

by the Rt Hon Frank Dobson MP

45. Letter to Thurloe, 20/30 June 1658, *TSP*, VII, 185-7.
46. cf. Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, p. 151. In the first year of occupation, about £80,000 was spent on Dunkirk against an income of £20,000.
47. Letter to the Committee of Safety, 17 May 1659, *TSP*, VII, 670-1.
48. Colonel Alsop to Fleetwood, mid May 1659, *TSP*, VII, 671.
49. July 1659, *TSP*, VII, 712-13.
50. Theophilus Verax, *Serious Sober State-Considerations, Relating to the Government of England and the Garrison of Dunkirk in Flanders* (London, 1660).
51. Lockhart's letter to parliament, Firth, 'Armies in Flanders', appendix B.
52. Letter to the Council of State, 4 August 1659, *TSP*, VII, 720-21.
53. Lillingston and Alsop to the Council of State, 23 August 1659, *TSP*, VII, 732.
54. Report of Ashfield, Packer and Pearson concerning Dunkirk, end of July 1659, *TSP*, VII, 712-14.
55. Alsop to Fleetwood, 6 May 1659, *TSP*, VII, 668-9.
56. Harley himself was replaced by Lord Rutherford in May 1661.
57. See Firth, 'Armies in Flanders', pp. 104ff. for what befell the various regiments.
58. Swaine, 'Acquisition and loss of Dunkirk', p. 118. R Hutton, *The British Republic* (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 112, for example, does not even credit the acquisition with popular support.
59. 'A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector', ll. 172-3.

Thomas Fegan is currently working as a volunteer at the London Film Archive. He is starting an MA in heritage interpretation in the autumn.

Oliver Cromwell is a dominant figure in the history of our country. That is why, four hundred years after he was born and 341 after he died we don't just discuss what he was and what he did - we take sides. From an early age we line up either with the cavaliers or with the roundheads. We choose between King and Parliament, between divine right and democracy. We throw in our lot with King Charles or with Oliver Cromwell.

That's certainly what I did. I was for the roundheads, for Parliament, for democracy, for Oliver Cromwell. That was the stand I took as a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things. I learnt that the seventeenth century world was more complicated than I had understood. That Parliament and the roundheads were not necessarily one and the same. That democracy and Oliver Cromwell were not always in harness together. I recognised the barbarities perpetrated in Ireland. I sympathised with the democratic yearnings voiced in the Putney debates in contradiction of Oliver Cromwell's views.

And yet, and yet I remain loyal to his memory. And I am proud to have been invited to address the Cromwell Association, in the town where he was born, as you mark the fourth centenary of his birth and celebrate his life and work and his contribution to the history of our country and of the whole of the English speaking world.

Many of you who have studied his life and times know so much more about him than I do. You will be immersed in your understanding of the religious, mercantile, social, military and philosophical forces at work during Cromwell's lifetime. You will understand what he drew from those forces then at work and what he contributed to them. You will have your own explanations of why you celebrate his name.

In the end, for me it boils down to this. Oliver Cromwell was on the right side in the English civil war and because of him the right side won. And so he changed the course of English history. And he changed it for the better. After Cromwell things were never the same again.

The civil war and its outcome was the biggest single step on the road to democracy in our country. It didn't immediately achieve democracy or anything like it. That would take another 250 years or more. But after

Parliament raised an army, defeated the King and then openly tried and executed the King, the forces of democracy were off on their long march.

And those who now take the side of the King tend to fight shy of the hard questions - what if the King had won? What would the consequences have been? Would British democracy have developed the way it did? How long would the country have had to wait for a constitutional monarchy? How much religious tolerance would there have been? What harm would have been done to the cause of democracy world-wide? And in my view we shouldn't underestimate the world-wide impact of the civil war, Commonwealth and Protectorate. In my view the answers scarcely bear thinking about.

