



## The Clash of Interests: Commerce and the Politics of Trade in the Age of Anne

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This article celebrates the contribution which Professor Holmes made to the field of British politics and society by the study of an important collection of political tracts. The compiler of the collection is identified as Sir Charles Cooke, one of the most significant commercial politicians of his day. The organisation of the collection illuminates the ways in which City politicians used various channels of information, both printed and personal, to support their political platforms. It also demonstrates how Cooke contributed to the defeat of the Tories over the French Commerce Bill of 1713, by supplying key sources to combat the ministry's position. On a wider plane, although it suggests that partisan politics tainted all information advanced in the public sphere, this did not relieve political rivals of the need to establish the superior authority of their sources, and political success only saw Cooke redouble his efforts to gain as wide a base of information as possible. Statistical precision remained elusive, but his archive stands testament to a growing need for authority of source in a political world of party and vested interests.

**Keywords:** political tracts; City of London; Sir Charles Cooke; whig and tory (party divisions); French Commerce Bill; Levant trade; political arithmetic

In common with so many other students of the Augustan age, my first and abiding impression of early 18th-century politics came from reading *British Politics in the Age of Anne*. Its sheer authority immediately impressed, its judgments delivered with an elegance rarely matched by any work I have encountered. It is a regret that I never met the author, but my appreciation of his achievement only grew when working with his research materials at the History of Parliament Trust. I had frequent recourse to work with the notes donated by Ella Holmes to the project, and came to marvel even more at his mastery of source. This article aims to celebrate that consummate professional skill by analysing a collection of political papers which speak directly to some of the core themes of his great work. More particularly, it will seek to build on our understanding of the relationship between commercial and political development in Anne's reign, one of the themes to which Professor Holmes contributed enormously in a famous chapter on the 'Clash of Interests' between the forces of land and money.<sup>1</sup>

At its publication, the 'Clash of Interests' represented a pioneering study of the relationship between economic change and political conflict in the Augustan age. On the basis of a wide trawl of manuscript and printed matter, Professor Holmes identified a strong socio-economic context for the partisanship of the time, as a new, whiggish

<sup>1</sup> G.S. Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (1967), 148–82.

monied interest squared up to a tory landed elite suffering from the effects of high taxation and low rents. Twenty years later, he conceded that some reassessment was necessary, confessing that the chapter had ‘weathered the intervening years less well than the rest’. Subsequent work had shown that the monied interest was a more complex entity than contemporary partisans might have suggested, and Gary De Krey’s in-depth study of the City had shown that other social dynamics were at work, most obviously the tensions between London’s commercial-financial plutocracy and its lesser traders.<sup>2</sup> Even so, few in 1987 would have doubted his original claim that the political character of the reign was ‘moulded by social prejudices and economic pressures as well as by the forces of principle and power’, and more recent work has continued to focus on the relationship between political activity and socio-economic change. This article takes its lead from this exciting work, and focuses on a contemporary collection of commercial tracts to highlight the strategies adopted by City politicians as they endeavoured to achieve significant commercial advantage in a party-riven age.<sup>3</sup>

The collection in question centres on two volumes of political tracts, deposited at the Bodleian Library.<sup>4</sup> It has been rarely used by historians, for its printed contents are available elsewhere, and the anonymous annotations and marginalia appear fairly random in character. My interest in the papers was sparked by their overwhelmingly commercial character, but it was only with closer inspection that I realized that its owner was one of the most significant commercial politicians of his day, Charles Cooke. The two volumes, in fact, represent one of Cooke’s key political resources, and reveal much about the ways in which the trading classes struggled to adapt and direct the fluid political world of the age of Anne. Many historians have regretted the lack of surviving merchant papers as a bar to understanding their political strategies and outlook, and thus the Cooke collection will permit a more thorough review of their political methods and attitudes, which goes beyond the evidence of officeholding or voting patterns.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Cooke was not a prominent political figure for most of the reign of Anne, and could never be ranked alongside the great City magnates such as Sir Gilbert Heathcote or Samuel Shephard, who mixed with ministers and dominated the boards of the great monied companies. The son of a modestly successful Hackney merchant, he had only reached his 30th birthday at the accession of the queen, and had no obvious claim to a

