Catholics to be completely false, and as a result fear of individual Catholics began to diminish. Catholics were consequently increasingly accepted into their local communities, whose internal bonds the war was strengthening anyway. Nothing similar to the suspicions and attacks of 1640-42 occurred again until almost a generation later, in 1666 following the fire of London. The panics then, and during the Popish Plot, show that the civil war certainly did not mark a watershed in the treatment of Catholics, but it did perhaps cause an acceleration in the trend during the seventeenth century from the pervasive Elizabethan phobia and intolerance of Catholics towards *de facto* toleration of them.

Notes.

1. D Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England 1603-58* (London, 1986).
2. J Miller, *Popery and Politics in England, 1660-88* (London, 1973).
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5. K D Lindley, 'The part played by Catholics', in B Manning (ed), *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War* (London, 1973).
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This essay, by Simon Stevens of Wolvercote, Oxford, won the 2001 Cromwell Prize Competition in the 15-18 age group.

DID THE CIVIL WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH TO 1660 OFFER ANY LASTING NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO WOMEN?

by Heather Delonnette

Life for women at the beginning of the civil war in England was a life ruled and administered by the men in their lives. Women themselves had few rights and privileges. In most cases they were seen as chattels of their husbands or fathers. It was these men who would do what they considered best for the women under their control. Men were considered as the head of their household and responsible for all those living within it. The upheavals caused by civil war provided some women, at least, with an opportunity to break from the social and cultural bonds that bound them. Brian Manning suggests that seeds of discontentment with their lot were already present in women before the outbreak of war, the war just allowed them to germinate.[1] It must, however, be stressed that this change in women's roles was not a nation-wide phenomena; it seems to have occurred in pockets and for many women life would have carried on virtually as normal.

Some areas of influence became available to women purely because of the absence of their men-folk. The defence of property often fell to the female inhabitants left behind by combatant male relations. Antonia Fraser recounts many episodes of high born ladies defending their homes, which were also the strongholds of whichever faction they supported, against opposing armies.[2] Many of their maidservants and other female members of the household were also caught up in the ensuing sieges and violence but were rarely mentioned or praised for their bravery, although their mistresses were. Gender was not the only discrimination taking place. The social status of women had a bearing on the way they were treated and represented.

Women without large fortified homes to guard did, however, get involved with the fortification and protection of their villages and towns. Many women raised money for the fortifications and defences, and some even helped to build and maintain them. Money was also raised to supply the army with troops. These troops were known as 'virgin' or 'maiden' troops because of their female patrons. Other women went one stage further, following the army around the country. Some of these women were prostitutes who saw the business potential of several hundred men away from home for months at a time. Soldiers' wives were also camp-followers, often adopting male dress to protect themselves from other soldiers. Sometimes women enlisted into the army as a way of staying close to their men and earning a living. This was usually the case when the wife had no other way of earning an income with her husband gone.

For some women the absence of their husband or father left them in the role of 'deputy husband'.[3] They were already becoming more important within businesses, often being effectively business partners with their husbands. The women of the period were similar to modern women; they worked in several different areas at the same time. They were in charge of their home, ensuring this was properly provisioned and maintained. They also worked in the family business, either selling their wears in shops and markets or tending fields and animals with their husbands. When the men left to fight the women were left in charge of these businesses and farms. This increased their economic activity; they were the ones making the decisions and reaping the rewards or penalties of those decisions. Martyn Bennett suggests that it was this increase in financial and economic power that encouraged women to attempt to increase their influence in other areas.[4]

One way in which women attempted to influence the way government behaved was by petitioning parliament. Women had been involved in more physical protests. They had been among the rioters in Herefordshire and the Fenlands as well as being members of the clubmen movement. The clubmen were groups of local people who took up arms, mainly the club of their name, to defend their local villages and livelihoods against any perceived threat. Women also joined the 'mob' that attempted to influence the attitudes of parliament. They attacked the Lord Mayor of London when he accompanied Charles I in his attempt to arrest the five Members of Parliament; what stopped them attacking the king may have been guards or may have been his rank. Petitioning parliament was a more political form of protest. In 1642 women petitioned parliament about the economic effects the war was having on their livelihoods. As they were now in charge of the family businesses, these women petitioners were often in the best position to describe the consequences of civil unrest on local economies. They were also those most affected by the shortages and high prices that the war induced; after all they did not have army provisioning officers making sure their family was fed and watered. Women Levellers claimed that they were just as affected by the war and the political decisions of government as any man in the country and so should have their views considered by parliament.

The following year, in August 1643, women appealed to parliament for peace, as the war was having such a dramatic affect on society. What started as a march by several hundred London women to parliament to hand in a petition and await an answer is described as resulting in a riot, the severity of which depends on whose account is believed. The 'Peace Petition' seems to have similarities with the Greenham Common protests that took place three hundred years later. Other similarities with later protests can be seen. Patricia Higgins suggests that men could well have been the instigators of the Peace Petition and may even have dressed as women to lead the demonstration.[5] If this is the case, the concept of men dressing as women in

protests was repeated two hundred years later in the Rebecca Riots. It is highly likely that women were present at the execution of Charles I, and the following century would again see women present at another king's execution, this time in France.

