

PASQUILL'S PROTESTATION: RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY AT LONDON STONE IN THE 16th CENTURY

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SUMMARY

Writers on the subject of the enigmatic London Stone have often cited, as evidence for its role as a traditional place for public proclamations, a 16th-century publication usually referred to as Pasquill and Marforius. In it 'Pasquill' announces his intention of posting a bill, his 'Protestation', on London Stone, and invites others to do the same. This paper considers the true nature of Pasquill and Marforius and its context, a religious controversy that shook Elizabethan England, and questions how far Pasquill's proposed action can be interpreted as evidence of a common practice at London Stone. In the spring of 2007 at the Medieval and Tudor London Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, I presented a paper under the title 'Jack Cade and the renowned Cavaliero Pasquill at London Stone'. The first part of that presentation provided the core of a paper later published in this journal, 'Jack Cade at London Stone' (Clark 2007); this essay is a rewritten and expanded version of the second half of the seminar paper.

In its edition for 21 April 1888 the popular weekly magazine *Chambers's Journal* included an article on London Stone, the historic and rather mysterious block of stone then set into an alcove in the wall of the church of St Swithin in Cannon Street, City of London (Anon 1888). The anonymous author noted the sorry state of the stone and the general ignorance of it – 'Few people, probably, have ever seen London Stone ...' (*ibid.*, 241). However, the author's comments on London

Stone's mysterious history and supposed significance were to have a considerable influence on later writers (Clark 2010, 54–5).

Among other things, the author claimed that London Stone 'had come to be one of the recognised places for the promulgation of edicts at the latter end of the sixteenth century' (Anon 1888, 242). The only evidence cited in support of this claim was from a publication that had appeared in 1589, whose long and elaborate title is usually abbreviated to *Pasquill and Marforius* or *The Return of Pasquill* (Anon 1589; Nashe 1958, i, 65–103). Thus *Chambers's Journal* tells us:

'Set up this bill at London Stone. Let it be doone solemnly, with drom and trumpet; and looke you advance my cullour on the top of the steeple right over against it' – runs a passage in *Pasquill and Marforius*. And again we read: 'If it please them these dark winter nights to sticke uppe their papers uppon London Stone' – from all of which it appears that in those days it fulfilled functions which were a little later discharged in most places, as they still are in some, by the town pump. (Anon 1888, 242)

The author's conclusion that London Stone 'had come to be one of the recognised places for the promulgation of edicts at the latter end of the sixteenth century' was subsequently repeated, with different

emphasis, by the eminent folklorist Lewis Spence. Spence wrote ‘At the end of the sixteenth century *it was still* a recognised spot for the public announcement of edicts’ (Spence 1937, 171, my italics). Thus Spence adopted the view then fashionable among folklorists that a ‘custom’ could (and probably should) be considered to have a history of incalculable age pre-dating the first record of it.¹ This has in turn fostered the growth of a belief that London Stone is not only of great age but has had some peculiar significance for Londoners and a perhaps esoteric relationship with the city throughout the ages – a mythical London Stone that transcends the historical (though admittedly puzzling!) reality (Clark 2010, 52–5).

The *Chambers’s Journal* contributor probably took the reference to this rather obscure 16th-century source from one or other edition of John Brand’s *Observations on Popular Antiquities* – perhaps from the new edition of 1888 – which includes these same two quotations in a brief account of London Stone (Brand 1888, 740).² There the quotations are taken out of context, referenced only to ‘Pasquill and Marforius, 4to, Lond. 1589’, and no conclusions are drawn about London Stone’s function as a ‘place for the promulgation of edicts’.

It is not clear whether the *Chambers’s Journal* author was aware of the true nature of the publication known as *Pasquill and Marforius*, and it has certainly since been described wrongly as ‘a now forgotten play of 1589’ or ‘an Elizabethan play’ (Ackroyd 2000, 18; Westwood & Simpson 2005, 475). *Pasquill and Marforius* is not, however, a play, although it does indeed take the form of a dialogue. It is a pamphlet that was published as a contribution to a major religious controversy that divided the England of Elizabeth I – the ‘Martin Marprelate Controversy’.