<sup>2</sup> G.S. Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (rev. edn, 1987), pp. xlv–lxi; G.S. De Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London 1689–1715* (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, *British Politics*, 182. For subsequent modifications of his argument, see G.S. Holmes, *The Making of a Great Power: Late Stuart and Early Georgian Britain 1660–1722* (1993), 287–91. For the interesting directions in which the interaction of economic and political change has been pursued since 1987, see S. Pincus, ‘Neither Machiavellian Moment Nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth’, *American Historical Review*, ciii (1998), 705–36; B.G. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton, 1992); W. Pettigrew, ‘Free to Enslave: Politics and the Escalation of Britain’s Transatlantic Slave Trade 1688–1714’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, lxiv (2007), 3–38.

<sup>4</sup> Folio Theta 665 and 666. The provenance of the volumes is unclear, although it appears that they were catalogued in the 1860s. I am very grateful to Professor Henry Horwitz, who first drew my attention to the first of these volumes.

<sup>5</sup> Note, for instance, Natasha Glaisyer’s recent observation on economic literature that ‘evidence for how readers engaged with their texts is sparse’: Natasha Glaisyer, *The Culture of Commerce in England 1660–1720* (Woodbridge, 2006), 185. Richard Grassby offers a stimulating interpretation of the various political and personal stimuli behind merchant officeholding in *The English Gentleman in Trade: The Life and Works of Sir Dudley North 1641–91* (Oxford, 1994), 151–76.

natural interest in the City hierarchy. However, his political services in the last years of Anne laid the foundations for his public career, in particular his support for the whig campaign against the French Commerce Bill in 1713–14. As an ally later revealed, Cooke was one of the key members of the team which ran a concerted press campaign to sink the measure, one of the most stunning ministerial reverses of this age. At the accession of George I his political skills were duly recognized, with appointment to the board of trade in 1714, election to a parliamentary seat at Grampound in 1715, and elevation to the aldermanic bench in 1717. A knighthood in January 1717 further underlined his favour at the whig court, although he was only to enjoy these honours until his death in 1721. While his political star might seem to have shone brightest under George, it is especially fortunate that Cooke's working collection of commercial tracts for the reign of Anne survives, for it throws light on his activity outside of office, and at a time of significant development for the politics of trade. The first section of this article will discuss the provenance and organisation of these volumes, thereby shining light on the political habits of leading City politicians. It will then discuss Cooke's more specific role in the debate over the French Commerce Bill, and assess how his response to that controversy reflected the wider impact of the public sphere on commercial politics.<sup>6</sup>

Although Bodleian records give little clue as to the origins of this collection, it can be confidently identified as Cooke's working archive from internal evidence. The printed papers all date from his lifetime, and while their content, and that of the annotations, ranges enormously, one of its major themes regards the export of cloth, a key interest for Levant merchants. As we shall see, the annotations suggest an insider's familiarity with the workings of the Levant Company, and a particular interest in the debate on the French Commerce Bill. More particularly, one annotation dated 1716 records a coach journey from the Cockpit (the location of the board of trade's offices) to Devonshire Square (Cooke's City domicile), which also took in the Mercers' Hall (Cooke's livery company). Little has survived of Cooke's papers, but the handwriting of a letter he penned in May 1710 also matches that used in both volumes. More conclusively still, a tract in the second volume of papers is addressed to 'Charles Cooke, Member of Parliament, Westminster'.<sup>7</sup>

The organisation of the volumes, especially the first tome, is far from straightforward, but its complexities reflect Cooke's political working practices, and the uncertain history of the collection after his death. In the first instance, this disorder stems from Cooke's possession of a very sophisticated range of sources for his political activities, which he was prepared to rearrange during his lifetime according to his particular needs. The contours of the archive have been further obscured by substantial re-editing since Cooke's death, and it is clear that many papers were additions to Cooke's original collection. It also appears that a subsequent owner tried to follow Cooke's own

