

Cromwelliana

The Journal of

The
Cromwell Association



2019

The Cromwell Association

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The Cromwell Association was formed in 1937 and is a registered charity (reg no. 1132954). The purpose of the Association is to advance the education of the public in both the life and legacy of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), politician, soldier and statesman, and the wider history of the seventeenth century.

The Association seeks to progress its aims in the following ways:

- campaigns for the preservation and conservation of buildings and sites relevant to Cromwell
- commissions, on behalf of the Association, or in collaboration with others, plaques, panels and monuments at sites associated with Cromwell
- supports the Cromwell Museum and the Cromwell Collection in Huntingdon
- provides, within the competence of the Association, advice to the media on all matters relating to the period
- encourages interest in the period in all phases of formal education by the publication of reading lists, information and teachers' guidance
- publishes news and information about the period, including an annual journal and regular newsletters
- organises an annual service, day schools, conferences, lectures, exhibitions and other educational events
- provides a web-based resource for researchers in the period including school students, genealogists and interested parties
- offers, from time to time grants, awards and prizes to individuals and organisations working towards the objectives stated above.

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Editor: Dr Maxine Forshaw

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This has been, to say the least, an interesting year in terms of parliamentary matters in the UK as the seemingly endless difficulties surrounding Brexit continue. In all sections of the media there have been regular references made to parliamentary affairs of the 17th century. In this issue of our journal we have two papers from the study day held in June 2018 ‘Oliver Cromwell...why should we care?’ Both these articles shed a fascinating light into the constitutional difficulties our forebears faced almost 370 years ago.

We also have two papers from the Shrewsbury Conference Day (November 2018) which take us into civil war action in Cheshire and Wales, illustrating the impact of war on local communities and the fact that the civil war did not simply revolve around the big set-piece battles, but was very much a series of local struggles. This thread can also be seen in the build-up to the Battle of Preston, the latest paper in our Cromwellian Britain series; and the theme continues in Peter Gaunt’s Writings and Sources item in which we can read a first-hand account of plundering in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.

We are holding our Cromwell Day service this year (September 2019) in St Mary’s Church, Putney, where the Putney Debates were held in 1647. I am very grateful to artist Clare Melinsky for permission to illustrate this year’s journal with her beautiful linocut image.

My thanks to all contributors for their valued input to the journal, which I gratefully acknowledge.

If you are interested in contributing to future issues of the journal, please contact the Cromwell Association via the email address:

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CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2018
OLIVER CROMWELL AND THE BATTLE OF WORCESTER

by Professor Peter Gaunt

The battle of Worcester, fought around here 367 years ago this coming monday (3 September), can be seen in different lights and can be held to represent different things. For some, it was a crowning mercy, the final battle in a series of conflicts which had torn England and Wales apart since the start of the civil wars in 1642, the first significant engagement of which had also taken place just outside the city, so that Worcester could be viewed as the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, of the English civil wars. For some, it represented a clear sign of God's love and support for the still fairly new and uncertain English republic, bolstering its standing and confidence, and seen subsequently as a key point of reference in the providential history of that republican regime. Some focused on the outcome as another crushing setback for English royalism – though in truth English and Welsh support for the venture and for the military expedition that got as far as Worcester but no further, had been very limited – and as a sign that the Lord had turned His face against the Stuarts and perhaps also against the institution of monarchy.

For Cromwell, Worcester turned out to be the last time he commanded an army in the field; it represented the end of his active campaigning and the end of a series of campaigns which had taken him across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland since he had first lifted a sword in anger in summer 1642, and thereafter he became a London-based 'armchair' general. For Charles Stuart, the future Charles II, it turned out to be the only battle at which he was personally present and had at least nominal overall command as king and commander-in-chief, though the wider campaign was probably just as important in shaping his outlook; the unhappy months preceding and down to the battle made him very wary of, and antagonistic towards, Scottish Presbyterianism, just as his arboreal adventures and so-called miraculous escape to the south coast and away to safety on the Continent were viewed as evidence that God, as well as English royalists, believed in him and wished his preservation. For the Scottish Covenanters themselves, Worcester was an unmitigated disaster and in giving account of individual units within it, regimental histories of the Covenanter army time and again close with the chilling note that the regiment ceased to exist on 3 September 1651. For Scotland and the Scots more broadly, Worcester effectively

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marked the temporary end of their independence and paved the way for closer unity with, but very much under, a militarily-dominant England.

What the battle of Worcester does not do is excite military historians very much. It had none of the thrills and uncertainty, the derring-do and the changing fortunes of many of the other and earlier battles of the English civil war. Edgehill and Naseby, for example, have attracted vastly more attention than Worcester. Even those historians who have explored Cromwell's own military career in detail, from Brigadier Peter Young and John Gillingham though to Ian Gentles and Martyn Bennett most recently, lavish none of the love and attention on Worcester that they do on some of Cromwell's earliest victories, such as Gainsborough and Winceby, on his leading role at Marston Moor and Naseby, and on his tremendous victories around Preston in August 1648, and on the hillside above Dunbar in September 1650, where he twice secured stunning victories against numerically much larger armies.

A century ago Samuel Rawson Gardiner noted that 'the military critic finds little to say about' the battle which took place here in September 1651. Unlike much smaller engagements, such as Cheriton and Cropredy Bridge, Worcester has no volume in the Roundway Press *Battles* series written by Peter Young and his acolytes, and more recently Professor Malcolm Wanklyn did not include Worcester in his volume of *Decisive Battles of the English Civil War*, robustly explaining and justifying its omission. It is generally covered quite briefly in overall military histories of the civil war and even Malcolm Atkin's book on the battle is in fact much fuller on the broader campaign and the events leading up to 3 September than it is on the fighting which took place on that day.

Indeed, at Worcester the outcome seemed clear and almost inevitable, even to the Scottish general, Leslie, who reportedly was very downcast in the days leading up to the engagement and was well aware that his side was doomed. Cromwell had a vastly superior army at his disposal, in terms of numbers but also in quality and morale. With such a huge inbuilt advantage, it would have taken a fool of a general to squander it and achieve anything other than a complete victory, and Cromwell was no fool. He had the luxury of being able to take his time, to lay careful plans and to launch his attack at a time and place(s) of his choosing. Thus the battle and wider campaign of

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Worcester fascinates me not so much for the nuts and bolts of the events of 3 September but for the light they throw on Cromwell and on aspects of his personality and generalship, his character and faith.

Firstly, the road to Worcester began with a bold ploy on Cromwell's behalf: the Worcester campaign opened with something of a calculated Cromwellian gamble. Although not all are convinced, I am one of those historians who argue that in summer 1650 Cromwell deliberately tempted the Scottish-royalist army out from their stronghold in and around Stirling. He did so both by carrot and by stick. The stick was the forced crossing of the Firth of Forth and the throwing of most of his army north into Fife and beyond to the fringes of Perthshire during July, thereby threatening to outflank the Scottish army but also more importantly to occupy the rich agricultural land and its produce upon which the enemy forces in Stirling depended. The carrot was the manner in which, as a direct consequence of redeploying most of his army, Cromwell left southern, lowland Scotland thinly guarded – quite deliberately and consciously, I believe – thus leaving the road south temptingly open. Of course, he could not have been certain that the Scottish army would drive south into England – they might have marched out to engage Cromwell's forces somewhere in Fife or Perthshire, they might have chosen to move only a little south and to make a stand somewhere in the lowlands of their home country; and equally, if they did drive into England and presumably vaguely towards London, Cromwell could not have been sure what route they would have taken and where they might have halted or been halted. But by his gamble, Cromwell made it impossible for them to stay in and around Stirling any longer and he was prepared to accept the consequences, even if that meant a Scottish-royalist army marching into England.

Why did Cromwell take this calculated risk? He and his army had been bogged down in Scotland for months, occupying the lowlands and the central belt, but unwilling and unable to mount a frontal attack on the rebuilt Scottish army in and around heavily-fortified Stirling and unable to tempt it out to fight in the open and away from the highlands. Like many members of his army, Cromwell had suffered during the previous Scottish winter – during the winter of 1650–51 his army had been decimated by illness and mortality and Cromwell himself had been laid up sick and at times reportedly near death in Edinburgh for several months. By late July

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1651 Cromwell was already thinking with horror about the approaching Scottish winter and was determined to avoid having to spend a second winter season in Scotland. In his letter of 4 August, with the Scottish army now on the move, Cromwell wrote in a relaxed style that although the Scottish expedition into England ‘will trouble some men’s thoughts and may occasion some inconveniences’, he was confident that with God’s support such inconveniences – a word he used several times – would be overcome and that in any case this was much, much better than carrying on as things had been going, as that ‘would occasion another winter’s war, to the ruin of your soldiery’, noting too the extreme problems ‘of enduring the winter difficulties of this country’. He went on to admit that he could have prevented the Scots from entering England by keeping his army south of Stirling, ‘but how to remove him out of this place, without doing what we have done ... is not clear to us’. Hence, I am convinced that the Worcester campaign opened with, and was triggered by, Cromwell’s deliberate decision both to force and to tempt the Scottish-royalist army out of Stirling by leaving the road south into England open, rather than risk the existing stalemate continuing and dragging on into a second winter. While Cromwell is not generally portrayed as a gambling man in military matters, this decision was perhaps not so out of keeping. After all, in summer 1648 he had – again, I think, deliberately – fallen in behind, that is to the north of, the Scottish-royalist army as it moved southwards through Lancashire, far from blocking and instead in principle leaving open the road to London, but ensuring that his enemies did not have the option of falling back northwards and seeking sanctuary in their homeland. This was also the Cromwell who several times in his military career – successfully at Burley House and Crowland in 1643, at Basing House in 1645 and at Drogheda and Wexford in 1649, though with less success at Pembroke in 1648 and Clonmel in 1650 – preferred briefly to bombard and then swiftly to attempt to storm an enemy-held stronghold rather than, like Fairfax at Raglan in 1646 and Colchester in 1648 and like many other senior commanders, opting for the slower but safer approach of surrounding, isolating and starving out an enemy garrison.

But if the Worcester campaign opened with a big gamble, thereafter – and secondly – we see a far more familiar side to Cromwell’s generalship: careful, thorough, meticulous and very much in control. Even though the precise ground of the end-game was not in his hands – in the end the

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Scottish-royalists chose to make their stand at Worcester, but they might have forced an entry into Shrewsbury and fortified that town, they might perhaps have chosen to make their stand at Bridgnorth, they might have tried to push on to Gloucester, they might have turned west and perhaps occupied Hereford – and even though the region was not personally familiar to him (hitherto he had never campaigned in or marched through Shropshire and Worcestershire) Cromwell seemed to have had the measure of his opponents and had little fear of them now they were in England. He directed, martialled and coordinated the efforts of various English-based forces, both units and regiments of the regular army and bodies of militia, progressively to mass around the Scottish-royalist position and hem it in. Meanwhile, marching south from Scotland, Cromwell and his own army followed a slightly circuitous route, swinging through Yorkshire and the Midlands in order to pick up reinforcements and supplies there, rather than directly following the Scottish-royalists along the main west coast route and then down the Severn valley. His planning for the final engagement was equally thorough, placing his main forces east and south of Worcester, with bridges of boats permitting good communications between those two positions and a strong mobile reserve in hand to be deployed where needed, while further units were stationed north and west of the city, to block or at least to give early warning of any enemy attempts to break out and escape in those directions.

With Worcester encircled and possessing such superior numbers, Cromwell seemed from the outset determined to force the issue, confident enough to attack and attempt to storm the city even had the Scottish-royalists not come out to contest the territory south and east of Worcester. There is not much evidence that Cromwell was ever minded to pursue the alternative strategy of tightly surrounding and besieging the city, no sign that he even began throwing up significant siegeworks – lines of circumvallation, earthwork mounts and suchlike. In any case, he was well aware that with so many men squeezed into Worcester, the Scottish-royalist forces were in no position to endure and resist a siege and that fighting their way out was their only option if they were to avoid depredation and starvation. The care he took in planning and supplying the whole parliamentary operation, with the gathering and deployment of his vastly superior resources, in placing and using his troops and in doing all he could to guard against blunders and unexpected eventualities as well as against enemy tactics, are all marks of

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Cromwell's campaign and battle plan and are consistent with his military approach through much of the war and his career; they are all reflections of his confidence, his care and his experience.

A third and perhaps less characteristic feature of Cromwell's approach was the choice of the date for the battle – 3 September. Cromwell and the bulk of his army were close by at Evesham by 27 August, fully a week before the battle actually commenced. True, his men needed or would benefit from some rest following their march from Scotland before offering battle at their optimum; true, Cromwell needed to carry and secure the crossing of the Severn at Upton, move a large body of troops up the west side of the Severn and construct the twin bridges of boats spanning the Severn and Teme close to their confluence. But even so, I contend that, had he wished to do so, Cromwell could have had everything in place and could have given or forced battle well before 3 September. Instead, I believe that he deliberately held things back a little, to ensure that the battle of Worcester would take place on the precise first anniversary of that great, unexpected, against-the-odds and God-given victory at Dunbar. It would be wrong, I think, to suggest that Cromwell was superstitious in the modern sense or that he saw 3 September as his lucky day exactly. He may have chosen that date for the Worcester fight in the hope of unnerving and demoralising his Scottish-royalist opponents. He might also have believed that God's support would have been evident if he gave battle on the precise anniversary of the Lord's dramatic intervention on the hillside above Dunbar. In several letters he wrote after the battle, Cromwell specifically and pointedly drew attention to the fact that Dunbar and Worcester had been fought on the same day, exactly a year apart, and this neat anniversary – no coincidence, I think, but deliberately engineered by Cromwell – seemed to attract and affect him. When, a little over two years later, a group of very senior army officers drew up a written constitution for the new Protectoral regime, apparently in consultation with Cromwell and elevating him to be head of state as Lord Protector, between them they chose 3 September 1654, the fourth anniversary of Dunbar and the third anniversary of Worcester, as the date upon which the first Protectorate parliament would assemble and open. That date had no particular worth or significance in terms of the operation of the Protectoral regime or of parliamentary business. It is another sign that the date of Dunbar, deliberately followed for that of the Worcester

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fight, had become so symbolic or totemic to Cromwell and those close to him.

Fourthly and lastly, the campaign, the battle and its outcome all reflect and display once again that fervent – dare one say almost self-fulfilling? – belief in an interventionist, providential and supportive God that had become so central to Cromwell’s belief system and whole career. Writing to the Speaker during the third week of July, Cromwell had portrayed the decision to throw most of his army across the Firth of Forth and into Fife – the manoeuvre that had precipitated the whole Worcester campaign – as done at the direction of God: ‘After our waiting upon the Lord and not knowing what course to take, for indeed we know nothing but what God pleaseth to teach us of His great mercy, we were directed to send a party to get us a landing’. The letters he wrote during August, as he was moving southwards from Scotland, drip with references to God’s support and to doing the Lord’s work. Here he is writing from Stratford-upon-Avon during the fourth week of August, urging political backsliders to throw their weight behind the campaign and its godly cause: ‘Now you have an opportunity to associate with His people, in His work and to manifest your willingness and desire to serve the Lord against His and His people’s enemies’. With battle just over, resting somewhere on the outskirts of Worcester, at 10 pm on the evening of 3 September, Cromwell wrote a hurried note to the Speaker, briefly reporting the great victory just secured that day, ‘remarkable for a mercy vouchsafed to your forces on this day twelvemonth since in Scotland’, and, as always, ascribing the newly-won victory not to his own abilities as general or even to the mortal and martial skills of his men, but to God: ‘Indeed this hath been a very glorious mercy. The Lord God Almighty frame our hearts to real thankfulness for this work, which is alone His doing’. The thanks and obligations due to the Lord were themes in the much fuller, far better known and oft-quoted letter on the battle which Cromwell wrote the following day [and which was read in full as part of the Cromwell Day service].

In due course, Cromwell came to rue the failure of the parliamentary regime to give due thanks to God for the divine mercy at Worcester by pushing ahead with godly reform, and in hindsight he saw the months and years after the battle as a period of disappointment and missed opportunities. But in the short term at least, Cromwell was buoyed up by the events of 3

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September 1651, his beliefs confirmed and the future seeming bright through the assured and newly-demonstrated love of God: ‘The dimensions of this mercy are above my thoughts ... It is for ought I know a crowing mercy’. As we gather today in this great cathedral church to mark and commemorate, to celebrate and mourn, the great fight at Worcester, we remember the triumph and the tragedy of Charles II’s only battle and Oliver Cromwell’s last battle.

Peter Gaunt is Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Chester and President of the Cromwell Association.

OLIVER CROMWELL
REGICIDE AND KINGSHIP, 1647–1658

by Dr Jonathan Fitzgibbons

In December 1653 a man who was a commoner by birth, a mere gentleman at best, and who had spent most of the first forty years of his life living in relative obscurity in East Anglia, became ruler of Britain.¹ For that reason alone Oliver Cromwell is worthy of our attention. Yet, in many ways, his meteoric rise has also led to a number of misunderstandings, misrepresentations and manipulations of his life and legacy. Nowhere was this more apparent than in that most depressing of periods in British history: the Restoration of King Charles II. Unsurprisingly, there were few willing – or able – to defend Cromwell’s reputation after 1660. Former friends and perennial enemies alike were quite prepared to attribute all the supposed evils and misdeeds of the previous two decades to his overbearing and malign influence.

Most obviously, it is in this period that we get colourful stories about Cromwell being the maniacal driving force behind Charles Stuart’s execution. Algernon Sidney, writing to his father the Earl of Leicester in 1660, claimed that he failed to convince Cromwell to abandon the trial, receiving the curt response that ‘we will cut off his head with the crown upon it.’² Others pleaded coercion, such as Richard Ingoldsby who claimed that his cousin Cromwell had ‘held him by violence’ and physically forced his hand to write his name on Charles’s death warrant.³ Ingoldsby, who had helped to bring about Charles II’s return, and who profited greatly from the appreciative monarch, needed a convenient way to explain his previous actions. Yet, the falsity of Ingoldsby’s story is as plain as his neatly formed signature on the death warrant.⁴ Clearly, there were many who had been caught up in the regicide, or were suspected by the Restoration authorities of complicity, that were quite prepared to reinvent the past, safe in the knowledge that dead men tell no tales. Lucy Hutchinson, for one, fumed against those who ‘for excuse... said they were under the awe of the army and overpersuaded by Cromwell.’⁵ His name alone became synonymous with the regicide. As one publication from 1660 put it, the High Court of Justice that tried Charles was more properly styled ‘Cromwell’s bloody slaughter-house.’⁶

Cromwell’s steadfast, burning desire to see Charles executed was attributed to the fact that he coveted power, and the crown, for himself. The charge

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was not a new one; it had already been articulated in numerous pro-Royalist tracts in the wake of the regicide, such as the printed ballad of 1649 entitled *A Coffin for King Charles; A Crowne for Cromwell*, which opens with Oliver proclaiming that:

So, so, the deed is done,
the Royal head is severed
As I meant, when I first begun
and strongly have endeavoured.
Now Charles the first is tumbled down,
the second, I not fear:
I grasp the Sceptre, wear the Crown,
nor the Jehovah care.⁷

After 1660, however, a number of memoirs written by former parliamentarians also stressed the self-serving motives behind Cromwell's actions from late 1640 onwards.⁸ Most notably, there are the memoirs of the lawyer Bulstrode Whitelocke, published posthumously in late 1681 as the *Memorials of the English Affairs*, which is built around a narrative of Cromwell's duplicitous nature and single-minded aim to be king.⁹ It is in Whitelocke's post-Restoration recollections that we find some of the most important evidence to show that Cromwell coveted the Crown, including, most infamously of all, a private conversation in St James's Park in 1652 when Cromwell ominously asked Whitelocke the question: 'What if a man should take upon him to be King?'¹⁰ It was at this point, according to Whitelocke, that he began to discern Cromwell's 'ambitious designs.'¹¹

Yet, the testimony of Whitelocke and others should be taken with a pinch of salt.¹² Like many former parliamentarians after the Restoration, Whitelocke hoped to escape the political wilderness. He tried to explain away the fact that he had been an acolyte of the Cromwellian regime by portraying himself as a dupe of Cromwell's ambitious schemes. Yet, this pleasing narrative failed to explain away the uncomfortable truth that Whitelocke had actually been one of the leading lights behind the offer of the Crown to Cromwell in 1657. More damaging still for those who stressed Cromwell's secret designs was the fact that he refused the proffered title, despite the repeated arguments of Whitelocke and other MPs concerning the absolute necessity of him accepting.¹³ Some tried to explain away this

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refusal by suggesting that Cromwell was forced by the army to abandon the thing that he had so long aimed at.¹⁴ Yet one is left feeling that Cromwell's ambition, if it burned as strongly as his accusers claimed it did, should really have been made of sterner stuff.

This article strips back the post-Restoration veneer to uncover the realities of Cromwell's political career from the late 1640s through to his death in 1658. Specifically, it will focus on the trial of Charles Stuart, and the motivations behind it, as well as exploring Cromwell's attitudes towards the abolition of kingship that followed the regicide. Finally, it briefly examines Cromwell's reign as Lord Protector and the extent to which the regime was a monarchy in all but name. Above all, it will show that Cromwell was no hypocrite. Instead, it is important to appreciate that for Cromwell – as for many others in the 1640s and 50s – political considerations waited on religious ones. Political forms and titles were relatively unimportant for Cromwell; they were a means to an end. As he would famously put it during the debates of the army council at Putney in late 1647, they were but 'dross and dung in comparison of Christ.'¹⁵ It is his lack of care about titles or forms of government that makes Oliver Cromwell worth caring about.

Leaving aside the jaundiced testimony of his enemies or the self-serving memoirs of his former friends, the reality behind Cromwell's role and motives in bringing Charles Stuart to account is conspicuously murky. Of course, he did not act alone; his signature was the third of fifty-nine affixed to the king's death warrant. At the same time, however, his voice was likely to have been louder, or more influential, than many others at this point. With Fairfax sidelined from the political stage, unwilling to take part in the trial, Cromwell had effectively become *de facto* leader of the army. The real frustration is that so little direct testimony survives containing Cromwell's thoughts and actions during this crucial period. His illuminating letters, written regularly to family and colleagues while on campaign, appear to have dried up once he had returned to London and was in the thick of the political drama being played out. Instead, we are left to feed off evidential scraps from contemporary reports and newsbooks, as well as the vital, but treacherous, testimony provided in post-Restoration memoirs and reflections.

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We can, however, draw some conclusions from Cromwell's actions and utterances in the months prior to December 1648, when his thoughts are much better documented. Certainly, this evidence suggests that if Cromwell was a committed regicide, he became one only relatively late in the day.¹⁶

It is something of a historical cliché to note that at the outbreak of Civil War in 1642 nobody took up arms for parliament to kill the king. The parliamentarians claimed to fight for king *and* parliament; they wanted to liberate Charles from the malign influence of his evil counsellors, not to remove him, much less to execute him. Even after the First Civil War was over, Cromwell and his fellow army officers worked for a settlement with Charles.¹⁷ Things changed, however, in late 1647 with the famous debates of the army council at Putney. Many in the army had grown dissatisfied with the ongoing negotiations with Charles. The king continually prevaricated, trying to play various factions off against one another in the hope of a better deal. During the Putney debates it was clear that some in the army's lower ranks had given up all hope of settling with Charles. As trooper Edward Sexby furiously informed his superiors: 'We have laboured to please a King and I think, except we go about to cut all our throats, we shall not please him.'¹⁸ Some soldiers even hinted that Charles must go. For Captain George Bishop it was sinful for the army to 'preserve that Man of Blood.'¹⁹

Cromwell, who chaired the meetings at Putney in place of the conspicuously absent Fairfax, listened patiently to these rebukes from his soldiers but was unmoved. While he admitted sharing the concerns of those who did not trust the king, he urged those who wanted to remove Charles to 'wait upon God for such a way when the thing may be done without sin, and without scandal too.'²⁰ So, in late 1647, it seems that Cromwell was not yet advocating removing Charles, but he was not ruling it out in the future either.

Charles I's subsequent actions changed Cromwell's mind on the matter. In November 1647, the king escaped from army captivity only to be recaptured shortly after on the Isle of Wight. Whilst there he concluded an Engagement with supporters in Scotland who committed to raise an army to put Charles back on the English throne. The result was a Second Civil War with a Scottish invasion of England and a series of localised Royalist risings. All

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were easily suppressed, with the Scottish invaders being routed by Cromwell at Preston in August 1648.

By this point Cromwell had decided that Charles must be removed. He had a firm belief in divine providence – the notion that all that happened in the world was part of God’s greater design.²¹ Nowhere was the working of God’s providence clearer than on the battlefield. The First Civil War ended with the utter defeat of the Royalists – for Cromwell and the soldiers of the New Model Army, there could be no more obvious sign that God favoured the cause of parliament over that of the king. And yet, despite these divine signs, Charles had the temerity to provoke a Second Civil War. As Cromwell put it in a letter in November 1648: ‘their fault who have appeared in this summer’s business [the Second Civil War], is certainly double to theirs who were in the first, because it is the repetition of the same offence against all the witnesses that God has borne.’²² As Captain Bishop’s remarks at Putney demonstrate, many in the army turned to a key passage in the Book of Numbers to explain the king’s guilt and to prescribe the necessary remedy:

So ye shall not pollute the Land wherein ye are; for blood it defileth the Land, and the Land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.²³

Charles’s actions were sinful; to avoid that sin falling on the whole nation it was imperative that he be brought to account for the blood he had shed.

The army’s plans to this effect were clearly stated in the *Remonstrance* of the General Council of Officers, penned by Cromwell’s son-in-law Henry Ireton in November 1648. It demanded unambiguously that ‘the capital and grand author of our troubles, the person of the king... may be speedily brought to justice, for the treason, blood and mischief, he is... guilty of.’²⁴ The problem for Cromwell and the army, however, was that the majority in parliament wanted to continue negotiating with Charles, not to bring him to justice. The army’s response was Pride’s Purge on 6 December 1648, which saw Colonel Thomas Pride arrest those MPs sympathetic to continuing negotiations with Charles. This left a radical remnant, known as the Rump Parliament, which went on to make preparations for the king’s trial.

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Yet Cromwell played little direct role in these events. He was not even in London as the army's plans came to fruition – rather he remained in the north of England mopping up the last outposts of Royalist resistance at Pontefract. It was left to Ireton to galvanise the army into action. Cromwell did not actually arrive in London until the evening after Pride's Purge. According to the post-Restoration memoirs of one of his critics, Edmund Ludlow, Cromwell upon hearing of the purge professed that he 'had not been acquainted with this design; yet since it was done, he was glad of it, and would endeavour to maintain it.'²⁵

Yet, it seems unlikely that Cromwell really knew nothing of the events unfolding in London while he meandered his way south. Cromwell was certainly no political innocent. As Blair Worden neatly puts it Cromwell: at many crucial times in his political career, was 'practised at not knowing.'²⁶ He was certainly aware of, and endorsed, the army's plans to cease negotiations with Charles I and to bring him to account. In a letter of late November 1648 to his cousin Robert Hammond, then serving as the king's jailor on the Isle of Wight, Cromwell made clear his opinion that no good could be expected from Charles, who he pointedly described as 'this Man, against whom the Lord hath witnessed.'²⁷

Perhaps Cromwell knew of the plans to purge parliament, but was happy to let others do the dirty work while he serenely rode down to London from the north. Ultimately, however, this apparent squeamishness over purging parliament did not make him any less committed to the king's trial. Some scholars have argued that Cromwell was actually something of a reluctant regicide; while he clearly believed that Charles should no longer be king, he did not necessarily want to see him executed. They point to the fact that he tried to work for other options through a series of backroom dealings, hoping to broker a deal that would have seen Charles abdicate in favour of one of his children, most likely the infant Duke of Gloucester. Yet, there is very little evidence to support such a conclusion. It is based primarily upon the vague information of foreign diplomats and the wishful thinking of Royalist commentators who refused to believe the army would go through with the king's execution.²⁸

The most frequently noted example of Cromwell's moderation is the so-called 'Denbigh mission' of late December 1648. Allegedly, Basil Fielding,

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Earl of Denbigh, was sent by Cromwell to Charles at Windsor in order to offer him propositions that, had he accepted, would have saved the king's life and precluded the need for a trial. Yet, despite this mission being a staple of historical narratives of the period, it seems that it never occurred. As Mark Kishlansky and Clive Holmes have demonstrated, there is no evidence to suggest that Denbigh ever met with Charles, meaning the king was in no position to hear or reject the supposed propositions for a settlement.²⁹ Moreover, the sole remaining source that alludes to Denbigh's visit to Windsor, a dispatch by the French agent Sieur de Grignon, claims that the mission was actually a ruse by Cromwell to push on the army's plans against Charles; it was a pretence to 'draw from the king declarations he [Cromwell] will use afterward either to destroy him or obtain his abdication with even more appearance of justice.'³⁰ At best, then, the mission was a plot by Cromwell and the army to ensnare Charles; at worst it was just a rumour – one of many tall tales being propagated by commentators at the time, anxious for any scrap of information about what was going on. Either way, it certainly does not provide compelling evidence that Cromwell had cold feet about bringing the king to account.

In fact, by paying too much credence to these unlikely stories of backroom dealings to save Charles we lose something of the essence of Cromwell. These tales seem to downplay or diminish the religious zeal that drove him, and the army, forward and turn him into the Machiavellian, scheming figure that his enemies later portrayed him to be. He comes across as a man guided by *realpolitik* rather than principle.

