

POLITICAL PETITIONING AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY MODERN SCOTLAND, BRITAIN AND NORTHERN EUROPE, 1550-1795

WORKSHOP 1: EARLY MODERN PETITIONING: INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS AND CONVENTIONAL PRACTICES

PETITIONING PROCESSES IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

The paper for this first workshop will provide an overview of the institutional context of the unicameral Scottish Parliament, consisting of different estates at different periods of Scotland's history, and the petitioning process. As has been identified in the aims and objectives of the workshops, this is an area that is ripe for research. This paper will look at key themes including the nature of the process of petitioning and how petitions were dealt with by a single chamber institution, such as by remit to a range of different parliamentary committees as they existed at different periods, such as the Lords of the Articles, the session and interval committees of the Covenanters, the standing committees of the 1689-1702 parliament, and specific committees or the full House in the 1703-1707 parliament. Specific committees can be analysed and membership analysis can therefore identify the parliamentarians who dealt with petitions as part of the legislative process than often resulted in the enactment of specific legislation based on a petition presented to the estates of the Scottish Parliament. Building on this, people and protagonists will also be explored in terms of who presented petitions to parliament, when individuals can be identified, and the relationship between elected representatives, both shire and burghs commissioners and their constituencies and communities. There is also scope for adopting prosopographical methodological approaches, common in the study of parliamentary history in continental Europe, for a holistic understanding of petitioning processes in terms of presentation,

process, family, factional, and community links, for example. This could relate to the theme of public engagement as a key theme of the workshop. Likewise, with regard to public engagement, this paper will discuss how communities and individuals in seventeenth and early eighteenth century Scotland 'engaged' with their parliament in Edinburgh and, in turn, how the national parliament in Scotland's capital 'engaged' with the Scottish localities as a part of a 'political culture'. The study of Scottish parliamentary history has often focused on political and constitutional issues and settlements, this scholar being a prime example of this, but the Scottish parliamentary records are extensive in the coverage of Scotland's social and economic history. The actual content of petitions and how they were dealt with are worthy of extensive analysis for exploring the life of the nation during this period. Furthermore, gender is an important issue too and petitions were presented by women, as well as men, of different social classes for consideration by parliament. Language and presentation are important too. The words 'petitions', 'supplications', 'address', 'memorial' and 'representations' can be identified as part of this wider process. This paper will provide examples and case studies of these issues, which can provide a useful context for the second workshop on 'Petitions and Public Politics in Early Modern Scotland, Britain and Northern Europe'.

Sundry examples

7 August 1644 – the humble supplication of the heritors and others in the east end of Stirlingshire where Colonel Erskine of Scotsraig's troops are presently quartering. Remitted to the **committee of estates** (interval committee)

9 February 1649 – committee for Colonel James Campbell, laird of Lawers' supplication – but the **humble petition** of Colonel James Campbell, son to the late Colonel Sir Mungo Campbell of Lawers, 9 February 1649, that led to the formation of the **session committee**.

24 February 1649 – the humble petition of Captain George Smith in Elgin of Moray – remitted to the **committee for common burdens, accounts, losses and monies (session committee at point of formation)**

1661 Committee for Bills and Trade – report by the committee on the petition by **Richard Simmons, baker in Leith**, on debts owed to him by **John Robison**, an **Englishman there**.

13 March 1661 – The **humble supplication** of **Janet Irvine**, spouse to Mr Robert Brown, sometime minister at the kirk of Kirkbean, for myself and in name and on behalf of my poor children procreated between us

1669 Lords of the Articles – **petition** of **Lord Torpichen, Charles Maitland of Hatton** and others concerning the building of the bridge at Saughton Hall

2 July 1689 – **address** from the synod of Aberdeen

14 May 1690 – **memorial** humbly presented to their majesties' high commissioner, noblemen, barons and burgesses assembled in this present parliament – on behalf of **James Gordon, merchant of London**, (Gordon was Scottish) for the construction of a gunpowder manufactory. Remitted to and reported on by the **committee for controverted elections** – resulting in an Act in favour of Mr James Gordon for a gunpowder manufactory, 1690.

21 July 1690 – the **humble supplication** of **Catherine and Margaret Cunningham**, for themselves and in name and behalf of the other sisters, apparent heirs... to the deceased Alexander and Robert Cunningham, our father and brother. **Remitted to the committee for fines and forfeitures**.

14 June 1695 – the **supplication** of **Andrew Watson, skipper, Alexander Sken, John Crawford, William Aidie, Cuthbert Glass, John Aitken, Roger Weir Thomas Hill, James Jarvis, all mariners** (held captive by the king of Fez – **not remitted to committee**, but considered by the High Commissioner and the estates – general contribution to be made throughout the kingdom.

22 August 1698 – petition of the magistrates and town council of the burgh of **Lanark** for financial aid to complete the construction of a bridge over the River Clyde. Remitted to the **committee for the security of the kingdom**.

27 May 1700 – to his grace his majesty's high commissioner and the right honourable estates of parliament, the **representation** of the **heritors of Stirlingshire**. (Also 27 May 1700 – **representation** of the **heritors of Perthshire**,

but the **humble address and petition** of the magistrates and town council of the **burgh of Haddington**, in name of the community thereof).

23 December 1700 – petition of **James Turner, cabinet maker in Edinburgh** – remitted to the **committee of trade**.

9 January 1701 – the **address of the inhabitants of the city of Glasgow** – ‘That whereas we have petitioned **John Anderson of Dowhill**, present commissioner to this present session of parliament for this city...’

23 August 1704 – petition of **William Forbes, Lord Forbes** (had served in Flanders) – remitted to the **commission for public accounts**.

26 November 1706 – then the **addresses** were given in and read namely **address of the barons, freeholders and others within the sheriffdom of Roxburgh...**; **address** of the magistrates, town council and the inhabitants of the **burgh of Annan...**; **address** of the magistrates, town council and other inhabitants of the **burgh of Lochmaben...**; and an **address** of the **parish of Lesmahagow...**; all against a union with England in terms of the articles.