<sup>6</sup> For the only short biography, see *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715–54*, ed. R. Sedgwick (2 vols, 1970), i, 573–4. His partisan convictions are best represented by his prominence in the whig club which co-ordinated party activity in the capital in 1714–17: 'Minutes of a Whig Club', ed. H. Horwitz (London Record Society, xvii, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> The only signed Cooke letter traced can be found at the BL, Add. MS 61535, f. 68. Another suggestive familial reference comes with the inclusion of a printed order to Cooke's father, Thomas, in 1694: Folio Theta 665, f. 141. Its survival may well have great personal significance, for Thomas Cooke died shortly afterwards while Charles was in the Levant.

numerical ordering scheme without recognizing the logic behind it, ensuring that materials were taken from a range of his papers without distinction. Nevertheless, sufficient internal evidence survives to permit a reconstruction of his working archive, and to gauge how he compiled and used it.<sup>8</sup>

The two volumes cover very distinct periods of Cooke's career, the first broadly spanning the reign of Anne, the second his more public life under George I. The first is the smaller, although including no less than 105 printed titles, while the second a hefty 210. The inclusion of an index in Cooke's hand in the first volume suggests that his collecting habits were of no mere antiquarian interest, and that he regarded it as a set of working papers. The index, in fact, only covers 62 titles, but there is a thematic logic behind the organisation of the titles, and Cooke added his own brackets to signify titles embracing a clear theme, such as tracts concerning new taxes, or duties on silks. Given this index, it suggests that Cooke had created a bound version of these papers for his own use, which he, or a later editor, decided to supplement with other printed and manuscript matter. The second volume has no index at all, although Cooke's numerical annotations run straight through until number 202, and thus can be very much viewed as his collection. Its superiority in terms of both quantity and order also reflect Cooke's enhanced status as a lord of trade, from which office he had both the need and opportunity to enhance his collection.

Internal evidence gives no clear sign as to the date when Cooke started to build up this collection, although a recognizable core of commercial tracts begins in 1705, which date accords with our knowledge of his career.<sup>9</sup> Born in 1671, he was apprenticed to Sir John Morden, and sailed to Smyrna in 1693. His father died in the following year, but he probably remained in the eastern Mediterranean, for the Levant Company granted him liberty to trade at Smyrna in June 1698. The first certain proof of his return to England came in May 1705, when he took his freedom of the company.<sup>10</sup> Once back in the capital, he was able to partake freely of the burgeoning London press, for he established bases in both Devonshire Square, on the northern fringe of the working City, and at Hackney, the family home and one of the most popular suburban sites for active merchants. Having been absent from Britain since the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695, the politically active Cooke was doubtless impressed by the liberal distribution of newspapers on his return, but his collection suggests that the appetite for printed tracts could be just as strong among City consumers. More interestingly still, Cooke's collection is noticeably limited to short papers on economic matters, the profusion of which reflects the increasing business of parliament during the reigns of William and Anne. These volumes suggest that their brevity and obvious self-interest did not preclude them

<sup>8</sup> The binding of these volumes only dates from the mid 19th century, shortly before their deposit in the Bodleian Library.

<sup>9</sup> The first volume does include papers dating back to the Popish Plot, but the vast majority pertain to Anne's reign.

<sup>10</sup> The National Archives (TNA), SP 105/155, f. 221; SP 105/156, p. 192; Folio Theta 665, f. 46v. He had probably been back in the country for some time before his admission to the freedom, for a list of the English Factory at Smyrna of January 1704 does not include him: Folio Theta 665, f. 192v. He was later to become a trustee of Morden College, founded by his former master: *The Survey of London Monographs 10: Morden College, Blackheath*, ed. T.F. Green (1916), 47.

from more serious study, and that contemporaries did not necessarily regard them as mere political ephemera to be forgotten at the end of each session.<sup>11</sup>

The collecting bug appears to have bitten Cooke particularly hard from 1708, when a variety of interests took an evident personal appeal. In a commercial vein, parliamentary proposals to levy new duties on imports and exports account for some 15 tracts, with predictable interest shown in the silk trade. However, other issues can be less obviously tied to his personal interests, most notably imprisonment for debt and the legal status of quakers. Of a more directly political interest, there was also a small collection of election papers, which show an early sign of the political ambition which led to a place on the common council by the end of Anne's reign.