England in the late 16th century was riven by religious conflict. It faced not only the ever present threat of a resurgence of the suppressed Roman Catholic faith, but disputes within the established Church of England. Puritans and Presbyterians saw many of the practices of the Church of England, with its authoritarian hierarchy of priests, bishops and archbishops, as little better than Papist, and sought its reformation openly or subversively. In October 1588 the

first of a series of seven satirical pamphlets was published, their target the established Church of England and its prelates – and they appeared under the name of ‘Martin Marprelate’. Issued from nomadic pirate presses operating outside the law, they have been described as ‘among the liveliest prose satires to appear in the sixteenth century’ (Ruoff 1975, 270). The bishops reputedly paid a team of writers to respond in kind.³ Thus was born the Martin Marprelate Controversy, and ‘Martinists’ and ‘anti-Martinists’ exchanged shot-for-shot in print (*ibid*, 270–2). The last Martin Marprelate pamphlet was published in September 1589, but the furore was slow to die down. There were arrests. One supposed Martinist ringleader was hanged, another probably died in prison.

Among the ‘anti-Martinist’ pamphlets three appeared under the name ‘Pasquill’. These were once traditionally attributed to Thomas Nashe (1567–c.1601), playwright, poet and pamphleteer, although almost certainly they were not by him (Nashe 1958, v, 49–58), and there has been much debate about their authorship. The identification of Pasquill as Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, proposed by Elizabeth Appleton (2001), has been dismissed by the recent editor of the Martin Marprelate texts as ‘implausible’ (Black 2008, xcvi n 58).

Pasquill and Marforius, which is dated 20 October 1589, was the second of these Pasquill pamphlets. The reference to London Stone needs to be read in this context – it is not a description of an actual event, nor even a realistically proposed course of action.

The pamphlet takes the form of a dialogue between Pasquill (introduced as ‘the renowned Cavaliero’) and his old friend Marforius, who have met at the Royal Exchange in London on Pasquill’s return from overseas, with satirical comments on ‘Martin’ and his opinions.⁴ At the end of it Pasquill declares his intention of setting out his own views publicly, in a bill to be stuck up on London Stone, inviting others to do the same:

In the meane season *Marforius*, I take my leaue of thee, charging thee vpon all our old acquaintance, and vpon my blessing, to set vp this bill at London stone. Let it be doone sollemnly with Drom and Trumpet, and looke you aduance my colours on the top of the steeple right ouer

against it,⁵ that euery one of my Souldiers may keepe his quarter. (Anon 1589, sig Diii verso; Nashe 1958, i, 100)

In the final tract in the 'Pasquill' series, *The First Parte of Pasquills Apologie* (Anon 1590), it seems that Pasquill has made London Stone his headquarters, since it is addressed 'From my Castell and Collours at London stone the 2. of Iuly. Anno. 1590' (Nashe 1958, i, 136), thus maintaining an apparent military context for his activities.⁶

However, *Pasquill and Marforius* continues with a transcript of Pasquill's proposed proclamation:

PASQVILS PROTESTATION VPPON LONDON STONE

I Caualliero Pasquill, the writer of this simple hand, a young man, of the age of some few hundred yeeres, lately knighted in Englande, with a beetle and a bucking tub, to beat a little reason about Martins head, doe make this my Protestation vnto the world, that if any man, woman, or childe, haue any thing to say against Martin the great, or any of his abettors, of what state or calling soeuer they be, noble or ignoble, from the very Court-gates to the Coblers stall, if it please them these dark Winter-nights, to sticke vppe their papers vppon London-stone, I will there giue my attendance to receiue them, from the day of the date hereof, to the full terme and reuolution of seven yeeres ensuing. Dated 20. Octobris. Anno Millimo, Quillimo, Trillimo, per me venturous Pasquill the Caualliero. (Anon 1589, sig Diii verso; Nashe 1958, i, 101)

