

The Editing of Francis Bacon as a man for all parties

Writing the life of Francis Bacon presents particular problems. As Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart point out, his biographers have been faced with two clearly incompatible versions.¹ We have the work and the letters; the writer and the life. The major problem confronting admiring biographers is, of course, that the genius they perceive in the writings was also a corrupt chancellor whose career ended in disgrace and ignominy. There are, however, other dilemmas. One is the fact that Bacon's genius apparently went unnoticed for a long time. Despite strenuous efforts their subject, as we know, failed to gain public office in Elizabeth's government. Some writers claim that this was a result of a power struggle between lord Burghley and the earl of Essex in which Bacon was a pawn.² Others insist that Burghley blocked Bacon's career because he was jealous that his own son, Robert Cecil, was no match for his cousin Francis.³ These explanations, however, rely on supposition and circumstantial evidence. Biographers can, however, claim empirical evidence to support another theory. This is that Bacon's lack of success during Elizabeth's reign was, in fact, a direct result of his own actions. This theory also serves to refute the claim that Bacon was not just a corrupt chancellor he was also a 'servile politician'.⁴ The event to which they refer is Bacon's intervention in the subsidy debate in the 1592/93 parliament which some commentators claim angered the queen sufficiently to ensure that he never gained political office during her reign.⁵

The controversial, chaotic and confused subsidy proceedings in which Bacon played a part are preserved in an anonymous journal of day-to-day business in the house of

¹ Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon 1561-1626* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1998) 19

² Paul E.J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabeth Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereaux, 2nd Earl of Essex 1585-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 291.

³ David Mallet, *The Life of Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England* (London: 1768) 17; Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay, 'The Life and Writings of Francis Bacon: Lord Chancellor of England' *The Edinburgh Review* (1837) 14'

⁴ Macaulay to William Whewell, 1 December 1842, *Selected Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay* ed. T. Pinney (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974) 6:69

⁵ Edwin A. Abbott, *Francis Bacon: An account of his life and works* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885) 34; Professor Gardiner, *DNB* s.v. Francis Bacon; A. Wigfall Green, *Sir Francis Bacon: his life and works* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1952) 44; J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliament 1584-1601* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957).

commons.⁶ Having been informed of the urgent need of money to defend the country against Spain the commons offered a double subsidy only to be told by Robert Cecil that Burghley would not consent to anything less than a triple subsidy. The size of the subsidy does not appear to have been the problem. The controversy and the confusion arose from demands that the commons confer with the lords on the matter. Bacon, we are told, yielded to the subsidies but 'disliked that [they] should ioyn with the lords of the Higher House in the granting of it, for the custome and privedge of [the Lower] Howse had allwaies beene first to make offer of the subsidie'. History tends to applaud those who uphold parliamentary privilege and Bacon's efforts in this direction have met with approval.⁷

Bacon intervened again. This time he spoke for the majority of the house in urging that the triple subsidy be paid over six years rather than the four put forward by Burghley's eldest son, Thomas Cecil. This intervention is interpreted as evidence of Bacon's public spirit in speaking out for his fellow countrymen who, he claimed, 'must sell their plate and the farmers their brass pottes' before the subsidy would be paid.⁸ For these highly commendable actions, Bacon, so the story goes, found his career blocked for the rest of Elizabeth's reign. Evidence to support this theory resides in two letters written after the event. One of these was addressed to lord Burghley and I will return to this later. For the other no addressee is specified. James Spedding places this letter amongst other relating to Bacon's suit for the office of attorney general. He claims it is a letter from Bacon to the earl of Essex written in relation to the earl's attempts to persuade Elizabeth to forgive Bacon and grant him the office he desired.

There is one manuscript witness to this letter, British Library Harley manuscript 286 folio 232.⁹ This letter is bound into 'A collection of letters and papers mostly original relating to public affairs of this Kingdom, or to the domestic Concerns of considerable

⁶ T.E. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, 3 volumes (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995) 2: 93-113.

