

VII.—NEWCASTLE'S REGICIDE:  
THE PARLIAMENTARY CAREER OF  
JOHN BLAKISTON

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In the course of the Civil War, Newcastle gained a wide reputation for being anti-Puritan and pro-Royalist. To the Presbyterian John Fenwick, the town was "famous for thy mocking and misusing Christ's messengers and ill entertainment of his servants."<sup>1</sup> William Lithgow, who wrote a spirited account of the siege of the town by the Scots in 1644, was even more outspoken. He claimed that the richest and best sorts of inhabitants were all malignants and most of them papists, but he did not excuse the lower classes either, terming them "a masse of silly ignorants" who lacked knowledge, conscience, and honesty.<sup>2</sup> The reputation which the town had gained between 1642 and 1644 was widely publicized at the Restoration. A poem published at Gateshead in 1660 to congratulate Charles II on the resumption of his "Birthright Power" stressed that loyalty had never wavered among Newcastle's citizenry and maintained that "On my first love my eye was ever bent/Though churlish Keepers did my hand prevent."<sup>3</sup> The picture is, of course, somewhat exaggerated. Newcastle had been held for the King, and since it was virtually the only major port in the hands of the royalists, it had assumed a great significance for their forces. Its royalism was, however, in many ways the result of the occupation of the town by the Earl of Newcastle

<sup>1</sup> J. Fenwick, *Christ Ruling in the Midst of His Enemies* in Richardson, *Historical Reprints* (Newcastle, 1847-9), vol. 1, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> W. Lithgow, *A True Experimentall Relation upon the Siege of Newcastle* (London, 1645), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> R. Astell, *Vota non Bella* (Gateshead, 1660), p. 7.

rather than the product of overwhelming sympathies. There were men in the town who were loyal to the parliament: thirty-five freemen were disfranchised in September, 1643, because they had "refused to hould wth our Sovereigne Lord the King . . . and [had] beene incendiaries and treated with seuerall men of another nation to invade this kingdome and to possesse themselves of this Tōwne."<sup>4</sup> Even Sir John Marley, who as mayor had the chief local responsibility for keeping the town safe for the crown admitted that there were dissident elements among the population.<sup>5</sup> When the Earl of Newcastle first attempted to garrison and fortify the town, he was stoutly resisted by the labourers in the coal trade.<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps suggestive that the Earl changed his appeal slightly but significantly when he came from Durham to Newcastle. At Durham, he had beat the drum for the King; at Newcastle, it was struck up for King and Parliament.<sup>7</sup>

It may seem ironic, nonetheless, that the most famous political figure of Newcastle during the Interregnum was a strong Puritan and an active parliamentarian, but to view John Blakiston as a republican anomaly in the politics of a royalist town is to misinterpret both Blakiston himself and the politics of the town. Blakiston's immediate ancestry contained little that foreshadowed his career as a radical. He was the second son of Marmaduke Blakiston, prebendary of Durham and vociferous Arminian.<sup>8</sup> His father was a frequent target of Puritan attacks, not only for his Arminianism

<sup>4</sup> M. H. Dodds, ed., *Extracts from the Newcastle upon Tyne Council Minute Book 1639-1656* (Newcastle, 1920), pp. 27-29.

<sup>5</sup> Bod. Clarendon MSS, State Papers 26, fols. 118-118v. This account of military proceedings in the North between 1642 and 1645 was apparently written by Marley in about 1648.

<sup>6</sup> *The Parliaments Resolution for the Speedy Sending of an Army to the North, also the True Relation of a Fight Performed at Newcastle* (London, 1642), p. 2; *Sir John Hothams Resolution whereunto is annexed Joyfull Newes from Newcastle* (London, 1642), sig. A 4v.

<sup>7</sup> *LJ* 5: 170.

<sup>8</sup> It has been stated, as in A.A.<sup>4</sup>, xviii, p. 67, that he was the son of Sir William Blakiston of Gibside, but this is incorrect. John Blakiston of Gibside died in 1647 when the future regicide was obviously still alive. See H. M. Wood, ed., *Wills and Inventories from the Registry at Durham*, pt. iv (Durham, 1929), Surtees Soc., vol. 142, p. 307.

but also for pluralism and for having secured the vicarage of Northallerton for his son Thomas.<sup>9</sup> Peter Smart, another prebendary of the cathedral, was the most outspoken of his critics, claiming that Blakiston had six livings of which he had bargained away all but two; at neither of the two which he had retained had he preached for seven years. Smart concluded scornfully "You thinke you doe service ynough to God and the Church, yf you sit now and then in your stall, like an idle drone (as allwaies you have ben), to heare piping and chaunting and observe devoutly your son Cosin his new ceremonies."<sup>10</sup> Little is known of the early life of John Blakiston, and there is no information which dates his repudiation of the Arminian views of his father or his own acceptance of Puritanism. He entered on a commercial career in Newcastle, married there in November, 1626, and by 1632 had secured a place at the bottom level of town office-holding as one of the chamberlains.

By this time, he was already a Puritan, and he continued to be an active leader of the movement in the 1630's, participating in the securing of the unofficial lecturer William Morton and being castigated in the local High Commission Court for his attacks on the vicar of the town, Yeldard Alvey.<sup>11</sup> Blakiston's position politically was enhanced by the growing Puritan strength, and, in 1640, when elections for the Long Parliament took place, he became a candidate. The election was a confused one. In the first place, it is necessary to appreciate the extent of the electorate. In the second place, the actual results must be clarified since the election led to a dispute. The original returns are lost, and

<sup>9</sup> P. Smart, *A Catalogue of Superstitious Innovations Brought into Durham Cathedral* (London, 1642), pp. 31-32; *Articles of Impeachment Proved upon Oath before the Lords delivered in writing by Nicholas Hobson and Robert King* (London, 1642), p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> G. Ornsby, ed., *The Correspondence of John Cosin* (Durham, 1869-1872), Surtees Soc., vols. 52, 55, 1: 185. Marmaduke Blakiston's daughter Frances had married Cosin in 1626.

