Promoting the Peace: Queen Anne and the Public Thanksgiving at St Paul’s Cathedral

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On 7 July 1713 a ‘Publick Thanksgiving’ was held at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London for the ‘Blessings of Peace’. This event involved a grand procession from the Houses of Parliament to the Cathedral, a long religious service accompanied by music, followed in the evening by spectacular firework displays and other forms of celebration. Enormous crowds turned out to watch the processions, some paying to watch the festivities from balconies overlooking the proceedings, while others sat on specially prepared stands. Four thousand children from London charity schools were ‘placed upon a machine in the Strand’ and throughout the event they sang ‘hymns of... praise to God, for her Majesty’ and the gift of peace. As the queen had issued a proclamation for a general thanksgiving, religious ceremonies were held in towns and cities all over the country. The form of service to be used for these ceremonies was dictated by the Church of England and authorised by Queen Anne who read the document before it was printed. These regional ceremonies were accompanied by civic festivities which brought local communities together, and generated outpourings of fidelity to the queen. At provincial gatherings aldermen and other civic dignitaries made speeches and drank loyal toasts to the ‘Queen’, the ‘Peace’ and the ‘Protestant succession’. But not everyone was enamoured of the Peace Treaty. On the day of the St Paul’s ceremony a number of Whigs resisted the

1 The service at St Paul’s Cathedral was originally planned for 16 June. I would like to thank Dr Toby Barnard and Dr Hannah Smith for their assistance in the preparation of this chapter.
2 Daily Courant 4 July 1713: 3658; Evening Post 2–4 June 1713: 596; Evening Post 2 July 1713: 609; Post Boy, 7–9 July 1713: 2834.
3 Post Boy, 7–9 July 1713: 2834; British Museum thereafter BM Mm, 2,106, engraved print.
4 A simple search on Solo (the online catalogue for the Bodleian Library, Oxford) and the British Library online catalogue produced 29 thanksgiving sermons from different parts of the country.
5 The National Archives sP/34/21/7 f. 14–15 Archbishop of Canterbury to Lord Dartmouth 7 April 1713; The National Archives, sP/34/21/9 Archbishop of Canterbury to Lord Dartmouth 8 April 1713.
6 For examples see: Post Boy, 2–4 June 1713: 2819; Post Boy, 11–14 July 1713: 2836.
royal call. Peers and Members of Parliament stayed away from the celebrations, and no doubt in the localities, other less prominent individuals also ignored the call to give thanks. These absences reflect the long-standing political controversies that surrounded the Peace Treaty and continuing animosity.

As the queen’s health deteriorated political acrimony was also fuelled by the question of the succession. Political intrigue and subterfuges during the negotiations for the peace treaty had made many in both Houses of Parliament feel uneasy, and anxiety over the security of the Protestant succession reached a critical level in the summer of 1713. Both Anne’s right to the throne and the Hanoverian succession were recognised in the treaty, but the queen and her Tory ministers were widely suspected of wishing to reinstate the Stuart heir to the throne—James Francis Edward; commonly known as the Pretender—and these misgivings were not without reason. Jacobite strength in Parliament was greater than in any House of Commons since the queen’s accession, and Anne’s chief minister, Robert Harley, the 1st earl of Oxford had needed Jacobite support to achieve his peace policy. On a trip to Paris, Oxford’s political ally—Lord Bolingbroke—had attended the opera and been seen sitting in a box near the Pretender, news which quickly got back to London and caused outrage. Furthermore, with the tacit support of the government, Jacobite rebels flooded back into Britain. These and other, similar acts simply heightened the atmosphere of distrust. The leaders of the Whig party, realising they could not prevent the conclusion of the peace, sponsored a propaganda campaign to arouse the widest possible suspicion of the Tory ministry’s future intentions towards the Protestant succession, once the Peace was concluded. These political manoeuvres simply exacerbated an already inflamed situation and undermined the authority of the Crown. With the Scots pushing for the dissolution of the union, the queen feared a civil war and others shared her concerns. Political factionalism had reached such a pitch that the British nation was threatened with destruction.

10 Gregg, *Anne*, 363.