⁷ Gardiner, *DNB* s.v. Francis Bacon,; *Works of Francis Bacon* ed Basil Montagu, 16 volumes (London: William Pickering, 1825-1836) 16:xxvii.

⁸ Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, 2:109-110.

⁹ The letter appears in print in Thomas Birch, *Letters, Speeches, Charges, Advices etc of Francis Bacon* (London: Andrew Millar, 1973) 1; Montagu, *Works of Francis Bacon* 12:75; James Spedding, *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon set forth in chronological order*, 7 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861-1874) 1:240.

Persons and Families'. Unfortunately this witness is not the original, or sent version, of the letter. It is a copy in an eighteenth-century hand, cleanly although hurriedly written. It has no address, no signature, no date. Spedding admits that it is 'without address, heading, date, signature, or indorsement' but claims that 'it explains and fathers itself'. The catalogue of the Harleian manuscripts suggests that it is a letter to Lord Keeper Puckering but adds a question mark to this suggestion. Spedding notes that the eighteenth-century Bacon editor, Thomas Birch, 'saw that the writer was Bacon and adopted the guess of the catalogue-maker' as to the addressee. He, however, 'rather believed' that it was written to Essex – a belief which fitted Spedding's narrative but which he failed to substantiate.¹⁰ Since Birch's 'discovery' the letter has become popular with biographers who wish to promote a version of Bacon as a conscientious member of the house of commons, who knew 'the common beaten way to please' but was not prepared to follow it for his own ends.¹¹ It provides a respectable solution to the problem of their subject's lack of success under Elizabeth. But that solution was already familiar to Birch when he 'discovered' the letter. As we have seen its status as evidence is uncertain. Without a narrative into which it could be fitted Birch could not 'have seen that the writer was Bacon'. The narrative that afforded this insight had been constructed from another letter. The one to Burghley.

In preparing the groundwork for a new critical edition of the correspondence of Francis Bacon, Andrew Gordon, Alan Stewart and I traced fourteen manuscript witnesses of Bacon's letter to Burghley concerning the subsidy debate.¹² I have surveyed eight of these copy letters.¹³ In every instance the letter forms part of a collection of letters from and to Bacon. Four of these collections contain the same forty letters arranged in exactly the same sequence, the subsidy letter being the first.¹⁴ Thirty-nine of the letters are described as having been written by Bacon, two of these

¹⁰ Spedding, *Letters and Life*, 1:233n1.

¹¹ Montague, *Works*, 16:xxvii.

¹² BL Additional Manuscripts 4108, ff.54v-55r, 4261 f.171r-v and f.227r, 5503 f.1, 35842 f.2r-v; BL Harley Manuscript 4761 f.185; BL Sloane Manuscript 3078 f.1r-v; BL Lansdowne Manuscript 238 f.242r; Edinburgh University Library Laing Manuscript III 348:121-124; FSL Manuscript V.a.239:379-381; FSL Manuscript V.b.132:1; FSL Manuscript V.b.234:2291-293; Oxford Queen's College Manuscript 32; West Yorkshire Archive Service 32D86/volume 19 f.19v-20r.

¹³ BL Additional Manuscripts 4108, ff.54v-55r, 4261 f.171r-v and f.227r, 5503 f.1, 35842 f.2r-v; BL Harley Manuscript 4761 f.185; BL Sloane Manuscript 3078 f.1r-v; BL Lansdowne Manuscript 238 f.242r.

¹⁴ BL Additional Manuscripts 4261 and 35842; BL Lansdowne Manuscript 238 and BL Sloane Manuscript 3078.

being framed by him for his brother Anthony and the earl of Essex. The only letter in the sequence written to Bacon is one from Thomas Bodley which comprises a very unfavourable review of Bacon's *Cogitata et Visa*.¹⁵ The letter from Bodley is the only one which is addressed, signed and dated according to convention. Information regarding the addressee and occasionally the date is usually given in headings to the letters. These headings, which also provide a brief summary of the letters, tend to direct our reading. As few of the letters are, in fact, given a date, chronology does not appear to have determined their ordering.