Perhaps more revealing, and more certain, in terms of accessing the mindset and motivations of Cromwell and his fellow officers at this point were the debates of the General Council of Officers at Whitehall from December 1648 over the so-called *Officers' Agreement of the People*. Besides debating and revising the Leveller-inspired constitutional document, the officers also devoted much time to seeking God's guidance in the business of the king's trial and the settlement of the nation. Not only did they search scripture for divine inspiration but they also looked for providential signs. It was in this context that the prophetess of Abingdon, Elizabeth Poole, was examined before the Council on 29 December 1648. Poole described a vision she had seen in which 'a member of the army' had given succour to an old ailing woman that represented the 'weak and imperfect distressed state of the

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land.³¹ The officers seemed to have taken the vision as confirmation of God's approbation for their actions and their need to press on with the king's trial. Tellingly, this was one of the few meetings of the Council that Cromwell actually attended during this period, albeit there is no record of him speaking. Perhaps it demonstrates that Cromwell was keen to hear Poole's vision, either for reassurance or guidance. Above all, however, it reinforces the view that the army were being guided not by political calculation but by divine inspiration.

Even more interesting was the sequel to Poole's prophecy. On 5 January 1649 she again appeared before the officers to tell them that she now had doubts about the army's actions and seemed to warn against regicide. Interestingly, however, the officers seemed much more sceptical about Poole's testimony on this occasion. One gets the impression that the officers only heard what they wanted to hear. Convinced that God was pointing the way towards the king's trial and execution they welcomed signs that confirmed them in that opinion and viewed with suspicion anything that suggested the contrary.³²

Of course, Cromwell and others who went on to try the king would not have been oblivious to the potential dangers of their proceedings. The king's judges would have been well aware that regicide would produce a backlash at home and abroad. Besides the threat of invasion from Royalist sympathisers in Scotland and Ireland, there was also the chance that the execution of the king could leave England alienated from the monarchies of Europe.³³ There could also have been concerns of personal risk for those who sat in judgment against their king – albeit they could hardly have known in 1649 that Charles's son would return to the throne in the future to take his revenge.

And yet, despite these obvious, worldly, considerations concerning the consequences of trying Charles Stuart, Cromwell persisted. He did so because he, like the majority in the army, was genuinely of the opinion that they had a divine mandate to do so, and that to allow Charles to go unpunished would bring sin upon the nation. The blood of the Civil Wars had to be answered for by the spilling of Charles's blood. Such considerations far outweighed any political calculations – before any settlement could be effected they must first get their spiritual affairs in

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order. It was this ordering of priorities – of making political considerations wait on religious ones that was the consistent theme of Cromwell’s political career.

It is also for this reason that, despite his role in Charles I’s execution, Cromwell was never really a republican. He was not ideologically committed to government without a king. He saw fault with Charles but not necessarily with monarchy. Certainly, there were others who acted as the king’s judges, men like Henry Marten, who saw the regicide as the necessary prelude to the abolition of kingship. Cromwell, however, seems not to have had such an aim in mind. While there are hints that he was already discussing the nature of a settlement in late 1648 with MPs and lawyers, it seems that a monarchical future remained on the table at that point.³⁴ Cromwell subsequently gave his support to the kingless Commonwealth regime but he had apparently not pushed for that outcome. That settlement was devised by others, by men who had taken part in the king’s trial – like Marten and Thomas Scot – and others who had stayed away from those proceedings – like Bulstrode Whitelocke.³⁵ As with Pride’s Purge, it seems that when it came to finessing the constitutional arrangements of 1649 Cromwell followed where others led.

Most of all, however, it seems that Cromwell accepted the abolition of kingship because he became convinced that it was part of the path along which God’s providence was leading the nation. Perhaps most instructive on this point is a section from Whitelocke’s memoirs, expunged from the later printed edition, that describes a dinner he purportedly had with Cromwell and Ireton a little under a month after the regicide, and a couple of weeks after the decision to abolish kingship. At that meeting both Cromwell and his son-in-law spoke of ‘many miraculous observations of God’s providence, in the affairs of the war, and in the business of the army’s coming to London and seizing the members of the house, in all which were wonderful passages’. Whitelocke is conspicuously silent on whether Cromwell and Ireton further discoursed upon the miraculous nature of the regicide and the abolition of kingship too, but he does admit that the sheer confidence of both men in God’s guiding hand ‘did greatly confirm me in my present resolutions’ to serve the new republican regime.³⁶ Of course, after the Restoration, it was easy enough for men like Whitelocke to claim that such professions were merely a cover for Cromwell’s ambitious designs.

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Yet, one wonders how many more threw in their lot with the new regime having been impressed by the singular conviction of Cromwell and the officers in God's greater design.

Moving away from Whitelocke's dubious testimony, however, the most important and direct statement on Cromwell's attitude towards the abolition of kingship undoubtedly came eight years later when he was confronted by parliament's offer of the Crown. As David Smith discusses elsewhere in this volume, and as Blair Worden has brilliantly explained, Cromwell made clear that he could not accept the kingly title because God's providence had witnessed against.³⁷ As he put it to a committee of MPs on 13 April 1657, 'truly the Providence of God hath laid aside this title of King providentially de facto... He blasted the very title ... I will not seek to set up that, that Providence hath destroyed, and laid in the dust.'³⁸ While the MPs and lawyers tried to convince Cromwell of the substantial legal and constitutional advantages that made kingship the ideal form of government, Cromwell held firm in his conviction that the will of God must outweigh any worldly considerations.

Yet, if Cromwell professed to oppose the kingly title on religious grounds there remains the uncomfortable truth that, following his rise to power as Lord Protector in 1653, and despite his refusal of the Crown in 1657, he looked and acted increasingly like a monarch. The title itself – Lord Protector – had previously been used by one who ruled in the stead of a king due to the incapacity of the rightful monarch through infancy or senility. In his official proclamations and pronouncements, Oliver began adopting the royal 'we'. The Protectoral great seal, used to literally give the seal of approval to important documents, mimicked the design used by former monarchs and abandoned the radical republican imagery of the seal used by the Commonwealth regime of the Rump Parliament. Cromwell lived like a king too, taking up residence in the former royal palaces of Whitehall and Hampton Court – both of which were lavishly decorated with what remained of Charles I's art collection.³⁹

Certainly, focusing on the outward displays of Protectoral power could lead to the conclusion that Cromwell's five years in power as Lord Protector are hardly worth bothering with. It was a pseudo-monarchy; Cromwell was a 'King In All But Name'.⁴⁰ The Protectorate, it could be argued, marked a

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conservative retreat from the radical, exhilarating moments of the king's execution and the abolition of kingship. It was a period of constitutional backsliding that made the restoration of monarchy a matter of when, not if.

Yet, by focusing too much on the similarities between Cromwell and the monarchs that preceded him, there is a danger that many significant differences are overlooked. For one thing, Cromwell as Lord Protector ruled a united Britain – England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland – under a single government, something that no previous ruler had done before. Even more importantly, his government was founded upon written constitutions – *The Instrument of Government* of 1653, subsequently supplanted by the *Humble Petition and Advice* of 1657.⁴¹ The significance of these documents should not be understated. For the first time the rules of government were written down and clarified. While these constitutions were far from perfect, and left significant loopholes for the Protector to act arbitrarily, they did provide remedies for many of the constitutional issues that had plagued Britain on the eve of the Civil Wars. Regular meetings of fixed-term parliaments were guaranteed, liberty of conscience in religion was safeguarded and the exercise of the single person's executive powers was to be supervised, if not totally restrained. If the Protectorate was a monarchy, it was very much a new-modelled monarchy, founded upon political ideas that had evolved and matured during the 1640s among the advocates of the parliamentary cause.

Even the more monarchical of the two Cromwellian constitutions, *The Humble Petition and Advice*, which initially included the offer of kingship, was far from advocating a straightforward restoration of the ancient constitution. A good example of this is the provision in the document for the creation of a new parliamentary upper chamber or 'Other House'. Since the abolition of the House of Lords in 1649, parliaments had been unicameral, comprising of only an elected House of Commons. The 1657 constitution, however, created a new upper chamber but it was not a revival of the House of Lords. It was a chamber with a capped membership of just seventy, all of whom were to be chosen by the Lord Protector and approved by the Commons. The members were not hereditary like the House of Lords – they were effectively life peers with their replacements being chosen by both Houses of Parliament. When choosing the members of this new Other House, Cromwell gave some seats to the old peers – to his former

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political allies like Lord Wharton and Viscount Saye. But he also filled it with new men – men who had fought with him in the wars or had since distinguished themselves in the Cromwellian administration. Most importantly of all, he chose men whose religious principles he knew and trusted. His primary aim in creating this Other House was to have a chamber that could effectively police the religious intolerance of the Commons by blocking any proposed legislation that would frustrate his ideal of liberty of conscience.⁴² Once again, it seems that for Cromwell religious considerations guided his political decisions.

That the Cromwellian Protectorate looked like a monarchy is understandable. In many ways, the failure of the Republican regime that had preceded it had been the failure to forge a republican culture.⁴³ The rule of the Rump Parliament was unloved not just because of the peculation of its members, but because early modern Britain was a society obsessed with precedent and the past. Anything that smacked of novelty, or deviated from past proceedings or customs, was viewed with deep suspicion. That the Cromwellian authorities felt the need to draw on royal imagery and forms to present Cromwell and his regime to the public is therefore understandable. As Cromwell conceded during his deliberations with MPs over the offer of the kingly title, ‘the people do love what they know’ – and it was monarchy that they knew best.⁴⁴ By dressing up constitutional innovation in monarchical clothing, by making the new and radical look old and conservative, the Cromwellian authorities hoped to secure support for the Protectorate. Certainly, it is for this reason that, following Cromwell’s death, the Council of State, facing the usual concerns over security and stability that plagued the succession of rulers in the early modern period, decided to give Cromwell a royal funeral, complete with a life-sized wax effigy of the late Lord Protector in full royal garb and with a crown upon its head. Yet, we must not take such imagery or ceremony at face value. Then, as now, spectacle and image was used to conceal as well as promote the realities of political power. It was precisely because Cromwell was not a king, and would not be a king, that he had to be made to look like one.

On 30 January 1661, the corpses of Oliver Cromwell, Henry Ireton and John Bradshaw were dragged to Tyburn and subjected to a truly sickening

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ritual. After hanging from the Triple Tree from morning to sunset, the bodies were cut down and decapitated. The heads were subsequently displayed prominently atop Westminster Hall, the very building in which the three men had sat in judgement against Charles II's father.⁴⁵ This literal unearthing of the past sat awkwardly with attempts to bury the events of the previous decades through legislation that offered pardon and oblivion to former parliamentarians. Yet, the grizzly scene at Tyburn was emblematic of those post-Restoration attempts, outlined at the beginning of this article, to discredit and vilify the late Lord Protector as the Machiavellian super-villain of the 1640s and 50s.

This is not to say that the accusations levelled against Cromwell after 1660 did not have grains of truth in them – all good legends have to bear some relation to reality. Clearly, Cromwell had been a key player, first in army circles and later in political affairs, following the Second Civil War. Doubtless he, along with Ireton and a coterie of radical Independent MPs, had a prominent role in the king's trial and execution. Yet, it seems that the real driving force behind those events was not Cromwell but God – or rather, the army officers' understanding of the divine will following on from their easy victory in 1648 and the various signs and messages they had received through biblical exegesis and divine messengers like Elizabeth Poole. It was this sheer conviction that the New Model Army was an army of Saints, or God's Instruments, that drove them on, and even carried more moderate figures along with them.

Cromwell's providential thinking also meant that he was not particularly attached to forms of government. As in the church, so in the state, Cromwell did not believe that forms should be rigid or fixed. They were a means to an end and nothing more. Perhaps he regretted the abandonment of kingship in 1649, but he accepted it as God's will. It is also for this reason that in 1657 he could not accept the revival of the kingly title, warning that it was an accursed thing that would bring sin upon both himself and the nation. It was this fact, that Oliver was the man who would not be king, which still makes him worth caring about today. At a time when many still believed that precedent and tradition were everything, Cromwell saw them as nothing in comparison to what he believed were the greater designs of the Almighty.

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- ¹ S.C. Lomas (ed.), *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, with Elucidations by Thomas Carlyle* (3 vols, London, 1904) [hereafter cited as Carlyle-Lomas], ii. 367 (speech of 12 Sept. 1654).
- ² R.W. Blencowe (ed.), *Sydney Papers, Consisting of A Journal of the Earl of Leicester, and Original Letters of Algernon Sydney* (London, 1825), 237.
- ³ Edward Hyde, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (Oxford, 1843), 906.
- ⁴ ‘The Death Warrant of King Charles I’, Parliamentary Archives, London, HL/PO/JO/10/1/297A.
- ⁵ *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, ed. N.H. Keeble (London, 1995), 234–5.
- ⁶ John Gauden, *Cromwell’s bloody slaughter-house* (London, 1660).
- ⁷ Anon., *A coffin for King Charles; a crowne for Cromwell* (London, 1649).
- ⁸ See, for example, *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, ed. C.H. Firth (2 vols, Oxford, 1894).
- ⁹ For more on the history of the memoirs see Blair Worden, ‘The “Diary” of Bulstrode Whitelocke’, *English Historical Review*, 108:426 (1993), 122–134.
- ¹⁰ Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs* (London, 1682), 524. For more on this conversation, see http://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/?page_id=1150
- ¹¹ Whitelocke, *Memorials*, 526.
- ¹² I am also currently working on a research project, funded by the British Academy, which will shed new light on the composition of Whitelocke’s memoirs. Focusing on sections of his memoirs composed in the late 1650s, this project will demonstrate how many of Whitelocke’s earlier views on Cromwell were substantially altered after the Restoration.
- ¹³ The arguments of Whitelocke and others are provided in the anonymously published pamphlet *Monarchy Asserted, To be the best, most Ancient and legall form of Government* (London, 1660).
- ¹⁴ For claims about the army’s influence see *Ludlow Memoirs*, ii. 24–28.

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- 15 C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Clarke Papers* (4 vols, Camden Society, 1891–1901), i. 369–70 (Cromwell to Army Council, 1 Nov. 1647).
- 16 A much more detailed discussion of Cromwell’s attitude towards Charles and the regicide in the period 1647–9, can be found in John Morrill and Philip Baker, ‘Oliver Cromwell, the Regicide and the Sons of Zeruiah’ in Jason Peacey (ed.), *The Regicides and the Execution of Charles I* (Basingstoke, 2001), 14–35.
- 17 The best, and most detailed, discussion of the army’s debates during this period is Austin Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen: the General Council of the Army and its Debates, 1647–1648* (Oxford, 1987).
- 18 *Clarke Papers*, i. 227–8.
- 19 *Clarke Papers*, i. 383.
- 20 *Clarke Papers*, i. 382.
- 21 Blair Worden, ‘Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England’, *Past & Present*, 109:1 (1985), 55–99; Blair Worden, ‘Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan’ in D.L. Smith (ed.), *Cromwell and the Interregnum: The Essential Readings* (Bodmin, 2001), 37–59.
- 22 Carlyle-Lomas, i. 387 (20 Nov. 1648).
- 23 Numbers 35:33 (King James Version).
- 24 *A Remonstrance of His Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax, Lord Generall of the Parliaments Forces And of the Generall Councill of Officers Held at St Albans the 16. of November, 1648* (London, 1648), 62.
- 25 *Ludlow Memoirs*, i. 212.
- 26 Blair Worden, ‘Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 20 (2010), 58.
- 27 Carlyle-Lomas, i. 399 (Letter to Robert Hammond, 25 Nov. 1648).
- 28 A good example of the latter type of evidence is analysed in Jason Peacey, ‘Marchamont Nedham and the Laweans letters’, *Bodleian Library Record*, 17 (2000), 24–35.
- 29 Mark Kishlansky, ‘Mission Impossible: Charles I, Oliver Cromwell and the Regicide’, *English Historical Review*, 125:515 (2010), 843–74; Clive Holmes, ‘The Trial and Execution of Charles I’, *The Historical Journal*, 53:2 (2010), 296–7.
- 30 Grignon’s dispatches are transcribed in Kishlansky ‘Mission Impossible’, 854–55.

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- ³¹ *Clarke Papers*, ii. 150–4; Carolyn Polizzotto, ‘Speaking Truth to Power: The Problem of Authority in the Whitehall Debates of 1648–9’, *English Historical Review*, 131:548 (2016), 54–55.
- ³² Polizzotto, ‘Speaking Truth to Power’, 56–7.
- ³³ For discussion on some of the perceived dangers facing those pursuing the king’s trial see John Adamson, ‘The Frighted Junto: Perceptions of Ireland, and the Last Attempts at Settlement with Charles I’, in Peacey (ed.), *Regicides and the Execution of Charles I* (2001), 36–70.
- ³⁴ The meetings are referenced in Whitelocke’s memoirs, but he is conspicuously opaque when it comes to the actual issues being discussed. See Whitelocke, *Memorials*, 357–8 (entries for 18, 19, 21, 22 & 23 Dec. 1648).
- ³⁵ For a discussion of the preparations for the change of government in the winter of 1648–9, and Cromwell’s possible role in them, see J. Fitzgibbons, ‘Rethinking the English Revolution of 1649’, *Historical Journal*, 60:4 (2017), 889–914.
- ³⁶ BL, Add MS 37344, fol. 265v.
- ³⁷ Blair Worden, ‘Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan’ in D.L. Smith (ed.), *Cromwell and the Interregnum: The Essential Readings* (Bodmin, 2001), 37–59.
- ³⁸ Carlyle-Lomas, iii. 70–1 (speech of 13 April 1657).
- ³⁹ For more on Cromwell and the royal palaces see Paul Hunneyball, ‘Cromwellian Style: The Architectural Trappings of the Protectorate Regime’ in P. Little (ed.), *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Woodbridge, 2007), 53–81; R. Sherwood, *The Court of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1977).
- ⁴⁰ R. Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell: King In All But Name, 1653–1658* (Stroud, 1997).
- ⁴¹ For the text of these two documents see S.R. Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625–1660* (3rd edn, rev., Oxford, 1906), 405–17, 447–64.
- ⁴² For a more detailed study of the ‘Other House’ see Jonathan Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell’s House of Lords: Politics, Parliaments and Constitutional Revolution, 1642–1660* (Woodbridge, 2018).
- ⁴³ For more on the attempt to forge a republican culture by the Commonwealth regime, see Sean Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic: The Political Culture of the English Commonwealth, 1649–1653* (Stanford, 1997). For the

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failure of republican culture and the persistence of monarchical imagery see Kevin Sharpe, ‘“An image dotting rabble”: the failure of republican culture in seventeenth-century England’ in K. Sharpe (ed.), *Remapping Early Modern England: The culture of seventeenth-century politics* (Cambridge, 2000), 223–265.

⁴⁴ Carlyle-Lomas, iii. 54 (speech of 13 Apr. 1657).

⁴⁵ For more on the curious afterlife of Cromwell’s remains see Jonathan Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell’s Head* (Kew, 2008).

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OLIVER CROMWELL AND PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT,
1649–1658

by Dr David L. Smith

From the creation of the English Republic in 1649 until his death in 1658, Oliver Cromwell's relationship with successive Parliaments was often troubled. It is one of the greatest ironies of Cromwell's career that this figure, who played such a pivotal role in the Long Parliament's campaigns against Charles I during the 1640s, should himself have found it so hard to form a stable and fruitful working relationship with Parliaments during the Interregnum. Whether or not it is appropriate to regard Cromwell as a champion of Parliaments remains a highly contentious question. When, in 1899, the former Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery commissioned and funded a magnificent statue of Cromwell by Hamo Thornycroft to be placed outside the Palace of Westminster, it had to be unveiled at a time when Parliament was not sitting for fear of hostile demonstrations. Why, it was asked, should someone so willing to purge or dissolve Parliaments be accorded such a place of honour beside the Houses of Parliament? Indeed, some might argue that with friends like Cromwell, did Parliaments have any need of enemies?¹

Part of the problem surely lies in the paradox that Cromwell appears to have believed in the importance of *a* Parliament within England's constitutional arrangements, but he was never committed to any one Parliament. As he put it in October 1647 at the Putney Debates, he was not 'wedded and glued' to particular 'forms of government.'² Rather, he applied stringent criteria to Parliaments and had very high expectations of what he wished them to achieve. Cromwell's letter to the Speaker of the Rump Parliament, William Lenthall, written the day after the battle of Dunbar, gives a good sense of his challenging agenda for Parliaments. Cromwell told Lenthall:

It is easy to say, the Lord has done this [meaning Cromwell's victory over the Scots at Dunbar on 3 September 1650]. It would do you good to see and hear our poor foot going up and down making their boast of God. But, Sir, it is in your hands, and by these eminent mercies God puts it more into your hands, to give glory to Him; to improve your power, and His blessings, to His praise. We that serve you beg of you not to own us, but God alone; we pray you own His people more and more, for they are the chariots and horsemen of Israel. Disown yourselves, but own your authority, and improve it to

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curb the proud and insolent, such as would disturb the tranquillity of England, though under what specious pretences soever; relieve the oppressed, hear the groans of poor prisoners in England; be pleased to reform the abuses of all professions; and if there be any one that makes many poor to make a few rich, that suits not a Commonwealth.³

Over the years that followed, however, Cromwell became ever more convinced that the Rump was falling short of these lofty ideals, and he grew ever more determined that it should put an end to its existence.

By the spring of 1653 he believed that he had secured the Rump's agreement to dissolve itself, but then, on 20 April he heard that the Rump was planning immediate elections without measures to exclude those whom Cromwell regarded as ungodly. He therefore rushed to Parliament, accompanied by troops, and denounced the members as 'whoremasters' and 'drunkards'. He told them that they had sat there too long for any good that they had been doing, and he ordered them to disperse.⁴ Two days later he published a declaration justifying this action in which he asserted that the Rump 'would never answer those ends which God, His people, and the whole nation expected from them; but ... this cause, which the Lord hath so greatly blessed and borne witness to, must needs languish ... and, by degrees, be wholly lost; and the lives, liberties and comforts of His people delivered into their enemies' hands'. He insisted that there was 'a duty incumbent upon us, who had so much of the power and presence of God going along with us, to consider of some more effectual means to secure the cause which the good people of this Commonwealth had been so long engaged in, and to establish righteousness and peace in these nations.'⁵ In Cromwell's eyes, the Rump had failed to discharge its duty to God's cause and God's people, and it therefore deserved to be dissolved. Yet in so doing, Cromwell had exercised that quintessentially royal prerogative of choosing, at his own discretion, the moment when a Parliament should end. He had also used the threat of force against a sitting Parliament in a manner reminiscent of Charles I's attempted arrest of five members of the Commons in January 1642. As Dorothy Osborne observed, 'if Mr Pym were alive again I wonder what he would think of these proceedings, and whether this would appear as great a breach of the privilege of Parliament as the demanding [of] the five members.'⁶

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Following the dissolution of the Rump, Cromwell probably wielded more power than at any other stage of his career, in the sense that his options were more wide open than they ever were again. Yet those people, both at the time and since, who have seen Cromwell as greedy to concentrate power in his own hands have always found it difficult to explain his next move, which was to establish another kind of Parliament. He adopted a proposal from one of his Army colleagues, the Fifth Monarchist Major-General Thomas Harrison, for a nominated assembly of 140 godly individuals, based on the ancient Jewish Sanhedrin. Convinced that the Rump had betrayed the godly, Cromwell now tried to construct a Parliament consisting exclusively of the godly. One such was the splendidly named Praise-God Barebone, and for this reason the assembly has often been known as Barebone's Parliament.⁷

When Cromwell opened Barebone's Parliament on 4 July 1653, he was full of optimism that this assembly would carry forward God's purpose. His opening speech was one of Cromwell's most exhilarated utterances. He declared: 'Truly God hath called you to this work by, I think, as wonderful providences as ever passed upon the sons of men in so short a time. ... It's come, therefore, to you by the way of necessity; by the wise Providence of God ... God hath owned you in the eyes of the world; and thus, by coming hither, you own Him.' Cromwell urged the members to 'consider the circumstances by which you are called hither; through what strivings, through what blood you are come hither, where neither you, nor I, nor no man living, three months ago, had a thought to have seen such a company taking upon them, or rather being called to take, the supreme authority of this nation! Therefore, own your call!'⁸ Yet Cromwell's optimism soon turned to disappointment as the members of Barebone's became deeply divided over which priorities to pursue. In December 1653 the assembly voted to dissolve itself and to surrender power back to Cromwell, who later described the whole episode as 'a story of my own weakness and folly.'⁹

At this point, Cromwell turned to another of his Army colleagues, Major-General John Lambert, who had been working for several weeks on a written constitution called the Instrument of Government. This constitution made Cromwell Lord Protector, and provided for government 'by a single person and a Parliament.'¹⁰ Parliaments were to be elected triennially and to sit for a minimum of five months. Members had to be 'persons of known

integrity, fearing God, and of good conversation.¹¹ The Lord Protector and the Council were empowered to exclude any whom they believed to fail this test. The new constitution thus placed considerable weight on the relationship between Cromwell and Parliaments. That relationship continued to be problematic, however, and before long the familiar pattern – with Cromwell’s initial high hopes of a Parliament giving way to frustration and disappointment – re-established itself.¹²

Once again, Cromwell displayed a visionary optimism when he opened the first Protectorate Parliament on 4 September 1654. He told members:

You are met here on the greatest occasion that, I believe, England ever saw; having upon your shoulders the interests of three great nations with the territories belonging to them; and truly, I believe I may say it without any hyperbole, you have upon your shoulders the interest of all the Christian people in the world ... It’s one of the great ends of calling this Parliament that this ship of the Commonwealth may be brought into a safe harbour; which, I assure you, it will not well be, without your counsel and advice.¹³

Unfortunately, things went wrong almost from the beginning. Members immediately began tinkering with the Instrument of Government, anxious especially to define the powers of the Protector and his Council more precisely, to reinforce the position of Parliament, and to restrain Cromwell’s desire to extend liberty of conscience. The latter was a particularly contentious point, for Cromwell cared passionately about it and included it as one of the four ‘fundamentals’ which he required members to accept on 12 September 1654 as a condition of their continuing to sit in Parliament. As he told them that day:

Liberty of conscience is a natural right; and he that would have it ought to give it, having liberty to settle what he likes for the public. Indeed, that hath been one of the vanities of our contest. Every sect saith, Oh! Give me liberty. But give him it, and to his power he will not yield it to anybody else. Where is our ingenuousness? Liberty of conscience – truly that’s a thing ought to be very reciprocal.¹⁴

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Yet many of the members, especially those of a Presbyterian persuasion, believed this to be a very dangerous principle which might unlock the spread of ‘damnable heresies.’¹⁵ On this issue, Cromwell was soon at odds with a significant number of members.

By the beginning of 1655, Cromwell had had enough and was determined to be rid of the Parliament at the first possible opportunity. The Instrument of Government stipulated that Parliaments could not be dissolved, except by their own consent, for at least five months, but it did not specify whether this meant five lunar months or five calendar months.¹⁶ Cromwell chose to interpret it as the shorter period, and after precisely five lunar months, on 22 January 1655, he caught members unawares with a snap dissolution. He denounced them for obstructing the progress of liberty of conscience: ‘Is there not yet upon the spirits of men a strange itch? Nothing will satisfy them, unless they can put their finger upon their brethren’s consciences, to pinch them there ... Is it ingenuous to ask liberty, and not to give it? What greater hypocrisy than for those who were oppressed by the Bishops to become the greatest oppressors themselves so soon as their yoke was removed?’ He lamented how they had missed opportunities – ‘the Lord hath done such things amongst us as have not been known in the world these thousand years, and yet notwithstanding is not owned by us’ – and he concluded: ‘I think it my duty to tell you that it is not for the profit of these nations, nor fit for the common and public good, for you to continue here any longer. And therefore I do declare unto you, that I do dissolve this Parliament.’¹⁷ This was Cromwellian rhetoric at its most devastating.

The first half of 1655 was a particularly difficult time for Cromwell. The dissolution of the first Protectorate Parliament was followed in March by a Royalist rising, Penruddock’s rebellion, in Wiltshire, and then in the early summer by severe setbacks in the Western Design, Cromwell’s campaign against Spanish power in the Caribbean. Faced with what he saw as these ‘late rebukes’ from God,¹⁸ Cromwell determined to embark on a more authoritarian solution and to impose what he called a ‘reformation of manners’ by military rule.¹⁹ In the late summer and autumn of 1655, England and Wales were divided into regions, each ruled by a Major-General who was instructed to ‘encourage and promote godliness and virtue, and discourage and discountenance all profaneness and ungodliness’ and ‘to enforce the laws against drunkenness, blaspheming and taking of the

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name of God in vain, by swearing and cursing, plays and interludes, and profaning the Lord's Day, and such-like wickedness and abominations.²⁰ This was the Cromwell who wished to rule, as he had said back in July 1647, for the people's 'good, not what pleases them.'²¹

The success of the Major-Generals' drive for a 'reformation of manners' was patchy at best, and there was considerable resentment of this attempt at military rule and the Decimation Tax on former Royalists that was used to fund it.²² When the costs of his campaigns against Spain forced Cromwell to call a second Protectorate Parliament in the summer of 1656, the elections were dominated by cries of 'no swordsmen! No decimators!' The Parliament met amidst growing concerns that Cromwell was becoming more authoritarian. Before it assembled, he and the Council excluded just over a hundred elected members who were thought to be hostile to the Protectorate and to the Major-Generals.²³ Members' fears of the open-ended nature of Cromwell's powers were only reinforced by the views that he expressed regarding the rule of law. In his opening speech on 17 September 1656 he declared: 'If nothing should ever be done but what is according to law, the throat of the nation may be cut while we send for some to make a law. Therefore certainly it is a pitiful beastly notion to think that though it be for ordinary government to live by law and rule, yet ... if a government in extraordinary circumstances go beyond the law even for self-preservation, it is yet to be clamoured at and blotted at.'²⁴ Comments such as this led a growing number of civilian politicians – many of them lawyers like Bulstrode Whitelocke – to feel that Cromwell's powers needed to be regulated more precisely. This was the political context that prompted the second Protectorate Parliament's offer of the kingship to Cromwell.