Of course, before I can claim for Cromwell a full measure of the credit for the benefits which flowed from the right side winning the civil war, I have to show that his contribution was vital. Of that, there can be no doubt.

It's my belief that he made a threefold contribution to Parliament's victory. Firstly he set about recruiting and training an army that could more than hold its own against the best that the King could throw against it. His personal contribution was to recruit, train and equip troops steadfast under fire and well capable of exploiting enemy weaknesses which opened up in the course of the fighting. The New Model Army that won the war was largely his creation. Secondly, though with no military training, perhaps because of it, he was a courageous leader, quick to spot a tactical opportunity and bold enough to take it. Time and again in battle he first saved the day and then carried the day. Thirdly he could do what every military leader would like to do. He inspired his own side and frightened the other side. His most talented military adversary, Prince Rupert, referred to him as 'Old Ironsides'. Just think how that must have raised the morale of Cromwell's troops. If you were picking sides you'd want to have somebody nicknamed 'Old Ironsides' on your side.

In short, in times of war what you want is a winner. Cromwell was a winner and all the rest flows from that. He was a complex man but he had a flair for reducing things to the bare simplicities. That was a top talent in a general. It can be useful in peacetime too, but governing a country is a much more long term, complex and less straightforward matter than winning a battle. That's one reason why he was less successful as a peacetime ruler than he was as a general.

In his sonnet 'To the Lord General Cromwell', Milton says '...peace hath her victories/ No less renowned than war.' When it comes to renown that is a dubious proposition at the best of times. Success or failure in peace is

harder to judge than success or failure in war. Most battles are either won or lost - the outcome is clear. The outcome of peacetime activity is usually more debatable. And that is certainly true in the case of Oliver Cromwell.

Trying to get at the truth about Cromwell's non-military successes and failures is much harder than finding out about his battles. The fog of war may partly obscure our view of Marston Moor, Naseby, Dunbar or Worcester, but it is nothing like so impenetrable as the mythology and royalist propaganda that envelops the Commonwealth and the Protectorate. And the same factors also tend to cover up the extent to which future monarchs and their courts restrained their behaviour because they feared a repeat of what Cromwell had helped bring about. He didn't need to establish a full-blown democratic republic in order to clip the wings of future kings and queens.

Having gone to war for Parliament against the King, Cromwell found himself ruling without Parliament and exercising powers the King he defeated had never had. He could do that because unlike Charles, he had a victorious army behind him. And he made sure they stayed behind him. It seems to me that the majority of the troops believed that he was theirs. That he understood their needs. Recognised what they had sacrificed and what their sacrifices had achieved. He was swift to put down mutiny in the ranks, and what he interpreted as mutiny. That was because he needed the army in his struggle with the other powers in the land. He was able to take such action with the mutineers because most of the troops were prepared to believe that when it came down to it he was on their side. From time to time he might be a hard man but he was their hard man.

Cromwell had lived and worked and fought as a Parliamentarian. So ruling without a Parliament was not what he wanted. His problem was that his Parliaments were a very mixed bag. They contained contending forces, some of whom were willing to sacrifice the whole for the sake of their sectional interest. Some had been lukewarm for the war. Others had been against it. And Parliament wasn't representative.

It represented only the better off and not even all of them. It represented some of the powers in the land. It wasn't just that the Commons wasn't elected by a universal franchise. It didn't even meet the requirement of a partial democracy. It represented some powerful forces but not others. It didn't represent the army. From Cromwell's point of view it didn't give proper weight to the views and needs of the army which had borne the heat and burden of the day. It wasn't just that the Parliaments in his time were not under his control and caused him trouble. To his mind they

behaved unfairly, their factional behaviour was undisciplined, and could undermine the stability of the fledgling state.