That Pasquill should, with the aid of Marforius, set up a bill in this way, and invite others to do the same, is appropriate. His name, otherwise Pasquin or Pasquino, was first applied to a battered classical statue in Rome, near the Piazza Navona, on which it became traditional in the 16th century to stick up lampoons and political satires – 'pasquinades' (Rendina 1991; Room 1999, 885). Our 'Pasquill' adopts the Latin form of the name, *Pasquillus*, as it appears for example in the title of a collection of the verses published in 1510, the first of many such anthologies: *Carmina ad Pasquillum posita* (Rendina 1991, 20). On the other side

of Rome, near the Forum, was an ancient statue of a sea or river god where the same custom prevailed – it was (and is) known as *Marforio* (*ibid*, 58–62). Pasquino and Marforio are the two best known of Rome's 'talking statues'.

But the practice of posting up provocative bills of this sort had in any case long been known in London. Already in the 14th and 15th centuries there are abundant references to official proclamations, political tracts and partisan letters being posted up around London – at the Cross in Cheap, at the doors of St Paul's, around the Palace of Westminster, in Fleet Street and Cheapside and at London Bridge, on the doors and windows of private houses, or simply in 'divers places in the city' (Gransden 1982, 238, 251–2; Scase 1998).⁷ By the late 16th century, the availability of cheap printing facilitated the plastering of London buildings, walls and structures with printed as well as handwritten posters – official notices, playbills, title-pages of new books and 'siquises' (advertisements, so called from their customary opening words in Latin or in English 'si quis ...' or 'if anyone ...'), not to mention 'libels' (that is, declarations of political or religious belief, or personal attacks on individuals, usually anonymous and scurrilous) (Stern 2006, 76–80; see also Stern 2009, 53–6).

In her paper on playbills and advertisements in Early Modern London, Tiffany Stern notes some 'publick places' that were then notorious for the posting of bills, for example 'Pauls Church dore' and even the internal columns of the cathedral, the Old and New Exchanges, and Cheapside (Stern 2006, 73, 76 n 54). She draws attention to a passage in Benjamin Rudyard's *Le Prince d'Amour*, an account of the Christmas Revels held at the Middle Temple in 1599, where we read

[...] there was a Libel set up against him in all famous places of the City, as Queen-Hithe, Newgate, the Stocks, Pillory,⁸ Pissing Conduit;⁹ and (but that the Provost Marshall was his inward friend) it should not have missed Bridewell. (*ibid*, 73; Rudyard 1660, 80)

None of these sources apparently mentions London Stone specifically.

Stern (2006, 77–8) also suggests that 'legal' space, for the display of official bills,

was distinct from that used for the random posting of siques, libels and such unofficial and private notices. She cites Adam Fox's study of *Oral and Literate Culture* (Fox 2000, 45) for the posting of public proclamations 'where they might best be seen and redd of all men', usually in marketplaces and churches. Fox (2000, 313) also identifies typical places for the posting of libellous verses, such as the parish pump, the pillory, the maypole or the market cross. Stern suggests that in London official notices were more likely to be found at parish churches, ward courts, company halls and possibly the city gates (2006, 78).

In that case, can we, from the evidence of *Pasquill and Marforius*, define the nature of bill-posting at London Stone? Was it 'official'? The contributor to *Chambers's Journal*, as we have seen, concluded solely on the basis of *Pasquill and Marforius* that London Stone 'had come to be one of the recognised places for the promulgation of edicts at the latter end of the sixteenth century' (Anon 1888, 242), and was followed in this belief by others.

Stern, however, simply notes that, on the basis of its appearance in *Pasquill and Marforius*, London Stone should be added to the tally of 'famous places of the City' for setting up bills and advertisements (2006, 73) – and surely rightly. For as the text clearly shows, Pasquill's 'Protestation upon London Stone' is not a public proclamation or edict. It is an *advertisement*, literally a 'siquis'. We can compare it with a 'siquis' that Stern quotes from Barten Holyday's play *Technogamia* of 1618:

If there be any Gentleman, that, for the accomplishing of his natural indowments, intertaynes a desire of learning the languages [...] he shall, to his abundant satisfaction, be made happy in his expectations and successe, if he please to repaire to the signe of the Globe. (Stern 2006, 76)

