The stables were a somewhat different matter, for they remained in use after the regicide as Whitehall continued to be used for state occasions. However, once again, the hierarchical structure that characterized the Caroline stables had disappeared. The stables of the Stuart era were run by three prestigious ranks, namely the Master of the Horse, the Gentleman of the Horse, and the Avenor, followed by sixteen Equerries. These offices were all honorific in nature, and were ranked quite high up in the general aulic ranking of the court.

The protectoral stables however, were a more modest affair. It remains unclear whether or not a Master of the Horse existed at all in the first few months of the Protectorate; the first mentioning this office dates from September 1654. Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be a Gentleman of the Horse present at all, which is also the case for the sixteen Equerries. There does seem to have been a protectoral Avenor, though the first mentioning of him dates of July 1655. The last months of 1657, then, brought little change, as only a Gentleman of the Horse was appointed.<sup>42</sup>

The chamber witnessed a similar trend. The Caroline chamber at Whitehall consisted of a number of public and private rooms, where most of the King's daily activities took place. These were arranged in consecutive order, making it possible to 'filter' the guests according to rank, done by the ushers, grooms and pages present in each room. Little is known about how this system of chambers functioned at the Cromwellian court, but as most retained their names it's likely that they functioned in a somewhat similar fashion. It's also unlikely that they remained unstaffed, as the Protector had much reason to feel threatened. In January 1657, an attempt on his life was made even at Whitehall.<sup>43</sup>

However, many of the high ranking offices, again, stayed unmanned before 1657. Present in Charles's chamber were a Lord Chamberlain, a Vice Chamberlain, two to four Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, up to seven Grooms of the Bedchamber, and a number of Gentlemen of the Household and Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber. Most of these offices

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<sup>41</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 199-200; Sherwood, *The court*, 33-34; Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, 122-123.

<sup>42</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 28, 30; Sherwood, *The court*, 54-59.

<sup>43</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 198-199.

were generally honorific in nature; the only administrative tasks were performed by the Lord Chamberlain, the Vice-Chamberlain and their servants.<sup>44</sup>

Before 1657, however, Cromwell's chamber was attended by only a few of these prestigious ranks, namely a small number of Gentlemen of the Household, and four Gentlemen of the Bedchamber. Furthermore, their duties changed considerably, with their officeholders preforming a myriad of tasks in and about the Chamber. Beyond these, no other prestigious offices were occupied before Cromwell's second inauguration, while 1657 only witnessed the return of a Lord Chamberlain and a Vice-Chamberlain. Instead it would appear that all administrative tasks were delegated to the two Stewards, Waterhouse and Maidstone, which implies that a distinct division between the chamber and household below stairs wasn't as strongly present at the protectoral court.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, it's clear that the Cromwellian court that preceded the Humble Petition knew little of the structuring and hierarchical system of offices that characterised its predecessor. Many posts in the household had been dispensed with all together, whereas others were merged together into already existing offices, as was the case with the Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, or into new functions altogether. Furthermore, the distinction between the chamber and the household below stairs isn't as apparent either.

Historians have, as of yet, never adequately explained this situation. In his article, Barclay suggests that the lack of many prestigious ranks in the chamber was the result of Cromwell's successful resistance to temptations to inflate the number of positions in his bedchamber, while both Charles and James failed. Such an explanation might suffice for the chamber and stables, where there was much prestige and power to be found. However, it doesn't take the rest of court into account, where an entire administrative system was neglected.

Instead it seems as though, before the Humble Petition, there was no concerted attempt to completely mirror royal example at court. Only after 1657 did Whitehall see a partial return of such a monarchical setting, coinciding with the Humble Petition and the greater regality that emanated from the second Protectorate.

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<sup>44</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 28-29; Sherwood, *The court*, 64-65, 70.

<sup>45</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 199; Sherwood, *The court*, 70-76, 85, 168-169.



## **Court Patronage**

Regally structured or not, the creation of a court undoubtedly increased Cromwell's dispensable patronage, especially after 1657. What kind of people took up office at the protectoral court?