As proof of the political habits and interests of leading citizens, the collection of printed tracts is significant, but the extensive annotations on these tracts, and the public use to which they were put, render them of particular importance. The annotations demonstrate that Cooke was not merely content to collect printed works, but that he used them as a primary working tool, alongside several other collections. While their selectivity suggests that Cooke had very particular priorities in assembling the collection, the tracts must be seen as a basis for a more general reference work for use in commercial and political affairs. The tracts clearly held an intrinsic interest for him, but he was also ready to use them as a convenient repository for adding materials from elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Internal evidence suggests that he had probably arranged the order of the tracts by the time of the great French commerce treaty debate of 1713, for even some of the earliest tracts contain annotations of especial pertinence to that controversy. Indeed, it is plausible to suggest that Cooke ordered his papers, and supplied the index, in preparation for that contest, or for the publications which appeared in its wake.<sup>13</sup>

The ordering and content of these manuscript entries indicate that Cooke used the political tracts in tandem with other kinds of political papers, both printed and unpublished. The profusion of cross-references to different alphabetical series of sources suggests a very mercantile approach to the organisation of his political sources, replicating the recommended book-keeping practices for running a business.<sup>14</sup> Most interestingly, he was not content to rest on the public sphere to provide political ammunition, and was evidently very resourceful in sourcing materials. It is clear, for instance, that he possessed a separate collection of manuscript items relating to economic and political affairs. Copies of petitions to parliament, and of the minutes of executive boards, feature prominently in this category, and Cooke numbered them in a different sequence from

<sup>11</sup> For the rise of parliamentary business, see J. Hoppit, *Failed Legislation 1660–1800* (1997); P. Gauci, *The Politics of Trade: The Overseas Merchant in State and Society* (Oxford, 2001), 195–233.

<sup>12</sup> The annotations usually have very little relevance to the tract itself, and thus up until the time when he systematised the ordering of the tracts, Cooke must have only regarded the tracts as a general storehouse of information.

<sup>13</sup> This would accord with the claim of Charles King that the key sources for his later work were 'the originals of Sir Theodore Janssen, bt., Sir Charles Cooke, Henry Martin esq., etc.': Charles King, *The British Merchant* (3 vols, 1721), i, title page.

<sup>14</sup> For the paramount need for order in the layout of merchant businesses, see D. Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 99–102. References within the Cooke volumes suggest that he may have had as many as five classes of records, of which class A dealt with statistical data, class D covered laws and customs, and class E focused on Levant Company affairs.

the tracts.<sup>15</sup> Most of these copies were not written by Cooke himself, which suggests that they came via political connections. Significantly, he rarely included transcripts of short political tracts, presumably because he could obtain them fairly easily through City channels.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond this series of manuscript sources, other annotated number sequences suggest that he was also attempting to create a more systematic review of global commerce, a practice in keeping with the general intellectual tendencies of the Augustan age.<sup>17</sup> At several points in the first volume the names of specific countries appear as headings to notes on their trade and customs, and this trend becomes even more defined in the second volume. Indeed, at several points a heading appears without any information supplied, as if Cooke was planning to fill in gaps in his commercial knowledge. This more ambitious project can be plausibly linked to his elevation to the board of trade in late 1714, especially given the extensive interest shown in these entries to the Atlantic trades, with which he had little personal connection.<sup>18</sup>