More work is required before we can establish when these four manuscript collections were compiled or understand how they were intended to function. We can, however, begin to trace their origins by comparing them with their earliest appearance in print.

Soon after Bacon's death in April 1626 his chaplain, William Rawley, began publishing his master's works but his edition of the letters, printed as part of *The Resuscitatio*, did not appear until 1657.¹⁶ This was not, however, the first volume of Bacon's letters to be published in print. It was preceded by a quarto volume entitled *The Remaines of the Right Honorable Francis Lord Verulam, Viscount of St. Albanes, sometimes Lord Chancellour of England* printed nine years earlier in 1648.¹⁷ The selection and arrangement of letters in the *Remaines* is identical to that in the four manuscript collections under discussion. Manuscript publication was often surreptitious and frequently undertaken for some political purpose. We need to determine whether these letters circulated in manuscript collections before their publication in print or whether they were merely copied from the printed edition.

The first twenty or so letters in *The Remaines* are identical to those in *The Resuscitatio* for which Rawley provided the copy text inferring that he had found these letters 'in his Lordship's Register Book'. In order to argue that manuscript collections were circulating prior to their print publication we need first of all to

¹⁵ This letter is missing from BL Sloane Manuscript 3078.

¹⁶ *Resuscitatio, Or, Bringing into Publick Light Several Pieces, of the Works, Civil, Historical, Philosophical, & Theological, Hitherto Sleeping, of the Right Honourable Francis Bacon Baron of Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban ... Together, with his Lordships Life*, ed. William Rawley (London: William Lee, 1657).

¹⁷ *The Remaines of the Right Honorable Francis Lord Verulam, Viscount of St. Albanes, sometimes Lord Chancellour of England* (London: E. Alsop for Lawrence Chapman, 1648).

establish that the printer of *The Remaines* had not received his copy text from the same source.

The printers and booksellers with whom Rawley collaborated in publishing Bacon's works were John Haviland, Humphrey Robinson, Sarah Griffin and William Lee. There is no evidence that he had any connection with Bernard Alsop and Lawrence Chapman who printed and sold *The Remaines*. Rawley had retreated to his rectory in the Cambridgeshire village of Landbeach in 1638 where he stayed until at least 1652. He does not appear to have been involved in publishing any of Bacon's writings during this period.

A comparison of the subsidy letter as printed in *The Remaines* with the version in the *The Resuscitatio* reveals several differences in the text. Some of these differences are substantive and do not appear to result from compositorial error, suggesting that the two earliest printed copies of this letter were typeset from different copy texts. The most notable of these differences come at the end of the letter. *The Remaines* reads

And therefore, I do most humbly pray your good Lordship First, to continue me in your own good opinion, and then to perform the part of an Honourable friend, towards your poor, humble, and obedient Servant, and Allyance, in drawing Her MAJESTIE to accept of the sinceritie and simplicities of my Zeal; and to hold me in Her Majesties good favour, which is to me dearer then my life.

Whereas *Resuscitatio* has

And therefore, I most humbly pray, your good Lordship; First, to continue me in your own good Opinion, And then, to perform the part, of an *Honourable Friend*, towards your poor *Servant*, and *Alliance*; In drawing her *Majesty*, to accept, of the Sinceritiy, and Simplicity, of my Heart; And to bear with the rest, and restore me, to her *Majesties* Favour.

Rawley provided the copy text for *The Resuscitatio* in order to vindicate the 'wrongs ... done to his Lordships Penne' by unauthorised printing of his writings. He complains that due to the 'loose keeping' of Bacon's papers surreptitious copies had been taken and since 'employed by the Presse.'¹⁸ It was evidently from one of these surreptitious copies that the printer of *The Remaines* took his copy text and as the copy letters in the manuscripts under discussion offer the same substantive reading as

¹⁸ *Resuscitatio* (1657) Sig. A4v

that of *The Remaines* there seems little doubt that these letters were circulating as manuscript collections prior to their publication in print.