At the Stuart court most of senior offices discussed earlier were, unsurprisingly, held by peers of the realm, though there was an evident contrast in the type of people found in the Chamber, and elsewhere. As a rule, those who held office in the chamber were of noble or gentle birth; the Lord Chamberlain, for instance, was usually an earl. The household below stairs, on the other hand, were mostly filled with what Aylmer calls 'administrative careerists', usually capable men of some landed or urban middle-class background.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, peers were mostly absent from the protectoral court, which is not such a shocking deviation from royal practice, considering the outcome of the Civil War. However, this doesn't mean that the basic function of those offices changed, as they could still be a means of rewarding people or binding them to the ruler.<sup>47</sup> Was this the case? Were these offices occupied by Cromwell's political or military allies, or by other influential figures? If that was indeed the case, then protectoral patronage did not function so differently from royal precedent, despite a lack of peers.

However, both military and political allies of Cromwell were a rarity at Whitehall. Only two army officers were appointed to court, colonel John Biscoe, who was appointed Knight Marshal, and captain Edward Dendy, as senior Serjeant-at-Arms. These men were exceptions; the remaining offices at the protectoral court were all staffed by civilians. This was even the case in those posts concerned with security. Among the highest ranks of the household bodyguards, Biscoe was the only one with prior military experience. The Captain of the Guards was Walter Strickland, who had spent the Civil War as an envoy in the Dutch Republic.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, this lack of army officers at court doesn't mean that none of the actual guards had military experience, but it remains peculiar that others from Cromwell's military past weren't present. Certainly, he could've

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<sup>46</sup> Aylmer, *The King's servants*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> L. Peck, "For a King not to be bountiful were a fault": Perspectives on court patronage in early Stuart England', *The journal of British studies* 25.1 (Jan. 1986) 31-61: 35-39.

<sup>48</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 203-204.

rewarded friends made during his own service, or even family members still serving, such as Charles Fleetwood and John Disbrowe. More peculiar still is the absence of military allies, as the protectoral government was in a somewhat precarious position before 1657, as it never received any Parliamentary or civil endorsement before that time. The whole Protectorate owed its existence to military backing and the Council of Officers.<sup>49</sup> So why were none of these men present at court?

Political allies, too, were absent, especially before 1657. Of all names directly implicated in the creation of the Protectorate, only Sir Gilbert Pickering and Philip Jones found their way into an office at court.<sup>50</sup> While few in number, they were political heavyweights and both were certainly implicated in the establishment of the Protectorate. Both also occupied seats on the Protectoral Council and, after the hierarchical shuffle of 1657, were appointed as Lord Chamberlain and Comptroller, respectively. So while immensely influential, both in and outside court, they were exceptions. It should be mentioned that two other conspirators of December 1653, Sir Charles Wolseley and Edward Montague, became regular courtiers. However, there is no evidence to suggest that either ever held any office at court.<sup>51</sup>

Instead, the group who most strongly benefitted from protectoral patronage was Cromwell's own family, which was, from a royal perspective, highly unusual. English monarchs, as a rule, never appointed members of the royal family to offices at court. Not only were these positions usually beneath them, but they were also potential rivals through their own bloodline, and should therefore not be kept too close to actual power. The most conspicuous appointment at court, that of John Claypole, Cromwell's son-in-law, as Master of the Horse, was an unprecedented move at Whitehall. After all, this was the third most important office at court, ranking only behind the Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Steward. For such a prestigious office, only distant relatives of the monarch might be considered.<sup>52</sup>

Next to John Claypole, a considerable number of family members were also appointed to posts before 1657. Two of the four Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, for instance, John Barrington and Edward Rolt, were

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<sup>49</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 204; Gaunt, *Oliver Cromwell*, 168.

<sup>50</sup> Coward, *The Protectorate*, 14, 29-31; Sherwood, *The court*, 168-173.

<sup>51</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 209; Hunneyball, 'Cromwellian style', 67.

<sup>52</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 200-201.

cousins once removed to the Protector. Both were only in their early twenties, lacking any political or military experience. Instead, these appointments seem to be simple nepotism, as with others.

Nathaniel Waterhouse was also related to the Protector, as he was a cousin of Cromwell's wife, but this likely wasn't the sole reason for his appointment at court. Waterhouse also shared a history with Cromwell, having handled some of his financial affairs during the Commonwealth.<sup>53</sup> And he wasn't the only person from Cromwell's past who found himself at court. Charles Harvey, who was employed as a servant in the bedchamber, was also involved in some financial matters in Cromwell's past. John Thurloe, who would go on to be his Secretary of State and one of his most trusted servants, was already working for the Cromwell family in the 1630s and 1640s. The same can be said for Philip Jones, who was appointed to the Comptrollership in late 1657. During the closing years of the civil war, Jones had been administering the Cromwellian estates in Wales.<sup>54</sup>

It therefore appears that the Protector never fully employed the possibilities open to him through court patronage. Clearly absent were his allies from Parliament and the army, the two groups most influential in the creation of the Protectorate. Rather, he focussed on people he knew to be trustworthy; people from his own past and family.