It was, perhaps, the supreme irony of Cromwell's career that he who had been so prominent in Parliament's campaigns against Charles I, and who had been the third signatory on the King's death warrant, should himself be offered the kingship. Yet Cromwell was never really a committed republican, and his hostility towards Charles I had always been much stronger than his hostility towards the monarchy itself. As early as November 1652, Cromwell had asked Whitelocke: 'What if a man should take upon him to be king?'²⁵ When it came, in February 1657, Parliament's offer of the kingship placed Cromwell in a very difficult dilemma which it took him over two months to resolve.

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That dilemma reflected the tensions between civilian politicians and Army leaders than ran throughout the Interregnum and that bedevilled the republic's attempts to generate political stability. In relation to the kingship, civilians such as Whitelocke argued that it would place the regime on a secure constitutional footing and provide for the future succession. Against this, Cromwell's Army colleagues were virtually unanimous in urging him to reject the offer, arguing that for him to become king would be to betray the cause for which they had fought, and for which so many of their comrades-in-arms had died or been maimed. In the end, it was this view that prevailed. Cromwell bowed to the Army's wishes, probably not because he feared a mutiny but more likely because he regarded the Army as God's instrument and interpreted its opposition to the kingship as a providential sign of God's opposition. As Cromwell declared on 13 April 1657, 'truly the Providence of God hath laid aside this title of King providentially de facto ... God hath seemed providentially, seemed to appear as a Providence, not only to strike at the family but at the name ... God hath seemed so to deal with the persons and with the family that He blasted the very title ... I will not seek to set up that, that Providence hath destroyed, and laid in the dust; and I would not build Jericho again.'²⁶ A few weeks later, on 8 May, Cromwell gave his definitive rejection of the kingship and under the terms of a new constitution, the Humble Petition and Advice, he remained Lord Protector, an office that he would continue to hold until his death in September the following year.

Although the bid to make Cromwell king had failed, the framers of the Humble Petition and Advice nevertheless succeeded in limiting Cromwell's powers in certain key ways. In particular, the Humble Petition stipulated that 'the ancient and undoubted liberties and privileges of Parliament' were to 'be preserved and maintained', and that 'those persons who are legally chosen by a free election of the people to serve in Parliament, may not be excluded from sitting in Parliament to do their duties, but by judgment and consent of that House whereof they are members'. With the case of the Quaker James Nayler fresh in people's minds, the limits of liberty of conscience were defined more specifically than in the Instrument of Government to spell out that it did not extend 'to popery or prelacy, or to the countenancing such who publish horrible blasphemies, or practise or hold forth licentiousness or profaneness under the profession of Christ.'²⁷ The old mistrust between Cromwell and a significant number of members

over the issue of liberty of conscience still persisted, and this clause was an attempt to satisfy as many different views as possible.

That mistrust was closely related to what was possibly the most intractable problem that Cromwell faced in his relations with Parliaments, namely how to reconcile his vision of England as a chosen people – like the people of Israel in the Old Testament – with the fact that those who enthusiastically embraced his vision remained a godly minority. Again and again he confronted this issue, and he insisted that it was possible to reconcile the interests of the godly and those of the whole nation. He felt that ‘the interest of Christians and the interest of the nation’ were not ‘inconsistent, or two different things’ and he pledged: ‘upon these two interests, if God shall account me worthy, I shall live and die.’²⁸ He hoped that Parliament would play a crucial role in the process of tying those two interests together, and there were times when he believed they were succeeding, as for example on 21 April 1657 when he told parliamentary representatives that he thought they had ‘provided for the liberty of the people of God, and for the liberty of the nation. And I say he sings sweetly that sings a song of reconciliation betwixt these two interests! And it is a pitiful fancy, and wild and ignorant to think they are inconsistent. Certainly they may consist!’²⁹ Yet in the end he was always disappointed, and that disappointment was never more apparent than in the second session of the second Protectorate Parliament which lasted for just two weeks in January and February 1658.

Cromwell’s speech at the opening of that session on 20 January 1658 showed that he still hoped he could work fruitfully with a Parliament, and his vision of England as an elect nation produced one of the most beautiful passages in all of his parliamentary speeches:

Truly I hope this is His land: and in some sense it may be given out that it is God’s land. And He that hath the weakest knowledge and the worst memory can easily tell that we are a redeemed people. We were a redeemed people, when first God was pleased to look favourably upon us, and to bring us out of the hands of Popery in that never-to-be-forgotten reformation, that most significant and greatest the nation hath felt or tasted.³⁰

Yet almost immediately Cromwell ran into problems. The Humble Petition and Advice had removed the power of the Lord Protector and the Council to exclude elected members, and this allowed many of those who had been so excluded in 1656 to return to Parliament. These included some highly articulate Commonwealthsmen, such as Sir Arthur Hesilrige and Thomas Scott, who had never been sympathetic to the Protectorate.

By this time there was a further bone of contention in the form of the second chamber, the ‘Other House’, which the Humble Petition and Advice had created. Jonathan Fitzgibbons discusses this in detail elsewhere in this issue of *Cromwelliana* and in his important new book.³¹ Here it is just worth noting that the ‘Other House’ proved to be another disappointment to Cromwell: only 42 of his 62 nominees actually accepted the invitation, and the creation of the second chamber both reduced his support in the Commons and antagonised those Commonwealthsmen to whom it seemed much too like the old House of Lords.³² A significant number of members of the Commons refused to recognise the ‘Other House’, and this sparked a passionate speech from Cromwell on 25 January 1658:

What is the general spirit of this nation? Is it not that each sect of people ... may be uppermost? That every sort of men may get power into their hands? ... It were a happy thing if the nation would be content with rule. Content with rule, if it were but in civil things, and with those that would rule worst; because misrule is better than no rule, and an ill government, a bad one, is better than none ... But we have an appetite to variety, to be not only making wounds but widening those already made, as if we should see one making wounds in a man’s side, and would desire nothing more than to be groping and grovelling in those wounds.³³

Even this extraordinary language failed to deflect the Commons away from the ‘Other House’ and on to Cromwell’s godly agenda. Barely a week later, on 4 February, he decided that he had had enough. He insisted that he had not sought power for himself: ‘I can say in the presence of God, in comparison with whom we are but like poor creeping ants upon the earth, I would have been glad to have lived under my woodside, to have kept a flock of sheep rather than undertaken such a government as this’. However, some of the members were ‘not to be satisfied’, and therefore: ‘I think it high time

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that an end be put to your sitting. And I do dissolve this Parliament! And let God be judge between you and me!³⁴ Whereupon, it was reported, ‘many of the Commons cried Amen.’³⁵

On that bitter note, Cromwell’s turbulent relationship with Parliaments drew to a close. In the end, he felt much cause for disappointment. He had hoped to work constructively with Parliaments and to use them to further his vision of England as an elect nation. Yet most members did not share his enthusiasm for extending liberty of conscience or for promoting a ‘reformation of manners’. To them, it mattered far more to protect the rule of law and to safeguard the rights and privileges of Parliament. At the heart of the problem lay the fact that although Cromwell was always committed to the principle of Parliaments, he was never committed to any individual Parliament. His eyes were always on the higher goal of protecting God’s cause and God’s people, and the moment he came to believe that any Parliament had ceased to pursue that goal he ruthlessly discarded it.

Cromwell’s relations with Parliament were therefore always complex and often very difficult. Whether he deserves to be praised as a champion of Parliaments will no doubt remain a controversial question. What can be said, in conclusion, is that Cromwell’s relations with Parliaments present the fascinating spectacle – one virtually unique in British history – of a republican Head of State attempting to work with Parliaments. Much of British political and constitutional history has been written in terms of Crown and Parliament, and the Interregnum affords the one opportunity we have to see how a non-royal ruler handled and interacted with a series of different Parliaments. For that reason – and despite all his frustrations and disappointments – this aspect of Cromwell’s career remains of commanding interest. It provides yet another reason why we should still care about him, and why he is still worth studying.

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- ¹ On the controversy surrounding the erection of the Cromwell statue outside the Palace of Westminster, see especially Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001), pp. 296–315; Jonathan Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell's Head* (Kew, 2008), pp. 198–204; and Peter Gaunt, 'The Reputation of Oliver Cromwell in the 19th Century', *Parliamentary History*, 28 (2009), 425–8.
- ² S.C. Lomas (ed.), *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, with Elucidations by Thomas Carlyle* (3 vols., London, 1904) [hereafter cited as Lomas-Carlyle], 3:362 (Cromwell at the Putney Debates, 28 October 1647).
- ³ Lomas-Carlyle, 2:108 (Cromwell to William Lenthall, 4 September 1650).
- ⁴ Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament, 1648–1653* (Cambridge, 1974), chapters 14–17.
- ⁵ S.R. Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625–1660* (3rd edition, Oxford, 1906), pp. 401–2 (Cromwell's Declaration, 22 April 1653).
- ⁶ G.C. Moore Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple* (Oxford, 1928), p. 39 (Dorothy Osborne to William Temple, 23 April 1653).
- ⁷ The fullest account of Barebone's Parliament remains Austin Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (Oxford, 1982).
- ⁸ Lomas-Carlyle, 2: 290, 296 (Cromwell to Barebone's Parliament, 4 July 1653).
- ⁹ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:98 (Cromwell to the representatives of the second Protectorate Parliament, 21 April 1657).
- ¹⁰ Lomas-Carlyle, 2:381 (Cromwell to the first Protectorate Parliament, 12 September 1654). For the full text of the Instrument of Government, see Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents*, pp. 405–17.
- ¹¹ Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents*, p. 411 (Instrument of Government, 16 December 1653).
- ¹² For fuller discussion of what follows, see Patrick Little and David L. Smith, *Parliaments and Politics during the Cromwellian Protectorate* (Cambridge, 2007).
- ¹³ Lomas-Carlyle, 2:339, 358 (Cromwell to the first Protectorate Parliament, 4 September 1654).
- ¹⁴ Lomas-Carlyle, 2:382–3 (Cromwell to the first Protectorate Parliament, 12 September 1654).

- ¹⁵ See, for example, Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents*, p. 443 (constitutional bill, 1654–5).
- ¹⁶ Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents*, p. 406 (Instrument of Government, 16 December 1653).
- ¹⁷ Lomas-Carlyle, 2:417, 429–30 (Cromwell to the first Protectorate Parliament, 22 January 1655).
- ¹⁸ Natalie Mears, Alasdair Raffe, Stephen Taylor and Philip Williamson (eds.), *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation, Volume 1: Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533-1688* (Church of England Record Society, 20, Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 606–7 (Cromwell’s Declarations, 21 November 1655, 13 March 1656).
- ¹⁹ For Cromwell’s use of the phrase ‘reformation of manners’, see for example Lomas-Carlyle, 2:538, 540 (Cromwell to the second Protectorate Parliament, 17 September 1656).
- ²⁰ J.P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (2nd edition, Cambridge, 1986), p. 323 (Cromwell’s instructions to the Major-Generals, October 1655).
- ²¹ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:345 (Cromwell at the Reading Debates, 16 July 1647).
- ²² Christopher Durston, *Cromwell’s Major-Generals: Godly Government during the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2001).
- ²³ For a list of these excluded members, see Little and Smith, *Parliaments and Politics*, pp. 302-5.
- ²⁴ Lomas-Carlyle, 2:543–4 (Cromwell to the second Protectorate Parliament, 17 September 1656).
- ²⁵ Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs* (4 vols., Oxford, 1853), 3:471 (November 1652); Ruth Spalding (ed.), *The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke, 1605–1675* (British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, new series, 13, Oxford, 1990), p. 281.
- ²⁶ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:70–1 (Cromwell to the representatives of the second Protectorate Parliament, 13 April 1657).
- ²⁷ Gardiner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents*, pp. 449, 455 (Humble Petition and Advice, 25 May 1657).
- ²⁸ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:31 (Cromwell to the representatives of the second Protectorate Parliament, 3 April 1657).
- ²⁹ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:101 (Cromwell to the representatives of the second Protectorate Parliament, 21 April 1657).

- ³⁰ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:153 (Cromwell to the second Protectorate Parliament, 20 January 1658).
- ³¹ Jonathan Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell's House of Lords: Politics, Parliaments and Constitutional Revolution, 1642–1660* (Woodbridge, 2018).
- ³² Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell's House of Lords*, chapter 4; Little and Smith, *Parliaments and Politics*, pp. 111–12, 138–9.
- ³³ Lomas-Carlyle, 3:174–5 (Cromwell to the second Protectorate Parliament, 25 January 1658).
- ³⁴ Lomas-Carlyle, 3: 188–9, 192 (Cromwell to the second Protectorate Parliament, 4 February 1658).
- ³⁵ C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Clarke Papers*, volume 3 (Camden Society, 2nd series, 1899), p. 139 (4 February 1658).

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THE CIVIL WAR IN CHESHIRE: A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE?

by Professor Peter Gaunt

This paper explores and reassesses the experiences of the county of Cheshire during the civil war of the 1640s in order to explore whether those experiences were common, typical and widespread, or whether conversely they were unusual or perhaps even unique. In one sense, they clearly were unique. Cheshire had been caught up in internal wars and disturbances several times before the mid seventeenth century. It was, after all, a frontier county on the Welsh borders and the centre of one of the three great Norman Marcher earldoms designed to hold the border against the still unconquered and potentially hostile Welsh. Equally, the county was involved in a generally small way and on the fringes of some later tumults, including the Glorious Revolution and the Jacobite incursions. However, all of those were very different from the experience of the county during the 1640s, for between 1642 and 1646 Cheshire was deeply involved in a major four-year war, an intensive conflict which deeply affected the country, the county and the people of Cheshire. It was waged by large, organised standing armies, equipped with artillery and muskets as well as sword and pike. The civil war of the 1640s was a territorial war, designed to secure and hold down territory, towns and countryside alike; it deeply affected and altered the administration of the counties; it resulted in a military presence which went on not for days, weeks or months but for years; and it entailed the seizure of goods and property, the conscription of adult males and the imposition of unprecedentedly high taxation.

The county's experience during the 1640s was thus very different from its involvement in other civil wars and disturbances, in terms of duration, intensity and magnitude. For example, it is instructive to compare Cheshire's experience of the mid seventeenth century civil war with its direct engagement in the Wars of the Roses, the lengthier but more sporadic civil wars of the mid and later fifteenth century. The nature of that conflict was very different, in that it was not fought by long-term or standing armies, was generally not about the long-term control of territory and the resources drawn from it, and instead was more a war of occasional field engagements fought between rival claimants to the throne than a conflict of standing regional and county forces, of garrisons and raiding, which was the experience of the 1640s. Although the protagonists in the Wars of the Roses occasionally passed through Cheshire and Cheshire men went off to fight

and die elsewhere, nothing more than minor skirmishing occurred in Cheshire; there were no significant battles within the county – though there were substantial engagements in neighbouring Shropshire and further south in the Marches – and the towns and castles of Cheshire were generally not garrisoned. All that is very different from Cheshire's engagement with the civil war of the 1640s, which had a far greater direct impact upon the county, its physical landscape, its resources and its inhabitants. For Cheshire, the experience of the civil war of the 1640s was undoubtedly unique, in that it experienced nothing like it before or since.

However, the question can be addressed differently and more profitably. How does the experience of the civil war of the 1640s within Cheshire compare and contrast to the nature and impact of that conflict in other English – and Welsh – counties during the 1640s? That is a far more complex but more interesting and rewarding question and it will be the focus of this article. Can we see events, developments and factors involved in the civil wars in Cheshire mirrored and replicated in other counties during the civil wars? Or, alternatively, were some features of the county's war unusual or perhaps even unique to Cheshire and not seen anywhere else in England and Wales in the 1640s? That question will be explored thematically and lies at the heart of this paper, but it is important first to set out the context by briefly running through the key events and developments within the county.

As the country moved from peace to war in summer 1642, both sides looked to Cheshire for support and both made attempts to recruit within the county. However, both met with very limited success at this stage. An attempted royalist meeting and recruiting drive, organised by some of the king's key supporters in and around Cheshire and planned to be held on open land on the fringes of the county town in July, fell flat and attracted very few participants, while the attempts of the county's leading parliamentary supporter, the MP Sir William Brereton, to recruit in Chester during early August met with a hostile response from the Cestrians, such that he was escorted out of the town for his own safety. The king's presence in the area for three weeks in late September and early October, based in Shrewsbury but with a four-day visit to Chester, ensured both expressions of support and an improved flow of recruits from Chester and its hinterland. It also encouraged a small group of native Cheshire gentry

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who had begun working to secure the county for the crown, but who were opposed by a clutch of parliamentarian activists seeking to secure key towns, strongpoints and resources for the parliamentary cause. However, during the latter half of 1642 these active, committed supporters of king or parliament within Cheshire seemed to be very much in the minority and more people, elite and non-elite, appeared either disinclined to become involved in the unfolding civil war or actively determined to keep the civil war out of Cheshire. There were no long-established and resident grand territorial magnates within Cheshire who might have swung the county decisively behind one side or the other, and instead political leadership lay with an interconnecting web of gentry families, most of whom during the latter half of 1642 seem to have been antipathetic to war and in favour of petitions and appeals, widely circulated at the time, addressed to both sides and urging them to settle their differences peacefully.

The situation in Cheshire during the closing weeks of 1642 was complex. For a time, particularly while the king was in the area, royalism appeared to have the upper hand, but when Charles I departed he took with him not only a body of locally-raised troops but also some of the active royalist gentry from Cheshire, to serve as officers in his royal army; many of those men never returned, so weakening the royalist cause in Cheshire. Supporters of the king had secured Chester and were beginning to fortify a scattering of manor houses and hastily renovated castles, mostly in the western part of the county. Assessing the strength of the parliamentarians within the county is more difficult, for at this stage many of those who were actively opposing the royalists claimed to be armed neutralists, determined to keep the full rigours of war out of Cheshire, rather than committed parliamentarians. But by the end of the year, much of central and eastern Cheshire, including Nantwich (recovered from royalist hands during December) was held by non-royalists. However, it is clear that as 1642 ended all parties – royalists, parliamentarians and active neutralists – were still struggling against the indifference and apathy of many, at gentry level and below, and were experiencing difficulties in raising more men and money. It is in this context that, on 22 December, key royalist and parliamentarian activists in Cheshire came together and signed a peace treaty at Bunbury. On paper, this committed them to disband their troops and dismantle their fortifications, thus demilitarising the county. In practice, however, it proved to be merely a brief truce and a breathing space.

The situation was changed and clarified during the opening months of 1643 with the direct military intervention of Sir William Brereton, at the head of a small body of horse and dragoons, many of whom he had raised in and brought north from the London area. Entering the county in late January and moving from east to west, he advanced quickly to secure Nantwich, Cheshire's second town and an important centre of communications. It became his HQ and was fortified with earthen ramparts. Over the following weeks he firmly secured most of the other towns in eastern and central Cheshire, including Northwich, Middlewich and Knutsford. In the process, he defeated and scattered Cheshire royalists in a series of limited engagements, the largest outside Nantwich on 28 January and at Middlewich on 13 March. By spring 1643 both royalism and neutralism had been largely overwhelmed and most of Cheshire secured for parliament. The royalists were left holding the county town and the western fringes of the county, including the Dee valley and the Wirral. The Cheshire royalists were a spent force and were on the defensive for the remainder of the war, trying to preserve their hold on Chester and its hinterland and attempting little more than occasional raids on parliamentary bases. Thus, after months of indecision and setbacks, the parliamentarians had been able to secure most of the county very quickly. They were able to do so because of the well-coordinated efforts of local parliamentary activists, bonded together under Brereton's dynamic leadership, in the process winning over some previously inactive and neutralist Cheshire gentry and compelling others to support the cause. In contrast, the royalist leadership was poor and divided, the very limited military skills of Sir Thomas Aston, at this point the leading royalist commander in Cheshire, were cruelly exposed at Nantwich and Middlewich, and within Chester military and civilian royalists were squabbling for supremacy. Moreover, having drained away from Cheshire so many locally-raised troops in autumn 1642, the king and his high command in Oxford were slow to aid and reinforce the royalist cause in Cheshire in its hour of need.

By spring 1643, most of Cheshire was quite firmly secured for parliament and Brereton worked hard to consolidate his hold on the area, establishing a more organised wartime administration which allowed him to raise Cheshire men and money on a regular basis. While he faced threats from outside the county – in 1643 much of neighbouring Shropshire and Staffordshire were under royalist control, as was Lancashire, though the royalist hold there

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crumbled in the course of the year – from within Cheshire itself thereafter he faced just two serious military problems or threats.

The first was the vulnerability of Cheshire to intervention by royalist forces based, not in Cheshire itself or even in the neighbouring counties, but from much further afield. Potentially the most serious of these materialised in the closing weeks of 1643 with the landing along the Dee estuary of several thousand hardened and experienced troops from Ireland, in the main part of the English and Welsh army which had been dispatched to Ireland in 1641–2 to crush the Irish Catholic rebellion and which the king was now shipping back to the mainland to fight for him in the civil war. Combined with reinforcements which John Lord Byron, the new royalist commander in the region, brought with him from Oxford, they provided the king with a formidable field army in Cheshire. During December 1643 and January 1644 this army roamed across the county, brushing aside parliamentary forces and capturing and plundering parliamentary outposts, including Beeston Castle and Barthomley. But the royalists' main target was Nantwich, which was under siege by the third week of January. It took the intervention of another 'foreign' force, Sir Thomas Fairfax's Yorkshire and Lincolnshire army, to save Nantwich and the parliamentary cause in Cheshire. In one of the most decisive battles of the civil war, Fairfax, who had been ordered by parliament to march to Cheshire's and Nantwich's aid, engaged and largely destroyed Byron's army outside Nantwich in late January 1644.

Despite parliamentary fears, no further significant batches of royalist reinforcements reached Cheshire from Ireland, largely because parliament stationed a squadron of ships in the Irish Sea to intercept and deter further crossings. But during 1644 and 1645 the king and his two nephews, Rupert and Maurice, marched towards, into or through Cheshire several times at the head of large armies of English royalists. They rarely stayed long in the area and their goal was mainly to force Brereton into temporary retreat and so relieve the pressure on royalist Cheshire; for his part, Brereton did not risk battle but instead fell back, confident and correct in his assumption that none of these armies would stay in the area and that he would soon be able to swiftly reassert his control over most of the county and resume operations against the county town. Not until autumn 1645, when the king paid his last visit to the county to aid beleaguered Chester, did Brereton and his allies feel strong enough to maintain the operation against Chester and

to engage royalist forces in the field, on 24 September at Rowton Moor, scattering the royalist army of relief which the king had ordered to come to Chester's aid.

Brereton's second problem was, of course, Chester itself, for although the Cheshire royalists were cooped up in the western fringes of the county from spring 1643 onwards, he could never feel completely secure while the king's men continued to hold the largest and wealthiest town in Cheshire, its natural focus of political, ecclesiastical and social affairs and its major port and centre of commercial activities, as well as an excellent landing and marshalling point should the king ever succeed in getting over further reinforcements from Ireland. But a combination of factors – the natural defences of the city, protected to the south and west by the looping River Dee; the man-made defences, including the repaired and reinforced medieval circuit of stone walls and gates and additional earthwork defences thrown up by the royalists to defend the extramural suburbs and other weak points; the resilience and determination of its defenders, especially its long-time governor John Lord Byron; the way in which to the west the royalist heartlands of North Wales ensured that the city could always be resupplied and reinforced from Wales and that until Brereton could drive round to the west of the city and sever that lifeline he would struggle to capture the city; and the way in which until very late in the war the parliamentary high command in London seemed to accord the capture of royalist Chester a fairly low priority – all these factors meant that the operation against Chester proved very protracted and it did not finally fall until very near the end of the main civil war. Thus, although Brereton had the city fairly well surrounded and blocked up on the English side by early 1644 and thereafter was able to gradually hem it in further by overrunning much of the lower Dee valley and the Wirral, Chester itself proved a very hard nut to crack. Even after the royalists had abandoned the northern suburbs and Brereton had succeeded in capturing the eastern suburbs in September 1645 and opened up a heavy bombardment, the historic heart of Chester, the walled town, held out and the royalist garrison and the remaining Cestrians continued their resistance. Not until January 1646, following a heavy and damaging bombardment, with clear signs of suffering, disease and starvation within the city and with the royalist hold over North Wales beginning to collapse, did Byron agree to open serious negotiations, leading to the surrender of Chester on terms in early February. The relinquishing of the

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county town to parliament effectively marked the end of the civil war in the county. (Cheshire escaped significant renewed fighting during the brief resumption of civil war in 1648.)

The first key feature of the civil war in Cheshire was the uncertainty, apparent disengagement and active neutralism of the opening months of the conflict. There was little evident enthusiasm for the war within the county, committed royalists and committed parliamentarians seemed to be in a small minority and the dominant outlook appeared to be non-involvement and neutralism, epitomised by and reaching its high-point with the demilitarisation treaty concluded at Bunbury in December 1642. Far from being unique or unusual, that was a common trait of the opening months of the war, seen in many other counties and regions of England and (more selectively) Wales. Informal pacts, truces and more formal treaties were common, the latter drawn up and signed in around twenty counties. Therefore during 1642 and slightly earlier than the Bunbury treaty, the gentry of Yorkshire had concluded a fourteen-point peace treaty, under which newly-raised troops there were to be disbanded, all hostilities were to cease, prisoners were to be released and weapons and other seized martial items returned, and reparation was to be made for any losses and damages. In the South West, the gentry of Cornwall (more royalist than parliamentarian in their sympathies) and of Devon (more parliamentarian than royalist) came together to sign a treaty which, for a time, theoretically took the whole south-western peninsula out of the war. In Staffordshire, the county leaders went further and not only formalised their disengagement from the unfolding civil war but also pledged to raise and maintain a neutralist Staffordshire third force, a body of armed men who would be deployed to confront, halt and repulse any royalist or parliamentarian army attempting to enter Staffordshire and to embroil the county in civil war. In its early hesitancy and active, formalised attempt at neutrality, Cheshire was quite typical of a county response to the outbreak of civil war.

Secondly, in Cheshire the collapse of neutrality, the extinction of the treaty of Bunbury and what it stood for and the much fuller engagement of the county in the civil war and with it the enforced adherence of most of the county to one side were all very much caused by, and followed on from, the intervention of an active, determined military commander. It was the return to Cheshire in the early weeks of 1643 of Sir William Brereton which tipped

the balance decisively away from both neutralism and royalism and which dragged Cheshire into the civil war. That development was far from unique and is seen occurring elsewhere during 1642–3. An obvious parallel is with the figure with whom Brereton is often compared, Oliver Cromwell, who acted decisively in the opening phase of the war to secure much of his home patch of Cambridgeshire – especially its county town – and Huntingdonshire and to ensure that neither neutralism nor royalism could get much purchase there. But there were others who did much the same at around the same time – for example, Sir John Gell in Derbyshire and Colonel John Hutchinson in much of Nottinghamshire acting in support of parliament, while Sir Ralph Hopton secured and galvanised Cornwall for the king. Typically, these figures were natives of the area to which they were returning and which they secured; they arrived at the head of a small body of non-local troops, often wholly or mainly cavalry, but they then set about boosting local recruitment, and they were usually from the landed elite, though not from the very highest levels of county society. Brereton conforms to this pattern, for his inheritance and estates in and around Handforth in north-eastern Cheshire were modest and he was from the low-to-middling ranks of the Cheshire gentry.

Thirdly, the form of the war fought within Cheshire was again fairly typical. The civil war is sometimes portrayed rather simplistically as comprising a single national campaign, albeit a rather protracted one, with a focus on a few great generals and their regional or national armies, who roamed around the country and occasionally clashed in great, set-piece battles, at Edgehill, Newbury (twice), Marston Moor and Naseby. All this is true as far as it goes, and it sets up an overall framework for the main civil war, but it actually provides well under half the real picture. Almost from the outset, king and parliament were attempting to secure and tie down the towns and countryside of England and Wales, to gain territory and the financial and material resources it could provide in order to supply a potentially lengthy conflict, and to establish garrisons in towns, refortified castles, hastily fortified country houses and other outposts who would secure and hold those strongpoints and their hinterlands and tap their resources. Thus, underpinning the major armies and their campaigns and the small number of very large battles, the civil war comprised a complex mosaic of local and county wars, smaller scale but often intense, a dour conflict of raiding and counter-raiding, of modest engagements and skirmishes contested by small

county-based forces or scratch armies made up of men temporarily drawn out from a clutch of garrisons.

This is very much the sort of war which Cheshire endured. No great set-piece battles took place within the county, no field engagements between the main national armies. The biggest clashes within Cheshire were distinctly second- or even third-rate affairs when compared with the likes of Edgehill, Marston Moor and Naseby; they were generally linked to the territorial-style warfare which predominated in Cheshire and were tied to clashes over control of a few key towns – the engagements in or just outside Nantwich and Middlewich, for example, or the running fight on Rowton Moor, which was very much linked to the siege of Chester. Of the nine battles of the civil war which resulted in deaths of one thousand or more, none occurred in Cheshire; what was probably the county's deadliest battle, fought outside Nantwich in January 1644, left fewer than 300 dead. Cheshire's small-to-medium scale war, a territorial war of garrisons, raiding and a handful of modestly-sized battles fought in the main by local forces, was certainly not unique and was fairly typical of a county experience of the civil war. A long list of other English counties fit this general pattern and experienced a war of this type and scale, including neighbouring Shropshire and Staffordshire, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Buckinghamshire and many more besides. So in this respect, Cheshire's experience was fairly common.