<sup>11</sup> *A.A.*<sup>4</sup>, xli, pp. 143-147; W. H. D. Longstaffe, ed., *The Acts of the High Commission Court within the Diocese of Durham* (Durham, 1858), Surtees Soc., vol. 34, pp. 155-167.

this is, in fact, no easy task. In the third place, the town was occupied by the Scots, and it is important to ascertain what role, if any, they played in the polling. One thing is certain; the elections created great interest and excitement. The town companies appear to have appointed representatives to meet together in order to draw up statements of their grievances to be presented to the members.<sup>12</sup> There has been some doubt expressed about the extent of the franchise at Newcastle,<sup>13</sup> but every available indication suggests that it was a freeman borough and that the electorate was large.<sup>14</sup> Three candidates presented themselves to this aroused body of freemen: Sir Henry Anderson, Sir John Melton, and John Blakiston.

They were men who differed considerably in background and outlook. Anderson was an elderly man who had already held high municipal office and had had considerable parliamentary experience.<sup>15</sup> He was a powerful Hostman, and, as such, was far more in touch with the governing classes of the town than Blakiston. Blakiston, of course, had some contacts with Newcastle political life. He was not, as one contemporary pamphlet charged,<sup>16</sup> a mere shopkeeper, but he was not a part of the inner ring of Hostmen and Mercers who had dominated municipal politics since before 1600. The third candidate, Sir John Melton, was a complete outsider. This in itself hindered his chances, for the town rarely elected anyone without close Newcastle connections to represent them in parliament. The closest contact which he had

<sup>12</sup> MSS Butchers' Co. Minute Book 1626-1722, f. 157; MSS Soc. Antiq. Newcastle, M 13/D 10, f. 45.

<sup>13</sup> See W. A. Taffs, *The Borough Franchise in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century* (London M.A. thesis, 1926, unpublished. Bod. MS Eng. Hist. d. 233), pp. 305-306.

<sup>14</sup> *Perfect Occurrences of Every Daie Journall in Parliament*, no. 14, 2-9 April, 1647, p. 107, for example, refers to "a great meeting of the whole body of Freemen, for the choosing of a Burgess to sit in Parliament." *Moderate Intelligencer*, no. 142, 2-9 December, 1647, p. 1051 gives the electorate as 361, while a newsletter of 1659 gives it as 1239. C. H. Firth, ed. *The Clarke Papers* (London, 1891-1901), 3: 174.

<sup>15</sup> *A.A.* 4, xxiii, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> *The Mystery of the Good Old Cause Briefly Unfolded* (London, 1660), p. 4.

with the town was through his post as Secretary of the Council of the North, but he was further hampered by being a pronounced Straffordian. He had attempted as early as 1635 to influence Strafford to procure the summons of a parliament, and there can be little doubt that he was Strafford's personal candidate in the election.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the odds against him, Melton was returned as one of the two members in a violently disputed contest. It is important to ascertain the order of events since they have frequently been treated in a misleading fashion by later writers. The *Old Parliamentary History* and Alderman Hornby, who followed it, stated that Melton and Anderson were elected and that, after Melton died, a new writ was issued which resulted in the election of John Blakiston.<sup>18</sup> The editors of the official returns confessed, on the other hand, that they were unable to determine the order of the elections.<sup>19</sup> Bean, in his study of the parliamentary representation of the northern counties, appears to have been the first to establish the correct sequence of events, namely a disputed election for one of the places between Blakiston and Melton, and an undisputed return of Anderson for the other place.<sup>20</sup> Although some more recent accounts have suggested other possibilities,<sup>21</sup> this would seem to be the correct view. The *Journals of the House of Commons* and various parliamentary diaries appear to demonstrate conclusively that Anderson's election was never in question. Within a week of the first sitting of the parliament, he was acting and speaking as a fully qualified member; the earliest reference to his activity

<sup>17</sup> *DNB*, s.v. Melton, Sir John.

<sup>18</sup> H. Hornby, "An Attempt towards Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Newcastle," MSS Duke of Northumberland 187A/202, f. 87, citing *Old Parliamentary History*, 9: 35.

<sup>19</sup> *Returns of the Names of Every Member Returned to Serve in Each Parliament* (London, 1878), 1: 491 and n.

<sup>20</sup> W. W. Bean, *The Parliamentary Representation of the Six Northern Counties of England* (Hull, 1890), pp. 564-565.

<sup>21</sup> M. F. Keeler, *The Long Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 59 suggests, for example, that there were two returns, one naming Anderson and Melton, the second naming Blakiston and one of the other two. See also D. Brunton and D. H. Pennington, *Members of the Long Parliament* (London, 1954), pp. 61-62, 202.

was on 10 November, 1640, when he made a relation of the state of Newcastle, Northumberland, and Durham, and concluded with an attack on the Book of Canons, suggesting that it should be burned by the common hangman.<sup>22</sup> There are, in addition, other traces of his speaking and participating on committees in the first month of the parliament's life.<sup>23</sup> There is, moreover, a clear statement that the dispute was over the election of Melton; this was made when there was a motion for a new writ for electing a burgess in place of Melton who had died in the interval between the election and 17 December, 1640.<sup>24</sup> Melton does not appear to have taken his seat in the parliament at any point; Blakiston first appears as a sitting member on 27 April, 1641 when he was appointed to the committee to consider the act for the reformation of abuses in ecclesiastical courts.<sup>25</sup>

Two further points about the election should be cleared up, namely the nature of Newcastle's two representatives, Anderson and Blakiston, and the extent to which the Scots may have interfered. It is misleading to talk as if Newcastle had returned at least one royalist in 1640. Anderson was later disabled from sitting in the parliament as a result of joining the King's forces,<sup>26</sup> but to talk of him as a royalist or even as a moderate royalist in 1640<sup>27</sup> is to miss the point that the parties, if such there were, were not drawn in that year on the lines of royalist and parliamentarian; if anything, they were divided into reformers and non-reformers, perhaps even more explicitly into Straffordians and non-Straffordians. On this division, Anderson and Blakiston clearly form a pair, for Anderson's parliamentary career was consistently

<sup>22</sup> Bod. MS Film 39, Diary of Thomas Peyton, p. 9; Cambridge Univ. Library, MS Kk.vi. 38, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> *CJ* 2: 39; J. Rushworth, *Historical Collections* (London, 1659-1701), pt. iii, vol. 1: 66; Bod. Rawlinson MS C 956, fols. 35, 62v, 73; Sir S. D'Ewes, *Journal*, ed. W. Notestein (New Haven, 1923), pp. 25, 43, 51, 56, 73, 81.