Circulation of manuscript collections of letters during the seventeenth century served several different functions. It requires scrutiny of more than one letter to establish how this particular collection functioned. We can, however, detect the function intended for early printed books from titles and prefatory material such as the dedicatory epistle, letter to the reader or complimentary verses. The mediation between printer and reader provided by an author or editor in prefatory materials directs the reading of the work. *The Remaines*, however, lacks this mediation. In its place we have an essay on the subject of king-hood. 'An Essay of a King' was first published as a pamphlet by Richard Best in 1642.¹⁹ Although attributed to Bacon it is classified in *The British Library Catalogue* as a 'doubtful work'. *The Remaines* was printed just a few months before the execution of Charles I. We cannot doubt, therefore, that it was intended as a contribution to political debate at a critical moment in the civil war. It commences:

A king is a mortall God on earth, unto whom the Living God hath lent his own Name as a great honor, but withal told him, he should die like a man, least he should be proud and flatter himself, that God hath with his Name imparted unto him his Nature also.²⁰

This opening passage simultaneously deifies kingship whilst reminding the reader of the mortality of kings: a king will 'die like a man'. The essay is structured as a series of propositions concerning the reign and government of kings and sets out 'what manner of persons' should execute the Ordinance of the Kings Prerogative. Claimed as the work of one who was 'sometime Lord Chancellor England' its conclusion appears to have the authority of legal opinion.

Hee then that honoureth him [the king] not, is next an Atheist, wanting the fear of God in his heart.²¹

¹⁹ *An Essay of a King with An explanation what manner of persons those should be that are to execute the power or ordinance of the Kings Prerogative. Written by the Right Honorable Francis, Lord Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban* (London: for Richard Best, 1642).

²⁰ *The Remaines* Sig. B1r

²¹ *The Remaines*, Sig. B2r

There is, however, something ambiguous about this. Is the word 'then' being used to strengthen a royalist assertion that he who does not honour a king is 'next an Atheist'? Or is it, as I would suggest, intended to qualify the context in which a king is to be honoured? Should the conclusion be read in a parliamentary context to mean 'only if the king is fit to execute a king's prerogative should he be honoured'?

The Remaines emanated from supporters of the parliamentary side in the civil war. The printer and the bookseller who collaborated in its publication are better known as publishers of news letters during this period. Laurence Chapman published the populist news book *The Scottish Dove* which appeared every Friday between October 1643 and December 1646. *The Scottish Dove* was edited by George Smith who, according to Joad Raymond, 'adopted an increasingly Presbyterian stance' during his editorship.²² As a parliamentary publication *The Remaines* seeks to appropriate Bacon for the parliamentary cause.

The title which invokes the image of a corpse advertises *The Remaines* as the work of a dead writer and is countered by Rawley's title *The Resuscitatio*. Before Rawley could resurrect Bacon's works, however, Chapman decided to re-issue the unsold copies of *The Remaines* under a new title: *The Mirrour of State and Eloquence represented in the Incomparable Letters of the Famous Sr Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, St. Albans, to Queene Elizabeth, King James and other Personages of the highest trust and honour in the three Nations of England, Scotland and Ireland*. The letters have now become the main selling point of the volume and are advertised as a 'mirror' or exempla for eloquent letter-writing. Bacon the author is curiously distant in *The Remaines*. He is, however, foregrounded in the re-issued volume to which has been added a small engraving of him with pen in hand and a verse extolling his grace, honour, virtue, and wit. Something has changed in the eight years since *The Remaines* was published. Letters, which are not particularly prominent in the volume, and the author, who was largely absent from the first issue, are made the principal features of the book.

²² Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641-1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 22.