The annotations also indicate that Cooke had his own library of commercial authorities, which he used alongside the series of tracts and notes already mentioned. Significantly, his choices mirrored those normally referenced by commercial authors, and confirm that active traders did recognize a canon of superior economic literature. His favourite sources thus include Sir William Temple's *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* (7th edn, 1705); John Pollexfen's *Discourse of Trade, Coin and Paper Credit* (1697), Lewes Roberts's *Merchant's Map of Commerce* (2nd edn, 1677), and various works by Charles Davenant. These works were predictably combed for information and arguments to support the dearest of Cooke's political causes, but they were not solely employed for polemical purposes. Often they simply filled gaps in Cooke's commercial knowledge, for instance the works of the great Elizabethan geographer Richard Hakluyt to supply details of customs in Russia and the Far East. Moreover, when using more controversial works, he was keen to note their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, he evidently found the work of the early 17th-century merchant, Thomas Mun, useful to warn of the danger of increasing imports, but he was concerned to date the work more precisely, for 'as appears by his preface [it] was written some time before'. This suggests that even such an avid collector and reader as Cooke was not cavalier in the use of printed sources, and in general he was scrupulous in comparing their findings with those derived from a range of other channels.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cooke's post-mortem editor evidently conflated the printed and manuscript numbering when creating this volume, even though there appears to be little direct correspondence between the two classes.

<sup>16</sup> The earliest evidence of Cooke's close involvement in national politics comes with the inclusion of manuscript copies of City and Levant Company petitions concerning the Garbling Act of 1708: Folio Theta 665, ff. 23, 29.

<sup>17</sup> For commentary on how an increasing level of information on commerce reflected wider trends in intellectual thought and didactic literature, see Glaisyer, *Culture of Commerce in England*, esp. 100–42; W.E. Houghton, 'The History of Trades: Its Relation to Seventeenth-Century Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, ii (1941), 33–60.

<sup>18</sup> The second volume has no less than 16 geographical headings in Cooke's hand, as well as many pages devoted to information concerning specific commodities: Folio Theta 666.

<sup>19</sup> Folio Theta 665, f. 122. Cooke cites the use of Mun by the well-known tract, *Britannia Languens* (1680). This work does reference Mun's preface, but Cooke's care in recording this remains significant. A new edition of Mun appeared in 1713, probably sponsored by the whigs: *England's Treasure by Foreign Trade* (1713).

Cooke's readiness to compile such a diverse and wide-ranging set of working papers must be linked to his political goals, both personal and party-linked. Although it is tempting to see the primary significance of the collection as its utility for the French commerce debates of 1713, the annotations to the first volume provide wider insights into the kinds of intelligence deemed politically useful for an active City merchant. A great deal of the information supplied centred on the affairs of the Levant Company, and was evidently generated by Cooke's experiences in the Mediterranean. Thus, there are many references to the costs of shipping in the region, and to the expenses of the company's officials in their Ottoman bases.<sup>20</sup> More interestingly, there is great interest in the identity of the admirals stationed in the Mediterranean since the Glorious Revolution, and in the membership of the English factories from Cadiz to Constantinople. On the domestic front, there is even a remarkable attempt by Cooke to list all the members of the Levant Company in order of the date of their admission to the freedom, probably attempted at the outset of Anne's reign. Marginalia entered by many of the names indicates that this paper was used by him as a working list of the current membership.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, it is important to see that this personal archive served a general set of working political practices and goals. It is also clear, however, that the great debate on the French commerce treaty of 1713 galvanised Cooke in a manner which no other political endeavour had, and that the contest proved the greatest test of the political utility of his collections. In particular, a further probing of the detailed evidence shows how Cooke endeavoured to use his commercial knowledge and expertise to clear political advantage, both within his own trading circles and before a wider public audience. In tandem with other politicians seeking to gain partisan advantage, the battle to present the 'truth' of the matter was a conflict which Cooke was determined to win, and spared no source to achieve that goal.<sup>22</sup>

No citizen could ignore the battle over the proposed commercial treaty with the French, which conflict raged from the spring of 1713 onwards.<sup>23</sup> Intended by the tory administration as a sweetener to garner an additional peace dividend ahead of the ensuing general election, the measure went disastrously wrong, sparking widespread controversy. The most vociferous opposition came from sectors most likely to be affected by a mutual lowering of tolls across the Channel, led by cloth producers and exporters, who feared that increased French wine competition would threaten the lucrative trade

<sup>20</sup> These records can be linked to his appointment as the Levant Company's husband in October 1706: TNA, SP 105/156, p. 248.