<sup>24</sup> *CJ* 2: 53; Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, pt. iii, vol. 1: 120.

<sup>25</sup> *CJ* 2: 128

<sup>26</sup> *CJ* 3: 227 (4 September, 1643); he was appointed to a committee as late as 7 August, 1643. *Ibid.*, 3: 196.

<sup>27</sup> Brunton and Pennington, *Members of the Long Parliament*, pp. 62, 126, use both terms.

anti-Straffordian,<sup>28</sup> and even in 1648, he was still professing a moderate reforming faith when he wrote "I have always conceived & still do, that the Regall Power ought to be limited by the Law: And if it be debarr'd of its due course in the execution thereof, God defend, but the people upon generall complaint should have remedy therein."<sup>29</sup>

The one point that remains to be cleared up is the extent to which Blakiston may have owed his election to undue influence on the part of the Scots. It was alleged in a pamphlet at the Restoration that he owed his seat entirely to their interference, and this charge has been repeated by later writers.<sup>30</sup> All suggest that this was to screen himself from paying £6000 which came into his hands as the executor to the executor of Sir John Farmer who had bequeathed the sum for charitable uses. While it is not impossible that the Scots did exert some influence on the election, several factors would indicate that this was unlikely. In the first place, the Scots were seemingly quite careful to maintain the good will of those Newcastle citizens who supported them. They plundered ruthlessly outside of the town, but they seem to have restricted their plundering inside the walls.<sup>31</sup> In the second place, there is some negative evidence. Not all hostile contemporary references to Blakiston mention the role of the Scots in his election.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, no comment about the Scots interfering in his election can be traced in 1640-1; this is especially notable in its absence from the manuscript address to the leaders of the Scottish army

<sup>28</sup> This judgment is based on an analysis of the committees on which Anderson served. He moved a series of charges against Strafford on 21 November, 1640. D'Ewes, *Journal*, ed. Notestein, pp. 51, 539.

<sup>29</sup> H. Anderson, *A Meanes to Reconcile the Present Distempers of these Times* (London, 1648). He expressed somewhat similar views in 1643. *HMC 5th. Report*, appendix, p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> *The Mystery of the Good Old Cause*, p. 4; *The History of King Killers or the Fanatic Martyrology* (London, 1720), vol. 1 (June), p. 77; M. Noble, *The Lives of the English Regicides* (London, 1798), 1: 91.

<sup>31</sup> *A Letre from an Alderman of Newcastle Shewing in Part the Grievances There in Richardson, Reprints*, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> See *The True Character of the Educations, Inclinations, and Several Dispositions of all Those Judges upon the Life of Our Late King* (London, 1660), p. 2.

which was scattered in the streets of Newcastle. This document accused the Scots of many things, but influencing the elections was not one of them.<sup>33</sup> Finally, it is clear that Blakiston was no pawn of the Scots. He was later referred to caustically as one of the "little Northern Beagles" who cried out loudly against the Scots and their depredations in the North in 1644.<sup>34</sup>

Blakiston did not make initially as much of an impact on the House of Commons as his more experienced colleague Anderson. There are scattered references to him in the *Journal* during the remainder of 1641, but it is apparent that it was Anderson who was more deeply involved in the work of the House, both in minor business and in more major affairs such as the disbanding of the army.<sup>35</sup> Something of the relative respect accorded to the two may be indicated in D'Ewes's journal. On 30 December, 1641, D'Ewes noted a speech by Anderson on the present dangers; two weeks earlier when Blakiston had spoken on a similar theme, D'Ewes had recorded only that he "withdrew out of the howse whilst hee was in speaking, it being between one and two of the clocke in the afternoon".<sup>36</sup> Blakiston's parliamentary career, in other words, began in an unspectacular fashion once he had won the fight to secure his seat. It was not long, however, before he became the more active of the two Newcastle members. The reasons for this do not seem too difficult to discern. Sir Henry Anderson had been extremely diligent during that period of the Long Parliament's life which was concerned with dismantling the apparatus of the Stuart state, with opposition to Straffordian policy, with the removal of Star Chamber, ship money, and the Council of the North. Once this work was completed, the unity of the House began to break up. The

<sup>33</sup> Bod. Tanner MS 65, fols. 37-38v. The earliest reference I have traced to the Scots' interference is in 1648. *A List of the Names of the Members of the House of Commons* (London, 1648), BM 669 f. 12 (103).

<sup>34</sup> "Memoirs of Holles" in F. Maseres, ed. *Select Tracts Relating to the Civil Wars* (London, 1815), 1: 227-228.

<sup>35</sup> *CJ* 2: 84, 153, 172.

<sup>36</sup> Sir S. D'Ewes, *Journal*, ed. W. H. Coates (New Haven, 1942), pp. 300, 364.



moderate reformers, such as Anderson, wished to hold to the constitutional position that had been created by the process of destruction. The radicals wished to push on with vigour and to attack, among other things, the position of the church. It is accurate, in some senses, to speak of the episcopal party which grew up to face this opposition, but it is also important to note that some men, such as Hyde, slipped into the royalist party in an attempt to preserve the constitutional position that had been reached.<sup>37</sup> There is some reason to think that Anderson's development was similar to this. Although he was not removed from the House until 1643, his activity there appears to have declined after the end of 1641. He continued to be appointed to a few committees,<sup>38</sup> and he twice acted as a teller, once in January, 1642 and once in May, 1643,<sup>39</sup> but it is apparent, even from a casual perusal of the *Journal*, that it was Blakiston who was becoming the more conspicuous of the two.