The tenor and style are those of Pasquill's 'Protestation':

if any man, woman, or childe, haue any thing to say against Martin the great [...] if it please them these dark Winter-nights, to sticke vppe their papers vppon London-stone, I will there give my attendance [...]. (Anon 1589, sig Diii verso; Nashe 1958, i, 101; my italics in each case)

In spite of Pasquill's drum and trumpet, his bill seems simply to be one advertisement among many. But it is an advertisement that invites others to post up *libels*, 'any thing [...] against Martin the great', and to do so, as was customary, under cover of darkness – 'these dark Winter-nights' (Anon 1589, sig Diii verso; Nashe 1958, i, 101).¹⁰

At the end of the 16th century, London Stone may well have been awash with bills, libels and siques – just like the Pissing Conduit or the Stocks. There is nothing, either among the evidence of late Tudor advertising practice or in *Pasquill and Marforius*, to support the contention that the Stone had any special significance at this time that set it apart from these other informal advertisement hoardings.

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NOTES

¹ Peter Ackroyd (2000, 18) also quotes *Pasquill and Marforius* in support of a contention that London Stone had a 'judicial role'. He presumably did not consult the original publication, since he identifies it as 'a now forgotten play'.

² The account of London Stone, with the quotations from *Pasquill and Marforius*, first appeared (as a long footnote) in the revised and expanded version of Brand's original work, published after his death under the editorship of Sir Henry Ellis (Brand 1813, ii, 593).

³ Of the 'anti-Martinist' campaign, the editor of the Marprelate tracts Joseph Black concludes 'there seems little doubt that major elements of the campaign were officially organized and sanctioned. More than twenty explicitly anti-Martinist works survive ... Not all were part of the official response ... [but] many ... those that deploy a recognizably Martinist style, were published with some measure of official encouragement' (Black 2008, lxii).

⁴ The title in full is: *The Returne of the renowned Caualliero Pasquill of England, from the other side the Seas, and his meeting with Marforius at London vpon the Royall Exchange. Where they encounter with a little houshold talke of Martin and Martinisme, discovering the scabbe that is bredde in England; and conferring together about the speedie dispersing of the golden Legende of the lives of the Saints.*

⁵ The tower of St Swithin's church on the north side of Cannon Street, opposite the original site of London Stone.

⁶ Appleton (2001, 283–8) notes the prevalence of military terms and images throughout the three Pasquill texts. However, Londoners would also have been familiar with companies of actors parading through the streets ‘with drum and trumpet’ to advertise their next production (Stern 2006, 58), so that the presence of these accompaniments does not in itself confirm that the image is a military one!

⁷ The subject was also discussed by Professor Caroline Barron in her inaugural lecture ‘The writing on the wall: the uses of literacy in Medieval London’ at Royal Holloway, University of London, 21 October 2002.

⁸ ‘... the Stocks, Pillory, ...’: There were a number of sets of stocks around the city ‘to punish vagabonds’ (Stow 1908, ii, 176), and there were also both a pillory and a stocks on Cornhill attached to a prison house known as the Tun (*ibid*, i, 190–1). However, ‘the Stocks’ might otherwise refer to the Stocks Market, which stood on the site now occupied by the Mansion House (Harben 1918, 554–5). In an earlier manuscript version of Rudyerd’s text (Manning 1841, 11) the reading ‘... the Stocks’ Pillory ...’, with an apostrophe rather than a comma, is found; the reference might be to a pillory by the Stocks Market rather than to two separate structures.

⁹ The ‘Pissing Conduit’ by the Stocks Market was presumably so called because it provided only a thin and intermittent stream of water (Stow 1908, i, 183).

¹⁰ Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes from a letter of Bishop Longland in 1532: ‘Suche famous lybells and bills as be sett uppe in night tymes upon Chirche doores’ (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, sv ‘libel’, meaning 4). For the earlier use of the Latin term ‘libelli famosi’ see Scase (1998, 236–7).

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288 *John Clark*

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