<sup>21</sup> Folio Theta 665, f. 97. The list begins with the admission of Sir Samuel Barnardiston in 1652, and runs through to 1699. There follows a list of omissions dating from 1672–98, and then further entries up to 1701. Crosses are applied next to many names, most of whom died after 1700, thus suggesting that Cooke kept this list as a working copy for organising company affairs. For instance, the earliest entrant, Barnardiston, died in 1707.

<sup>22</sup> M. Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> For accounts of this key contest, see D. Coleman, 'Politics and Economics in the Age of Anne: The Case of the Anglo-French Trade Treaty of 1713', in *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. D. Coleman and A.H. John (1976), 187–211; G. Holmes and C. Jones, 'Trade, the Scots and the Parliamentary Crisis of 1713', *Parliamentary History*, i (1981), 47–77; Gauci, *Politics of Trade*, 234–70; D.A.E. Harkness, 'The Opposition to the Eighth and Ninth Articles of the Commercial Treaty of Utrecht', *Scottish History Review*, xxi (1924), 219–26.



to Portugal, secured by Britain's favoured status to port wine. Amongst those groups alarmed by the changing *status quo*, the Levant merchants appeared especially vulnerable, their woollen exports placed in jeopardy and their silk imports facing the prospect of stiff Gallic rivalry. Indeed, one of the first groups attempting to influence a possible Anglo-French accord was the Levant Company in 1709–10, but a resurgent war effort had put paid to their overtures. When peace finally materialised in 1713, Turkey traders were once more to the fore, especially after the administration introduced a bill in May of that year to confirm the 8th and 9th articles of the commercial treaty. This measure was to give Cooke a taste of the political spotlight for the first time, when, as an 'eminent' merchant, he testified on 4 June at the bar of the house of lords. However, his collected papers suggest that he had already made sterling efforts on behalf of the bill's opponents.<sup>24</sup>

Cooke's first political attempts against the bill centred on the production of a Levant Company petition to protect domestic silk manufacturers, and to return French tariffs on British exports and re-exports to their 1664 level. On 28 May the company's general court had met to decide their position on the treaty, and voted overwhelmingly by 35 votes to 11 (with eight abstentions) to back a petition against it. The company was clearly divided along partisan lines on this measure, for only two of these 54 members deviated from these established party lines at the subsequent City of London election. Cooke could obviously take great pleasure in this victory, but such was the contentiousness of this battle that he felt constrained to take further steps to confirm the advantage of his party. In particular, he took seriously the rumours spread abroad that the whig victory had been achieved at the expense of the more established traders, and that the lesser merchants had simply outnumbered the more prestigious magnates. Evidently concerned that these allegations might harm whig aspirations to present themselves as the more knowledgeable party in trade, Cooke therefore endeavoured to provide statistical proof that the anti-treaty group included the principal merchants in the trade. The pains he took in this regard support recent arguments that the 18th century was no lacuna in the development of political arithmetic, and again suggest a mercantile commitment to transparency and exactness of dealing.<sup>25</sup>

His principal winning strategy was to calculate how many cloths had been exported to the Levant in 1712 by the rival factions. He concentrated first of all on members present at the vote of 28 May, and produced the satisfactory majority of 15,858 cloths for the whigs against 9,059 for the tories and abstentions. These figures demonstrated that the whigs had failed to win over two of the greatest exporting merchants (John Williams and Thomas Vernon), and their prominence probably lay behind tory claims that their support was superior in quality, if not numerically. Significantly, Cooke did not rest there, and made further calculations to cover members who were not present at the key vote, but who had expressed support for or against petitioning at other times. This produced overall totals of 17,203 cloths exported by pro-petitioners, and 11,639 exported by those 'against petitioning'. More problematically for him, he also felt

<sup>24</sup> A. Boyer, *The Political State of Great Britain* (60 vols, 1718–40), v, 358. Boyer does not make it clear whether Cooke testified on the 2nd or 4th of that month, but the Levant merchants were heard on the latter date, after they had petitioned on the 2nd: *LJ*, ix, 557, 562.