It is not possible to follow in precise detail Blakiston's parliamentary career. He did not keep a diary himself, so one is forced to rely on the official records and the mentions made of him by others. Evidently, he became recognized as one of the most belligerent of the war party, more outspoken than Pym who can be associated frequently with the middle group in the House.<sup>40</sup> Although his personal contribution to the money raised in June, 1642 for the defence of parliament was not a large one, it is worth remembering that Anderson did not contribute at all.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Blakiston did advance a sizeable amount for the Irish land venture in addition to the amount which he advanced for the town.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> On this point, see B. H. G. Wormald, *Clarendon* (Cambridge, 1951), pt. I.

<sup>38</sup> For example, to the Committee for Ireland in April, 1643. *CJ* 3: 47.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 366; 3: 102.

<sup>40</sup> J. H. Hexter, *The Reign of King Pym* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), p. 20, n. 30.

<sup>41</sup> Bod. Tanner MS 63, f. 59. Blakiston advanced £50.

<sup>42</sup> *C.S.P. Ireland, Adventurers 1642-59*, p. 76; Keeler, *Long Parliament*, p. 109.

Even more indicative of his growing importance in the House is the increasing frequency with which his name is mentioned in the *Journal*. Between April and December, 1641, Blakiston had served on six committees to consider bills of various natures.<sup>43</sup> Between March and December, 1642, he had served on 17. In 1643, he served on 35 such committees, and by June of that year, he was acting as chairman of a more permanent one.<sup>44</sup> In 1644 the number of committees on which he participated increased to 44. His extended activity in the House is further revealed by the fact that he became a teller in a division; significantly, the vote concerned a matter of religion and Blakiston's co-teller was Oliver Cromwell.<sup>45</sup>

Religion was one of Blakiston's chief concerns, and a number of the committees to which he was appointed in this period reveal that interest. He served on the committee to consider the act for reformation of abuses in ecclesiastical courts, on the Covent Garden Church committee, on one to consider depriving the bishops of their places in the House of Lords, and on at least eleven other committees whose concern was primarily religious.<sup>46</sup> Of these, the most significant was that for plundered ministers of which Blakiston became a member in November, 1644.<sup>47</sup> This committee had wide powers of dealing with scandalous ministers, of providing for the taking of the Solemn League and Covenant, and of dealing with questions of lay preaching, heretical doctrine, and preaching without a licence.<sup>48</sup> Blakiston is also to be found asking ministers to preach before the House of

<sup>43</sup> The following figures are taken from *CJ*, *passim*. They include committees to consider bills as well as more permanent bodies such as the Committee of Adventurers for the reducing of Newcastle.

<sup>44</sup> *CJ* 3: 146. The committee is simply referred to as Blakiston's committee. There is another reference to it *ibid.*, 3: 315. It is possible that it was the committee for sorting petitions of which Blakiston was certainly chairman in December, 1644. *Ibid.*, 3: 723.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 470. The vote concerned a lecturer for St. Giles in the Fields.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 128; 2: 191, 467, 816, 893, 895; 3: 37, 60, 271, 340, 470, 579, 699, 705.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 699; BM Add. MSS 15669, f. lv.

<sup>48</sup> On its work, see W. A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth* (London, 1900), 2: 194ff.

Commons and giving the thanks of the House to those who did so.<sup>49</sup> There is further an almost certain connection between Blakiston and the general movement against some of the more unpopular clerics of Durham and Northumberland in 1642. On 25 March, 1642, it was ordered that the petition preferred by Blakiston concerning Durham, Northumberland, and Newcastle be referred to the Committee for Scandalous Ministers.<sup>50</sup> The exact contents of this petition are unknown, but it obviously concerned ecclesiastical matters, and it is suggestive that there are at least four petitions involving Durham and Northumberland clergymen which can be dated to about this time.<sup>51</sup> Blakiston's hand was no doubt strong in the decision to send for the Newcastle Arminians Alvey and Wishart as delinquents. Although the complaints against these two took the form of a petition by the burgesses and other inhabitants of Newcastle, Blakiston was one of the two men who attested the validity of the articles.<sup>52</sup> It also seems probable that Blakiston exercised considerable influence on the choice of representatives to the Westminster Assembly from Durham and Northumberland; the two Puritan preachers of Newcastle with whom he had had close contacts in the 1630's, Dr. Jenison and William Morton, were chosen to represent Durham.<sup>53</sup>

Blakiston's work was not, of course, entirely concerned with religion. At various points when the position of Newcastle closely touched the position of the parliament, he played an extremely active role on committees. This is

<sup>49</sup> *CJ* 3: 182, 639, 642.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 496.

<sup>51</sup> *The Petition and Articles Exhibited by the Parishioners of Pont Island and Others in Northumberland against Dr. Gray* (London, 1642); *The Petition of the Parishioners of Ackeliffe, Durham* (London, 1642); *A Most Lamentable information of Part of the Grievances of Muggleswick Lordship* (London, 1642); *The Petition of John Salvin* (London, 1642). The last petition can almost certainly be dated in March, 1642. The Muggleswick petition is somewhat earlier; the incumbent Bradley was sent for as a delinquent 22 February. *CJ* 2: 449.

<sup>52</sup> *CJ* 2: 127, 128, 151, 636.

