After many weeks of listening to the “strong opinions” of Tabitha Smith, an Oxford glover named Richard Crutch decided to go to the authorities. In February 1686, he traveled to London and out of his “duty to his majesty” accused Smith of treasonable activity. She had come from the West Country to live with Richard and his wife, Katherine, about a month ago. Loquacious and opinionated, Smith had told them a fraught tale of daring and escape. Her husband, James, had joined the rebel leader, the Duke of Monmouth, at Lyme and had sent word to her in Taunton that she and their servants should prepare to provide horses and provisions for the rebellion. Tabitha Smith joined Monmouth’s army and saw action at Phillipsp-Norton where she herself commanded a company of horse. After the rebels’ defeat at Sedgemoor, Smith escaped back to Taunton “wearing men’s clothes” to secure what goods she had left. Colonel Kirke’s regiment came “speedily after.” Smith hid what she could, borrowed money from a shopkeeper in Bristol and made it to Oxford. Since Smith practiced the same trade as the Crutches, they had taken her into their home. But her bold talk soon made Richard apprehensive, and he regretted it. Smith swore that the Duke of Monmouth was still alive and would come again with 40,000 men. She boasted of having been entertained by a kinsman of the Earl of Derby’s in Lancashire, where they were raising money in preparation for Monmouth’s return. She refused to call James II, “king,” and declared that the Queen was “as arrogant a whore as any in England” and kept

1 BL, Add. 41,804, ff. 257–257v. Tabitha Smith was probably referring to William Stanley, ninth Earl of Derby (c. 1655–1702) who was lord lieutenant for Cheshire and Lancashire.
“five or six gallants” to please herself. Smith hoped to one day “drink a draft of the Queen’s blood.”

Is Tabitha Smith’s story true? Possibly. The authorities in London certainly took Richard Clutch seriously. Smith was arrested and questioned. Naturally, she denied Clutch’s allegations. She was promptly imprisoned anyway. Interestingly, rather than support her husband, Katherine Crutch softened the story, reporting that although Tabitha spoke “very kindly of the Duke of Monmouth, wishing God to bless him where ever he was,” she never said anything “treasonable.” Oxford authorities were not convinced and were more inclined to believe her husband. What happened to Smith, how long she was confined, or whether she was ever reunited with her husband, James, remains a mystery. She never resurfaces among the sources. Her story is but a sliver, a small chard of evidence, among the numerous informants’ reports on, and interrogations of, suspected Monmouth supporters following the failed Rebellion. We may find parts of the story that Tabitha Smith told the Clutches suspicious, particularly her boast of having led a troop of horse. But parts of it also mirror the activities of many women throughout history in times of war and rebellion: supplying horses, arms, food, and money or cross-dressing and even joining men in battle. Even if Smith exaggerated, she certainly had “strong opinions,” as Richard Clutch put it, it is reasonable to assume that she took some action to assist Monmouth, especially since she was on the run.

However slender the evidence, the tale of Tabitha Smith is revealing, and it supports the conclusion that women in former times, including common women, were both politically alert and active. This is nothing new. Historians of women’s history and gender history have reiterated this time and again, yet somehow it fails to breach the bulwarks around

---

2 BL, Add. 41,804, ff. 258–9.
3 Ibid., ff. 260, 262, 263.
4 The story of Tabitha Smith was reported to Secretary of State, Charles Middleton (BL, Add. 41, 804, ff. 257–63). There were at least two “James Smiths” in the Rebellion. One, a cloth worker, was tried in Taunton and sent to Jamaica. The other, a yeoman, was still at large. While neither of them fit Richard’s information, it is possible that one of them was Tabitha’s husband. W. MacDonald Wigfield, The Monmouth Rebels, 1685 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), p. 157; CSPD, James II, 1: 428, 430.
5 Chapter 2 describes women who helped supply Monmouth’s army. On the tradition of women cross-dressing and joining armies, see Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, eds., The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe (New York: Palgrave, 1997).