<sup>25</sup> Folio Theta 665, f. 190; J. Hoppit, 'Political Arithmetic in Eighteenth-Century England', *Economic History Review*, xlix (1996), 516–40.



constrained to list the cloths exported by those absent at the key meeting: another 29 names, who had exported 8,536 cloths; a significant figure given the difference between the two sides.<sup>26</sup> It is plausible to suggest that these absentees frustrated Cooke's plans to publish his findings, for it would only fuel divisions still further, and allow the tories to point to the wavering of other key company figures.<sup>27</sup>

Even though Cooke's calculations did not surface in print, he had the satisfaction of seeing the French Commerce Bill fall to an ignominious defeat in the house of commons on 18 June, its fate sealed by a sizeable group of tory rebels. This tory disaster only further stirred up contention on the fate of British trade, and saw notable clashes at the subsequent general election and beyond. Stung by tory success at the polls, and by reports of a new French commerce treaty, Cooke then became part of the whig team backing the tri-weekly *The British Merchant*, a direct contender against the government-backed *Mercator*. The contest gave Cooke's collection continued value as a political tool, as the battle raged over the commercial 'authority' of the ministry and its opponents.<sup>28</sup>

The principal protagonists in this debate were the *Mercator's* Daniel Defoe, and *The British Merchant's* Henry Martin. Although the former had some claims to a commercial education, neither were active traders, and thus both sides delighted in rubbishing each others credentials as economic commentators. For instance, in November 1713, the *Mercator* claimed that its rival had 'two attorneys set up for the champions of merchants, who understood railing better than trade'. Martin could not deny this, but his enlistment of Cooke and other merchants emboldened him, declaring 'tis sufficient for me that I have been assisted by gentlemen of as great skill and experience as are to be found in this kingdom'. Unable to deny the commercial expertise behind *The British Merchant*, Defoe thereafter contented himself with questioning the patriotism of his mercantile opponents, saving particular criticism for Sir Theodore Janssen. Cooke was spared direct attack, but closer inspection of *The British Merchant's* arguments demonstrates that he was a key part of the anti-government team.<sup>29</sup>

The pages of *The British Merchant* indicate that Cooke's collection was put to very direct use in the contest, and that it compensated for a serious deficiency in the anti-ministry platform. As Martin conceded, Defoe had better access to customs records because 'his interest is better', and he argued that 'every office in the kingdom has been

<sup>26</sup> Significantly, a scrupulous Cooke refused to include the figure of Sir Randolph Knipe, 'who was at the last court, but [I] cannot tell how he gave his vote'. A leading cloth exporter, Knipe later sided with the whigs at the City election of 1713: Folio Theta 665, f. 190.

<sup>27</sup> Note the observations of Cooke's ally Henry Martin with regard to the limitations of statistical records: Hoppit, 'Political Arithmetic', *Economic History Review*, 532. A fair copy of his calculations by another hand is included in the same volume of *Economic History Review* (xlix (1996)), and thus his table might have circulated in manuscript. Cooke's jottings include a calculation of the costs for publishing 1,000 half-sheets (at 66s. 8d.), which may refer to this table: Folio Theta 665, f. 106v.

<sup>28</sup> In King's later work, Cooke was the first-named of the merchants who helped *The British Merchant* to fruition, the others being Sir Theodore Janssen, James Milner, Nathaniel Toriano, Joshua Gee, Christopher Haynes and David Martin. 'Several other very able and worthy merchants' were also said to have helped: King, *British Merchant*, i, pp. ix-x.