<sup>53</sup> *A Catalogue of the Names of the Divines Approved of by the House of Commons for Each County in England and Wales* (London, 1642), sig. A 2v.

shown, for example, in June, 1642, when the town was garrisoned for the King by the Earl of Newcastle. He was then appointed to a committee on 20 June to consider information received from the town and to another on 27 June to consider the state of the business in the North. On 8 July, he reported to the House about arms and horses being brought into the town, while in September he is found propounding to the Committee for the Navy what ships were available and suitable to ride at the mouth of the Tyne to see to the defences of Newcastle.<sup>54</sup> Between the summer of 1642 and the reduction of the town in 1644, Blakiston is to be found serving on many similar committees. In October, 1642 he was one of those considering how two troops of horse might be raised and paid for in Durham and Northumberland. In December, 1642 he was on a committee to consider raising money for the supply of the North, and in February, 1643 he served on a similar committee, while in March he was attempting to secure the release by *habeas corpus* of several Puritans and parliamentarians who were imprisoned at Newcastle.<sup>55</sup> In 1644, he likewise appears on a number of committees dealing with Northern affairs and with the provision of coal to London. As a war measure, trade to Newcastle was prohibited as long as the town remained in royalist hands. It was fitting that when the town was reduced to parliament Blakiston was ordered to bring in an ordinance for re-opening the trade.<sup>56</sup>

One can catch other glimpses of Blakiston's activities in these years. In 1643, he handled much of the business connected with the making of a new Great Seal for the parliament.<sup>57</sup> Although he was more bellicose in his views than Pym, he is found on one occasion jumping to his defence by presenting information to the House against a Mr. Shawberry who had called the Puritan leader "King Pym and Rascal".<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *CJ* 2: 638, 646, 657, 776.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 806, 895, 985, 996-997.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 690.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 226, 269; BM Stowe MS 184, f. 58.

<sup>58</sup> *CJ* 2: 478.

Blakiston even attracted the notice of the Royalist newspaper *Mercurius Aulicus* as a result of his strong views on the position of the House of Commons. According to this account, Blakiston "lately told the Lower Members openly, that the Lords had been suffered too long to domineer, and we see (said he) how often they have been defective." Thus, the account concluded, "these two pretended Houses having graspt at all England as a Monopoly for themselves, doe now tug hard to defraud one another, the Lower stickling to heave out the Higher."<sup>59</sup>

The reducing of Newcastle to parliamentary hands opened a new phase in Blakiston's career. One of the most important tasks facing parliament was to ensure the safety of Newcastle once that town was under their control. The lesson of the first Civil War had been well-learned; London's reliance on Newcastle for its coal supply placed the northern town in a unique relation with the capital, and it was apparent to all that the Newcastle trade must not be cut off again.<sup>60</sup> It is not surprising, then, to discover that Blakiston devoted an increasing amount of effort to the problems of Newcastle politics. It seems certain that the political life of the town continued to operate well within the framework of the old struggle between the inner ring of the Hostmen and Mercers and the rest of the freemen for control of corporation offices,<sup>61</sup> but Blakiston brought, or rather attempted to bring, to the local struggles the awareness of national politics which he had gained during his years at Westminster. Although he had served his town in parliament, Blakiston had not held major town office before 1644. This was changed by the parliamentary ordinance dis-

<sup>59</sup> *Mercurius Aulicus*, no. 29, 20 July, 1644, p. 1088.

<sup>60</sup> The price of coals in 1643 had risen to 20s. above the legal price by May. *Mercurius Aulicus*, no. 21, 21-27 May, 1643, p. 277. The dangers were well pointed out by Alderman Adams of London, *CJ* 3: 171. See also the comments in *Artificiall Fire or Coale for Rich and Poore* (London, 1642) and in *Sea-Coale, Char-coale, and Small-Coale* (London, 1643).

<sup>61</sup> The desires for a limited extension of town government had been expressed earlier by Henry Sanderson, customer of the port in the 1590's and during the Shrove Tuesday riots in 1633.

franchising the mayor and others of Newcastle in May, 1645; by its terms, Blakiston was appointed an alderman.<sup>62</sup> He continued to play an active role in the House of Commons, but it is apparent that he was also devoting much of his time to the affairs of the corporation. His involvement in local politics became even greater in the following year when he was elected mayor of the town.

It is worth tracing Blakiston's local political career in some detail at this point. It should be admitted from the start that he was not in a position to be present in the town for any extended periods since his duties in the House of Commons precluded this. Consequently, he was never able to dominate its political life nor to bring it completely to the awareness of national politics which he had come to possess. On the other hand, he did take as active a part in the corporation's affairs as his parliamentary career allowed. In October, 1645 he was given leave by the House to go to Newcastle, obviously in connection with his election as mayor.<sup>63</sup> He was certainly still in Newcastle in the following January and cannot be traced as definitely back in the House of Commons before 11 March.<sup>64</sup> It is also very important to note Blakiston's further leaves of absence from the House. In 1646, 1647, and again in 1648 he was given permission to withdraw from the House near the beginning of September.<sup>65</sup> The only explanation for this absence at the same time in successive years is that he was returning to Newcastle to participate in the municipal elections and to keep an eye on them. Thus it would appear that even when he was absent from the town for most of the year, he was determined to keep a close watch over its affairs. On the one other occasion when Blakiston was excused from the House, in March, 1648, he does not appear to have gone to

<sup>62</sup> *LJ* 7: 395.

<sup>63</sup> *CJ* 4: 306.

<sup>64</sup> He wrote a letter from Newcastle to the House in January. *Ibid.*, 4: 403. On 11 March, his presence in the House was recorded. *Ibid.*, 4: 472. In April, a deputy mayor, Henry Dawson, was appointed in his place. *Dodds, Council Book 1639-56*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>65</sup> *CJ* 5: 286, 663; 6: 20.

Newcastle.<sup>66</sup> But it is probable that he was engaged on town business, for two matters which closely concerned the town and on which he is known to have been consulted were then at a critical stage.

The first of these was the projected purchase of the Grand Lease by the corporation. The fortunes of the town were obviously closely linked to the collieries lying within the manors of Gateshead and Whickham, but the decision to sell church lands to the profit of the state threatened the town's interest there severely, especially since the Common Council of London had decided after a stormy meeting to purchase the manors themselves.<sup>67</sup> The expressed desire of Newcastle to purchase the lease antedated London's decision by two years, for as early as 1646 the corporation had exchanged letters with Blakiston on the subject and had summoned the stewards of the town companies to see if they would lend money for the purpose on the security of the corporation.<sup>68</sup> The agitation over the purchase had reached its peak in March, 1648, and the town was able, with the aid of Blakiston, to fight off the threat from London. A strongly worded petition to the Lord Mayor and Common Council of London contained an intimation that London interference would lead to a disastrous interruption in the coal trade,<sup>69</sup> and this appears to have worked. Only a small portion of Gateshead manor seems to have been sold outside the corporation, and at the Restoration Bishop Cosin complained that the control of Newcastle over the Grand Lease was so strong that no episcopal profit could be extracted from it unless a concurrent lease were granted.<sup>70</sup>

The second piece of town business on which Blakiston

<sup>66</sup> He was given leave on 9 March; he was again present in the House on 20 March. *Ibid.*, 5: 489, 505.