Fourthly, and very much following on from this, if we explore the depth and ferocity of the civil war, Cheshire probably sits roughly midway in a rather gruesome and bloody league table. Each county had its own civil war and counties and regions were affected to differing degrees. Thus most of East Anglia and the South East were firmly parliamentarian throughout the main war of 1642–6 and suffered nothing more than occasional royalist raids or skirmishing around the landward perimeters – though this area saw much more significant military action in the renewed war of 1648. Other counties, including Cornwall in the far South West and most of Wales, were firmly royalist from spring 1643 onwards and were largely immune from parliamentarian attack or fighting until the closing stages of the main war, when they fell quickly, with limited armed resistance and almost bloodlessly to parliament. These counties and their inhabitants were not immune or disengaged from the war – they endured high and regular taxation, conscription and requisitioning, too – but they generally did not suffer much

fighting or bloodshed within their borders. At the other, nastier end of the scale, some counties were repeatedly fought over, disputed, conquered and reconquered and saw direct and frequent military action – Yorkshire during the first two years of the war, Lincolnshire, parts of central southern England, Pembrokeshire, Gloucestershire and an area of the central Midlands spanning parts of Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Berkshire. Most of the first-rank battles were fought in these counties, but more than that they all endured prolonged fighting and changing fortunes, a degree of direct involvement in the conflict, bloodshed and attendant suffering more intense and fiercer than was generally the position in Cheshire.

Cheshire therefore sits somewhere around the middle of the bloody league table, again alongside counties such as Shropshire and Staffordshire, Devon and Dorset, western Sussex and Bedfordshire. It was not immune from the fighting. After all, Cheshire was divided until February 1646; it suffered plenty of raiding and skirmishing; a series of engagements took place within the county which, although fairly modest in terms of the numbers involved and casualties suffered, do merit the label ‘battle’ rather than mere ‘skirmish’ and it endured not only the prolonged operation against royalist Chester but also occasional examples of military cruelty, such as the killing (in parliamentarian eyes, massacre) of pro-parliamentarian civilians at the hands of royalist troops at Barthomley church in December 1643. On the other hand, Cheshire did not suffer particularly large-scale or ferocious military action on anything like the scale and intensity seen in a dozen or more unlucky counties.

Fifthly, as a series of maps showing those parts of England and Wales under royalist and parliamentarian control at different stages of the main civil war of 1642–6 make clear, there were huge territorial shifts from one camp to the other and often back again in the course of the four years of the war. While territorially the two sides were quite evenly balanced during the opening phase of the war in winter and spring 1642–3, by the end of 1643 the royalists seemed to have gained the upper hand, acquiring a great swathe of territory across much of south-western and central southern England, as well as more modest territorial gains in Lincolnshire and parts of the Midlands. By the end of 1644, in the wake of the royalist disaster at Marston Moor, most of northern England had fallen to and been mopped up by

parliament. In the course of 1645 and early 1646 the parliamentarians captured much of the Midlands, retook most of the South and South West lost in the first full year of the war and were beginning to make inroads into Wales. In most contested and divided counties and regions, therefore, the frontiers between royalist-controlled and parliamentary-controlled territory swept backwards and forwards, one way and the other, in the course of the war, moving scores or sometimes a hundred or more miles, and in the process thousands of square miles of England and Wales changed hands, often more than once. The ebb and flow in Pembrokeshire was so dramatic that some of the county's strongholds changed hands six times in the course of the civil war. In other divided and contested counties, such as Shropshire and Staffordshire, the changes may not have been so frequent or dramatic, but the dividing line between royalist and parliamentary territory shifted steadily and significantly, by twenty, thirty or forty miles, as the parliamentarians progressively expelled royalist garrisons and, from an initially weak position, came to dominate and take control of both counties. But very unusually, and perhaps uniquely for a divided county, we see no such movement in the frontier between royalist- and parliamentary-controlled parts of Cheshire, no changes in fortune which resulted in significant expanses of territory changing hands. Indeed, in terms of territorial control, Cheshire had a very static civil war. From spring 1643 onwards the parliamentarians were fairly secure in their control of eastern and central Cheshire, well over two-thirds of the land mass of the county, while the king's men held the western portion, including the lower Dee valley, Chester and the Wirral. Thereafter, things changed very little and only slowly and modestly. Only gradually did the parliamentarians manage to push forward just a few miles to take control of parts of the Dee valley and of the Wirral and eventually to secure the surrender of Chester itself. Territorially, Cheshire had a remarkably static civil war, perhaps uniquely so for a divided county.

Sixthly, in order fully to understand Cheshire's civil war it is necessary to see how it sat within the wider region and to explore the position on and around its borders. Cheshire was not really a distinct geographical unit and had no great topographical features likely to keep it secure and immune from developments around it. To the east, the high ground of the Pennines provided some protection and in any case much of Derbyshire and northern Staffordshire were also under parliamentary control for much of the war.

To the north, the Mersey offered some protection and in any case by autumn 1643 much of neighbouring south Lancashire had fallen to parliament. But to the south, there was no clear or defensible line or feature which might protect the southern flank of Brereton's hold over most of the county and instead in that area Cheshire tends to merge into the north Shropshire plain and into central and southern Staffordshire; no major rivers or line of hills mark the boundary. That in turn helps to explain why, with an eye on his position in Cheshire, Brereton always took a regional approach to the war and why – to the consternation of some of the Cheshire parliamentary commissioners – time and again he was willing to commit Cheshire men, money and material to support parliamentary efforts to capture Shropshire and Staffordshire. He appreciated only too well that his hold over most of Cheshire would never be completely assured and secure while significant royalist forces and territorial resources lurked close by his southern and south-eastern flanks, and hence his keen interest in and support for parliamentary campaigns to expel the king's men from Shropshire and Staffordshire. To the west, the lower Dee provided a defensible line, spanned by few bridges (though it could also be forded at several places, especially during the summer), but more importantly there was generally easy access between royalist Chester and west Cheshire on the one hand and the low land of Flintshire and eastern Denbighshire on the other, facilitating movement across and between those areas and ensuring that the sometimes beleaguered royalists of the western parts of the county could quite easily be reinforced and resupplied from royalist North Wales, adding to Brereton's difficulties. Overall, therefore, the nature and duration of the civil war in Cheshire as well as the outlook and strategy adopted by the county's parliamentary commander were in (large) part determined and decided by the county's place within its wider region, its neighbours and its topography, especially along and around its borders.

Once again, this is fairly typical of a county's experience of the civil war. In very few counties which saw active fighting can the course of that fighting be explained solely by looking at the county in isolation. Even in Cornwall, surrounded on three sides by sea and on its landward side for much of its length separated from Devon by the Tamar, the strategy adopted by Hopton and other royalist generals operating there was largely determined by wider regional goals or developments and by the wider ebb and flow of military fortunes in the South West as a whole. Although historians are now

more aware of the county-war aspect of the conflict and are more attuned to exploring local issues, in almost no cases can that county war be fully understood and explained in isolation from what was happening in neighbouring counties and within its wider region. County boundaries proved at most semipermeable membranes in terms of fighting and campaigning, of operational and strategic thinking. For example, the civil war in (western) Lincolnshire cannot be understood without grasping the influence of the royalist super-garrison just over the county boundary at Newark in Nottinghamshire; Berkshire's civil war is inexplicable without taking account of its position between parliamentary London and royalist Oxford; and the initial carving up of Warwickshire into rival royalist- and parliamentary-dominated sections rests in part on internal Warwickshire features and factors but in part, too, on which side had gained the upper hand in neighbouring Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Staffordshire. Only perhaps in far-off Pembrokeshire, completely cut off from the other active theatres of the war by the land mass of solid and securely-royalist South Wales, and in which local royalists and local parliamentarians fought a wildly fluctuating civil war whose ebbs and flows appear to have little connection to the changing fortunes of the war in England, might the military events be assessed more or less in isolation and without placing the county within its wider regional context.

Seventhly, it would be wrong to assess the civil war in Cheshire without exploring the role of Chester, given that it was the county's major centre and strongpoint and that it became the focus for much of the contest between the royalists and parliamentarians. The lengthy parliamentary operation to blockade, besiege, bombard, storm and capture the city dominated much of Cheshire's civil war. It was by no means unusual in the civil war for a major urban centre, often a county town, to be the focus of operations within the county as a whole or across a wider region – in different ways and at different stages of the war, York, Gloucester, Bristol and Newark, as well as the rival capitals of London and Oxford, acted in this way. It was not unusual for urban action to focus on a major port and for its seaward facilities to contribute to its long survival even when surrounded or isolated on the landward side – Plymouth, Lyme Regis, Gloucester, Hull, Milford Haven and Pembroke conform to this general pattern. That the town was eventually taken not by storm but by a negotiated surrender, triggered by shortage of supplies and the hopelessness

of its position, was also common – operations against Bristol, York, Worcester, Oxford, Newark and many other besieged towns ended thus. Chester is unusual in that most of the towns which were able to endure prolonged sieges or blockades were parliamentarian-held ports, able to be resupplied by sea by the parliamentarian navy, whereas Chester was a key royalist centre, and parliamentarian naval supremacy meant that its port facilities were of limited aid to its survival for so long. Instead, it was Chester's landward proximity to royalist North Wales and the inability of the parliamentarians until very late in the war to break that lifeline that proved a key factor in its long survival.

Eighthly and lastly, Cheshire's civil war, dominated by the ultimately victorious parliamentarian forces, was very much moulded by parliament's commander-in-chief in the county, Sir William Brereton. His dynamism as well as at times his caution, his realism and regionalism, shaped Cheshire's war and does much to explain the course and features of the parliamentarian war effort within the county. But Brereton was more than just the supreme military commander for almost the entire war, for in 1643 he also emerged as the county's political boss and at least until 1645 he continued to dominate the political and administrative life of parliamentarian Cheshire. In the course of the war, he worked with considerable success to reshape his officer corps, his county committee and other administrative bodies to his liking and consistent with his outlook. He became, in effect, the county boss *par excellence*, the dominant, active, energetic leader of the parliamentarian cause in Cheshire in military, political and administrative affairs. It was not unusual for a dynamic local military figure to emerge in 1642–3, securing the county for parliament and going on to dominate its military affairs – Sir John Gell in Derbyshire and John Hutchinson in Nottinghamshire have already been held up as good examples of that. It was not unusual for a single political and administrative boss to emerge who dominated the civil running of a county during the war years – on the parliamentarian side, examples might include Sir Anthony Weldon in Kent, Herbert Morley and Anthony Stapley jointly in Sussex, and Sir William Purefoy in Warwickshire. But it was much more unusual for the two areas of command and control – military on the one hand, political and administrative on the other – to be acquired and retained by a single person at county level and for one figure to serve as both county boss in civil matters and commander-in-chief of the military and to dominate – not unchallenged, but almost always able to

defeat such challenges – and thus to achieve and retain dual control. A few others tried it – Gell clearly sought to do so in Derbyshire, though it was a struggle and ended badly; Hutchinson may have sought to do so in Nottingham and those parts of the county under parliament’s control, though his wife’s biography of him makes clear that he encountered huge difficulties and stubborn opposition and was often effectively swamped. But securing the degree of joint control achieved by Brereton and retaining it for so long, until close to the end of the main war, generally proved elusive. In Brereton’s person and position, in his remarkable if local dominance – Cheshire’s Oliver Cromwell perhaps, though unlike him never breaking out of his home region to cut a dash on the national stage – we see an aspect of Cheshire’s civil war which was very unusual, if not unique.

Note: This is the text of an illustrated lecture given at a day-conference on the theme ‘A World Turn’d Upside Down: The English Civil Wars from a Regional Perspective’ held at the University Centre Shrewsbury in November 2018. It has been slightly edited for publication but is otherwise largely unaltered; accordingly, it is not annotated or referenced and it retains the feel of a lecture, complete with occasional colloquialisms and rhetorical questions.

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'A VOYAGE INTO WALES': REVISITING SIR THOMAS MYDDELTON'S 1644–1645 CAMPAIGN

By Dr Jonathan Worton

At the close of March 1645, from his fortress headquarters at the Red Castle (today Powis Castle) at Welshpool in Montgomeryshire (the present county of Powys), Sergeant-Major-General Sir Thomas Myddelton, MP for Denbighshire and since June 1643 Parliament's commander-in-chief for North Wales, penned a rather despondent situation report to the speaker of the House of Commons:

I may lie under some prejudice in the opinion of some, because the work of reducing my country to due obedience thrives not so fast as in the neighbouring parts, and because I cannot form such strength in mine, as others do in their associations [ie other regional Parliamentary commands], I hope by the good means this will not be attributed by those that employ me to want of industry in me who am satisfied in my own conscience that I have not been wanting in any thing that my ability could perform for the advancement of the service.¹

Myddelton went on to blame the religious backwardness of the common people and the overbearing influence the gentry had over them for the continuing Royalism of his fellow Welshmen and women, comparing them in their stubborn resistance to another Royalist heartland, Cornwall. He wrote seven months into the second of two military campaigns he led in Wales during the 1642–46 civil war.

That longer campaign, beginning in September 1644, is the subject of this article. Myddelton's military activity is mentioned in passing or more fully in modern studies of the war in Wales and bordering England, including two recent books by the present writer.² Although there is as yet no published full biography of Sir Thomas Myddelton, there are pen portraits of him in national biographies published online.³ This essay is a development of a paper given by the author entitled 'Expeditionary Warfare: Sir Thomas Myddelton's campaign into mid-Wales, 1644–45' at the day-conference 'A World Turn'd Upside Down: The English Civil Wars from a Regional Perspective', held at the University Centre Shrewsbury campus of the University of Chester on 3 November 2018. That lecture in turn drew inspiration from R. N. Dore's 'Sir Thomas Myddelton's Attempted

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Conquest of Powys, 1644–45' published in *Montgomeryshire Collections* in the early 1960s and providing a thorough view of Myddelton's campaign for the first time.⁴ This article is not intended to correct or significantly revise Dore's scholarly account, but rather to complement and expand on it.



Plate 1: The region of Thomas Myddelton's 1644–45 campaign.
(© Jonathan Worton)

In 1642 the Principality almost wholly declared for King Charles I, and the Royalist party in Myddelton's home county of Denbighshire had been particularly vigorous. Indeed, Myddelton was forced into London-based exile and local Royalists in mid-January 1643 occupied his home estate and

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castle at Chirk.⁵ Parliament on 12 June gave Myddelton the command on paper of the six counties of North Wales – Denbighshire, Flintshire, Caernarvonshire, Anglesey, Merionethshire and Montgomeryshire – not because of his military experience – as far as we know, before the civil war he had none – but because of his social status as the wealthiest North Walian Parliamentarian landowner. In addition to expanding and developing their Denbighshire estates, the previous generation of the Myddelton family had been merchant adventurers, manufacturers and financiers in and around London. Myddelton dug deeply into his financial acumen to fund his war effort, but despite the vicissitudes of civil war by his death in 1666 Myddelton had established his family as among the leading landed families of the British Isles.

Intending to secure a bridgehead into Royalist North Wales, in August 1643 Myddelton, bringing from London few soldiers but substantial military supplies, joined Sir William Brereton, commanding Parliament’s Cheshire county forces, at his Nantwich headquarters. In September, Myddelton and Brereton crossing into Shropshire enabled the local Parliamentarians to establish a garrison at Wem, Parliament’s first military foothold in that county. In the third week of October the regional Royalist commander Lord Capel was heavily defeated attempting to take Wem, and this encouraged the Parliamentarians to invade north-east Wales.⁶ Brereton with Myddelton in effect his second in command formed an army 2,000 or so strong, including Myddelton’s small contingent. On 8 November the Parliamentarians stormed the fortified bridge across the River Dee at Holt. The Royalists retreated and as the Parliamentarians pushed into Denbighshire and Flintshire seizing castles, seemed poised to strike further into North Wales. However, the Parliamentarians became over-extended, and they in turn retreated when Royalist reinforcements shipped from Ireland landed in Flintshire around 19 November. Shunning battle, Brereton’s army hurriedly recoiled into Cheshire, leaving most of Myddelton’s contingent to surrender at Hawarden Castle.

While fighting continued into the New Year, when a Royalist offensive in Cheshire ended in defeat at Nantwich on 25 January 1644, Myddelton returned to London. There he set about financing, recruiting and equipping a brigade to replace his previous small force.⁷

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An eyewitness recorded how Myddelton came to Nantwich on 19 August 1643 ‘with [...] seven great pieces of ordnance, four cases of drakes [each a probably multi-barrel light cannon] and about 40 carriages of arms and ammunition.’⁸ Myddelton had obtained this equipment in London and in south-eastern England under Parliamentary control, and in 1644 drew again on those places for military supplies. An important source was grants from the central Parliamentary magazines in London. In February 1644, for instance, the Commons allocated Myddelton munitions including gunpowder from the Committee of Safety’s magazine, and petards (demolition charges) from the Ordnance Office stores in the Tower of London.⁹ However, most of Myddelton’s requirements were met from merchants and manufacturers of London’s thriving arms market, among them makers and contractors identified by Edwards as key suppliers to Parliament’s wider war effort:¹⁰ pole-arms from Anthony Webster, who mass-produced pikes, including for the New Model Army; swords from the cutler Stephen Heard, who supplied 400 to Myddelton’s London storehouse in April 1644; grenades ordered from the London agent of John Browne, the ammunition- and cannon-founding industrialist, from his furnaces in the Sussex Weald; hundreds of knapsacks from James Gough, a leading maker of leatherware for Parliamentary forces; horses purchased at Smithfield livestock market from the dealer Harvey Conway; and tack to equip them from the saddler William Pease.¹¹ New and reconditioned firearms were purchased in quantity. From September 1644 to January 1645 Myddelton’s brigade seems to have been issued with or had held in magazines 1,150 muskets.¹² The other standard infantry weapon was the pike, a form of spear, now understood to have generally been issued in the ratio of one to two muskets. However, just 200 pikes are recorded purchased for Myddelton’s brigade, perhaps because they were considered to be of limited use fighting in the valleys and broken countryside of upland Wales. The standard issue equipment for one of Myddelton’s infantrymen was a matchlock or flintlock musket with a collar of bandoliers (a shoulder belt carrying bullets and the charges of gunpowder), a short sword and a knapsack. Cavalry troopers were armed with a sword, a pair of pistols, and a flintlock carbine suspended from a shoulder belt with an attached swivel allowing the weapon to be fired from horseback. This made the firearm also handy for dismounted action, and it seems that in recognition of the Welsh terrain the cavalry would be expected to operate also as dragoons (mounted infantry).

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On 28 March 1644, the London-based weekly *Perfect Diurnall* reported 'there is 500 Foot [infantry] and 300 Horse [cavalry] already raised in and about the city for Sir Thomas.'¹³ This raises the question of the size of Myddelton's brigade. In February, Parliament had authorised Myddelton to recruit 1,500 Foot and 300 Horse. They would form Myddelton's own regiments of Horse, Foot and Dragoons and his cousin Sir William Myddelton's regiment of Foot and troop of Horse.¹⁴ However, the brigade never seems to have achieved more than half strength. Indeed, in Wales in October Sir Thomas explained that his brigade 'at its utmost' never exceeded 650 men. Yet in September his senior cavalry officer had numbered the brigade at 800.¹⁵ If, as seems likely, these figures omitted commissioned and non-commissioned officers and musicians (which could form ten per cent of a civil war unit), it can be assumed that in September 1644 Myddelton led upward of 900 soldiers into Wales.¹⁶ There the brigade strength fluctuated by casualties, desertion and insubstantial recruitment. But in July 1645, by which time Myddelton has relinquished his command, Sir William Myddelton led an attack into Radnorshire by 500 Horse and Foot.¹⁷ Allowing for the remainder left in garrison, the brigade at this time may have achieved its ceiling strength of 800 or more officers and men.

At the beginning of June 1644, Myddelton with his brigade joined forces in Warwickshire with the Earl of Denbigh in command of Parliament's West Midland Association. Their combined army of about 2,500 strong advanced into Staffordshire. Paying lip service to unrealistic orders from the Committee of Both Kingdoms (the London-based war cabinet of parliament and its Scots allies) to head north to reinforce forces gathering against Prince Rupert in Lancashire, Denbigh marched into Shropshire and to Wem. There he joined forces with Colonel Thomas Mytton, commander of the Shropshire county forces who also happened to be Myddelton's brother-in-law. On 22/23 June, taking advantage of the absence of Prince Rupert's Shropshire-based field army, their forces stormed and captured the Royalist garrison at Oswestry near the Welsh border.¹⁸

On 2 July, the same day Rupert was defeated in Yorkshire at Marston Moor, Myddelton returned to Oswestry from Cheshire leading a relief column that drove off a Royalist force from Shrewsbury which was besieging the town. Myddelton based his brigade at Oswestry, recognising it was 'a very strong

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town, and if once fortified, of great concernment, and the key that lets us into Wales.’¹⁹

In mid-July the Committee of Both Kingdoms granted Myddelton licence to enter Wales. About the same time, Colonel Mytton wrote to his wife in London that ‘Brother Myddelton and myself intend, God willing, to take a voyage into Wales’.²⁰ That ‘voyage’ was underway on the morning of 5 August, when Mytton’s and Myddelton’s forces jointly raided Welshpool in Montgomeryshire, a long day’s march south-west of Oswestry. The Royalists had a garrison close to Welshpool in the Red Castle. However, the Parliamentarians, in a classic example of the tactic known as beating up enemy quarters, instead targeted Prince Rupert’s own regiment of Horse billeted in and around the town, scattering the men and taking their horses.²¹

A month later, on 3 September Myddelton led his brigade into Montgomeryshire. The force split, and next day while his horsemen captured a Royalist munitions convoy at Newtown in the upper Severn valley, Myddelton with the rest of the brigade occupied Montgomery, the county town. Myddelton’s objective was to seize the strong castle dominating the town from its lukewarm Royalist owner, Edward Lord Herbert of Chisbury. By intimidation the Parliamentarians gained Montgomery Castle on 6 September, securing there the munitions taken at Newtown. However, on the 8th Royalists from Shropshire counter-attacked. While Myddelton with his horsemen fled northward, his infantry withdrew into the castle to which the Royalists laid siege. Myddelton meanwhile secured support from Sir William Brereton and also Sir John Meldrum in Lancashire, whose forces, joined by some Staffordshire units, converged on Montgomery on 17 September. Around the same time a larger Royalist army led by John Lord Byron from Chester and North Wales came to Montgomery. With more than 8,000 soldiers engaged, the battle fought next day north-east of the town was the largest engagement in Wales during the 1642–46 civil war. After gaining initial advantage in the fighting the Royalist army routed in the face of stubborn Parliamentary resistance and determined counter-attack. Myddelton’s garrison in Montgomery was relieved, the Royalist regional field army broken.²²

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The Parliamentary victory at Montgomery was a psychological shock as much as a heavy military blow to Royalism in the region. It unnerved King Charles’s supporters and heartened his opponents in a part of the kingdom considered reliably Royalist. This was recognised by the Royalist governor of Shrewsbury Sir Michael Ernle, writing in report to Prince Rupert on 2 October: ‘Since our late disaster at Montgomery the face of our condition is much altered. The edge of the gentry is very much abated, so that they are all at a stand and move but heavily to advance this service. The countryside’s loyalty is strangely weakened, they begin to warp to the enemy.’²³

Established at Montgomery as his first independent base on Welsh soil, a week after the battle Myddelton wrote to the Committee of Both Kingdoms reflecting on ‘as great a victory as hath been gained in any part of the kingdom.’²⁴ He also represented his shortages of men (his allies in the battle having now left) and ready money, but there were hopeful signs that both might increase. Later on the day of the battle local gentry, probably including fair weather Royalists shifting with the balance of power, came to Montgomery to make themselves known to Myddelton. Foremost among them was the county MP Sir John Price of Newtown. In 1642 Price had headed the minority Parliamentary party in Montgomeryshire, but yielded when local Royalists gained ascendancy in the county. Whether he had then acted in submission or pragmatic acquiescence, once Price joined Myddelton he was characterised for Parliamentary supporters as ‘one whose heart was always with the parliament, but was so over mastered by the enemy he durst not appear.’²⁵ Price having made his appearance and joined Myddelton before the battle of Montgomery (when he was holed up in the besieged castle) used his influence to prosper the invasion. As the Royalist archbishop John Williams following events from Conway in North Wales saw it, Myddelton was ‘quietly possessed of Montgomeryshire by the help of Sir John Price.’²⁶ Myddelton rewarded Price with the governorship of Montgomery Castle.²⁷

Given Price’s backing, Myddelton summoned public gatherings held first at Montgomery and then at Newtown on 26 September. Intending to assert authority as well as rally support, Myddelton proclaimed the traditional device of summoning all physically fit men aged 16 to 60 to report for militia service. Perhaps because of Price’s local standing, the Newtown assembly was busy. The outcome seems to have been that a substantial

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handful of notable gentry along with a crowd of ‘the commons of all the county’ declared themselves for parliament.²⁸ Price enthused that ‘the country do come in cheerful, they only want arms to defend themselves.’²⁹

Four days later Myddelton, with the strength of his brigade, 400 Foot and 50 Horse, came to Welshpool to hold another assembly. Myddelton also intended to take advantage of its current isolation by seizing the nearby enemy garrison at the Red Castle. Before dawn on 2 October, Myddelton’s men stormed the castle once his engineer and master gunner, John Arundel, had deployed a petard to blow in the outer gate. Royalist resistance collapsed after the Parliamentarians gained the inner ward of the castle. Its active Royalist owner Lord Powis was among almost 100 prisoners taken along with horses and weaponry.³⁰ Myddelton had repairs made and a garrison established. He now had two strongholds in Montgomeryshire that, within eight miles of each other, were mutually supporting. With soldiers also likely posted in Newtown, Myddelton held three of Montgomeryshire’s five market towns (the others being southerly Llanidloes and far westerly Machynlleth). This enabled control of communications along the more populous and agriculturally productive upper reaches of the Severn valley.

From these bases Myddelton’s brigade made further incursions into hitherto secure enemy territory. Since the battle of Montgomery, Royalists had begun to refortify Lea Castle near the Shropshire market town of Bishop’s Castle, eight miles south-east of Montgomery. In the second week of October, a detachment from Montgomery advanced upon Lea and the unprepared garrison temporarily abandoned it. Elsewhere in south Shropshire the Parliamentarians probed the Clun valley. Myddelton’s Horse also ventured southward into Radnorshire, capturing a leading Royalist county commissioner together with the Warwickshire Royalist, Baron Leigh of Dunsmore. This encouraged some Radnorshire gentry openly to express their support for the Parliamentary cause.³¹ Before the end of October, Myddelton’s patrols penetrated the westerly reaches of upland Montgomeryshire. Some 60 troopers came to Machynlleth to levy the assessment tax and ransacked nearby Dolguog Hall, home of the Royalist Francis Herbert.³²

With Montgomeryshire cleared of effective Royalist opposition, Myddelton looked northward to his home county – Denbighshire. With Colonel

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Mytton he planned to seize the town and castle of Ruthin, an enemy garrison before the battle of Montgomery numbering 320 or so Horse and Foot commanded by the Denbighshire Royalist, Colonel Marcus Trevor. The originally 13th century masonry castle was partly ruinous, but Trevor had repairs underway to make it defensible. The Parliamentary stratagem was remarkably ambitious. Fifty-three miles north of Welshpool by present roads, Ruthin was reached by valley routes cutting through the high uplands of the Clywdian Range. Although Mytton’s base at Oswestry was used as the jumping-off point, and Llangollen, in the Dee valley southward of Ruthin, as a staging post, the operation involved lengthy approach marches through semi-mountainous terrain in what was still ostensibly Royalist territory. And Ruthin was further distant than Myddelton’s family seat at Chirk. Perhaps Myddelton hoped to repeat his success at Montgomery of unbalancing the enemy by an unexpected strike into their territory. He certainly viewed Ruthin as a springboard for further operations to unhinge the entire Royalist position in North Wales.³³ Furthermore, Ruthin Castle was one of Myddelton’s properties.

Myddelton and Mytton’s combined forces attacked Ruthin early on 19 October. The Parliamentarians drove the outnumbered Royalists from their outposts into the town, overrunning their street barricades and routing Trevor’s Horse. However, the aptly named Captain George Sword rallied some Royalist Foot who withdrew into the castle. Confident of gaining the incomplete defences, the Parliamentarians attempted to storm the castle but were beaten off by Sword’s determined garrison. Myddelton whitewashed this failure, but whether one takes at face value other contemporary reports of 100, 60 or 57 Parliamentarians killed in the fighting (which appear more credible if we accept the inclusion of badly wounded) these were serious losses that, coupled to concerns about the arrival of Royalist reinforcements, compelled Myddelton and Mytton to abandon Ruthin later on the 20th. The locals had appeared hostile, and a neutral contemporary diarist noted how the Parliamentarians ‘retreated out of the country [ie Denbighshire] without any other achievements.’³⁴

The Royalist mouthpiece journal *Mercurius Aulicus* gloated how Myddelton ‘had come with so great a strength, and yet be shamelessly beaten and abused by so few before his own door.’³⁵ The attempt upon Ruthin, as well as causing Myddelton loss of face, had, notwithstanding Mytton’s

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Shropshire reinforcements, demonstrated how far his brigade was overstretched attempting to achieve further territorial gains. Furthermore, Myddelton’s old ally Sir William Brereton did not share his view of the strategic advantage of Ruthin, viewing it as too remote to be of significance to his operations against Chester;³⁶ a campaign which Brereton would doggedly pursue into 1645 with the backing of the Committee of Both Kingdoms as the main focus of Parliament’s war effort in the north-west.