The issues covered by women's protests extended further in later years. The 'Women's Petition' of 1651 argued for reforms in the laws of debt. They claimed that being imprisoned for debt was unjust as there was no way for the debtor to repay his debt while incarcerated. Other legal issues were addressed in petitions put forward by women, such as the use of courts martial during peacetime. A great number of petitions were presented demanding the release of Leveller leaders and other 'political' prisoners. These groups were usually led by the prisoners' wives such as Elizabeth Lilburne and Mary Overton, who claimed that their husbands were being held without trail and therefore illegally.

All this political activity was not received with complete acceptance. The term 'fishwife' became used as a disparaging term for the women who involved themselves in these protests. This type of behaviour was considered abnormal for women at the time despite their increased activity in other spheres, as we have seen. Women's involvement in politics was the source of a series of jokes claiming that there would soon be a 'Parliament of Women' where women would have superiority over their husbands and fathers, a world truly 'turned upside down'.

Women were considered incapable of making a reasoned decision, and this was done for them by their husbands and fathers. Some groups did argue for the right of women to vote, but they were usually groups of women rather than men. Some women attempted to register to vote - for example widows who were landowners were entitled to vote, but only if the local sheriff allowed them. Leveller women claimed equality with their male counterparts - 'Have we not an equal interest with the men of this nation in those liberties and securities contained in the Petition of Right?'[6] When this claim was rejected a pamphlet was circulated claiming that 'if this principle were true, that all subjection and obedience to persons and their laws stood by virtue of electing them, then...all women at once were exempt from being under government'.[7]

Parliament had declared that women were excluded from the Petition of Right and to emphasise this the word 'persons' was substituted by 'men' in the 1650 debate on the Act of Subscribing the Engagement. Even the Levellers, who claimed to want to 'level' society and called for anyone who was 'freeborn' to have the vote, made clear that 'freeborn' did not include servants or anyone who did not maintain themselves, thus excluding wives and daughters. Widows and spinsters who had their own income would,

under these rules, have been able to vote. This disparity existed within the Leveller movement, in spite of John Lilburne's assertion, in 1646, that men and women 'are, and were by nature all equall and alike in power, dignity, authority and majesty, none of them having (by Nature) any authority, dominion, or magisterial power, one over or above another'.[8]

The legal and administrative systems were areas where women had been involved and continued to be throughout the war and interregnum. Women had been allowed to act as prosecutors in certain cases in both the secular and ecclesiastical courts. More usually, though, women were called as a kind of expert witness when medical evidence was needed, for example in cases of rape or desertion. Women were also given minor roles in local government, such as overseers of the poor in the parish, which was considered to be in keeping with their natural talents. These positions were often given to women because of a lack of male candidates. Women did become especially valuable as representatives of their husbands during sequestration cases. There were harsh penalties to pay if the estate's valuation was wrong and using women as the representative had two main advantages. First, as the estate's owner was usually on the losing side and away fighting, he was unlikely to have a clear idea of what his estate was worth. Secondly, a woman was entitled to one fifth of the value of the estate to maintain herself and her children. This meant that it was not in a woman's interest to undervalue her husband's estate. In fact Thomas Knyvett wrote to his wife 'Women solicitors are observed to better Audience than masculine malignant'.[9]

Religion was the other area in which women's roles changed. Many of the newer religious groups believed that men and women were equal in the eyes of God and so therefore they should be equal within their church. This equality allowed women not only to be equal members of the congregation but also to preach. They were not, however, expected to preach their own ideas; they preached only as the Spirit moved them and not by right. There had been a limited precedent for women being deeply involved in religion. During the middle ages a group called the Lollards had had many female members who were encouraged to be as religious as their male counterparts.

The increase in radical religious groups rekindled these notions of female piety, although not all groups agreed with female religious equality. The Muggletonians looked forward to a heaven that consisted only of men. The established, traditional Church of England and Roman Catholic church did not have a policy of allowing women any religious freedom. As with politics, they were supposed to be guided by their male superiors; this patriarchal stance is suggested as the reason why many women opted to join more radical groups. Even members of these groups did not always agree with allowing women more involvement. Prynne, for example, felt that the sects

that encouraged female membership only did so to increase their ranks and therefore appear more popular than they actually were, thereby increasing the group's importance and influence. In 1641 a rhyme was circulating entitled 'Lucifer's Lackey or the Devil's New Creation'. Its words claimed that women preachers were the Devil's work: 'When women preach and cobblers pray/ The fiends in hell make holiday'.[10] At the same time the male-dominated established churches claimed that the increasing involvement of women in religion was undermining the family and therefore society, a parallel with what the MPs felt about many of the women petitioners. Women preachers claimed that Joel 2:28-29 allowed for female preaching: 'your sons and daughters will proclaim my message'.