<sup>67</sup> *The Kingdome Weekly Account of Heads of Chiefe Passages in Parliament*, no. 9, 1-8 March, 1647/8, p. 68.

<sup>68</sup> Newcastle Council Book 1645-50, fols. 75, 82-83.

<sup>69</sup> Dodds, *Council Book 1639-56*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>70</sup> Several parcels of Gateshead manor were sold to James Baylis in April, 1648, for £63.15.10. BM Add. MSS 9049, f. 6v. For Cosin's fears, see Ornsby, *Correspondence of Cosin*, 2: 94.

was almost certainly engaged at this period was the procuring of a new master for the Grammar School. The master who had come to replace the royalist Amor Oxley after the reduction of the town had decided to retire. Blakiston's aid in securing a replacement was eagerly solicited. It is well to remember the importance with which the Puritans viewed education. As the Common Council itself expressed it, "the Scholes of this Kingdom have byn and are the Nurseries and Seedeplotts of Learninge and good Educacion."<sup>71</sup> William London, the Newcastle bookseller, expressed the other side of this picture in a well-known passage when he drew attention to the great interruptions to education which a period of disorder had brought to the North; commenting on "the present want of Studious Gentlemen" in the area, he concluded that "these Tempestuous Winds of a civil war" had made learning "too great a stranger to these parts."<sup>72</sup> Given these conditions and the general Puritan concern with education, it is not surprising that Blakiston took an interest in procuring a new schoolmaster. What is of more significance is the schoolmaster he attempted to procure, Hezekiah Woodward, a notable exponent of the importance of elementary education and a close associate of the advanced educational thinkers Hartlib and Comenius.<sup>73</sup> Blakiston's attempt to secure Woodward for the town broke down, apparently as the result of a dispute over the proper method of teaching Latin, but it is probable that Blakiston had some influence on the eventual choice of George Ritschel, a Bohemian refugee, since Ritschel was also a member of the Hartlib-Comenius circle.<sup>74</sup>

Blakiston did not turn his attentions to what were essentially municipal affairs only on the occasions when he

<sup>71</sup> Dodds, *Council Book 1639-56*, p. 60.

<sup>72</sup> W. London, *A Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books in England* (London, 1658), sig. B 1-iv.

<sup>73</sup> *DNB*, s.v. Woodward, Hezekiah; A. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* (London, 1813-20), 3: 1034-1037; Newcastle Council Book 1645-50, f. 227.

<sup>74</sup> Ritschel had acted as Comenius's literary agent. There is a good account of his career before he came to Newcastle in R. F. Young, *A Bohemian Philosopher at Oxford in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1925).



sought leave of absence from the House to do so. There are frequently recurring references in the minutes of the Common Council to letters received from him, and it is apparent that he kept in close touch with the Puritan corporation. He also played a major role in the beginning of the Commonwealth agitation over the town's rights and liberties in the Tyne. These were to result eventually in the celebrated onslaught of Ralph Gardner in the 1650's, but the forces were already taking shape around the issue of Sir Henry Vane's ballast shore. The town had seen to the destruction of this, but Vane objected on the grounds that such action constituted a breach of his privileges as a member of parliament. He was joined in protest by shipowners and masters trading to Newcastle.<sup>75</sup> If the references to this affair in the books of the Common Council are a true guide, Blakiston played an active role in combatting any attempt to break down the town's privileges. He may not have been acting in the long run in the best interests of the Tyne Conservancy, but he was acting precisely in the way a burgess loyal to the interests of his town was expected to act.

Blakiston's attention to local affairs overlapped with an interest in national affairs in connection with a new parliamentary election. After Sir Henry Anderson had been removed from the House, Blakiston sat as the town's sole representative. There were frequent demands, following the reduction of the town to parliamentary hands, that this situation should be rectified. As early as December, 1644 there were demands that writs be issued for a new election,<sup>76</sup> and in September, 1645 Blakiston himself indicated in a letter that these would be sent down speedily.<sup>77</sup> Nothing was done, however, and a year later Blakiston was violently

<sup>75</sup> On Vane's case, see R. Gardner, *England's Grievance Discovered in Relation to the Coal Trade* (Newcastle, 1796), p. 57; Newcastle City Archives, Foreshore Case Documents, Box 49, 7/40-45, 47-49; PRO SP 16/492/37; *CJ* 4: 461; Newcastle Council Book 1639-56, fols. 91v.-92, 95, 96-96v; Council Book 1645-50, fols. 58, 61.

<sup>76</sup> *CJ* 3: 715.

<sup>77</sup> *C.S.P. Dom.*, 1645-7, p. 124. 9 September, 1645.

attacked in the House for withholding the writs.<sup>78</sup> It seems clear that the accusation was, at least in part, true, but Blakiston defended himself by asserting that he had been acting in the best interests of the state. He argued that Newcastle was still full of delinquents and that an election would thus be dangerous. He seems to have won the House to this view; at least they agreed that no election should be held until after the King had been removed from the town. It is also apparent that he was not the only person who was blocking a new election; the mayor and other members of the governing body of the corporation backed him completely on this point.<sup>79</sup> In addition, it should be noted that the election was allowed as soon as conditions permitted.<sup>80</sup>

Blakiston continued at the same time to show a lively interest in national affairs. It seems certain that he was becoming more and more attached to the Independent cause; he was one of those who joined Speaker Lenthall in fleeing to the army at the end of July, 1647.<sup>81</sup> He was also gaining a wide reputation as a religious radical; in 1648 a newspaper rather unfairly referred to "Blakiston the reformed Pedler of Newcastle" as an "Anabaptistical" sectary.<sup>82</sup> The judgment was based on his attitude to the bishops, for he had argued that since "the Bishops were set up here in this kingdom by a Law . . . therefore now the inconveniencie of them is found, they may be put down by a Law." Analysis of the committees on which Blakiston served between 1644 and Pride's Purge reinforces the view that he was still devoting a large part of his parliamentary time to matters

<sup>78</sup> BM Add. MSS 10114, f. 18v. Diary of John Harington, 11 September, 1646.