The Resuscitatio, first published one year later, in 1657, is a highly mediated collection of works in which Rawley claims an intimate acquaintance with Bacon's writings. No-one, he argues, 'could pretend a better interest ... to the ordering of them' than himself.²³ The letters form the fourth part of the volume and Rawley admits to the insertion of 'some few ... written by other pennes' ... 'like as we find, in the Epistolar Authors, Cicero, Plinius secundus and the rest' which he included because 'they were written with some similitude of Stile'.²⁴ Rawley places his author within the circle of the revered classical writers and suggests that these letters function simply as exempla of eloquent writing.

The first edition of *The Resuscitatio* lacked a dedication. Rawley dedicated the second edition, printed in 1661 – one year after the return of the king – to 'His Sacred Majesty Charles II' explaining that when the first edition appeared 'there wanted a Royal Majestie in the Land to dedicate it unto: and a lower Dedication did not beseem the works of the Honourable Author'.²⁵ Rawley served as chaplain to both Charles I and Charles II and there is little doubt that he was a royalist. We would, therefore, expect him to appropriate Bacon for the same cause yet, apart from this belated dedication, the Bacon of *The Resuscitatio* is promoted as a member of parliament. Rawley provided his readers with a brief 'Life of the ... Author' in which he argues that Bacon 'was ever Acceptable to the House of Commons, when He was a Member thereof'.²⁶ The first eight items in the volume are speeches he made in the lower house or as a spokesman chosen by the commons to deliver their opinion to the king. This is not, however, the radical Bacon described by Christopher Hill; a Bacon whose philosophy made 'all men equal'.²⁷ Rawley's Bacon upheld the principals of social hierarchy. He was a 'good servant to his Master' and 'a good Master to his servant'.²⁸

²³ *Resuscitatio* (1657) Sig.A4r

²⁴ *Resuscitatio* (1657) Sig. B1r

²⁵ Francis Bacon, *Resuscitatio or, bringing into Publick Light Several Pieces of the Works, Civil, Historical, Philosophicaland Theological, Hitherto Sleeping of the Right Honourable Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban. According to the best Corrected Copies. Together, with his Lordships Life.* Ed. William Rawley, Doctor in Divinity, His Lordships First and Last Chaplein. And now his Majesties Chaplain in Ordinary. (London: S.Griffin for William Lee, 1661). Sig. A1r.

²⁶ *Resuscitatio* (1657) Sig.C2v.

²⁷ Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution: Revisited* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 100-101.

²⁸ *Resuscitatio* (1657) Sig.C2v

Rawley wrote the first biography of Bacon. Although it is brief it provides the armature upon which later biographers moulded Bacon's life. It is Rawley who initiates the dilemma concerning Bacon's career during Elizabeth's reign. Bacon's 'Heart and Affection' he tells the reader 'was ... carried away after the Affaires and Places of Estate ... for which he was most fit'. Yet although Elizabeth 'cheered him much, with the Bounty, of her Countenance' she 'never conferred upon him, any Ordinary Place, or Means of Honour, or Profit'.²⁹ Rawley does not report Bacon's part in the subsidy debate. He does not mention the queen's anger. He suggests no reason for this 'standing at a stay'. Others have, however, discovered a reason in the subsidy letter. This letter is the first item in part four of *The Resuscitatio*. In the enlarged third edition, which ran to two separate volumes, it became the first item in the second volume.³⁰ Placed first in an elegant and expensive volume the subsidy letter is elaborately typeset with ornament and illuminated incipit. A consequence of this formatting is that it is the most prominent of the letters and appears, therefore, to have a special significance.