Groups that did accept women preachers claimed that women were less susceptible to the sin of pride and therefore less likely to corrupt the word of God. Also as women were not used to this elevated role within the group they would be very frightened by the idea of getting up and speaking in front of the congregation. So if they were moved to speak it could only happen by the will of God.

There was also a rise in the acceptance of women prophets during this period, probably for the same reasons as the increase in women preachers. Lady Eleanor Davies was known to have advised Cromwell as well as prophesying the deaths of the Duke of Buckingham and Charles I, while Elizabeth Poole advised the army council. Women prophets were not accepted universally. As women, they were always liable to claims of bewitchment or possession by the Devil, a charge not often made of male prophets. Women preachers and prophets were considered as different from most women and not always thought of in a positive light. They were the consequence of the world being upended and when it returned to normal these women would retake their rightful positions in society, as wives and mothers under the authority of men.

Women were also involved in other aspects of society during the war. They wrote the pamphlets and sold the news sheets that were used as propaganda by both sides. Women were also used as spies and messengers because their sex gave them a greater freedom of movement than men. They also campaigned for better education and prospects for women when the war was over. Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing suggest that women's activities during the civil war showed the first glimmers of what would become feminism three hundred years later.[11]

When Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660 the turbulent years of the civil war and the interregnum were over and things could return to normal. Women ceased to be a force in politics, and they again became the chattels of their male relations. Women who had petitioned parliament and

been actively involved in local administration were once again treated as possessions. Even the women who satisfied the property qualification, which would allow them to vote, continued to be excluded from the electoral system. Women would not be granted the vote for another two and a half centuries, when women would also take their places in the House of Commons, a Women's Parliament perhaps. Women preachers would likewise have to wait to be allowed to preach in the Church of England and this would so upset some male preachers that they would join the Roman Catholic church where women are not allowed to preach. Even the Quaker movement, which had been so progressive in its acceptance of women, had reversed it stance by 1700 and not only were women prevented from preaching in all but the most exceptional circumstances but separate meetings for men and women were held.

The civil war did offer women new opportunities. They were short-lived and by the turn of the century most of the advances had been reversed, the world had been righted and women were firmly back at the bottom of the heap. Women would eventually have access to similar opportunities as men, but this would not be the case until well into the twentieth century.

Notes.

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2. A Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel* (London, 1985), especially pp. 183-207.
3. M Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland, 1638-51* (Oxford, 1997), p. 222.
4. Ibid, p. 8.
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7. K Thomas, 'Women and the civil war sects', in T Aston (ed), *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660* (London, 1969), p. 336.
8. Bennett, *Civil Wars*, p. 320.
9. Fraser, *Weaker Vessel*, p. 234.
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This essay, by Heather Delonnette of Llandrindod Wells, won the 2001 Cromwell Prize Competition in the adult age group.

THE REVEREND ROBERT RAM AND THE SIEGE OF CROWLAND, 1643

by Michael Byrd

Crowland, or more correctly Croyland meaning soft muddy island in the original Saxon, is chiefly associated with site of the great Benedictine abbey founded by Ethelbald, King of Mercia, in AD 716, just two years after the death of the hermit Saint Guthlac who landed on this 'island' in the fens in AD 699. In fact, the site has revealed much earlier evidences of occupation, including a series of tumulus urns, flints and pottery, Bronze and Iron Age and Roman artifacts. Isolated it may have been but not quite the howling wilderness devoid of human habitation commonly portrayed in the early accounts.

Whilst surrounded by still largely undrained fens in the seventeenth century, Croyland was accessible, weather permitting, by raised roads from Peterborough, Spalding, Wisbech and Stamford, making it a place of strategic importance. In April 1643 the parliamentary cause in south Lincolnshire was under threat, Newark, Grantham, Stamford and Peterborough were under royalist control, Lincoln and Boston were threatened, Spalding had been captured and retaken, and Croyland had been seized and hurriedly fortified with earthworks. Thus the natural line of defensible towns covering the eastern counties from the north was dangerously compromised and a determined royalist army might have successfully breached the gap.

The Rev Robert Ram, minister of Spalding since 1626, was a much respected and active parliamentary figure in the area. In 1644 Ram published the *Soldier's Catechism* composed for parliament's army, in 1645 he published *Paedobaptism or A Defence of Infant Baptism* dedicated to Edward Rossiter, and on 27 March 1646 he preached a sermon to the army at Balderton near Newark, which was then published. Finally in 1655, still minister at Spalding, he published the *Countryman's Catechism*, dedicated to his parishioners, and set up a library in the parish church.

It is therefore not surprising that he should have written on 31 January 1643 to his errant neighbour, the royalist rector of Croyland, Mr William Stiles, pointing out his misguided support for the royalist partisans who had lately taken over the town. Bearing in mind that Stiles had been rector at Croyland since 1640, was a warden of Browne's Hospital in Stamford and also held the rank of colonel in the royalist army, the appeal was perhaps misguided, if not futile.