The legitimacy of a Parliament springs from its representative capacity and its accountability. With anything less than a universal suffrage its legitimacy is open to challenge and so Cromwell could have concluded that the army was as representative or even more representative than the Parliament. It covered a far broader spectrum of the population. It was a stakeholder whose members had literally staked their lives for the cause. On the other hand when Cromwell considered some of the MPs in his Parliaments he would have felt them adequately covered by Stanley Baldwin's description of the Tory Benches in 1918 - a lot of hard faced men who looked as if they had done very well out of the war.

So while Oliver Cromwell manifestly didn't establish a system of government in which Parliament reigned supreme, the circumstances that prevailed after the civil war made that task well nigh impossible. Nor did he widen the franchise significantly, still less did he introduce universal suffrage or even universal male suffrage.

It can't be said in his favour that the idea of universal suffrage was unknown. It was being formulated and advocated by radicals both inside and outside the army. Ideas which are now the commonplace of democracy were first put into words in Cromwell's time. But not by him. He never subscribed to them. Some accuse him of betraying the cause - but he didn't. You can't betray a cause you have never subscribed to.

Nor is it clear that he could have enfranchised the common man even if he had wanted to. The idea was novel and therefore untried. Powerful forces would have resisted the idea. Many of the radicals themselves wanted to draw a line somewhere. Often they favoured the franchise being extended down the social scale just sufficiently to include them and then no further. The Levellers didn't support the Diggers. All the people involved had been brought up to believe that a hierarchy was the natural order. Some still do. To move from divine right to electoral democracy in one step was something few had ever contemplated.

But whatever happened to Parliament during the Commonwealth and Protectorate, the overall effect of the civil war and its aftermath was to strengthen the position of Parliament and shift power from the monarchy.

What then of the question of religious freedom? First we must recognise that in seventeenth century England most people took religion very seriously. The debate was dominated by fundamentalists on all sides. And

it wasn't just that religious beliefs were deeply held. Religious loyalties often carried with them political allegiances. So religion was far more important to them than it is to us now.

Oliver Cromwell himself was a deeply religious man. His religion gave him great inner strength but it also meant that when he wrestled with his conscience it often involved protracted and furious bouts. However it seems to me very clear that he was well ahead of his time when it came to 'liberty for tender consciences'. Like most of us he sometimes shared Milton's objections to those who 'still revolt when truth would set them free,/ Licence they mean when they cry libertie'. Cromwell would have recognised Milton's precondition that those who love liberty 'must first be wise and good'. But compared with many he was easy going in his attitude to the religious convictions of others. I think he was honestly expressing his views when he said 'To be a seeker is to be of the best sect after that of a finder and so shall all humble seekers be in the end'.

History shows that after a revolution the rulers of a country tolerate little dissent because they fear it will lead to rebellion, rejuvenate the defeated and encourage other countries to intervene. Yet under Cromwell penal laws against dissenters or Catholics were less harsh than under monarchs both before and after him. And they were generally less harshly enforced. The pressure for such measures and their enforcement didn't come from Cromwell. Indeed he resisted such pressures from lesser men with fiercer views. When we consider the troubled times and the depth of religious feeling, the Commonwealth and Protectorate under Cromwell come out pretty well on the scale of religious tolerance. And that is before we recognise that it was because of Cromwell's personal commitment in the face of the religious bigotry of others, that Jews were invited back to England after being outlawed in 1290 - something the Kings and Queens of England who preceded him had never done. Here again the long term effect of Cromwell's rule was to undermine religious intolerance and to strengthen objections to the state interfering in matters of religion.

What else did he do for the country? For a start he brought it peace. From the end of the first civil war whenever war arose Cromwell's aim was to end it as soon as possible - and he did. And it is clear that it was the King's willingness to resort to arms for a second time that led Cromwell and others to decide to try the King and execute him.