Rawley added another selection of letters some of which he admitted he found 'not in his Lordships Register Book of Letters'. From this we might infer, as did Spedding, that Rawley had copied the other letters printed in this edition from that letter book. Spedding went further, however, and assumed that part four of *The Resuscitatio* was, in fact, a replica of Bacon's Register Book and that Bacon had been personally involved in directing the selection and organisation of its contents. No such Register Book is extant. Spedding, however, believed that British Library Additional Manuscript 5503 was 'a fair copy' of that book written in the hand of one of Bacon's own men and that 'the collection is the same, or an independent copy of the same, which Rawley used'. The manuscript volume is entitled 'A collection of letters to and from Sir Francis Bacon'. Its copy letters are elegantly written between ruled margins to form a complete volume; the pages still bear the original foliation numbers and it is written in a late seventeenth-century hand. There are, however, substantial differences between this manuscript and the collection in *The Resuscitatio*. The

²⁹ *Resuscitatio* (1657) Sig.B3v

³⁰ *Resuscitatio or, bringing into Publick Light Several Pieces of the Works, Civil, Historical, Philosphical and Theological, Hitherto Sleeping of the Right Honourable Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount Saint Alban, in Two Parts.* (Printed by S.G. and B.G. for William Lee, 1671).

manuscript contains thirty-five letters which are not in the printed edition. At least one of these, Bacon's supplication to the house of lords in respect of corruption charges, circulated widely as a separate. [We have traced nineteen manuscript witnesses]. There is nothing to support Spedding's belief that British Library Additional Manuscript 5503 emanated from Bacon. He, however, was so convinced that he had discovered a 'fair copy' of Bacon's letter book that he immediately slips into referring to this manuscript as 'the register book' and decides that this offers the 'better reading' of the subsidy letter. The manuscript collection holds more value for Spedding than the printed edition. Perhaps it seemed to offer a more transparent record of his subject's thoughts and actions because it was 'in the hand of one of Bacon's men'. In any case it allows him to claim that the subsidy letter 'is the first of Bacon's letters which has been preserved by his own care'.³¹ Convinced of Bacon's personal involvement in the production of the elusive letter book, Spedding privileges the subsidy letter because it is placed first in the manuscript as well as in the printed book.

Although this letter is less than eloquent it contains two words of great importance to Bacon's admirers. 'Duty' and 'conscience' provide evidence for Bacon's 'conscientious opposition' to the lords' attempt to undermine parliamentary privilege for which this letter represents 'a justification and no apology'.³² Spedding, as we have seen, had no proof that Bacon had carefully preserved the evidence that his lack of success under Elizabeth was a result of his conscientious behaviour in parliament. Moreover until we have further considered the manuscript collections in which it was first published the status of this letter as empirical evidence remains uncertain.

There is a tradition of Bacon scholarship and biography which commences with Rawley and carries on through Spedding. Rawley provided a brief chronology of his subject's life to which later biographers have added using evidence gleaned from the letters. Rawley draws attention to Elizabeth's unwillingness to confer any office upon Bacon. Puzzled by this others have sought a reasonable explanation and found one in the subsidy letters. These letters, however, offer very uncertain evidence. The claim that Bacon wrote the letter in the Harley collection is based on supposition. The

³¹ Spedding, *Letters and Life*, 1:233n1.

³² Spedding, *Letters and Life*, 234.

frequently copied letter to Burghley requires critical analysis before we understand the evidence it offers. Because it formed part of a circulating manuscript collection we need to establish how it was intended to function before we can interpret it fully.

When the Royal Society was founded in 1660, shortly after the return of Charles II, Bacon became its 'inspiration source'. It has long been accepted that after his death Bacon's philosophical and scientific writings offered succour to both parties.³³ It appears that his letters were similarly employed. Spedding's Bacon is derived from the Bacon of *The Resuscitatio* whose writings, Rawley claimed, merited dedication to none less than a king. The subsidy letter, however, is always employed as evidence of Bacon the 'parliament man'. A fuller interrogation of this letter in the context of the manuscript collections in which it circulated prior to its appearance in print could provide contemporary evidence of the man before he was appropriated to the nuances of party, history or biography.

³³ Margery Purver, *The Royal Society: Concept and Creation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) xv; Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1975)