In mid-November 1644 Myddelton received welcome news of reinforcements. Colonel Beale's Foot, recruited for Myddelton in London, had instead been diverted to Pembrokeshire. Since landing at Milford Haven in August they had served under Sergeant-Major-General Rowland Laugharne, Parliament's commander in south Wales. Notified that Laugharne was returning Beale's men to his command, Myddelton with Horse and Dragoons rode to meet them. They joined forces at Lampeter in Cardiganshire on probably 24 November. While no doubt pleased to confer with Laugharne in person, Myddelton was probably disappointed to find that Beale and Carter (his lieutenant-colonel) had just 140 men. On their return march, having failed to seize the Royalist Sir Richard Price of Gogerddan at his home near Aberystwyth, on 27 November near Machynlleth Myddelton's column was ambushed by outnumbering Royalists from Merionethshire led by the commissioner of array Rowland Pugh. In the ensuing running skirmish, the Royalists (who Myddelton reckoned were mostly reluctant untrained conscripts) were driven through the town and, after making a stand at the nearby bridge over the River Dyfi, were routed – losing, by Myddelton's calculation, 20 killed and 60 captured. The victorious Parliamentarians then looted Machynlleth, and further up the Dyfi valley occupied and burnt Pugh's house at Mathafarn, which he had fortified as a garrison. From there they returned south-eastward to Newtown, according to Myddelton without the loss of a single man.³⁷

In August 1644 Radnorshire's Royalists had established their first seriously fortified garrison in the county at the (originally) 12th century abbey at Abbeycwmhir, by present roads 15 miles south of Newtown. Dissolved in 1535, the abbey estate in the 1560s had been acquired by the Fowler family. In 1644 the place was the seat of Richard Fowler and the garrison incorporated his manor house and the remaining abbey buildings.³⁸ Abbeycwmhir was situated to counter Parliamentary movements into

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Radnorshire along the valley routeways in the surrounding hill country. Like any civil war garrison, the troop of Royalist Horse and company of Foot based at Abbeycwmhir sustained themselves by exploiting communities within reach. They had ranged into the Kerry hills of south Montgomeryshire and to Newtown itself. Their requisitioning and taxation – ‘cruelties, plunder and unchristian usage’ – from this former ‘Abbey of the Papists’, according to a correspondent with Myddelton’s brigade, ‘began to be a great annoyance to us.’³⁹

Making their approach march overnight, after sunrise on Thursday 5 December, Myddelton’s force, including Colonel Beale’s men, surprised and stormed the stronghold at Abbeycwmhir. For the loss of several wounded, the Parliamentarians captured most of the garrison – 85 officers and men with the governor – and their magazine, including 260 muskets. Also taken captive was Hugh Lloyd, the Royalist high sheriff of Radnorshire and leading commissioner of array: ‘the most active and bitterest man of all the others in those parts against parliament’, Myddelton described him.⁴⁰ Before escorting the prisoners to Newton the Parliamentarians burned the house and damaged the outworks, rendering the place indefensible.

By the second week of December Myddelton had also established a small garrison in Flintshire by fortifying a manor house at Willington, countering the Royalists holding the crossing of the River Dee at nearby Bangor. Disconcerted, the Royalists abandoned and partly burnt Bangor-on-Dee and withdrew to the Welsh side of the river.

The outpost at Willington lay, as the crow flies, within ten miles of Myddelton’s home at Chirk. At Christmastide Myddelton, again joining forces with Colonel Mytton, re-entered Denbighshire to regain his castle. Arriving at Chirk on 21 December, the Parliamentarians forced the Royalist garrison, commanded by Sir John Watts, from their outworks. *Mercurius Aulicus* later mocked that although Myddelton had ‘ambition to keep Christmas in one of his own houses’, he ‘would not abuse the castle with ordnance [artillery] (because his own house).’⁴¹ In fact Myddelton and Mytton had no heavy cannon to breach the castle walls, so instead planned to do so by undermining. Pioneers sheltering under an improvised timber hoarding used hand tools to work into the base of the wall, but retreated when the Royalists tumbled the parapet and other masonry onto them. The

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death of Myddelton's engineer John Arundel, as he directed operations, seems to have been the final setback that compelled the Parliamentarians to abandon this medieval-like siege on Christmas Eve. Perhaps wintry weather also hastened their withdrawal to Oswestry, from where local hearsay informed Watts that the Parliamentarians had suffered 31 fatalities and 43 other casualties.⁴²



Plate 2: Sir Thomas Myddelton's family seat at Chirk Castle, seized by Royalists in January 1643 and unsuccessfully besieged by Myddelton's Parliamentarians at Christmas 1644.
(© Jonathan Worton)

The attempt on Chirk Castle marked the high-water mark of Myddelton's campaign. By the turn of the year he had established a Parliamentary enclave in Montgomeryshire, and by raids across the county border furthered the contraction of Royalist authority since the battle of Montgomery. In late January 1645, a detachment based at Machynlleth under Sir William Myddelton, recently arrived from London, raided Royalist houses northward into coastal Merionethshire and southward into Cardiganshire, where at Llanbadarn they won a skirmish against Royalists from the nearby garrison at Aberystwyth Castle.⁴³ By these shows of his limited force, Myddelton appeared to be making the periphery of Montgomeryshire 'conformable to the rest.'⁴⁴ But the failures before Ruthin and Chirk castles showed that Myddelton lacked manpower and resources to take major Royalist strongholds.

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In October, reporting to the Committee of Both Kingdoms, Myddelton had complained of his brigade weakened to just 350 men by casualties and desertion. While word from Myddelton’s camp was that the number of Welsh recruits had fallen short of expectation – ‘the country come in very willingly to Sir Thomas Myddelton upon summons, but are very unwilling to fight’⁴⁵ – Sir John Price was in fact issued with firearms to equip 340 musketeers of his own regiment. Although Myddelton, sensibly at first, distrusted these raw recruits to secure his garrisons, let alone go on operations, it may be assumed that given time they became effective. Myddelton’s horsemen also gained in number, from just 50 he mentioned in October to the 235 officers and men mustered in January 1645.⁴⁶ However, desertion was a chronic drain on Myddelton’s manpower. Captain Hannay, captured in March 1645 and held captive in Chirk Castle, found upon rejoining Myddelton’s brigade that his troop of 40 Horse had shrunk to just 12, ‘the rest being run to other brigades which hath better pay’. Fellow captain Simon Farmer reported that of his originally 50-strong troop, 19 officers and men deserted – 13 to the enemy, 6 to other Parliamentary forces. Farmer’s own resignation from Myddelton’s brigade in July 1644 was but one example of the turnover among its English officers.⁴⁷ In March 1645 Myddelton wistfully complained to the speaker of the Commons ‘I find by sad experience that the liberty which many [Parliamentary] commanders take in entertaining of soldiers which deserts their colours [...] proves very prejudicial.’⁴⁸

Logistical difficulties also hampered Myddelton’s war effort. The brigade on invading Montgomeryshire was well equipped, and inventories from the magazines at Montgomery and the Red Castle indicate that to the end of 1644 it continued to be so. However, there seems no reason to doubt Myddelton’s increasing concern before then about diminishing stocks of vital munitions, particularly gunpowder. The Royalist surrender of Liverpool on 1 November had reopened the seaborne supply line for Parliamentary forces in the north-west, but probably in late November a merchantman heading there from Milford Haven carrying military supplies for Myddelton, including 50 barrels of gunpowder, was wrecked on the Cardiganshire coast.⁴⁹

Myddelton also struggled to pay and supply his men from the resources of the region. He complained of ‘this country having been exhausted by the

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exactions of the enemy before my coming.⁵⁰ Across large swathes of Wales relatively unaffected by the fighting, paramilitary Royalist county administration are likely to have already placed heavy burdens of taxation on market towns and thinly populated upland areas alike.⁵¹ Under the command of Prince Rupert and his predecessor Lord Capel, Royalist units had routinely been posted to Montgomeryshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire to recruit and recuperate. A Parliamentary journalist reflected that Welsh Deeside and beyond was ‘so barren a place, [...] there is no provisions to be had, for our men in those parts, being only rock and mountains, no victuals for any party that are able to make it good.’⁵² As the Royalist system of contributions fractured under Myddelton’s inroads into mid-Wales, the Parliamentarians set out to replace it with their equivalent assessment. Raiding the country served in the interim; a reported foray into Radnorshire in November by Myddelton’s horsemen to seize cattle fits this context.⁵³ By December, Myddelton’s soldiers felt secure in visiting Machynlleth to order the assessment levied in neighbouring Merionethshire, including five months arrears.⁵⁴

The assessment was administered by the Parliamentary county committee for Montgomeryshire. It was based since October at the Red Castle, under the direction of the treasurer Lloyd Pierce of Maesmawr Hall in nearby Guilsfield (who became the county high sheriff in 1650). In Captain Hannay’s example, the committee allocated taxes to pay his troop from Llangurig in south Montgomeryshire, and from parishes in the easterly hundreds of Deuddwr and Caus along the Shropshire border.⁵⁵ This standard practice of allocating to particular units taxes from certain areas did not end unwarranted requisitioning. In March and April 1645 Pierce and the committee were frustrated by Captain Swift’s company from Montgomery ‘taking monies for themselves’ by violent intimidation. The committeemen told Sir John Price that while they had allowed what they considered sufficient allocation to pay his garrison, he could also sequester Royalist estates as he saw fit in supplement.⁵⁶ Royalist interference with tax collection could not be discounted. The village of Chirbury, three miles eastward of Montgomery, was also within easy riding distance of the Royalist garrison in Shropshire at Leigh Hall. In later October 1644, Royalist troopers from Leigh reportedly menaced the parishioners at Sunday service and seized the minister in punishment for Chirbury having paid Myddelton’s levies. In the Welshpool area, into April 1645, a high constable encouraged

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the Royalist garrisons at Chirk and Shrawardine, Shropshire, to continue to execute their warrants for tax, despite Lieutenant-Colonel Carter’s threats ‘not to pay contribution to the Cavaliers.’⁵⁷

Taxation, intimidation and looting by the soldiery of both sides provoked hostility from communities across mid-Wales and bordering England from autumn 1644 into spring 1645. Parliamentary inroads coupled to the lessening of Royalist control in some areas and intensification in others since the battle of Montgomery provoked widespread outbreaks of armed civilian vigilantism, acting neutrally to protect property and community. Myddelton in April 1645 acknowledged that ‘the licentiousness of the soldiers in wasting and plundering the country make most people that have no relation to arms to hate the very name of a soldier.’⁵⁸ The so-called Clubman movement that also spread across Shropshire, Herefordshire and Radnorshire was recognised by the Royalist military as a threat in Montgomeryshire and Merionethshire in October 1644. A report that in Merionethshire ‘people of the country’ had in early November angrily mobbed Myddelton’s horsemen at Dinas Mawddry, capturing an officer and seriously injuring several troopers, rings true in this context.⁵⁹

Into 1645 Myddelton continued his campaign with less success, probing into Denbighshire while providing token support for Brereton’s operations against Royalist Chester. Early in January some of Myddelton’s horsemen returned and, carelessly quartered in reach of Chirk, were surprised by Royalists, losing 30 or so men taken prisoner with their horses.⁶⁰ More successfully, on the 18th about 100 of Sir Thomas’s and Sir William Myddelton’s Horse helped defeat an attack by the Chester garrison upon Brereton’s outpost near the city at Christleton, that was shielding Brereton’s siege operations against Beeston Castle.⁶¹ Myddelton posted some forces to the Wrexham area but they remained vulnerable to Royalist counter-attack. In early May, Myddelton’s men were driven from Wrexham by 500 of Marcus Trevor’s garrison at Ruthin, with the loss of 60 casualties and captured. Myddelton’s defeated officers urgently called on Brereton for reinforcements, to which he grudgingly agreed.⁶² Myddelton’s brigade was scattered in detachments whose actions were limited. In December a London journal had trumpeted Myddelton’s success at Abbeycwmhir as ‘the news from the Welsh Alps, though somewhat far distant, may be a considerable aspect to us here.’⁶³ In the wider direction of the war, however,

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within the Committee of Both Kingdoms there was no enthusiasm for an invasion of remote North Wales. Brereton’s steadily executed campaign against Chester was regarded as nationally significant and drew resources accordingly. Myddelton’s actions were a useful sideshow distracting the Royalists from countering Brereton’s main effort.

That Myddelton was stretched to maintain a hold on his own backyard was revealed in March 1645, when the Royalist general Charles Gerard, previously Laugharne’s opponent in south Wales, invaded Montgomeryshire. From winter quarters in Monmouthshire, Gerard brought his army northward in support of the Princes Rupert and Maurice when they advanced into the northerly Marches, who, before withdrawing to Worcestershire and Herefordshire in later March relieved Chester and Beeston Castle and threw the Parliamentarians in the region onto the defensive. Gerard made Newtown his base for three or so weeks to rest his men. Gerard maintained his army’s mobility at the expense of living off the land, and in Montgomeryshire imposed a harsh levy for supplies and remounts. From neighbouring Shropshire it was reported in early April that Gerard’s forces ‘continue about Montgomeryshire, making great havoc and spoil, having taken all the horses they can find, and driven in all the colts off the mountains.’⁶⁴ Myddelton’s brigade withdrew into its strongholds after defeats skirmishing with Gerard’s veterans. Some of Myddelton’s Foot and Horse were beaten at Knockin in westerly Shropshire on 18 March by Sir Edmund Cary’s Horse, sent by Gerard to ‘scour the country up to Shrewsbury’, while three days later in south Montgomeryshire another of Gerard’s detachments defeated Sir John Price’s men at Llanidloes (‘of his young regiment he hath not a dozen left’, crowed *Mercurius Aulicus*).⁶⁵ By all accounts having ‘plundered exceedingly’ and used ‘all the country most miserably.’⁶⁶ and, it seems, beaten Sir John Price’s troop of Horse in another skirmish,⁶⁷ in the third week of April Gerard’s refreshed army marched from Montgomeryshire rapidly southward, and on 23 April in Carmarthenshire surprised and badly defeated Laugharne’s army and went on to capture or isolate Parliamentary garrisons in Pembrokeshire.

It was perhaps Gerard’s success coupled to knowledge that the main royal army was in the field and reportedly targeting Chester, that in mid-May this encouraged Sir John Price to side-shift again and declare Montgomery Castle for King Charles, who at the time was with his army on the

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Shropshire/Staffordshire border, two long days’ march from Montgomery. Price handed the castle back to his erstwhile Parliamentary comrades upon news of the king’s defeat at Naseby in June, but what part Myddelton played in that is unknown.⁶⁸ His command of North Wales had been one of few exemptions from the Self-Denying Ordinance passed on 3 April, removing politicians from Parliamentary military command. On 13 May parliament had extended Myddelton’s dispensation (ironically together with Price) for a further 40 days, and nominated his brother-in-law Colonel Mytton to take command in North Wales.⁶⁹ In fact Myddelton relinquished his commission, probably in London, on 13 June 1645. His sergeant-major-generalship had lasted for two years and a day.⁷⁰

It was by good fortune and with the strong support of allies that in September 1644 Myddelton established and kept position in Montgomeryshire – a Royalist victory at Montgomery would have brought his campaign and probably his military career to an abrupt end. The Parliamentary enclave he carved out destabilised a former heartland of support for the king, and by incursions into surrounding areas which were still Royalist, it can be argued that Myddelton’s brigade punched above its weight. Myddelton’s campaign was of more than nuisance value, directly and indirectly having the wider effect of supporting the Shropshire Parliamentarians, Laugharne’s effort in southerly Wales, and Brereton’s actions against Chester and supporting Royalist garrisons.

But Myddelton could not manage any further sustained advance into North Wales. Reasons for this failure included operational difficulties largely beyond his control – unforgiving terrain and poor communications, logistical isolation and shortage of supplies, shaky recruitment and manpower retention because of financial weakness – coupled to the uncertainties of popular allegiance, the product of the alienation and war weariness of the increasingly neutralist population. Moreover, in terms of Parliament’s conduct of the war into 1645, North Wales was peripheral to more pressing military objectives, including the formation of the New Model Army.

Myddelton was therefore unable to land any knockout blow against the Royalists in North Wales – against their fortresses in particular. Therein, as John Lord Byron in command at Chester in April 1645 recognised, in a near

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dozen by then well-garrisoned, well-fortified and supplied castles – including Myddelton’s own at Chirk and Ruthin – rested Royalist military power. Without them, Byron believed North-Walian Royalism was but a veneer; pick off the castles and Royalist administration would crumble and the gentry come to terms with Myddelton and his fellow Parliamentarians.⁷¹



Plate 3: Likeness of Sir Thomas Myddelton (1586–1666)
on his funerary monument in St. Mary's Church, Chirk.
(© Jonathan Worton)

- ¹ Bodleian Library, Tanner Manuscripts 60, f. 41.
- ² P. Gaunt, *A Nation Under Siege; The Civil War in Wales 1642–48* (London, 1991); R. Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort 1642–1646* (2nd edition, London, 2003); N. Tucker, *North Wales in the Civil War* (Wrexham, 1992); N. Tucker, *North Wales and Chester in the Civil War* (Ashbourne, 2003); J. Worton, *The Battle of Montgomery, 1644: The English Civil War in the Welsh Borderlands* (Solihull, 2016); J. Worton, *To Settle the Crown: Waging Civil War in Shropshire, 1642–1648* (Solihull, 2016).

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- ³ J. Gwynn Williams, 'Myddelton, Sir Thomas (1586–1666), parliamentarian army officer', in C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), online edition available (April 2019) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19686>; A. H. Dodd, 'Sir Thomas Myddelton (1586–1666), parliamentary commander', in *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* online, available (April 2019) <https://biography.wales/article/s-MYDD-ELT-1207>.
- ⁴ R. N. Dore, 'Sir Thomas Myddelton's Attempted Conquest of Powys, 1644–45', *The Montgomeryshire Collections, Transactions of the Powys-Land Club*, 57 (1961–2), pp. 91–118.
- ⁵ R. Williams (ed.), 'An Account of the Civil War in North Wales, transcribed from the MS Notebook of William Maurice, esq., Preserved in the Wynnstay Library', *Archaeologica Cambrensis*, I (1846), pp. 33–4.
- ⁶ Worton, *Settle the Crown*, pp. 205–7.
- ⁷ In several contemporary sources the term 'brigade' is applied to the force Sir Thomas Myddelton raised and led from spring 1644 into summer 1645. At the time of the civil wars brigade usually referred to a tactical body of infantry, in particular following Swedish drill and formation. But interestingly, in respect of Myddelton's force, brigade was used in the modern military organisational sense of a self-contained and self-supporting mixed arms force. In Myddelton's brigade this included units of infantry, cavalry, dragoons (mounted infantry) and artillerymen.
- ⁸ J. Hall (ed.), 'Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties by Thomas Malbon of Nantwich, Gent.', *The Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, XIX (1889), p. 71.
- ⁹ *Journals of the House of Commons, Volume III*, p. 412.
- ¹⁰ P. Edwards, *Dealing in Death: The Arms Trade and the British Civil Wars, 1638–52* (Stroud, 2001), pp. 72–3, 95–6, 150, 169–70.
- ¹¹ The National Archives (hereafter 'TNA'), SP28/346 Part 1, f. 57; SP28/346 Part 1, f. 49; SP28/346 Part 2, f. 56; SP28/346 Part 1, f. 51; SP28/346 Part 2, f. 46.
- ¹² TNA, SP28/300 Part 1, f. 93; SP28/346, Part 1, f. 91; National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Chirk Castle Mss. 1/Biii, 93.
- ¹³ *A Perfect Diurnall of some Passages in Parliament*, edition for 25 March–1 April 1644, p. 277.

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- ¹⁴ *Journals of the House of Lords, Volume VI*, pp. 424–5; W. D. Hamilton (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I* [hereafter *CSPD*], 1644 (London, 1888), p. 65.
- ¹⁵ W. D. Hamilton (ed.), *CSPD, 1644–1645* (London, 1890), p. 34; NLW, Herbert Manuscripts and Papers, Series II, Vol. IX, E6/1/3.
- ¹⁶ The problem of establishing the actual strength of civil war military formations, given the contemporary habit of generalising about numbers of rank and file and troopers but not their officers, was acknowledged in A. H. Burne and P. Young, *The Great Civil War: A Military History of the First Civil War 1642–1646* (Moreton-in-Marsh, 1998 reprint), p. 13, and considered in depth in G. Foard, *Naseby The Decisive Campaign* (Barnsley, 2004), pp. 202–3, 206–7.
- ¹⁷ *Perfect Passages of Each Dayes Proceedings in Parliament*, edition for 30 July–6 August 1645, p. 324.
- ¹⁸ Worton, *Battle of Montgomery*, pp. 18–20.
- ¹⁹ *A Copy of a Letter sent from Sir Tho. Middleton, to the Honorable, William Lenthall Esq; Speaker of the House of Commons. Concerning the Siege at Oswestry* (London, 1644), unpaginated.
- ²⁰ *CSPD, 1644*, p. 355; NLW, Sweeney Hall Manuscripts A1, f. 20.
- ²¹ Worton, *Battle of Montgomery*, pp. 21–5.
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 34–45, 84–92, *passim*.
- ²³ Bodleian Library, Firth Manuscripts C7, f. 191.
- ²⁴ *CSPD, 1644*, p. 533.
- ²⁵ *The London Post*, edition for 16 October 1644, p. 4.
- ²⁶ J. R. Phillips, *Memoirs of The Civil War in Wales and the Marches, 1642–1649, Volume II* (London, 1874), p. 215.
- ²⁷ *Perfect Occurrences of Parliament and Chief Collections of Letters*, edition for 18–25 October 1644, p. 12.
- ²⁸ Anon, ed., ‘A Short Account of the Rebellion in North and South Wales, in Oliver Cromwell’s time’, *The Cambrian Quarterly*, I (1829), p. 62.
- ²⁹ *The London Post*, edition for 16 October 1644, p. 4.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3; The British Library, Additional Manuscripts 18981, f. 281.
- ³¹ *Perfect Occurrences of Parliament and Chief Collections of Letters*, edition for 18–25 October 1644, p. 12; *The Weekly Account*, edition for 2–9 October 1644, p. 463; *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 33.
- ³² *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, pp. 63, 65.

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- ³³ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 81.
- ³⁴ ‘Account of the Civil War in North Wales’, p. 38. For another mention of the action at Ruthin by a neutral contemporary, see *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, pp. 62–3. Myddelton’s own account is in *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 81, and from the Royalist side, in Phillips, *Civil War in Wales and the Marches*, II, p. 215, and reported in *Mercurius Aulicus* for the edition week ending 23 November 1644, pp. 1261–2.
- ³⁵ *Mercurius Aulicus*, edition for the week ending 23 November 1644, p. 1262.
- ³⁶ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 133.
- ³⁷ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 81; *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, p. 63.
- ³⁸ ‘Abbeycwmhir’, *Clwyd Ponys Archaeological Trust Historic Settlements Survey – Radnorshire*, undated. Available online (April 2019) <http://www.cpat.org.uk/ycom/radnor/abbeycwmhir.pdf>.
- ³⁹ *Perfect Occurrences of Parliament and Chief Collections of Letters*, edition for 20–27 December 1644, unpaginated.
- ⁴⁰ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 181.
- ⁴¹ *Mercurius Aulicus*, edition for 5–12 January 1645, p. 1329.
- ⁴² Phillips, *Civil War in Wales and the Marches*, II, p. 224.
- ⁴³ *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, p. 61.
- ⁴⁴ ‘Account of the Civil War in North Wales’, p. 38.
- ⁴⁵ *The True Informer*, edition for 19–26 October 1644, unpaginated.
- ⁴⁶ NLW, Chirk Castle Manuscripts 1/Biii, 93.
- ⁴⁷ TNA, SP28/41 Part 4, f. 483, Hannay’s accounts; TNA, SP28/37 Part 1, f. 89, Farmer’s certificate.
- ⁴⁸ Bodleian Library, Tanner Manuscripts 60, f. 41.
- ⁴⁹ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 182; *The True Informer*, edition for 21–28 December 1644, p. 446.
- ⁵⁰ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 181.
- ⁵¹ M. Bennett, ‘Damnified Villagers: Taxation in Wales during the First Civil War’, *The Welsh History Review*, 19 (1998), pp. 34, 36–7.
- ⁵² *Perfect Occurrences of Parliament and Chief Collections of Letters*, edition for 21–28 February 1645.
- ⁵³ Bennett, ‘Damnified Villagers’, p. 39; *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, p. 63.
- ⁵³ *The True Informer*, edition for 19–26 October 1644.
- ⁵⁴ *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, p. 63.

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- ⁵⁵ TNA, SP28/41 Part 4, ff. 472–3.
- ⁵⁶ Anon., 'The Price Correspondence of Newtown Hall', in *Collections Historical and Archaeological relating to Montgomeryshire and its Borders*, XXXI (1900), pp. 110–11.
- ⁵⁷ *Perfect Passages of Each Dayes Proceedings in Parliament*, edition for 6–13 November 1644, pp. 25–6; Anon., 'Civil War Incidents in Montgomeryshire: Supplementary Information', *Collections Historical and Archaeological relating to Montgomeryshire and its Borders*, XVI (1883), pp. 384–7.
- ⁵⁸ Bodleian Library, Tanner Manuscripts 60, f. 41.
- ⁵⁹ Bodleian Library, Firth Manuscripts C7, f. 205; *Cambrian Quarterly*, I, p. 63.
- ⁶⁰ *The Weekly Account*, edition for 1–8 January 1645, unpaginated; *The London Post*, edition for 21 January 1645, p. 3.
- ⁶¹ Phillips, *Civil War in Wales and the Marches*, II, pp. 225–6.
- ⁶² R. N. Dore (ed.), *The Letter Books of Sir William Brereton, Volume I, January 31st–May 29th 1645*, The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 366–7.
- ⁶³ *A Perfect Diurnall of some Passages in Parliament*, edition for 23 December 1644, p. 589.
- ⁶⁴ *The Weekly Account*, edition for 16–23 April 1645, unpaginated.
- ⁶⁵ *Mercurius Aulicus*, edition for 23–30 March 1645, pp. 1520–1
- ⁶⁶ *Perfect Passages of Each Dayes Proceedings in Parliament*, edition for 6–9 April 1645, p. 189.
- ⁶⁷ *The Weekly Account*, edition for 7–14 May 1645, unpaginated.
- ⁶⁸ Dore, 'Attempted Conquest of Powys', pp. 116–17; C. H. Firth (ed.), 'The Journal of Prince Rupert's Marches, 5 September 1642 to 4 July 1646', *The English Historical Review*, 13 (1898), pp. 738.
- ⁶⁹ *Journals of the House of Commons, Volume IV*, p. 139.
- ⁷⁰ TNA, SP28/139 Part 18, f. 203, Myddelton's declared accounts of wartime receipts.
- ⁷¹ *CSPD, 1644–1645*, p. 435.

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‘DOES CROMWELL’S LEGACY HAVE ANY RELEVANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY?’

by Ben Rhydderch

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Characterising Cromwell’s legacy presents many difficulties. Even determining exactly what impact Cromwell had on his own times is a daunting task; let alone tracing that impact over succeeding years, decades and even (in this case) centuries. The question of his ‘relevance in the 21st century’ should not concern Cromwell in isolation – from whose life we can draw out morals that apply to contemporary society, as was the intention of Carlyle,¹ for instance – this would lead to analysis which would be largely ahistorical. Instead, we must view the question as addressing the extent to which the effects of the Cromwellian legacy can be identified in the present day. I argue that under this approach, the impact of Cromwell and his actions continues to have some relevance in the 21st century. Considering the impossibility of encapsulating all aspects of a life such as Cromwell’s in the short space provided for this essay, I will focus on two specific areas: that of his foreign policy (now only relevant as a result of Empire) and that of his Irish policy (which has much more widespread relevance).

In terms of foreign policy, Cromwell’s legacy was generated over his tenure as Protector alone, with the Instrument of Government² (and later, the Humble Petition and Advice³) allowing him to have almost full control over its direction. Many commentators in the immediate context of the Restoration attempted to point out that Cromwell’s attitude to Europe, especially in his controversial alliance with Catholic France, became quickly irrelevant when France itself came to dominate Europe in the latter half of the 17th century. Edmund Ludlow argued that, by this alliance, ‘the balance of the two crowns of Spain and France was destroyed, and a foundation laid for the future greatness of the French’, a sentiment echoed in Slingsby Bethel’s influential pamphlet, *The World’s Mistake in Oliver Cromwell*.⁴ Whilst this assessment may not be entirely fair (many have traced France’s territorial expansion in the Thirty Years War, aided by Spain’s loss of much of the Low Countries to the new Dutch Republic in the Peace of Westphalia (1648), as a more pivotal moment in its ascendancy⁵), it remains hard to trace much of Cromwell’s legacy with regards to European policy much beyond his time, and certainly not to the 21st century. Not only is this

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because of the constantly shifting balances of power in Europe (making much of Cromwell’s attitudes towards it defunct anyway), but also because the ‘basic assumptions’⁶ of Cromwellian European policy are contended to be rooted in his religion.^{7,8,9} Under this analysis, Cromwell wished to further the aims of Protestantism by making alliances which would aid him in a struggle against Papists on the Continent (especially Spain), even if it meant entering into an alliance with Catholic France.¹⁰ Whilst it is possible to take into account ‘secular’ motivations,¹¹ we must still concede that Cromwell often reviewed his policy in a providential context¹² which meant that, although England’s interests would be preserved, they would necessarily coincide with the wider Protestant cause. The consequence of this is that much of the *idea* of Cromwell’s foreign policy bears little relevance to the largely secular nature of contemporary international relations.