<sup>29</sup> *Mercator*, no. 81, 26-8 Nov. 1713; *The British Merchant*, no. 20, 9-13 Oct. 1713. A possible reference to Cooke comes in *Mercator* no. 153 [13-15 May 1714] with mention of 'the foreign knight [Janssen], the ignorant lawyer [Martin] and their yet more ignorant abettor', although this may refer to another member of the whig team.

rummaged to equip him'.<sup>30</sup> Cooke certainly helped the whig team to overcome that disadvantage, and *The British Merchant* is littered with references from annotations in the first volume of Cooke's papers. For instance, issue 63 cites Samuel Puffendorf's *Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms and States of Europe* (1711) for information on French exports, which accords directly with Cooke's own 7th edition. Sir William Temple's respect for Dutch frugality and religious tolerance, echoed in issues 82 and 84, directly matched the pagination listed in notes from Cooke's collection. More generally, the paper also supplied informed commentary on the Levant trade, and was clearly abetted by Cooke's calculations on the price and volume of English imports and exports. Cooke's first volume suggests that as early as issue fourteen he was taking private soundings over the real value of goods to perfect the whig claim over the serious imbalance of trade with France in 1685–6. Cooke was merely one of a team, but there can be no doubt that his knowledge and records were a significant boon to the whig platform.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, Cooke and his allies emerged victorious from the protracted contest, for the Oxford ministry never attempted to re-introduce the French Commerce Bill, and the death of Anne spelt disaster for the tory cause in general. It is easy to dismiss the significance of the City battle in this whig triumph, and to suggest that *The British Merchant* had little more than an immediate importance, but Cooke's collection suggests that the commercial battles of Anne's reign represented an important stage for economic debate in the public sphere. Cooke himself appears to have re-doubled his efforts after 1714 to gain as wide a knowledge of global trade as possible, and to keep his working archive up-to-date and well-ordered. His new responsibilities as a lord of trade were doubtless behind this diligence, but the collection also suggests that he had learnt important lessons from the battles of 1713–14. In particular, he appears to have taken additional pains to garner good statistical evidence of trade flows, and to learn a great deal more about global commercial practices. In this vein, he was perhaps conscious of Defoe's claim that 'such is the misfortune of the times that if an untruth will but stand uncontradicted one half an hour, it is of use'. This universal, systematic approach was certainly reflected in the most concrete legacy of the commercial controversy, Charles King's three-volume digest of *The British Merchant*. Not only did it directly acknowledge Cooke's contribution to the commercial politics of its era, but its format imitated his political working habits, for it provided a 'very copious' index to ensure its 'constant use' when commercial matters came before the state.<sup>32</sup>

As ever, one must be wary of ascribing general practice from the jottings of one individual, and few could have matched Cooke's industry in amassing such a formidable collection of papers, particularly in the field of commerce. None the less, his remaining archive faithfully reflects an array of responses to a fast-changing political landscape. For all its limitations as a coherent collection, it provides access to the more mundane workings of the political minds of the age, and permits us to see beyond the finished

<sup>30</sup> *The British Merchant*, no. 28, 6–10 Nov. 1713; no. 80, 7–11 May 1714.

<sup>31</sup> *The British Merchant*, no. 14, 18–22 Sept. 1713; no. 82, 14–18 May 1714; no. 84, 20–5 May 1714; Folio Theta 665, ff. 110–111v, 123. Humphrey Willet, a merchant-turned-broker, provided Cooke with the prices of Levant goods sold to France in 1685–8: Folio Theta 665, f. 96v.

<sup>32</sup> *Mercator*, no. 68, 27–9 Oct. 1713; King, *British Merchant*, i, p. ix. Commerce clearly benefited from a wider publishing trend to provide universal guides, such as Malachy Postlethwayt's monumental, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, Translated from the French of the Celebrated Monsieur Savary* (1751).

product, and to assess how various kinds of resources were used to build a political case. In this vein, it commemorates both Geoff Holmes's mastery of source, and his famed ability to recreate political personality. Moreover, these volumes validate his commitment to constructing a social history of politics, and would doubtless have further convinced him of the importance of Anne's reign for the development of the economy as an issue of fundamental national concern.