<sup>79</sup> *London Post*, no. 1, 14-31 December, 1646, pp. 4-5.

<sup>80</sup> The election was temporarily delayed by an error in the wording of the writ. *CJ* 5: 86. When it did take place, the result was disputed and a second election had to be held before Robert Ellison was chosen. *Perfect Occurrences of Every Daie Journall in Parliament*, no. 14, 2-9 April, 1647, pp. 107-108; *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, 20-27 April, 1647, p. 610; *CJ* 5: 255; *Moderate Intelligencer*, no. 142, 2-9 December, 1647, p. 1051.

<sup>81</sup> Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, pt. iv, vol. 2: 755. On this incident, see S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War* (London, 1911), 3: 334 ff.

<sup>82</sup> *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, no. 35, 21-28 November, 1648, sig. Bbb 3v-4.

of religion. He served on committees dealing with the sale of bishops' lands, with the abolition of deans and chapters and the sale of their lands, with the reconstruction of damaged churches, with the maintenance of ministers, with the determining of scandalous offences, with the problems of pluralism and division and unification of parishes, as well as a large number of other committees of a similar nature.<sup>83</sup> He continued to be asked on frequent occasions either to invite ministers to preach before the House or to convey the thanks of the House to them for their pains.<sup>84</sup> His stature in the House is likewise revealed by two major appointments; in October, 1645, he was added to the Committee for Privileges and in July, 1646 he became one of the conservators of the peace between England and Scotland.<sup>85</sup>

The final stage in Blakiston's parliamentary career was opened by Pride's Purge in December, 1648. The forcible exclusion of unsure spirits from the House was a necessary adjunct to the furthering of the revolution. Blakiston once again became the town's only representative; his colleague Ellison cannot be traced in the records of the House after the purge. It is of some significance that at this time the one clear radical outcry of the Newcastle corporation during the Interregnum can be heard. In October, 1648 the mayor, aldermen, Common Council, and other well-affected persons of the town set their hands to a strongly worded petition calling for speedy justice on all the incendiaries and actors in the Civil War.<sup>86</sup> The mayor, aldermen, and Common Council backed up this petition with an additional one of their own, arguing against a personal treaty with the King and rebuking the parliament for being ignorant of their own freedom and birthright "which they are willing to sell for a Messe of Pottage, so that they may enjoy a Slavish Peace."<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *CJ* 4: 97, 211, 218, 275, 276, 425, 502, 516, 562, 608, 719; 5: 84, 602; 6: 81; *LJ* 8: 359; 10: 471.

<sup>84</sup> *CJ* 4: 36, 224, 226, 663; 5: 287, 545.

<sup>85</sup> *CJ* 4: 300; T. Birch, ed., *Thurloe State Papers* (London, 1742), 1: 79.

<sup>86</sup> *Moderate*, no. 14, 10-17 October, 1648, pp. 115-116.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

When one remembers these petitions and the enthusiastic welcome which the town gave to Cromwell in October,<sup>88</sup> it becomes apparent that Blakiston was not acting in a unilateral fashion when he participated in the trial of the King. Blakiston was one of the most active of those who sat in judgment on the King; he attended every meeting of the court, was present when the sentence was passed, and signed the death warrant,<sup>89</sup> but before one condemns him completely for this, one should remember two things. In the first place, the evident duplicity of Charles I was an ever-present danger to parliament. If we accept the principles of government for which the parliament was striving, we cannot condemn their action completely. In the second place, Blakiston was acting with the full support of the Newcastle corporation. Nothing is more damaging to Newcastle's reputation as a royalist centre than its reaction to the death of the King; after his execution, a letter from the town stated that the prevailing view of Charles there was that he was "not onely weak but very wilful and obstinate, and for Religion, the simplest of all carnal men of his principles in the world except Doctor Juxon . . . nothing can we see in him tending to a true Christian or the power of godliness."<sup>90</sup>

In the months between Pride's Purge and his own death, Blakiston became one of the most active members of the Rump. He served on 37 committees from 13 December, 1648 to 30 April, 1649;<sup>91</sup> these included some of the major bodies of the House, such as those for the excise and the army. His active participation in the affairs of the Rump Parliament raises the question of his relationship with Sir Henry Vane the Younger, who became in many ways the

<sup>88</sup> B. Whitelocke, *Memorials of English Affairs* (Oxford, 1853), 2: 429, 431.

<sup>89</sup> J. Nalson, *A True Copy of the Journal of the High Court of Justice for the Tryal of K. Charles I* (London, 1684), p. 129. According to Nalson's list, only four others (J. Carew, Sir J. Danvers, A. Scroop, H. Smith) attended all the sessions and signed the warrant.

<sup>90</sup> *Moderate*, no. 30, 30 January-6 February, 1649, pp. 295-296.