Furthermore, the role that religion played in underpinning Cromwell’s foreign policy is evidenced in his peace negotiations with the Protestant Dutch Republic in 1653. Cromwell originally proposed a close coalition, which Thomas Burton MP believed ‘might have brought them to oneness [full political union] with us ... in four or five months.’¹³ This, along with plans for a Dutch sphere of influence in the East Indies and an English sphere of influence in the West, can be regarded as an attempt by Cromwell to create a strong ‘nucleus’¹⁴ of Protestant political power in Europe, as well as serving England’s economic interests by dealing with the competitive influence of the Dutch East India Company. However, not only did the Dutch reject such plans, never giving the idea any serious credit, but the concept of any kind of union of states under the supranational authority of the Protestant faith never truly resurfaced, although some argue that it continued to shape international conflict well after the turmoil of the early 17th century.¹⁵ At the very least, it is fair to say that religion does not significantly inform current British foreign policy, let alone dictate it – and therefore, much of Cromwell’s legacy in this area, with his conception of political blocs based around religion, is now irrelevant in the 21st century.

That being said, one specific aspect of Cromwell’s foreign policy continues to have an impact on social and political relations both in the UK and in the wider world. Linked to Cromwell’s ambition to expand Protestant influence in the Americas and challenge Catholic Spain in a new theatre,¹⁶ his ‘Western Design’ and subsequent annexation of Jamaica from the Spanish in

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1655 represented a significant expansion of what would become the British Empire, following St. Kitts, Barbados and Nevis as one of the first permanent English colonies in the Caribbean. Some significance to the 21st century therefore lies in his colonial legacy: that is, the continuation of this fledgling Empire. Even after the decolonisation process of the 20th century (and the success of Jamaica’s own independence movement in 1962) concluded, Empire continues to have a heavy influence on post-colonial Britain and Jamaica to this day, as well as on the numerous other parts of the former British Empire. The effect to which the conquest of 1655 still has an indirect effect on current affairs in both countries can be illustrated by the ‘Windrush scandal’ of March 2018, which involved the infringement of the legal rights of Caribbean migrants (including 15,000 Jamaicans)¹⁷ from territories in the British Empire by the UK government.¹⁸

Of course, the indirect nature of Cromwell’s legacy on post-colonial Britain and the Commonwealth means that we should still limit its importance somewhat, considering the fact that the nature of the British Empire (even in Cromwell’s original conquests, such as Jamaica) was drastically different in the 20th century than the 17th century, as a result of developments which cannot in any way be attributed to him. However, Cromwell’s significance to Ireland can be felt much more directly than his foreign policy. Due to its proximity to England itself, Cromwell began to play an active part in its internal affairs from an early stage in his career, being heavily influenced by the Irish uprising of 1642: he became one of the commissioners in Parliament for Ireland in 1642,¹⁹ attending 12 out of the 16 meetings of the commission despite his other duties as an MP.²⁰ It was later, however, that Cromwell’s actions came to bear on Ireland in any serious manner, although it is likely that those actions were influenced by his original membership of the commission. His controversial military campaign in Ireland (1649–1650), quite apart from producing an indelible stain on his character for many historians,²¹ remains a part of contemporary discussion in Ireland. Debate on atrocities such as the siege of Drogheda is as active in the public sphere as it is in Irish academia today,²² suggesting that Cromwell’s personal military involvement in the English occupation of Ireland holds some measure of importance in Irish culture, regardless of the extent to which English atrocities during the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland can be attributed to his generalship. Indeed, such was his profound impact on Irish memory that of the thousands of pieces in the National Folklore Collection,

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Cromwell ranks second in the amount of material devoted to him,²³ verifying the towering position he holds in Irish history.

It is even possible to trace Cromwell’s legacy in Ireland beyond culture, myth and memory, in Cromwell’s continuation of the policy of ‘plantation’ as Protector. Although the concept of plantation emerged under Mary I with the creation of Queen’s and King’s counties,²⁴ with the first major site for New English planters established at Munster in 1584 under Elizabeth,²⁵ Cromwell continued and expanded this policy, supervising the planting of the 11 million acres (around half of Ireland’s total area) which had been cleared in the invasion of 1650–1653.²⁶ The Old Irish-English unity over the Catholic faith being decisively broken by New English and Scottish Protestant incursions, and the subsequent Protestant ascendancy is often considered to be Cromwell’s most significant mark on Ireland;²⁷ in particular, these religious and ethnic divisions (which arguably were first seriously introduced to Ireland by large-scale Cromwellian plantation) are stressed as fundamental to an understanding of the independence struggle in the 20th century, especially in Northern Ireland.²⁸ The ramifications of this conflict, informally concluded by the Good Friday Agreement (1998) which finalised arrangements both within Northern Ireland and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, are still felt to this day. In particular, the border policy between the two has come under pressure in the last year, whilst the UK prepares to leave the European Union.²⁹ As ever with political observations on legacy, we must be sure to heavily qualify the extent to which Cromwellian actions can be brought to bear directly on Ireland’s situation in the 21st century; however, as S.R. Gardiner reflected on the turn of the 19th, in the midst of the debate on Home Rule, ‘though Ireland’s [current] evils were not created by Cromwell’s settlement, they were enormously increased by his drastic treatment.’³⁰ Cautiously, we may make the same judgement today, albeit in very different circumstances – regardless, it is unlikely that Ireland will forget Cromwell swiftly.

In summary, therefore, Cromwell’s legacy has little direct relevance to the 21st century, but much indirect relevance – certain aspects of his life continue to play an often foundational role in social and political issues today. It is necessary to stress that this conclusion does not in any way reflect poorly on the importance of Cromwell as a figure in history, as the very fact that he provides a clearly identifiable link between time periods

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almost four centuries apart testifies. Indeed, what other relevance could a figure from the 17th century have on the 21st other than a largely indirect one? The significance of Cromwell, and indeed the period of Interregnum more widely, have in my opinion been unreasonably skewed by the emphasis placed on them in Whig and Marxist accounts, which identify him as epitomising a particular stage of a determinist narrative in history. For the former, Cromwell assumes a role in the 'forward march of liberal ideas',³¹ dispelling the 'lingering clouds of medieval privilege',³² if only for a time. For the latter, Cromwell typifies the emergence of the bourgeoisie and a proto-bourgeois state, with Cromwell being seen 'not only as the enemy of Charles and 'feudalism' but also ... [as that of] of Lilburne and Rainsborough.'³³ At least in this brief survey, the evidence seems to point to a legacy that is exceptional without needing contextualisation within wider theories such as these – not least because it continues to be relevant today.

- ¹ For Carlyle, the ideas of which Cromwell's century was the 'ultimate manifestation' were something to which English society 'must endeavour to return' [T. Carlyle, *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 1: (1846), p.1]
- ² S.R. Gardiner, *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625–1660* (1899), p.406: *The Instrument of Government*, Article V.
- ³ Ibid. p.448: Article I [implicit], p.452: Articles VII and VIII
- ⁴ S. Bethel, *The World's Mistake in Oliver Cromwell* (pub. anon.) (1668), p.4: '[Cromwell] made an unjust war against Spain, and an impolitick league with France ... and by that means broke the balance between the two Crowns of Spain and France.'
- ⁵ See P.H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War*, (2015), p.3, for instance. The Congress of Westphalia happened almost a decade before France signed their military accord with England in March 1657.
- ⁶ D.L. Smith, *Oliver Cromwell: Politics and Religion in the English Revolution* (1991), p.8
- ⁷ G.M.D. Howat, *Stuart and Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (1974), p.70

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- ⁸ M. Prestwich, *Diplomacy and Trade in the Protectorate*, *The Journal of Modern History*, 22(2): (1950), pp.103–121
- ⁹ N. Greenspan, *Selling Cromwell's Wars: Media, Empire and Godly Warfare 1650–1658* (2015), p.123–124
- ¹⁰ Howat, *Stuart and Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, p.93. In this case, Cromwell's legacy was nullified within a month of his death by the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659), which guaranteed an uneasy peace between France and Spain only punctuated by minor territorial disputes in the Netherlands and Catalonia until the War of the Spanish Succession broke out in 1701 [see D. Maland (1991): *Europe in the Seventeenth Century*, p.225–30].
- ¹¹ R. Crabtree, *The Idea of a Protestant Foreign Policy*, in I. Roots (ed.) *Cromwell*, (1973), p.160–189
- ¹² See T. Carlyle (ed.), *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 3: (1846), pp.232–233 for a good example of this in the latter half of Cromwell's letter to Vice-Admiral Goodson in Jamaica (1655).
- ¹³ J.T. Rutt (ed.), *Diary of Thomas Burton*, 1: (1828), p.112
- ¹⁴ Prestwich: *Diplomacy and Trade*, p.105
- ¹⁵ Such as in D. Onnekink (ed.), *War and Religion after Westphalia, 1648–1713* (2009).
- ¹⁶ D.L. Smith, *The Western Design and the spiritual geopolitics of Cromwellian foreign policy*, *Itinerario* 40(2) (2016), p.279
- ¹⁷ The Migration Observatory, *Commonwealth citizens arriving before 1971* (2018), retrieved from <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/commonwealth-citizens-arriving-before-1971/>. [Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Labour Force Survey, Q3 2016 to Q2 2017.]
- ¹⁸ Under the British Nationality Act 1948 from the period 1948–1971, these migrants had been granted citizenship in the UK.
- ¹⁹ *Journal of the House of Commons*, 2: (1640–1643), p.453
- ²⁰ V.F. Snow, A.S. Young (eds.), *The Private Journals of the Long Parliament*, 3: (1992) p.438, cited in I. Gentles, *Oliver Cromwell: God's Warrior and the English Revolution*, (2011), p.16
- ²¹ See M. Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner* (2008) in particular pp.85–86, for instance.
- ²² Most recently for instance, debate over T. Reilly, *Cromwell Was Framed – Ireland 1649* (2014), (which re-asserted Reilly's view that there is no

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evidence that unarmed civilians were killed at Drogheda) featured not only as part of the ongoing academic controversy created by his original assessment [T. Reilly, *Cromwell: An Honourable Enemy* (1999)], but also featured in multiple opinion pieces in mainstream publications such as the Irish Times [P. Lenihan, *Do we owe Old Ironsides an apology?* (2014), retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/do-we-owe-old-ironsides-an-apology-cromwell-was-framed-ireland-1649-1.1924166>] and the Irish Independent [H. Murphy, *'Cromwell is owed a huge apology'* (2014), retrieved from <https://www.independent.ie/regional/fingal/independent/news/cromwell-is-owed-a-huge-apology-30287816>]. For counter-argument, see J. Morrill. *Renwriting Cromwell: A Case of Deafening Silences*. Canadian Journal of History 38(3): (2003) p.19

²³ S. Covington, *'The Odious Demon'*, p.156

²⁴ I. Roots: *Union and Disunion in the British Isles, 1637–1660*, in I. Roots (ed.), *'Into Another Mould': Aspects of the Interregnum*, (1981), p.12

²⁵ Although ultimately unsuccessful, the Munster plantation did manage to establish some English landlords in the area, as well as illustrating that, despite being poorly executed with regards to the timing and placement of the undertakers, the idea was sound in practice [R. Dunlop, *The Plantation of Munster 1584–1589*, *The English Historical Review* 3(10): (1888), p.269].

²⁶ S. Covington, *'The Odious Demon from Across the Sea'. Oliver Cromwell, Memory and the Dislocations of Ireland*, in E. Kuijpers, J. Pollmann, J. Müller, J. van der Steen (eds.), *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (2013), p.154

²⁷ I. Roots, *Union and Disunion*, p.20; T.C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English Government and Reform in Ireland 1649–1660*, (1979), cited in *Ibid*.

²⁸ C. Townsend, *Religion, War and Identity in Ireland*, *The Journal of Modern History*, 76(4): (2004), pp.882–902

²⁹ See European Commission, TF50, *Guiding principles transmitted to EU27 for the Dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland* (2017), p.2; and Northern Ireland Office, *The Belfast Agreement, Strand Two: North/South Ministerial Council*, (1998), Article 1, for the root of the issue.

³⁰ S.R. Gardiner, *Cromwell's Place in History* (1897), p.59. Despite accusations of Whiggishness levelled at Gardiner, especially in his *History of England*,

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[L. Bowen, *Politics*, in G. Walker (ed.), *Writing Early Modern History* (2005), p.185–186] they are certainly not unanimously held [see M. Nixon, *Samuel Rawson Gardiner and the Idea of History* (2011), p.33]. This, along with the supporting evidence discussed, suggests that Gardiner was not significantly influenced in this assessment by a teleological approach, and thus may be extended.

³¹ W. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 2: (1956), p.315

³² G. Smith, Review of: [S. Gardiner, *Cromwell’s Place in History*, (1897)], *The American Historical Review*, 3(1): (1897) p.136

³³ D.H. Pennington, *Cromwell and the Historians*, in I. Roots (ed.), *Cromwell*, (1973), p.228

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CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXVIII
THE BATTLE OF PRESTON (17–19 AUGUST 1648)

by Dr Mark Parry

‘Surely, Sir, this is nothing but the hand of God, and wherever anything in this world is exalted, or exalts itself, God will put it down, for this is the day wherein He alone will be exalted.’¹ So wrote Cromwell, in his official account of the battle of Preston to Speaker Lenthall. Characteristically, he attributed the resounding victory for the forces of the English Parliament over the numerically superior Scottish royalist army commanded by the Duke of Hamilton, to Providence, emphasising the disparity in numbers in order to magnify the level of divine favour.

While the centrality of religious conviction to Cromwell’s world-view should never be underestimated, an examination of the Preston campaign suggests that not only was he being (falsely?) modest regarding his own contribution to Parliament’s military success, but also overstating the strength of his opponents. The Duke of Hamilton would eventually pay with his life for the defeat he suffered in Lancashire, and from a royalist point of view, the outcome was explained by much more mundane factors. In his life of Hamilton, Gilbert Burnet highlighted the weakness of the royalist forces, as ‘those who did impartially reflect upon the whole progress of that army ceased to wonder, when they saw the ruin of a raw, undisciplined army, which, without either artillery or ammunition sufficient, was precipitated by an over-hasty march into an enemy’s country’, as well as the power of Cromwell, ‘so strong an enemy’, who, in the shape of the New Model had a ‘well-disciplined and trained army’, along with popular support, with ‘the whole country on his side.’² An analysis of the battle reveals that not only was Burnet’s verdict on the outcome generally correct, but that given the respective state of the two armies, Cromwell’s victory was never in doubt.

The background to the Preston campaign was the King’s decision to restart the civil war in 1648. In December 1647, while a prisoner on the Isle of Wight, Charles signed the Engagement with a faction of the Scots Covenanters, by which he undertook to establish Presbyterianism in England for three years while retaining his control of the armed forces and his right to appoint his own advisers, agreeing to work towards a closer union of the two kingdoms and to involve Scots in the royal government. If no agreement to this from the English Parliament were to be forthcoming (there was little chance of it) then the Scots would send an army into

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England to implement the settlement. This was part of a wider attempt by the King to use the resources of his three kingdoms to reclaim the plenitude of his royal power by force: he was in extended correspondence with his representative in Ireland, the Marquis of Ormond, regarding the possibility of bringing Irish troops over to assist in the royalist war effort. Emboldened by these developments, Charles rejected the latest offer of a settlement, the Four Bills, which would have required him to surrender the control of the armed forces in England and Ireland to Parliament, as well as cancelling his declarations against the two Houses, annulling peerages granted since May 1642 and allowing Parliament to adjourn to wherever in the kingdom it thought suitable.

As royalist sentiment appeared to be growing throughout the provinces in England by Christmas 1647, with protests against the perceived harshness of parliamentary rule, Charles was emboldened to condemn the Four Bills as likely to give ‘an arbitrary and tyrannical power to the two Houses for ever’, while Parliament responded by passing a Vote of No Addresses on 3 January 1648, pledging not to undertake any negotiations with, or receive any messages from, the King. Royalist uprisings followed in the spring and summer, mainly in South Wales (Pembrokeshire), Kent, East Anglia and West Yorkshire. These were poorly coordinated and ultimately easily suppressed (though it would take until December for the last resistance to be crushed). This was the context for the main royalist thrust which was to come from Scotland under the Duke of Hamilton and its success depended on being able to mobilise English royalist support and link up with what remained of the King’s military backing in the north. In the event, the premature provincial uprisings, which were motivated more by resentment of the Army and Parliament than by positive royalism, ensured that the campaign was doomed from the start, while the forces raised in Scotland would themselves prove inadequate to the task. Before dealing with the royalist risings, the Army held its famous Prayer Meeting at Windsor at the end of April, at which Charles I was denounced as a ‘man of blood’ and where Cromwell began a process of soul-searching as to the role of divine providence in the recent events.³ This process lent a more ruthless tinge to the fighting in the Second Civil War, in which both the English royalists as well as the Scottish Engagers, were regarded as having ignored the dictates of providence and thereby left themselves liable to condign punishment. Fairfax, together with Ireton, dealt with the Kentish rising, while Cromwell

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was sent to South Wales to confront the royalist insurgency there, though he found upon arrival at Chepstow on 11 May that Colonel Thomas Horton had already vanquished the main Welsh royalist force at St Fagans, and so he settled down to a drawn-out siege of Pembroke Castle, where he remained for two months.⁴ It fell to Lambert to go to Lancashire to hold the northern front against the expected Scottish invasion until parliamentary reinforcements could be sent to his aid.

The prospects for the royalists in the north of England rested in part on the actions of Sir Marmaduke Langdale, who landed in Scotland in April 1648 from France. Langdale was a Yorkshire gentleman who, despite having been an opponent of the Forced Loan and an antagonist of Sir Thomas Wentworth and his policy of ‘Thorough’ during the 1630s, had been an important royalist general during the First Civil War, fighting with distinction at Marston Moor and rallying the royalist cavalry after Newcastle’s flight into the ‘Northern Horse’. After being beaten by Cromwell at Naseby, he had returned north where, hampered by Digby’s poor generalship, the rest of the Northern Horse were lost at Sherburn, and the two commanders fled to France. The start of the Second Civil War led Langdale to return to the British Isles: he landed in Scotland and captured Berwick in a surprise attack with only one hundred men on 28 April, before proceeding to raise the northern counties of England under a commission from the Prince of Wales, eventually achieving a force comprising 3,000 infantry and 600 cavalry.⁵

Meanwhile the Scottish forces under Hamilton entered England on 8 July and, arriving at Carlisle, replaced the English garrison there under Sir Philip Musgrave with Scottish troops.⁶ Hamilton’s forces were, however, incredibly weak. One of his difficulties was the relative lack of preparedness of his army: he had managed to raise only about 9,000 of the anticipated 30,000 men, owing to resistance to his enterprise within Scotland (notably from the Kirk) and most of the recruits were untrained and required basic instruction in the use of pikes and muskets. In addition, Hamilton was trying to hold together a fragile coalition: in order to sustain the alliance between royalists and Engagers, he was forced to accept as second-in-command the Earl of Callander, whose self-regard ensured that he was a far from obedient subordinate, and of whom it was commented that ‘the authority he usually took on him, being judged far beyond his skill in the conduct of an army’;

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while in addition, the English royalists in the north of England, led by Sir Marmaduke Langdale, were refusing to sign a letter sent to them by the Scottish Committee of Estates which had them invite the Scots into England in order to enforce the Covenant.⁷ Indeed the fatal lack of cooperation between Hamilton and the English royalists was attributable to a combination of religious difference and mutual suspicion, some of which was Hamilton's fault, 'for having incommunicable and clandestine designs, he concerted nothing with any of the English', who, as a consequence, 'judging his design only presbyterian, and so likely to grate as much upon his majesty's honour and conscience, as all their former proceedings had done' were reluctant to assist them. In addition, anti-Scots sentiment died hard, the English royalists also fearing 'that the bottom of the design would be but some advantage to the Scots upon this nation' and so determined to act independently.⁸ The result of this was that when Hamilton's army entered England, it found that, within a week all of the royalist risings south of Yorkshire and Lancashire had effectively been defeated or at least contained.⁹ Hamilton's army was, in any case, in no real condition to fight until he received reinforcements and artillery from Scotland and the anticipated boost of the arrival of Sir George Monro from Ireland with 'veteran and experienced soldiers'.

Hamilton reached Kendal on 2 August but, still lacking horses and artillery, was obliged to commandeer the former, thereby alienating much of the local population, and he was meanwhile unable to take the militarily advisable step of fighting Lambert before Cromwell's forces arrived to bolster him. Had he been a better general or commanded a better army, he ought surely to have done so.¹⁰ Internal dissension now plagued the royalist forces, and Monro's reinforcements, having enjoyed a bad reception at Galloway, never effectively caught up with him.¹¹ Hamilton, still lacking horses and artillery, and enduring poor Cumbrian weather, paused at Kendal for a week before moving down via Kirby Lonsdale to Hornby, north of Lancaster, where he stayed from 9 until 14 August, and it was only here that he resolved upon continuing into Lancashire on the westward route to London, rather than heading east into Yorkshire. His rationale seems to have been the hope of raising fresh English recruits from the traditionally royalist heartlands of Lancashire and Cheshire, but the behaviour of his troops, coupled with the general lack of enthusiasm for war after so many years of privation, meant that he struggled to raise men. Sir Marmaduke Langdale and his (at least)

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3,000 English royalist troops moved to Settle, hoping perhaps to persuade the governor of Skipton to surrender the castle and then assist in the relief of Pontefract.¹² He visited Hamilton at Hornby on 13 August to tell him that parliamentary forces in Yorkshire were assembling and a royalist council of war, directed by Hamilton, and seemingly unaware of Cromwell's advance through Yorkshire, resolved to continue through Lancashire in the hope that Manchester might declare for the king and that Lord Byron would raise North Wales to assist him. Langdale was told to return to Settle and to bring his forces to join Hamilton, who was to proceed via Lancaster and Garstang on the road to Preston. The total strength of the royalists, by the time they entered Lancashire, was perhaps as great as 20,000, comprising 17,000 Scots and Langdale's 3,000 English royalists. They were, however, in a poor condition as 'The regiments were not full, many of them scarce exceeded half their number and not the fifth man could handle pike or musket'. Undernourished, poorly equipped (notably lacking artillery), and, after a long march in the rain (the north-west of England seldom disappoints in this regard), nights spent in the open fields, and a hostile reception rather than the expected enthusiastic support from the local population, the Scottish royalist forces were distinctly low on morale. Above all, the outbreak of the royalist uprisings in England in the spring had forced them to invade England 'before they were in any posture for it.'¹³

Cromwell and Lambert had both expected Hamilton to take the eastward route to the south, relieving Pontefract and heading perhaps for Colchester, where another royalist force was under siege, and then linking up with the Prince of Wales and his naval forces off the coast of Yarmouth. As such, and with Fairfax's army still engaged in the south-east, Cromwell, having taken the surrender of the Welsh royalists at Pembroke on 11 July, was despatched to deal with Hamilton's invasion, and reached Leicester by 2 August, though his forces were short of equipment and had to await a delivery of shoes from Northampton, stockings from Coventry, and artillery from Hull, moving in the interim to assist in the siege of Pontefract (to which he would return later in the year). On 13 August, having received the artillery from Hull, Cromwell joined up with Lambert at Wetherby and, when the Lancashire parliamentary forces under Ashton were added, had around 8,600 men at his disposal, though 6,500 of them (2,500 horse and 4,000 foot) were experienced veterans. He left the artillery behind him and,

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moving via Otley and Skipton, reached Gisburn in the Ribble Valley two days later.

The council of war then debated whether to block Hamilton's route across the river as he left Preston or to attack him in the town itself, ultimately resolving upon the latter course. Having passed by Clitheroe, Cromwell spent the night of 16 August at nearby Stonyhurst Park, then a mansion belonging to the Catholic Shireburn family, now Stonyhurst College, about nine miles from Preston.¹⁴ Cromwell's intelligence as to his enemies' whereabouts was much superior to Hamilton's, who had marched blindly further into Lancashire despite Langdale's warnings. Callander and Middleton were allowed to take the cavalry on to Wigan, but Callander journeyed the 16 miles back to Preston when he heard a rumour that Cromwell was nearby, and there he joined up with Hamilton.¹⁵ Langdale repeatedly warned Hamilton that the parliamentary forces were approaching Preston but the Duke disregarded the information, assuming it was merely an advance guard, until finally, having skirmished with the enemy forces, Langdale fought his way back to Hamilton and brought several prisoners as proof of their proximity, Hamilton being 'confounded with the intelligence.'¹⁶

Eventually, on Callander's urging (and probably wisely), the main body of the Scottish infantry were withdrawn across the Ribble, where they hoped to join up with Middleton's cavalry returning from Wigan via Chorley and have the advantage of fighting with the river in front of them rather than behind, thereby leaving Langdale and the English royalist forces isolated on Ribbleton Moor on the north side of the river, on the road to Longridge.¹⁷ Upon Langdale's request for reinforcements, Hamilton sent 700 men to his aid, though as the encounter progressed and the English royalist position became more desperate, Langdale's further requests for assistance were ignored by Callander, a further sign of the damaging effect his relationship to Hamilton had upon the royalist cause.¹⁸ Cromwell, who had resolved on the riskier tactic of striking at the royalist infantry from north of the river rather than crossing the Ribble to block the Scots' advance southward, attacked the English royalist troops on Ribbleton Moor.¹⁹ There followed an attritional encounter in which, given that Langdale's infantry were protected by the hedges of enclosed fields, it was impossible for Cromwell to use the same tactics as he had deployed at Marston Moor and Naseby. Instead he

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had to rely on his infantry and after repeated attacks was forced to call-up the Lancashire parliamentary levies under Ashton in support. After a four-hour long fight, Cromwell's veterans ultimately forced their way through, despite the bravery and determination of Langdale's troops, who now fell back upon the town of Preston.²⁰ Even Cromwell admitted, while praising the 'incredible valour and resolution' of his own troops, that 'though he was still worsted, [the Enemy] made very stiff and sturdy resistance.'²¹ Langdale later bemoaned the lack of assistance from Hamilton, suggesting that even the dispatch of a thousand men to his aid would have made a difference, and, while it is perhaps unsurprising that subsequent accounts by English royalists, such as Clarendon and Sir Philip Warwick, should blame the failure of the campaign on their Scots allies, Hamilton's slowness to appreciate the gravity of the situation or assert himself over his subordinates seems not to be in doubt.²²

Now the fighting reached Preston itself, where Hamilton retreated to be joined by Langdale, 'his excellent body of foot being broken', with as many of his cavalry as remained, having been forced back by the vigour of Cromwell's pursuit. All sought to retreat over the river to rejoin Baillie and the infantry to the south, though crossing the river proved difficult on account of the heavy and persistent rains, a reminder of the particularly extreme climatic conditions experienced across Europe in the 1640s, as recently emphasised by Geoffrey Parker.²³ They did eventually manage to ford the Ribble and reached Baillie on the south side, while Langdale's cavalry fled north to join Monro.²⁴ Callander had sent 600 men to hold the bridge over the Ribble to the south-east of the town, but, forced to march through fields covered by parliamentary musketry, they sustained heavy losses and Cromwell was able, by the end of the day, to take control of the Ribble bridge before driving Baillie back over the Darwen, a tributary of the Ribble, in turn capturing the bridge there.²⁵ By the fall of night on 17 August, not only had Cromwell captured both bridges and killed at least a thousand Scots, he had also taken four thousand prisoners.²⁶ It was at this point that the royalists, now almost entirely a Scottish contingent, held a council of war to decide what to do next, at which Baillie and Turner argued that they should stand and fight, while Callander, whose actions were generally unhelpful to the royalist war effort, proposed slipping away by cover of night, an action that was to ensure that his army was pursued vigorously by Cromwell and his experienced veterans. Hamilton's army

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lacked effective means of transport as many of the horses he had commandeered had been taken back by their owners overnight, and, the soldiers being ordered to take only such powder as they could carry, orders were given, after the departure of the army, to destroy what remained.²⁷ In the event, these instructions were not carried out and so, to add a further error to a campaign littered with them, Cromwell was able to take possession of the abandoned ammunition.