In terms of its impact on the public at the time the decision to try the King and execute him was a mistake. It created sympathy for the royalist cause and turned the King into a martyr. But its long term impact was enormous. For the people (however defined) to rise up, defeat a monarch

in war, publicly try him and execute him was a signal to all peoples and all monarchs. Sudden death was no novelty to the Stuart dynasty - but it had usually come in private, often at the hand of a relative. What happened to Charles I was something new. It put monarchy on a new and conditional footing. In England that turned out to be a safer footing. After centuries of being murdered in dynastic quarrels no English monarch after Charles I died other than by accident or natural causes. Quite a thought really - Oliver Cromwell making England safe for monarchy.

I could now take up a lot more of your precious time by rebutting a lot of the sneers and lies about Cromwell's habits of speech or dress, the activities of his family. I could go through the usual routine putting the record straight about how life in England really was under Cromwell, but it's a process which usually sounds far too apologetic.

Perhaps the shortest and most telling point to make is in response to the impressions created by the Restoration spin doctors, that, no sooner was Cromwell dead, than the English people rose up as one and carried Charles II shoulder high back onto the throne. Not so. Twenty-one long months passed between Cromwell's death and the return of Charles II. Negotiations took place. Terms were laid down which the King in name had to meet if he wanted to become King in fact.

Oliver Cromwell died on 3 September 1658. Yet it was not until 26 May 1660 that the restored King arrived in England from Holland aboard the vessel the Royal Charles. And as Pepys records, that selfsame ship had sailed out as the Naseby and its name was only changed after the King had confirmed his acceptance of the conditions laid down for his return. A conditional monarch on a recycled ship - all because of Oliver Cromwell.

We celebrate his birth and life because of his achievements. In war and in peace his actions helped to shape our history. Cromwell made a crucial contribution to this defining point in our history and in the history of the development of democracy world-wide. Over the centuries, people in the rest of Europe and in North America drew inspiration from Oliver Cromwell. Kipling's poem *Edgill Fight* ends with the words: 'The first dry rattle of new drawn steel/ Changes the world today.' It did. It changed it for the better. And that is why we rightly mark the 400th Anniversary of the birth of the man who did most to change it - Oliver Cromwell.

The Rt Hon Frank Dobson has been an MP since 1979 and Secretary of State for Health since May 1997. This is the text of a speech he gave at Huntingdon on 24 April 1999, as part of the quatercentenary week-end.

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XII ISLINGTON, LONDON

by Jane A Mills

Islington is just under six square miles and is one of the smallest of the thirteen inner London boroughs. It is situated on the north side of the Thames, surrounded by Stoke Newington, Camden, Hackney, Haringey and the City.

In the Anglo-Saxon charter of AD 1000 it is referred to as 'Gislandune' and later in the Domesday Book as 'Isendone' and 'Iseldone', which probably means the lower town or fort. It was made up of four manors - Barnsbury, Canonbury, Prebend and Highbury. There is evidence that prehistoric man had settlements in the area, and the Romans had a summer camp in Highbury. For a time it was believed that the main Roman road from London to the north (Ermine Street) was situated along Highbury Grove, Highbury Park and part of Blackstock Road. This however has been disproved through archaeological research and there is a strong belief that Kingsland Road, Stoke Newington Road and Stamford Hill in the borough of Hackney are the site.

Several of the major roads running through Islington were important routes out of London originating as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By the seventeenth century all the roads were in a state of disrepair and, as they were a vital link for the City, the Company of Clothworkers gave money annually for their repair; gradually a series of turnpikes were set up. In 1756 the New Road was built, later to become Marylebone, Euston and Pentonville Roads. It was a forty feet wide road, the earliest by-pass linking Paddington Green and Islington (north-west London) to the City.

Islington has been a popular site for country houses because of its close location to the City of London; Sir Walter Raleigh, the Earl of Leicester and the Earl of Essex all had residences here. During the seventeenth century Clerkenwell Green was a popular location for the nobles and affluent. Izaak Walton lived just off the Green and it was here that he wrote his famous book *The Compleat Angler* published in 1653. Nearby in Charterhouse Square lived Catherine Parr, Richard Baxter and William Davenant; references to Islington and Finsbury can be found in Davenant's poetry.