Instead, Cromwell's allies were overwhelmingly found in the Protectoral Council. A majority of those who conspired to establish the Protectorate in December 1653 would become a member of that council, which was, as Peter Gaunt has convincingly shown, far more than a rubber stamp. It was strongly involved in many aspects of government, including some of the highest affairs of state such as finance and religious reform. Despite all the power Cromwell could muster, he usually worked with them and respected their constitutional independence.<sup>55</sup> It would seem that these people were indeed rewarded with positions close to the levers of power. These levers, however, had left court.

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<sup>53</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 202-203, 207-208.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, 205, 208-209, Hobman, *Cromwell's master spy*, 14-16.

<sup>55</sup> Coward, *The Protectorate*, 13-15, 29-30; Gaunt, 'The single person's confidants', 548-549, 551-560.

### A royal court in all but name?

Contemporaries were hardly concerned with the subtle differences between Cromwell's inauguration as Protector and an actual coronation, as expectations unavoidably coloured their perception.<sup>56</sup> Court life was similarly perceived to be regal. One author was clearly impressed with the luxury enjoyed at Whitehall: '[Major-General Harrison] was sent for to Court, entertained privately at dinner with rich wine and eight or ten dishes of meat, and as many gentlemen to attend him (...)'.<sup>57</sup> Royalists shared such a perception. In 1679, James Heath wrote:

A great deal of state was now used towards him, (...) and other ceremonious pieces of gallantry and good deportment, which were thought unchristian and savouring of carnality, introduced in place of austere and down looks.<sup>58</sup>

However, when focussing on the protectoral Household with the aid of historic distance, a different image appears. While expenditure changed little, the financial organization witnessed a structural overhaul. Not only was the court put on a state pension, its entire administration became far more organised. At the same time, the traditional Household structure and elaborate hierarchy of the Stuart monarchy was barely implemented. The definitive partition into separate structures was missing, while many offices remained vacant, or changed entirely. Furthermore, the social elites of the Protectorate never flocked to court seeking offices or power. Instead, they found it elsewhere, whether in government or in the military. Neither was there ever an atmosphere that came close to resembling the thriving court life of the Stuart palaces; the festivities surrounding diplomatic visits and the weddings of Cromwell's daughters seem to have been the only exceptions.<sup>59</sup> Even with the Humble Petition the royal household was only partially recreated at Whitehall. Neither Oliver, nor his son Richard, witnessed a complete return of regality to Whitehall. Why was this the case?

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<sup>56</sup> Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell*, 111.

<sup>57</sup> *Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers Vol. 2*, No. 2021, 397-398.

<sup>58</sup> J. Heath, *Flagellum: or, the life and death, birth and burial of O. Cromwell the late usurper, faithfully described. With an exact account of His policies & successes* (London 1679) 158.

<sup>59</sup> Sherwood, *The court*, 135-143.

Laura Knoppers has argued that Cromwell could not completely ignore some rites of state, but never attempted to fully recreate monarchical antecedents. In this, she contradicts Barclay, who argued that the public face of the Protectorate was consciously modelled on that of the English Monarchy. However, the evidence of the protectoral Household seems to support Knoppers' view. Of course, the Protectorate was certainly concerned with international recognition, which is evident in the impressive ceremonial receptions for foreign dignitaries, while the conservative elements in society needed to be appeased as well. But this was never done consistently. As Knoppers put it, 'although the ceremonies drew upon monarchical precedent, they reworked the symbols to cohere with constitutional changes in the state'.<sup>60</sup> This seems to have been strengthened in 1657, but never led to a full adherence to royal tradition.

While a state in the seventeenth century certainly required a court as an expression of sovereignty, it seems that there was never a wish, nor a necessity, to fully recreate a Household that was structured and functioned like its royal predecessor. What remains are two palaces that witnessed a partial return of former splendour, but never hosted a complete mirror-image of the Stuart courts throughout the Interregnum.

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<sup>60</sup> Barclay, 'The Lord Protector', 195-197; Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell*, 70-72, 76-78, 80, 122-126.