The royalists descended into chaos. The Scottish infantry had marched down one road towards Wigan, via Standish; the cavalry under Middleton, chose the other road, via Chorley, and thereby the forces failed to join up, such that Middleton, having clashed with Cromwell's advance guard outside Preston, turned around and arrived at Wigan on the morning of 18th in a ragged and exhausted state. Cromwell had had to leave a garrison in Preston but he was able to pursue as the Scots retreated, though they were able to get to the relative safety of Wigan before he could catch them. When they resumed their march the next day towards Warrington, Cromwell once again pursued, and it was just to the north of there, at Winwick, that the royalists made a courageous last stand, holding off the parliamentary forces for several hours. They earned praise again from Cromwell, 'they maintaining the pass with great resolution' but in the process they lost a thousand killed and two thousand prisoners. Hamilton left Baillie to negotiate a surrender for his infantry, and, the two generals meeting on the bridge, Cromwell gave reasonable terms, promising quarter in return for taking possession of their horses and ammunition, though this was in part because he realised that he could not easily ford the Mersey and continue his pursuit, particularly given how tired and worn out his own troops were.²⁸

It was at this point, while still at Warrington, that he received word that Hamilton had ridden on into Cheshire (in the hope presumably of linking up with whatever putative uprising he hoped Byron might instigate), and had been caught at Nantwich by the local parliamentary militia, losing another five hundred men. Having been disappointed in his hopes of Cheshire, Hamilton pressed on, though harassed by trained bands and losing Middleton, the best of his officers, as a prisoner. Finally Hamilton, his 'troopers both heartless and disposed to mutiny', and, in Clarendon's harsh judgement, 'neither behaving himself like a general nor a gentleman of courage', decided at Uttoxeter that he would seek terms from the enemy.²⁹

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He tried to negotiate with the governor of Stafford but Lambert arrived and insisted that he must take the surrender, though Lord Grey of Groby, appearing from Leicestershire, tried to muscle in on proceedings. In the end, Hamilton, having declined to agree to surrender Carlisle and Berwick on the grounds that he had no authority to do so, was taken as a prisoner of war under guarantee of his life and the safety of his person. He would be tried as a traitor and executed in March of the following year. Meanwhile Callander and Langdale had left Hamilton and ridden towards Ashbourne, and while Langdale was eventually captured near Nottingham and held in the castle (where Charles I had raised the royalist standard only six years before), Callander, whose forces mutinied and refused to go on, was able to get to London and eventually sail to safety in Holland.³⁰

The defeat at Preston was terminal to the royalist cause in the Second Civil War. As Gardiner wrote: ‘Every Royalist in England knew that the blow struck at Preston had crushed his last hopes.’³¹ The garrison at Colchester, which heard of the defeat on 24 August, digested the news and then surrendered another three days later, while the defeat also put an end to the Prince of Wales’s plan to take his naval contingent of nine ships to Berwick and link up with Scots royalists. He was forced to return to the Netherlands and the once threatening naval mutiny petered out to become little more than a privateering operation under Prince Rupert.³² Cromwell knew how seismic his victory had been when he addressed his official account of the campaign to Speaker Lenthall from Warrington on 20 August, in which he attributed credit for the resounding victory to the hand of the Almighty. He did, however, in order to highlight the scale of the victory, and thereby the extent of God’s favour, emphasise the numerical disparity between the two armies, his 8,600 parliamentary forces against around 21,000 royalists, who, he insisted, ‘were as well armed, if not better than yours’ and nor were they devoid of courage, for ‘at diverse disputes [they] did fight two or three hours before they would quit their ground.’³³ He was right to emphasise the courage shown by royalist troops at particular moments, notably that of Langdale’s English royalist troops fighting at close quarters in an effort to hold Cromwell outside Preston, but the deficiencies in equipment and leadership of the Scottish royalist contingent largely undermined their efforts. In reality, the scale and scope of the parliamentary victory was due primarily to the weaknesses and mistakes of the royalist commanders, principally Hamilton and Callander, coupled with Cromwell’s ruthless ability

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to exploit the situation and achieve a decisive outcome. That said, the Lord-General's military reputation was immeasurably enhanced by the success of the Preston campaign, through the rapidity of his march northwards, his ability to confront the various enemy contingents in decisive encounters in and around Preston, Wigan and Warrington, and his forcing Hamilton and such royalist forces as remained to venture further into hostile territory where they could be brought to a final surrender.

As he returned south, and as his official report to Parliament had demonstrated, he was imbued with a clearer sense of God's favour for his cause, as well as a more uncompromising attitude towards those Englishmen who had dared to defy the divine verdict delivered in the outcome of the First Civil War. To the governor of Berwick a few weeks later, he wrote of 'The witness that God hath borne against your Army, in their Invasion of those who desired to live in peace by you', while to the Committee of the Estates of the Kingdom of Scotland he railed against 'so great a violation of faith and justice...How dangerous a thing it is to wage an unjust war'. Above all, to members of the Committee for Compounding in London he gave his most damning verdict on those who had participated in the Preston campaign: 'their fault who have appeared in this summer's business is certainly double to theirs who were in the first, because it is the repetition of the same offence against all the witnesses that God has borne, by making and abetting to a second war.'³⁴ These sentiments, emerging from his experience of the Preston campaign, would inform his approach to the debates surrounding the fate of the King over the following weeks and months.

- ¹ *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, with elucidations by Thomas Carlyle*, ed. S.C. Lomas (3 vols, 1904), I, 343.
- ² Gilbert Burnet, *The Memoirs of the Lives and Actions of James and William, dukes of Hamilton and Castle-Herald* (Oxford, 1852), p. 463.
- ³ Barry Coward, *Oliver Cromwell* (Harlow, 1991), pp. 61–2.
- ⁴ J.P. Kenyon, *The Civil Wars of England* (London, 1988), pp. 179–81.

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- 5 Andrew Hopper, ‘Langdale, Marmaduke first Baron Langdale (1598–1661)’, ODNB.
- 6 *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England, begun in the Year 1641, by Edward, Earl of Clarendon*, ed. W.D. Macray (6 vols, London, 1888), IV, 366.
- 7 Burnet, *Lives of Dukes of Hamilton*, p. 449; S.R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War, 1642–1649* (3 vols, 1886–91), III, 406.
- 8 Sir Philip Warwick, *Memoirs of the Reign of King Charles the First* (Edinburgh, 1813), p. 352.
- 9 Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625–1660* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 414–15.
- 10 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 432–3; Warwick, *Memoirs*, p. 353.
- 11 Burnet, *Lives of Dukes of Hamilton*, p. 453.
- 12 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 434.
- 13 Burnet, *Lives of Dukes of Hamilton*, p. 450; Kenyon, *Civil Wars of England*, p. 188.
- 14 Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 337.
- 15 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 438–9; Kenyon, *Civil Wars of England*, pp. 187–8.
- 16 Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, IV, 368.
- 17 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 440–1
- 18 Burnet, *Lives of Dukes of Hamilton*, p. 455.
- 19 Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, p. 417.
- 20 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 442.
- 21 Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 338–9.
- 22 Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, IV, 369; Sir Philip Warwick, *Memoirs of the Reign of King Charles the First* (Edinburgh, 1813), p. 355.
- 23 Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change & Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 5–6, 374.
- 24 Burnet, *Lives of Dukes of Hamilton*, pp. 455–6.
- 25 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 442–3.
- 26 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 443; Kenyon, *Civil Wars of England*, p. 189.
- 27 Burnet, *Lives of the Dukes of Hamilton*, p. 457.
- 28 Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 341.
- 29 Burnet, *Lives of the Dukes of Hamilton*, p. 460; Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, IV, 369.
- 30 Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 447–8.

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³¹ Gardiner, *HGCW*, III, 449.

³² Kenyon, *Civil Wars of England*, p. 192.

³³ Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 343.

³⁴ Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 358, 361, 387.

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WRITINGS AND SOURCES XX
PLUNDERING IN WELLINGBOROUGH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

by Professor Peter Gaunt

From the very start of the civil war, royalist and parliamentarian soldiers alike resorted to plundering as they moved around and between towns, villages and the countryside, both as a means of punishing civilians who were neutral or who inclined to support the other side, and as a way of making good the shortfalls in military pay, supplies and rations which in turn encouraged men in arms to live off the land. For example, the series of letters written by the parliamentarian sergeant Nehemiah Wharton as he moved across the Home Counties and the south Midlands en route to Hereford and Worcester between mid August and early October 1642, made no attempt to disguise the way in which he and his men had pillaged the possessions and rustled the livestock of assorted Catholics, royalist-sympathisers and malignant ministers they encountered or sought out along their line of march.¹ On the other side, accounts of the advance of the king's main army through the Thames valley and towards London in the weeks after the battle of Edgehill revealed how the houses of prominent parliamentarians in the region were routinely plundered, while Brentford was stripped bare of anything of worth, supposedly 'leaving scarce one piece of bread or meat in all the town', once the royalist army rolled in on 12 November.²

Before the end of 1642 plenty of other accusations of plundering were appearing in print, both in pamphlets recounting specific actions and in reports found within the regular newspapers, perhaps most notably howls of parliamentarian anguish about the misdeeds of the king's men when they captured Marlborough in early December. It was alleged that the royalists

¹ The original letters survive in The National Archives, SP 16/485, 491, 492. A fairly accurate transcript, albeit with spelling generally modernised, appeared in H. Ellis, 'Letters of a subaltern officer of the Earl of Essex's army written in the summer and autumn of 1642', *Archaeologia*, 35 (1853) and, with additional commentary and contextual material, in S. Peachey, *The Edgehill Campaign and the Letters of Nehemiah Wharton* (Leigh-on-Sea, 1989).

² *A True and Perfect Relation of the Barbarous and Cruel Passages of the King's Army at Old Braineceford* (1642), pp. 5–12.

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had indulged in an orgy of violence, plunder and destruction, one parliamentary account explicitly seeking to liken their behaviour to that of the Irish Catholic rebels and claiming that a staggering £50,000-worth of cash, goods and wares had been taken by the royalists from this modest Wiltshire town.³ Thereafter, plundering seems to have become a way of life for most field armies and garrisons and its reportage become one of the mainstays of royalist and parliamentary wartime publications and propaganda.

On the royalist side, some of the most detailed and prolific accounts of alleged parliamentary plundering appeared in the Oxford-based newspapers, especially *Mercurius Rusticus*, which was issued frequently but irregularly during the central years of the civil war. Both its subtitle, *The countries complaint of the murders, robberies, plunderings, and other outrages committed by the rebels on His Majesties faithfull subjects*, and its editorial approach reflected a keen interest in, and focus on, the topic of parliamentary plundering and other outrages. It was edited by Bruno (or Bruen) Ryves, a minister whose London- and Middlesex-based career had advanced during the years of Laudian ascendancy, culminating in his appointment as a royal chaplain at the end of the 1630s, but whose unambiguous royalist leanings cost him his livings in and around the capital once civil war broke out; with the Irish Rebellion, he also lost most of the land and property in Ireland which he had acquired at his marriage in the late 1620s. Accordingly, he was a man who had suffered personal deprivation and loss of property and income through rebellion and civil war and, now as an Oxford-based journalist redirecting his abilities in the service of the king, during the war years he took a very keen interest in the various depredations committed by parliamentary soldiers – highlighting and perhaps exaggerating the various outrages which loyal subjects suffered at the hands of cruel, greedy and corrupt ‘rebels’, as well dwelling on the alleged religious sacrileges committed by the same hands. Historians must therefore treat with caution the various reports which Ryves put forth, both within individual wartime editions of *Mercurius Rusticus* and then, slightly later, gathered and reprinted both from his newspaper and from other royalist sources of the war years, several more substantial compendia of parliamentary outrages and

³ T. B., *Marleborowe’s Miseries or England Turned Ireland* (1642), pp. 2–8.

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accounts of the main civil war, published under various titles in 1646, 1647 and 1648. Some of these were reissued posthumously in the 1680s and it is from the text of one of these, also entitled *Mercurius Rusticus*, that the following extract is taken. Ryves himself compounded for his royalism after the civil war and spent much of the 1650s preaching in London, though his activities as a regular preacher at Lincoln's Inn may have been terminated in 1656 when they came to the attention of Protector Cromwell. After the Restoration he regained interests in, or possession of, several London and Middlesex livings, though his principal position was as dean of Windsor, to which he was appointed by the king in late summer 1660. He died at Windsor in 1677, reportedly in his early eighties, and was buried in St George's chapel, near a mural inscription recording (in Latin) his efforts to promote the 'cause of king, church and monarchy with faith, zeal and love'.⁴

In the following extract, Ryves provides a detailed account of how the market town of Wellingborough in Northamptonshire, some of its pro-royalist residents and its minister suffered at the hands of parliamentary forces based in Northampton and elsewhere in the county in December 1642. The story told is of how divisions within the town and the reluctance of some pro-royalist residents, notably Mr Gray, the clerk of the peace, to contribute to the parliamentary war effort at the urging of their pro-parliamentarian neighbours, not only drew in many surrounding villages, but also spiralled into violence when a force of mounted parliamentary troops from Northampton arrived at midnight on Boxing Day intent on arresting Gray, searching his house and seizing goods. His friends and supporters in the town and nearby villages responded by beating off some of the parliamentary guards posted near the church, but they were unable to prevent the troops seizing and carrying off Gray and some of his valuables, and although they pursued the main parliamentary force they found themselves outnumbered and out-armed and had to fall back. However, on returning to Wellingborough this angry and armed crowd then turned on some of their parliamentary neighbours, though Ryves goes out of his way to try to minimize the nature, extent and cost of this violence. Some of the townsmen who suffered in this way sought help, initially from the radical

⁴ J. Raymond, 'Ryves [Reeve], Bruno [Bruen]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

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minister of nearby Wilby, who in turn presented their case at Northampton, where it met a sympathetic and swift military response from the parliamentary officers and garrison there. Accordingly, a much larger mounted force returned to Wellingborough, determined to restore order and to avenge the sufferings of the parliamentary residents. Although one of their officers was shot and seriously wounded, unhorsed and captured – Ryves suggests that prominent royalists saved him from being killed on the spot and gave him medical aid, though the injury proved fatal – the soldiers gained the upper hand, and news that reinforcements were en route with artillery persuaded many of the locals to give up the struggle and submit. However, probably in ignorance of this development, Ryves suggests, at that point another group of royalist supporters renewed their assault, leading to further bloodshed and retribution, including the unprovoked killing of the curate of nearby Harrowden, the ruthless plundering of the town by the now dominant parliamentary force and the harsh treatment meted out to supposed ringleaders, several of whom were carried away as prisoners. The closing section of the extract recounts in detail and at length the particular sufferings of one such prisoner, the vicar of Wellingborough, Mr Jones, who survived his first period of imprisonment but not the second. This closing section also relates how a captured bear supported and allowed itself to be ridden by the poor and aged vicar, but turned against a parliamentarian who sought to do the same and gored him to death. Aware that such a tale might strain his readers' credulity, Ryves goes out of his way at this point to stress the accuracy and veracity of his account.

In fact, how far should we trust and accept Ryves' account of events in Wellingborough? Clearly, there is a large element of bias and selectivity if not pure invention here, with repeated reference to the cruelties and inhumanities of 'the rebels' and the skewed and emotive language employed throughout. It is best viewed as a propaganda piece. On the other hand, that something of this sort occurred at Wellingborough is attested by other contemporary sources, not least a report printed in one of the London-based and broadly pro-parliamentarian newspapers:

That envious man the Divill, soweth every where his tares amongst the good wheate, which appeared lately at Wellingborow in Northamptonshire; for the Malignants in that Town, without any cause given, became so desperately mad that they rose up against the

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good people amongst them, and plundered them of all their substance; these sent Messengers to Northampton to informe them of their losses, and desired them to send some aid to relieve them and to help them to recover their goods; whereupon that Towne sent out Captaine Sawyer with some considerable forces, who being approached to Wellingborow, was resisted by the Malignants and shot at, but notwithstanding they forced their way, got into the Town, and have plundered all the Malignants, so that there is not a man in that place of either side, but hath bin ransacked and pillaged. Captaine Sawyer expressing his valour and forwardnesses somewhat too much was shot and is sorely wounded.⁵

A slightly later parliamentary report revealed that ‘Captaine Sawyer who was lately shot at Wellingborough in Northamptonshire by the Malignants there, comming onely to parley with them in a faire manner, for plundering the well affected People amongst them, is since dead of his wounds’. The report went on to suggest that ‘He is much lamented in that County because he was approvedly known to be a good, honest & worthy Person.’⁶

The alleged mistreatment of Jones also received detailed coverage in John Walker’s published survey of Church of England clergy who suffered at parliament’s hands, though Walker readily admitted that much of his account had been taken from *Mercurius Rusticus*. He confessed that the story might seem unbelievable, ‘had it not been confirmed to me from several other hands’ and by someone who heard the account direct from an acquaintance of the late Rev. Jones. Walker adds a few details to those found in and clearly lifted from Ryves, including embellishing the virtues and goodness of the unfortunate vicar of Wellingborough, but he also noted that the parliamentary force which attacked the town and carried off its vicar comprised ‘a Rabble of 300 Watermen’ which had been assembled and dispatched by Zouch Tate – of Delapre in Northamptonshire, MP for Northampton in the Short and Long Parliaments and a prominent

⁵ *England’s Memorable Accidents*, 26 December 1642–2 January 1643, p. 136.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2–9 January 1643, pp. 140–1.

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supporter of the parliamentary war effort – ‘a Man of Power in those times.’⁷

In the following extract, taken from the 1685 edition of Ryves’ *Mercurius Rusticus*, the spelling and the use capitals and italics have been retained as in the original, but the text has been very lightly repunctuated and reparagraphed in order to aid a modern reader.

That the Kingdom might not be undone but at their own charges, sundry Ways and Arts, both by force and intreaty, have been used to extort Monies from the King’s good Subjects, to maintain the present Rebellion. Amongst others, Mr *Graey* of *Wellingborow*, Clark of the Peace for the County of *Northampton*, was assaulted by persuasion, and very earnestly solicited by Sir *Rowland S. John*, to contribute liberally to this unnatural War. But his refusal to partake in so crying a sin, did produce a double effect, indignation in the Rebels, that hate all men that run not into the same excess of Treason and Rebellion with them, because others’ backwardness doth upbraid their forwardness that rush into Rebellion like the Horse into the Battel. But brought forth imitation in others, not only in *Wellingborow*, but in some Villages bordering on that Town; who seeing so good a president of Loyalty, refuse with him to hearken to so Traiterous proposals.

And now thinking themselves indangered by their refusal, and exposed to the mercy of Rebel Plunderers, they enter into a consultation how to secure themselves from violence, and resolve to come to each others’ assistance, if the Dragooners from *Northampton* or any else should assault them, upon notice given by jangling their Bells. And that the World might not think their fears to be groundless, on the 26 of *December*, 1642 at 12 of the Clock at Night,

⁷ J. Walker, *An Attempt Towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England ... in the Late Times of the Grand Rebellion* (2 vols., London, 1714), vol. II, pp. 283–84.

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Captain *Francis Sanyer* (and as is supposed a Brother of Sir *Gilber[t] Pickering[s]*) attended by a 100 Dragoons, beset Mr *Graye's* House; and the signal of jangling the Bells being discovered by some of the Town that were of their faction, to prevent the Alarm to the Country, they tie up the Bell-ropes, and place a Guard of twelve Musqueteers in the Church-yard, to secure the passage to the Belfrey. Having thus beset the House, and as they thought frustrated the device of calling the Confederate Villages to their help, Captain *Sanyer* demands entrance, Mr *Gray* out of his Window, tells him that he and his Family were in Bed, and withal desired to know what their intentions were, thus in the dead of the night to disturb their rest, and what Warrant they had to command entrance? They return him answer that they had a Warrant to apprehend his Person, and seise on his Plate and Arms for the use of the Parliament. Half an hour was spent in this Parley, Mr *Gray* protracting the time, that perhaps his Neighbours hearing of his danger, might come to his rescue. Which accordingly fell out, for some of the Town hearing that the Rebels had beset Mr *Graye's* House, hasten towards the Church that by the sound of the Bells (the Signal agreed on) they might summon the Country. When they come thither, they find the way intercepted, a Guard of Musqueteers denying them entrance; but iraged to find opposition where they did not expect it, they fell foul on the Guard, beat them off, took five of their Musquets, forced their entrance, and so rang the Bells.

Hereupon the Rebels, fearing that their entrance was delayed, thereby to gain time till the Town and Country might come in to his Rescue, brake open a Window, and put in one or two of their company, who presently open the Doors to them and give them free entrance. Having thus possessed themselves of the House, their first work is to seise upon Mr *Grac's* Person, to this purpose they make directly to his Chamber, whom they found in his Shirt, and would hardly give him leave to put on his Clothes; and that their seising of his Person might not be without all shew of Authority, they produce a Warrant signed by the Earl of *Essex*, in which Mr. *Gray's* name was, this they shew only, but will not permit them to read it. All the Monies and Plate which they found in the House they take away, and as for Mr *Gray* himself having taken him Prisoner, they compel him to go on foot from *Wellingborow* to *Welby*. While they are on their way towards

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Welby, some 40 or 50 men from *Wellingborow*, armed only with Swords and Staves, come to Rescue Mr *Gray* from the Rebels. After a short Skirmish (wherein one or two of the Pursuers were hurt only, not slain) finding that they were unequal for the Rebels both in Number and Arms, leaving the Prey in the hands of the Oppressors, they retreat to *Wellingborow*.

Being returned thither, they find Five hundred of the Country come in to their assistance: The common People (who seldom love or hate moderately) enraged that Mr *Gray* should thus be taken from them, especially some of his poor Neighbours, who in him were robbed of the relief which they received from his Charity, resolve to make some of the Rebels' Faction in that Town sensible of their displeasure; and therefore since they cannot reek their anger on the Rebels that did the fact, they fall foul on those that did approve it, if they were not Abettors and underhand Contrivers of it. They break their Windows, break into some of their Houses, and spoil their Goods. Amongst the number of those that suffered under the fury of the People, a Chandler and a Cooper underwent the greatest Loss, yet it could not be much, since upon a strict survey, the whole spoil done in the Town did not amount to £30.

Many of this assembly, utterly disliking such disorders, did not only reprove the chief Actors in this Outrage, but to discountenance their proceeding withdrew themselves; they of the Town to their Houses, they of the Country to their several Habitations, so that by the break of day the Tumult was appeased, and the Town cleared. While these things were in doing, the Cooper and one or two with him post away to Mr *Perne*, the Parson of *Welby*, a Turbulent and Seditious man, and make their complaint to him, and to inflame him that was too apt to kindle without their help, they do not only aggravate their own losses at *Wellingborow*, but tell him that they threatned to come and do the like at *Welby*. Mr *Perne* (changing his black Coat for a gray) instantly goes to *Northampton*, and there represents the injury done to their Faction at *Wellingborow*, and the pretended danger of *Welby* so effectually, that by Noon that Tuesday, Colonel *Normich* commanding in chief, Sergeant-Major *Mole*, Captain *John Sawyer*, Captain *Francis Sawyer*, Captain *Pertlow*, Captain *Redman*, Captain *Farmer*, Captain

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Harrold, with 500, but others say 1000 Horses and Dragoons, came to *Wellingborow*.

Being come thither, they divide themselves into several Troops, to make good several passages into the Town, thereby to keep out the Country that were coming to their aid, Captain *John Sanyer*, with 80 or a 100 Dragoons enters the Town at that side which leads to *Welby*; and riding in the Front of his men marched directly towards Mr *Neile* of *Woollaston*, and some few with him who stood to oppose him. *Sanyer* discharges at Mr *Neile*, and whom he missed with his Bullet he would be sure to hit with his Tongue, shooting out Arrows, even bitter words, calling him *Popish Rascal*. But what reward shall be given unto thee, O thou false Tongue? He staid not long without it, for the words were no sooner spoken, and (to second his words) a charge given to his Soldiers to give fire, but he received what he would have given, his death's wound by a shot in the Head and Neck by Goose-shot, which made him fall on his Horse-neck, which shot was seconded by a Country-man, who with a Club beat him off his Horse into the Dirt; being thus beaten down, the Women to revenge their Husbands' Quarrel fasten on him, but Mr *Oliver Gray* (Nephew to Mr *Gray* before mentioned) and Mr *Woolaston* rescued out of their hands, who otherwise had immediately died the death of *Sisera*, by the hands of Women. Reprieved thus for some few hours, they carry him to one *Gray's* House an Alehouse-keeper, whose Wife was Captain *Sanyer's* Aunt, where they administred what they could, but in vain, for after two and twenty hours' Languishment he died.

As soon as Captain *Sanyer* was fallen, his Soldiers instantly ran away, only his Son, unwilling to leave his Father, followed him to the hazard of his life, by many Wounds which he received. In other Parts of the Town, the Townsmen quit themselves like valiant Soldiers and loyal Subjects, and with very little help of the Country, kept the Rebels out. Mr *Gray's* man and another, with each man his Musquet, kept out above a 100 at the lower end of the Town, and repelled them twice or thrice; and had not Captain *Sanyer* coming to himself a little before his death, persuaded them that it was in vain to stand out, there being three Pieces on the way from *Northampton*, to Batter the Town (which proved true) and withal persuading them to write a

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Letter to the Commanders, promising that upon their submission the Town should be secured, they had held it out to the last man. But the dying Captain prevailed with them, they write a Letter according to his advice, which as they say was signed by his own hand, the apprehension of his desperate condition having put new thoughts in him.

But this Resolution not being so fully made known to the Town, as a business of that concernment ought to have been, some of the Town, being ignorant of any Treaty, made some shot, and the Rebels willing to take advantage, rush into the Town, put both those of the Town and Country to flight. Captain *Francis Sanyer* much enraged for his Brother, and coming near the place where his Brother was Wounded, seeing Mr *Flint* the Curate of *Harrodden* stand there, not any way engaged in the Resistance, having not given any provocation, he barbarously struck him with his Pole-Ax, and cleft his Head down to the Eyes, of which Wound he died instantly: The Earth drinking up that innocent Blood, shed by the hand of an accursed *Doeg*, which like the Blood of *Abel*, calls loud in the Ears of God for Vengeance upon them, who authorize and countenance such horrid Murthers; *Cursed be his anger for it was fierce, and his wrath for it was cruel.*

Being masters of the Town, at three of the Clock in the Afternoon they begin to Plunder, and continue the Spoil until the next Day-light failed them, until Wednesday night. In this time they carry away the Wealth of the Town to *Northampton* and other places, sparing none but those whose Tongues are framed to *Shiboleth*, men of their own Faction, whether they were active against them, or stood Neuters. By which Essay, those Luke-warm men (who stand Pendulous equally poised between Rebellion and Loyalty, and know not which side to lean unto) may guess what measure they are like to receive from the Rebels hands, if ever they come to have them in their power.

In the Town, two men especially suffer under these Free-booters, Mr *Gray* and Mr *Fisher*, from the first being Clerk of the Peace, they take away the Commissions of Peace, the Sessions Rolls, together with his own Evidences and Leases, all his Houshold-stuff, even to his very Bed-cords, leaving but one Sheet for his Wife and five Children. His

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Wheat and other Corn they give to their Horses; what they did not eat, they threw into the Streets, and trampled it in the dirt. From the other they took Goods, and other things, amounting to a very great Sum. And to compleat their wickedness, to their Oppression they add Scorn; for having taken away all that they could, in derision they affix Protections in writing under Colonel *Norwich* his hand, at his and some others doors, forbidding any man to Plunder. Generally what they could not carry away, they spoil, so that the Loss sustained by the Town, is valued at Six thousand pounds.

They took Mr *Neile* Prisoner, and some Forty more, amongst them they took the Vicar, Master *Jones*, a grave and learned man, but lame and very sickly, and having Plundered him of all he had, they mount him on a poor Jade, with a Halter instead of a Bridle; the rest they tie two and two together, and drive them before them to *Northampton*. Mr *Gray*, as I told you, was the day before led Prisoner to *Welby*, from thence to *Northampton*, where his Prison cannot afford him protection from the fury and rage of the Soldiers; to make way to his death, they threaten to pull down the House where he was confined. And the Commissioners finding that he could not remain there with any safety, were constrained to send him away Prisoner to *London*. Being come thither, Articles are framed and exhibited against him, which being examined at a Committee, and no proof at all made, he was Voted to be discharged his Imprisonment: yet to delude Justice, and the *Petition of Right*, the Chair-man could never find a time to make his Report to the House, so that he remained a Prisoner for a long time...

When I first entred on this Work, it was a promise solemnly made, not to abuse the World with Fals[e]hoods or Uncertainties, but to use all Candour and Ingenuity; and if any thing should chance to pass, which upon better information should appear false, I should not blush to make a free and an ingenuous acknowledgment. In these several Relations what to retract or recal of the Rebels' Cruelties, I yet know nothing, but what to add unto them I do.

The sixth Week's *Mercury* told you of the Plundering of *Wellingborow* in *Northampton-shire* by the Rebels, and the taking of Mr *Jones* Vicar of

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that Town, Prisoner; and in that account which I there gave of him, I left him in Captivity at *Northampton*. Since that *Mercury* went abroad, some good Body finding that Relation to come far short of that barbarous usage which Mr *Jones* found from the Rebels, moved either with detestation of such inhumane Cruelty, not to be buried in Oblivion, or out of affection to his Person murdered by these savage Monsters, hath supplied the former defect, and enabled me to bring this Story to its sad conclusion.

Master *Jones* was a man very aged, being arrived at that Term which *Moses* made the usual boundary of man's life in his time, *Threescore and ten*; and had not these blood-thirsty men shortned his dayes by an untimely death, he might have been so strong as to *come to fourscore years*. And though age itself be a disease (which yet few men that have it are willing to be cured of) it pleased God to add a casual infirmity to his natural; for some two years since by a fall he unhappily broke his leg, of which he continued lame to his death. When the Rebels, those Locusts that devour all the good things of the Land, came to *Wellingboron*, having ransacked the Town, they took many Prisoners, and amongst the rest Master *Jones*. All that knew him must bear him record, that he was a man of a most unblamable life and conversation, an able Scholar, and extraordinarily gifted for Preaching, of which he gave ample proof by his Labours diligently bestowed among his Parishoners by the space of Forty years. Having *him* in their power *whom* they knew to be a great means by his Orthodox Preaching to keep that Town, and some parts thereabouts in obedience, when the rest of the Country were in Rebellion against their Sovereign, they neither reverence his calling, nor honour his age, nor pity his infirmity, but abuse him by scoffs and jeers, and compel him to go on foot a great part of the way (lame and weak as he was) between *Wellingboron* and *Northampton*. And that he might keep pace with the rest, they compel him to make more speed than his infirmity could brook.

