

= Elizabeth Alkin =

Elizabeth Alkin ( c . 1600 ? c . 1655 ) was a publisher , nurse and spy for the Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War . Among the many derogatory names she was called by royalist sympathisers , that of Parliament Joan is one by which she is also commonly known .

= = Background and Civil War activities = =

Nothing is known of Alkin until 1645 ; because of comments of her age made later in life , her date of birth is taken to be around 1600 . She was the wife of Francis Alkin , a spy for the Parliamentarians who was hanged early in the English Civil War by royalist forces for his activities . She was the mother of three children .

In 1645 Alkin was employed by the earl of Essex , Sir William Waller , to be a spy for the Parliamentarians . She received a similar commission from Sir Thomas Fairfax two years later . Parliamentary records show that in 1645 she received payment from the Committee for the Advance of Money for uncovering the activities of George Mynnes , a Surrey @-@ based iron merchant , who was supplying metal to the royalist forces .

In the seventeenth century , daily news was published in newsbooks which tended to be small eight @-@ page publications , the forerunners of newspapers . They were usually sold on the street by what the historian Bob Clarke describes as " semi @-@ destitute female hawkers , known as Mercury Women " . Those publications supporting the royalist cause were closed down and the publishers prosecuted , and Alkin became involved in uncovering those behind the publication . In 1648 the royalist newsbooks the Mercurius Melancholicus and the Parliament Kite both referred to her attempts to uncover them , and the following year the Mercurius Pragmaticus called her an " old Bitch " who could " smell out a Loyall @-@ hearted man as soon as the best Blood @-@ hound in the Army " .

Although Alkin acted as one of the newsbook sellers , between 1650 and 1651 she published several short @-@ lived newsbooks , including The Impartial Scout , The Moderne Intelligencer , Mercurius Anglicus ( formerly a royalist title which she appropriated ) and Mercurius Scoticus , or , The Royal Messenger . Clarke believes Alkin may have used formerly royalist titles , or royalist @-@ sounding names to win the confidence of royalist sympathisers , and get them to reveal the location of illicit printers . The historian Marcus Nevitt disagrees , and argues that Alkin was " reappropriating Royalist titles for Parliamentary consumption " . In total she produced ten notebook issues of differing titles .

One of those she uncovered was William Dugard , who ran four presses at the Merchant Taylors ' School in London ; Dugard was imprisoned in February 1650 . The following year she was paid £ 10 for discovering the printers of Edward Hall 's work Manus testium lingua testium , and received further recompense from the Committee for the Advance of Money for other , unknown services .

= = Post Civil War = =

In 1653 , during the First Anglo @-@ Dutch War , Alkin assisted Daniel Whistler in setting up a network of casualty reception stations in Portsmouth , Harwich and East Anglia . The stations treated both English and Dutch casualties .

Alkin made financial claims from the state for her nursing , some of which were paid , although a petition of 1654 refers to her severe illness . The same letter stated that she had had to sell many of her possessions , including her bed . A petition for financial relief from May 1655 is the last recorded note on her , and it is presumed that she died soon afterwards .