<sup>91</sup> *CJ* 6: *passim*. There appears to be some overlapping in these appointments and the actual number of effective committees on which he served may be somewhat smaller.

leading exponent of the Rump's powers.<sup>92</sup> It is difficult to prove that Vane and Blakiston had very close connections; Blakiston's role in preserving the interests of the town against Vane's father in the case of the ballast shore on the Tyne may well have told against this. But there is one reference which would indicate that his relations with the Vane family were, in fact, close in this period. The Leveller, John Lilburne, in the course of a typical diatribe against the Vanes referred to Blakiston as "one of Vane's creatures for the many thousand pounds sake of the Commonwealth's money he has helped him to."<sup>93</sup> One can conclude that Vane and Blakiston were at least associated enough to become the targets of similar attacks. Lilburne's bias against Blakiston is obvious. One should place the statement in its proper perspective, for it was precisely in this period of intense parliamentary activity that the Newcastle burgess came under fire from the Leveller leader and more particularly from Lilburne's brother George. These attacks contained two main charges, namely that Blakiston had furthered the cause of delinquents in the North and that he was busily stuffing his own pockets with profits extorted from private individuals and from the commonwealth.<sup>94</sup> This was not the first occasion on which charges of double-dealing were levied at Blakiston. John Musgrave, a disgruntled pamphleteer whose reliability is far from being above question, had made such charges in 1645 and 1647, but they had never been substantiated.<sup>95</sup> It should be remembered that Blakiston's family connections placed him in an awkward position. He

<sup>92</sup> On Vane, see R. Howell, "Sir Henry Vane the Younger and the Politics of Religion," *History Today*, 1963, pp. 275-282.

<sup>93</sup> J. Lilburne, *The Legall Fundamentall Liberties of the People of England* (London, 1649), p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> Much of the following is based on *To every individuall member of the honorable House of Commons, the Humble Remonstrance of George Lilburne* (n.p., 1649). This was answered by T. Shadforth, *Innocency Modestly Vindicated* (London, 1649); T. Saunders, *An Additional Answer to a Pamphlet Called a Remonstrance written by Mr. George Lilburne* (n.p., 1649); *The Vindication of Edward Colston to a Most False and Scandalous Remonstrance* (London, 1649).

<sup>95</sup> J. Musgrave, *A Word to the Wise* (London, 1645), p. 5; J. Musgrave, *A Fourth Word to the Wise* (London, 1647), p. 2.

had a large number of delinquent relatives, some of them in the church, and there may be some truth in the complaint that he went out of his way to protect them. This appears, for example, to have been the case with his brother Thomas, the vicar of Northallerton. There is certainly a suspicion that Thomas was, in his views, much after the likeness of his father Marmaduke Blakiston; certainly pre-war Puritan comment would suggest this. It is striking, however, that he was not removed from his post until well after John Blakiston had died, and the implication of protection is obviously present.<sup>96</sup>

It is impossible to assess with complete confidence the accuracy of the various charges that were made against Blakiston, but it seems plausible to suggest that most of them were false. The accusation that he had placed malignant preachers in livings in the North is highly unlikely in view of what is known of his own religious development, and, in any case, the three preachers who were specifically named by Lilburne in the attack were apparently appointed by order of parliament rather than by direct action on Blakiston's part.<sup>97</sup> There may be more truth in the accusation that Blakiston had taken over some of the property belonging to his relatives in order to protect it from sequestration, but there is little evidence that Blakiston grabbed other property on dishonest terms. It was charged that he purchased Durham Castle as the result of shady dealing. This seems unlikely; it is not even established that he purchased it under any conditions.<sup>98</sup> The corporation of Newcastle was not convinced of the truth of the charges. They wrote to Speaker Lenthall in May, 1649 in defence of their burgess, pointing out "how it hath pleased God in mercie even in a

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Blakiston did, however, claim to have parliamentary sympathies. See A. G. Matthews, ed., *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1948), p. 389.

<sup>97</sup> Shadforth, *Innocency Modestly Vindicated*, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Colston who was supposed to have aided in the transaction utterly denied it and queried whether Blakiston had made the purchase. *Vindication of Colston*, p. 6. In the records of the sale of bishops' lands, it is noted as being sold to Thomas Andrews, Lord Mayor of London in May, 1649. BM Add. MSS 9049, f. 16.

declining age to preserve Mr. Blakistone in an acceptable way of sinceritie and faithfullnesse to ye commonwealth and how unapt he is to cramme himselfe w<sup>th</sup> ye riches of a ruined countrie or seeke after great things notwithstanding his many losses."<sup>99</sup> Final resolution of the matter was not achieved; in the midst of the agitation over the charges, John Blakiston died.

Some no doubt saw this as a judgment of God on a man who had dared to participate in the trial and execution of a king. This was hardly the view of the parliament that he had served and the town he had represented. The former voted his widow and children a large sum of money in respect of his personal losses and in gratitude for his services; the latter likewise made a payment to his widow "takinge into their due consideracion his great paines and ffaithfulness about their Occasions and the many good services he performed for this Corporacion."<sup>100</sup> The eventual collapse of the English republic and the restoration of the monarchy brought with it a blackening of the reputation of all the regicides including Blakiston. Pamphlets such as *The Mystery of the Good Old Cause* portrayed them as dishonest, scheming, and unsavoury. Blakiston's own town began to stress its royalist past and conveniently forgot the attachment which it had once shown to him and his ideas as well as the services which he had performed for it in municipal politics, education, and religion. The biased picture of these men, enshrined in the Rev. Mark Noble's *Lives of the English Regicides* which was published at the end of the eighteenth century, continues to shape the reactions of many people to them. They were, of course, determined and often desperate men, engaged in the violent business of revolution. Not all of them were, by any means, above reproach; perhaps John Blakiston himself was not when things came to a conflict between family interest and the interests of the state. But to accept Noble's view as the final judgment on Blakiston is

<sup>99</sup> Bod. Tanner MS 56, f. 22.

<sup>100</sup> *CJ* 6: 280; Dodds, *Council Book 1639-56*, pp. 107-108.

to do a major figure in Newcastle's history a great injustice. One should remember the note written by a descendant of Newcastle's regicide into his copy of Noble's book: "This 'Life' is in every respect strikingly inaccurate & cannot be depended on."<sup>101</sup> That judgment is perfectly correct; John Blakiston was certainly a regicide, but he was also one of the most active, imaginative, and faithful members of parliament to have served the town.

<sup>101</sup> This copy of Noble, which formerly belonged to the Rev. R. Blakiston, is owned by my colleague, K. V. Thomas, St. John's College, Oxford.