At *Wellingboron* the Rebels murdered a Barber and stole away his Bear; and when they could not force this reverend old man to mend his pace, Lieutenant *Grimes* (a desperate Brownist, the Master of this misrule, and the chief agent in inflicting all this scorn and tyranny on

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Master *Jones*, but since a Prisoner in *Banbury* Castle) to see if fear would add to his strength, forceth the Bear upon him, which running between his legs, took him upon her back, and laying aside the untractableness of its Nature, grew patient of her burthen; and to the astonishment of the beholders carried him quietly, so that what was intended as a violence, became his ease. The Rebels overcome by so unusual an example of kindness, the savage Bear *reproving the madness* of their fury, they remove Master *Jones* from off the Bear to a Horse, but such a Horse as did but vary, not better the condition of his Transportation. One of the rout observed to be extremely active in all these insolencies, and to have a hand in murdering the Barber, se[e]ing the tameness of the Bear, as quiet under Master *Jones*, as if she had been accustomed to the Saddle, presumes that it was *no more but up and ride*, and presently bestrides the Bear, who as if she had been of that race that did revenge the Prophet *Elisha's* quarrel, dismounts the bold Rider, and as if she had been robbed of her Whelps, did so mangle, rend, and tear him with her teeth and pawes, that the presumptuous Wretch died of these hurts suddenly after.

Stay, Reader, suspend thy opinion, be not too hasty, I profess ingeniously the relation seems at first blush to partake something of the *Romanse*, or at best to be but an imitation of some Popish Legend, as if we meant to implore the help of feigned miracles to gain credit to a party. But against all this prejudice I must oppose, first, the integrity and quality of the Relator, being beyond all exception, and affirms it on his credit. Secondly, why may not God stop and open the mouth of the Bear now as well as the Lions heretofore? or revenge the indignities offered to a Minister under the Gospel, by the same creature, as those offered to a Prophet under the Law? Or lastly, why may not the blood of him that owned this Beast, be required by this Beast of him that had his hand in shedding it? This was not the first time that God gave commission to the Brute to execute his vengeance. But I forget myself; my business is to relate things done, not to encounter Objections against their probability of doing. To go on therefore.

Having brought Mr *Jones* to *Northampton*, his entertainment there was as bad as his usage in the way thither; though it were in the depth of

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Winter, when old age needed good fortifications of Lodging and Diet against the incursions of cold and wet, yet they afforded him nothing but a hard mat, with a little straw under him, and to cover him and to keep him warm nothing but one blanket, and his own wearing cloaths. As for his food, they give him the *Bread of Affliction*, denying his own friends leave to supply him with competent diet, to sustain nature, and his growing infirmities. Yet to shew that *Man lives not by bread only, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God*, it pleased his good providence to preserve him like the *young Children in Daniel, fed only with Pulse*, so that he was in good plight, and seemed to want nothing, though he continued in this distressed condition from Christmas to almost Easter. About which time, not remorse of conscience for so much cruelty practised on a decrepid old man, (but an Orthodox Reverend Divine) but importunity of friends, prevailed with the Rebels to release him of his imprisonment in *Northampton*, and to remit him to a neighbour Minister of his, one Mr *Walters*, Bachelor in Divinity, Vicar of *Doddington* near *Wellingborow*, a very learned and industrious Preacher, and permitted him to Officiate in his own Cure at Easter, there being but one Parish Church in the Town, but no less than two thousand Communicants.

Having licence to visit his Charge, not awed by that tyrannous usage which he had undergone, Conscience of his duty doth press him to a punctual observance of the Orders and Canons of the Church. He celebrates Divine Service according to the Book of Common Prayer; preacheth Obedience as boldly as if there had been no Rebels in *Northamptonshire*, administreth the Sacraments with the same Reverence, Decency and Devotion, as if there had been no Puritans in *Wellingborow*. Nor doth the undaunted old man remit any thing enjoyed by Canon or Rubrick. This constancy of his so incensed the Schismatical Puritanical Party of the Town, that complaint is made at *Northampton*, that Mr *Jones* is the same man he was, as much a true Son and Minister of the Church of *England* as ever. Upon this information, he is apprehended in Easter week, and carried Prisoner to *Northampton* a second time, where they use him with more inhumanity (if it be possible) than before; they will not permit his Wife to visit him and kept him so short in his diet, not suffering his Wife or friends to relieve him, that most barbarously they starved him

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XX
PLUNDERING IN WELLINGBOROUGH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

to death, for about Whitsontide his spirits exhausted, and his body pined by famine, the good old Martyr resigned his Soul to God.

There is in *Northampton* one *John Gifford*, for his extraction the Hogherd's Son of *Little-Houghton*, for his education, a *Knitter*, afterwards a *Hose-buyer*, now Mayor of *Northampton*, and Colonel of the Town Regiment. This man to his power Civil and Martial assumes an Ecclesiastical Superintendency too, and orders what forms shall be used in *Baptism*, *the Lords Supper*, *Burial of the Dead*, and the like. When therefore they came to interr the skin and bones of this starved Martyr, for flesh he had none, the form enjoyed by this *Gifford* was the same which one *Brooks*, a *London* Lecturer, used at the burial of *John Gough* of *S. James Dukes Place* within *Aldgate* in *London*, viz.

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust;
Here's the Pit, and in thou must.

The World may in this see what devout Liturgies we are like to have, when a Mayor of a Town shall suppress the Ancient pious forms, and introduce rime Doggerels, fitter for a painted Cloth in an Alehouse, than the Church of Christ.

Before I leave this particular Relation, I must not forget to tell you one act of these Religious Reformers. Being at *Willingborow* at the Sign of the *Swan*, two maid Servants making a bed, some of these Rebels did sollicite them to incontinency, but the Maids refusing to hearken to their beastly sollicitations, they began to offer violence, and to enforce what they could not perswade, they still making resistance, they shot one of them dead in the place, and shot the other through the wrist. Such Monuments of *Religion* and *Purity* do these blessed Reformers leave at all places where they come.

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John Barratt, *The Last Army: The Battle of Stow-on-the-Wold and the End of the Civil War in the Welsh Marches, 1646*. Helion and Company, 2018 (144 pp.) ISBN 978 1 912390 21 2, £19.95 soft cover.

reviewed by Dr Stephen K Roberts

This book, Number 24 in Helion's *Century of the Soldier* series, deals with the closing stages of the first English civil war in England and Wales. The battle fought at Stow-on-the-Wold, Gloucestershire, on 21 March 1646, was the last hurrah for the king's field army, although Charles retained garrisons for some considerable time afterwards (Harlech did not surrender until March 1647). The game was up for the royalist cause until Charles's insatiable appetite for intriguing with any potential allies produced his Engagement with the Scots in December 1648, to herald the renewed conflict known as the second civil war.

This is primarily a book about the campaigning in the Welsh Marches, 1645–6, and there would have been a very compelling case for rearranging the elements in the subtitle. John Barratt chooses to begin his narrative account of the events leading to Stow with the parliamentarian assaults on Chester from September 1645: he does not in fact arrive at Stow until page 100 of his 131 pages of narrative. Furthermore, having arrived at last at Stow, we find that there is no certainty about the location of the battle, which involved a total of around 3,000 horse and foot, each side more or less evenly matched. Was it at the village of Donnington, to the north of the town, where there is a modern memorial, or was it nearer the town itself, 'in the vicinity of the modern Tesco supermarket'? As modern archaeology, including metal detecting, has thrown up no material evidence, the question cannot yet be confidently answered, though John Barratt is inclined to favour the second possible location.

This is a detailed, careful account, supported by a range of contemporary, mainly printed, sources. There are useful appendices, a generous use of quotations, and 41 well-chosen illustrations and maps. Some of the modern black-and-white photographs, such as that of the intersection of the modern A424 and A429, suggest only that there is nothing evocative of the battle to be seen; others, such as that of the bridge at Bidford-on-Avon, gives no impression of the span of the 15th century structure, broken down by the

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parliamentarian army. As with many books of this kind, it is light on the politics of the period, concentrating its focus on the military campaigning. It is generally accurate, though perhaps stronger on military strategy than on biographical detail. It is unfortunate that there is no index.

Richard Blakemore and Elaine Murphy, *The British Civil Wars at Sea, 1638–1653*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018 (xi + 225 pp., 6 b&w plates, 3 maps, 1 table.) ISBN 978 1 78327 229 7, £65 hardback.

reviewed by Professor Peter Gaunt

While studies of civil war field armies and garrisons, of their campaigns and battles and of towns besieged or stormed, together with the array of generals-on-land who commanded them, have continued to proliferate, the war fought out on the water, naval operations and generals-at-sea remain the Cinderella of the military side of the civil war, starved of attention and generally overlooked. Two young historians, both with recent and distinguished publications in this watery field under their belt, have combined to redress the imbalance in this clear and wide-ranging account, partly chronological and partly thematic in approach.

The joint authors set themselves three goals. First, they aim to provide an overview of the mid-seventeenth century wars at sea, from the beginning of the Scottish troubles in 1638 through to the mopping up of home-grown (royalist, Irish and Scottish) resistance in 1653, all viewed from a British perspective; indeed, one of the strengths of this volume is the detailed attention to operations against, around the coasts of, and involving ships sailing from Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Conversely, the British perspective means that there is little coverage here of the (first) Anglo-Dutch naval war, well underway and indeed petering out by 1653. Second and third – as the authors rightly note, really two sides of the same coin – they seek to investigate both how maritime activity affected the course of the civil wars on land and how the experience of those wars impacted upon the broader development of this country’s naval and imperial history. That third issue is extremely broad and challenging and to fully address it probably required more space than was available in this volume, the main text of which runs to

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a little under 180 pages, though plenty of suggestive ideas and conclusions are to be found here. The first two aims have been clearly and admirably met.

An introductory chapter sets out issues and parameters and effectively demonstrates British naval improvement over this period via two vignettes – the humiliatingly supine role a squadron of Charles I's ships played in the Downs in autumn 1639 as the Dutch attacked and scattered Spanish ships in defiance of British claims, contrasting with the superiority of the Republic's navy over the Dutch in July 1653 in the final significant naval battle of the Anglo-Dutch war. Following this, the first main chapter sets the scene by exploring the nature of early modern navies and warfare, including weaponry and tactics, the growth of state navies but also the continued importance of private enterprise, privateers and pirates and the contribution of a revamped merchant arm. The heart of this new study, however, comprises a series of chapters analysing the maritime contribution to a series of British troubles – wars against Scotland in 1639 and 1640, the jockeying for position in England in the early 1640s, the Irish Rebellion and war in Ireland, the main English civil war of 1642–46, the failure of settlement, mutiny and renewed civil war of 1647–48, and the Republic's operations of mopping up and conquest in 1649–53. In the midst of this run of chronologically-based and semi-narrative chapters sit a brace of chapters exploring first the nuts and bolts of running the parliamentary navy in the main civil war – covering things like administration and supply, command and officers, impressment and so on – and then similar issues relating to the royalist, Irish Confederate and Scottish naval arms from 1642 through to 1653. It is a measure of the discrepancies in the quality and quantity of the surviving source material – quite rich and plentiful on the English parliamentary side, much thinner on the English royalist side and for the Scots and Irish – that the former provides a meaty chapter on the four years 1642–46 alone, while the latter are combined in a chapter taking the story down to 1653. This has clearly presented something of a challenge to the two authors, but they have risen to it well and in the process have added significantly to our understanding of royalist, Irish and Scottish naval operations, as well as those of the English parliamentarians.

This volume brings home a number of key messages. While there were few sea battles in this period, not least because the defection of the royal navy to

parliament before the main civil war began meant that the English parliamentarians always possessed a huge superiority, maritime operations did contribute to the conflict in other important ways. Moreover, through the employment of merchant vessels, of letters of marque to privateers, of limited foreign support and so on, both sides and all the key players were able to operate at sea; the authors ably demonstrate the diversity of naval operations and operators in the mid seventeenth century. Thus the English parliament could never take its seaborne dominance for granted and it worked efficiently and effectively during the main civil war to keep trade flowing into and out of the Port of London and to dominate the Irish Sea. Parliament's own problems, divisions within the parliamentary cause and the major mutiny of 1648, which saw part of the navy depart and defect, opened the sea lane to a potential royalist maritime recovery, though that potential was not effectively seized, the authors suggest, and parliament was able to regroup and reassert its naval supremacy, so playing a vital support role in the Cromwellian campaigns in Ireland and Scotland. Another theme which the authors bring to the fore, apparent especially in issues of allegiance and mutiny, is the political outlook of the navy, of the ordinary below-deck seamen, as well as – perhaps as much as – that of their officers.

All this is clearly, crisply and convincingly conveyed, built upon thorough research. The profuse and detailed footnotes, often taking up a third or more of the page, attest to the depth and breadth of the authors' immersion in the surviving contemporary printed and archival source material. So, too, does the impressive bibliography, though it is a shame that archival primary sources are merely listed there under repository and with call numbers; it would have been helpful to have included a brief description of each manuscript volume or batch. The text is also supported by two appendices, the first providing a useful timeline of operations at sea, the other discussing and including quantitative tables for the parliamentary fleets of 1642–49. While this is not a huge or weighty volume and there is doubtless more to be said on British naval affairs 1638–53, not least in respect of the last and most expansive of the three issues which the authors set out to explore, this is an excellent, informative and accessible study, throwing new light on an aspect of the wars which has for too long lurked in the doldrums. The only significant disappointment – and alas it is far from the first time in reviewing a Boydell volume that I have noted this issue – is that £65 is a lot of money to pay for a book which is not especially long or lavishly produced and

which contains just six illustrations, all of them somewhat sludgy and not especially crisp on the greyscale. It is to be hoped that this important and accessible text will soon be available in paperback at a more accessible price.

Michael Braddick, *The Common Freedom of the People: John Lilburne and the English Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2018 (391 pp.) ISBN 978 0 19 880323 2, £25 hardback.

reviewed by Dr Stephen K Roberts

John Lilburne was the enduring *enfant terrible* of the English Revolution, whose own life story provides a commentary on successive phases of the revolutionary decades. The second son of a family of minor gentry in north-east England, he first came to prominence during the years of resistance to the government of Charles I, and was rarely out of sight until his death twenty years later. He first came to the attention of the authorities in the late 1630s as a member of the ‘underground’ network of writers and publishers defying the policies of censorship then in force in both the secular and religious spheres, and was first arrested for this defiance in 1637. Imprisoned in London for three years, he was released in a tide of liberation during the early days of the Long Parliament; his case was the subject of the first recorded intervention by Oliver Cromwell in that assembly.

It was almost inevitable that a man of Lilburne’s youth and vigour – he is thought to have been 27 in 1642, though Braddick does not supply or discuss a birth date – would enrol in the army of Parliament during the civil war, and he was evidently a bold and fearless soldier, suffering serious injuries and advancing to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He might have risen further in military service, had he taken a commission in the New Model, as Cromwell urged him to do, but instead, in April 1645, he left the army altogether. He was unwilling to take the Solemn League and Covenant: Cromwell was himself no enthusiast for it, but recognised that both Parliament and army were vehicles for promoting an alternative, Independent, polity in opposition to the more authoritarian Presbyterianism then in the ascendancy. Lilburne, in sharp contrast, was never able to make that kind of compromise or calculation, and his public life thereafter was

one of defiance towards authority of successive political hue, whether towards parliament in the late 1640s, the purged Rump after December 1648, or the Cromwellian regimes of the mid to late 1650s. In the last phase of his life he was drawn towards the Quakers, the natural home for a man whose conscience knew of no compromise or dilution.

Throughout his life, or at least those parts of his life when he had access to the press, Lilburne generated ample autobiographical material, much of it as asides and commentary on his own publications. Michael Braddick has studied 38 of these, and his biography offers what is surely the most detailed contextual study available on this output, beginning his book with Lilburne's first arrest, in 1637. The vignette captures the clandestine quality of the London underground opposition to the policies of Charles I and the style of government surveillance and arrest, both conveyed in a dramatic word picture worthy of John le Carré. From this point in his life until his death in 1657 there would be only six years in which Lilburne was not in prison, or in the army or in exile. In eight chapters, Braddick explores in detail Lilburne's successive clashes with authority, and in doing so provides a reliable guide to opposition politics throughout the period. The author views his achievement in this book as the tracing of 'a political life', rather than the creation of a biography. There is more context, particularly on the circumstances of Lilburne's arrests, trials and sufferings, than might be expected in a conventional biography, and this weighting may well be dictated by the sources: plentiful on Lilburne's politics; scanty on his private life.

The result of the careful attention to Lilburne's own writings and to the context of his political activities will be, to some readers, a surprising one. The upshot suggests an individual who, despite his sufferings, his articulacy, his raging – and the sheer drama of his life – in fact did not develop a great deal politically. He repeatedly insisted he was acting in defence of the 'laws, liberties and rights of all the people of this land', resisting all encroachments on personal liberties. He had the politician's knack of turning his trials and punishments into good PR, but lacked the politician's gift for recognising fellow-travellers and building alliances with similarly-placed individuals. His quarrelsomeness was legendary, and the Lilburne that emerges from these pages seems an isolated individualist, detached even from the Levellers of 1647–9, with whom he is always associated. With the focus firmly trained on

Lilburne, the motivations and characters of his adversaries and interlocutors are often sketchy: Edmund Prideaux, the attorney-general of the English republic, unfortunate enough to be managing two successive trials of Lilburne, remains a butt of the irrepressible contrarian, and none of his own formidable political career emerges. And the author's insistence that this is not a conventional biography of Lilburne may justify the cloudiness that remains about Lilburne's character: was he in essence a rebarbative misogynist with a monstrous ego? Braddick concludes that 'we should honour him for his courage', though this seems rather a diminished, even timid, verdict, in the light of the scale and weight of evidence marshalled in these pages.

Generally, the standard of accuracy in this book is high, though there are occasional lapses. For example, that other uncompromising radical, Henry Marten, is given an unwarranted knighthood; what is here referred to as the 'summer recess' of 1641 only began on 9 September; Thomas Rainsborough here becomes William. The author has been poorly served by the once-great Oxford University Press: I counted 10 typos within the first 55 pages. This book is bound to be compared with what was for decades the standard biography of Lilburne: *Freeborn John: A Biography of John Lilburne* by Pauline Gregg; and although Michael Braddick's study is based on up-to-date scholarship and ranges more widely and deeply, it does not entirely supersede that classic of 1961.

Jonathan Fitzgibbons, *Cromwell's House of Lords: Politics, Parliaments and Constitutional Revolution, 1642–1660*. The Boydell Press, 2018 (285 pp.) ISBN 978-1-78327-247-1. £75 hardback.

reviewed by Dr Ismini Pells

On 6 February 1649, exactly a week after the execution of Charles I, the House of Commons declared that 'the House of Peers in Parliament is useless and dangerous, and ought to be abolished'. As political statements go, they do not come much more contemptuous or final than that. Yet, when the Second Protectorate Parliament reassembled on 20 January 1658, the House of Commons was joined by a second chamber, styled the 'House

of Lords' by the Cromwellian government. The restitution of bicameral parliaments had been part of the proposals put forward by the Humble Petition and Advice, the constitutional document which was passed on 25 May 1657 and the earlier drafts of which had included the offer of the Crown to Oliver Cromwell. Like much of that document, the Other House has been written off both by contemporaries and subsequent generations of historians as symptomatic of the reactionary or 'backsliding' nature of the Protectorate, from which the journey to the Restoration was inevitable.

Consequently, the Other House has received little attention from historians. This is, as Jonathan Fitzgibbons explains, in part due to the lingering influences of the historiography of the early twentieth century, which emphasised the triumph of the Commons over the Lords. However, the more recent work by John Adamson (although not without its critics) has reminded us that the co-operation between Lords and like-minded colleagues in the Commons played an important role in Civil War politics, whilst the House of Lords in the reign of Charles II has been the subject of a detailed examination by Andrew Swartland. Fitzgibbons gives two explanations for the lack of scholarly interest in the 'House of Lords' of the intervening period. Firstly, the Other House was a short-lived institution, which sat for only two parliamentary sessions that lasted for a total of barely fourteen weeks. Secondly, the proposals for a second chamber have been written off as an adjunct to the more dramatic events of the offer of the Crown.

This book is therefore an important work that fills the scholarly lacuna on the history of the second chamber during the Interregnum. Fitzgibbons gives us a masterly study of the political ideologies surrounding the formation of the Other House, the composition of its membership and the role that the second chamber played in the political affairs during the period of its existence. Underpinning his analysis is a reconsideration of the meaning of 'conservatism'. Fitzgibbons argues that when contemporaries appealed to history or past forms, it was through a manipulated version of events that was used to solve new constitutional problems and the political results were far from reactionary. In reaching this conclusion, he deftly navigates the paradox of old and new and complements the work on the Commonwealth by Sean Kelsey and the Protectorate Parliaments by Patrick Little and David Smith.

Cromwell may have feigned surprise when presented with the new constitutional proposals but, as Fitzgibbon notes (quoting Blair Worden), ‘Cromwell was practised at not knowing’. In reality, he had played an integral part in the negotiations surrounding the document prior to its presentation and Fitzgibbons even demonstrates how the idea for the Other House emanated from the Protector. Furthermore, the men appointed to the Other House were to be selected by Cromwell. This exploration of the Other House thus sheds fresh light on Cromwell’s own political outlook. A second chamber would ensure the success of his godly agenda, which was only supported by a minority, against the majority in the Commons who had proved themselves unsympathetic to that cause. It would achieve this by providing a check to the Commons without the need for the repeated military purges that had tarnished the reputation of every regime since 1648. A few of the old peers were summoned (though only two accepted) but these were men who had been central to the parliamentary cause in the 1640s. None of the seats were hereditary, demonstrating Cromwell’s ‘hostility to the hereditary principle as a basis for government’. The emphasis was on building a new peerage. These included a few of his relatives but these had to be men of experience and social standing. Indeed, only twenty percent had been below the line of the lower gentry prior to the Civil Wars, meaning the Other House was ‘not the harbinger of social revolution that its critics claimed’. Likewise, although two-thirds of the new ‘Lords’ had some form of military experience, only a few were active army officers and the House was not intended to bolster the army’s interest. Most importantly, the new ‘Lords’ shared Cromwell’s commitment to a church settlement based on an educated preaching ministry, whose quality was controlled by the state and maintained by tithes, and which allowed for liberty of conscience.

With the Other House, ‘Cromwell pleased nobody but himself: conservative MPs in the Commons disliked it for not being a restoration of the old House of Lords, whilst republicans hated it precisely because it resembled the abolished House too much. The Commons’ failure to accept the new House and the resulting legislative impasse made a significant contribution to Cromwell’s abrupt dissolution of parliament. Nevertheless, despite inauspicious beginnings and a change of Protector, it was at the very moment that the two Houses were just beginning to work together when the Protectorate was brought to an end.

This book is a revised version of a PhD thesis aimed at an academic audience (with the unfortunate price tag to match) but the fluid writing style, depth of research and authoritative hypotheses will make this a standard work for anyone studying the political history of the later 1650s for many years to come.

Malcolm Wanklyn, *Parliament's Generals: Supreme command & politics during the British Civil Wars 1642–1651*. Pen and Sword Military, Barnsley and Philadelphia, 2019 (212 pp., 8 black & white plates). ISBN 978-1 47389836 3. £25 hardback.

reviewed by Professor John Morrill

Some academic historians take their foot off the pedal when they retire after a lifetime of teaching and research. A few – Austin Woolrych is the star example amongst civil war historians – feel a whole new lease of life and produce their best and most vigorous work into their seventies and eighties. So it is with Malcolm Wanklyn. Previously, principally a historian of the economic and social history of the west Midlands, he has now produced six substantial volumes on the civil wars in just over a decade: *A military history of the English Civil War* (2005), *Decisive Battles of the English Civil War* (2006), *The Warrior Generals: winning the British Civil Wars* (2010), the extraordinary two-volume *Reconstructing the New Model Army* (2015, 2016) and now *Parliament's Generals*. There is a little overlap between these volumes but far less than the titles might suggest and there is a wonderful and pervasive freshness. This is a root-and-branch re-evaluation in which tired judgements about major issues are challenged and stimulating alternatives offered.

Readers of *Cromwelliana* will possibly be most aware of his challenge to the perpetual assessment that in his quarrel with the Earl of Manchester (the trigger to the Self-Denying and New Model Ordinances), Cromwell's accusations against the Earl are not as sound as has been so regularly assumed, and Manchester's counter-accusations carry much weight. This is characteristic of Wanklyn's ability to challenge settled opinions, and this new book offers us loads of new examples. Of the three commanders-in-chief around whom the book is based – Essex, Fairfax and Cromwell – it is

Cromwell who comes off least well, so Cromwell Association members need to be prepared. But books as *serious*, as *deeply thoughtful* and as *well written* as this one need to be respected. It has changed my mind about some things and made me go back and think more deeply about others, nuancing my views if not changing them. Cromwellians have nothing to fear from such responsible scholarship.

The great strengths of this book are Wanklyn's deeply impressive sense of the shape of the whole, of the national picture, how events across the whole of Britain and Ireland affect what is possible in particular places and at the times he is writing about. He has an equally impeccable grasp of the logistical challenges, how the struggle to secure and mobilise resources is central to decision-making, and his knowledge of all the regional commanders is also outstanding. There is a great chapter on why Fairfax, amongst all possible candidates, is the logical choice to command the New Model in 1645 and his chapter on Fairfax's relationship with Cromwell, his willingness to let his subordinate share and then take over primary responsibility is full of challenging detail. In fact, the chapter on 'Fairfax in Politics and War 1646–50' is the best of an excellent crop.

The book is very widely researched and much of the source criticism is very good indeed (although it is a shame Wanklyn has to rely more than is desirable on calendars of, for example, the state papers domestic – it may well be that he does not have institutional access to the online versions of the papers themselves, but at times this does limit the authority of what he has to say). He engages in quite a lot of hand-to-hand fighting with all the leading scholars in the field, and is not mealy-mouthed in calling them out, but neither is he unfair or even remotely arrogant. This is a palpably honest and fair-minded book. Its coverage is fuller and more persuasive for the years 1642–7 than 1647–51 and Wanklyn says little (and little that is fresh) about the Putney Debates, the second civil war, the Irish campaigns of 1648–51 or the Regicide crisis (except for an excellent focus on the letter Cromwell added when he forwarded a petition from regiments and garrisons with him in the north and despatched on 20 November 1648, a letter not previously read as closely). I am sure he is right that we will find more solid evidence of the 'real' Cromwell in his letters to Fairfax than in his much-hyped letters to Hammond. There is also an impressive re-

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evaluation of when Fairfax's *Short Memorials* were written and why they should be taken more seriously.

All in all, this is the opposite of a pot-boiler. It understands military history to be about much more than fighting; it understands that when there are many army brigades and limited resources, war is at the heart of politics; it understands that the greatest battles are fought in the minds and hearts of vulnerable individuals. It also shows that there is no such thing as a definitive history of *anything* in that 'thing' which never has had and probably never will have, a stable title: the English (or British) Civil War, the Great Rebellion, the English Revolution, the Puritan Revolution, the Wars of Religion, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. When we cannot agree what to call the greatest turning point in our history (after 1066, perhaps) it is not surprising that we cannot agree how 'they' panned out as they did!

Julian Whitehead, *Cromwell and his Women*. Pen & Sword Books, 2019 (xiv + 236 pp.) ISBN 9781526719010, £19.99 hardback.

reviewed by Serrie Meakins

Julian Whitehead was a former intelligence officer and has used his skills to great effect to write the lives of Cromwell's wife, mother, daughters and other female relatives. At times the paucity of evidence leads to rather too many speculations on the author's part, some rather purple and sentimental, but in the main he has produced a very readable and hugely entertaining book.

His remit isn't Cromwell the soldier or politician; it is Cromwell the man. The loving husband, the doting father, the proud grandad, and it is a novel way to present Oliver Cromwell because it makes us understand him just that little bit better. Moreover, the book also explores how the vicissitudes of Cromwell's remarkable life affected the lives of the women dependent on him. Tracy Borman is quoted as saying that, viewing Cromwell through the eyes of his womenfolk shows him to be a complex, sympathetic and essentially human figure, and in that sense this book presents a fresh perspective.

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The book has its faults, mostly down to the publisher, in that there are a few unfortunate mistakes. On p6, Oliver's sister Joan dies twice on one page; on p162 Lockhart investigates... Lockhart; occasionally pronouns are missing and sometimes names are misspelled. However, these gripes are more than compensated for by the fluent and expressive style of the author. Mr Whitehead has a gift for simplifying complex ideas into short pithy sentences. Describing the growth of Puritanism under James I, he says, 'Puritanism spread and found favour among the gentry and thus in the House of Commons, where many of them held seats' [p18] which conveys much in a few words. He is especially interesting on Cromwell's early life, his financial precariousness, and the vast reaches of his extended family, and he is also very illuminating on the possible sources of his depression. There is a nice use of Cromwell's own words to add veracity and weight to the text: Oliver's letter to a fellow father concerning the death of Valentine Walton, although well known, has an extra poignance when it is being used to describe Cromwell's sadness of the earlier death of his own son.

There are also a number of hugely entertaining 'interesting facts' that creep into the text and under the reader's skin. For instance, I learned that 17th century Nottinghamshire practiced ultimogeniture, which was why Henry Ireton, despite being the eldest son, received no inheritance from his father. On p142 the author tells us that Cromwell is credited with inventing the weekend, because he used to head off to Hampton Court on Friday and not return until Monday! These little tidbits illuminate the text and add an extra layer of interest to an already fascinating story. They also demonstrate the research and knowledge that Whitehead has poured into this book.

The 'heroine' of the book is unquestionably Elizabeth Cromwell, Oliver's long-suffering wife, and despite rather too many speculations about how much Elizabeth would have missed Oliver when he was in London, the author does succeed in presenting a more sympathetic and, I suspect, more accurate picture of her than has previously been the case. If Elizabeth is mentioned at all in earlier books, the satirists view of her as a rather parsimonious, drab country wife is accepted. Whitehead points out that Elizabeth entered a world totally alien to her when she moved to Whitehall, yet she set about renovating and refurbishing both Whitehall and Hampton Court, she oversaw vast numbers of servants, she acted as Oliver's companion and welcomed official delegations to the Protectorate court, and

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she offered a degree of patronage herself, as well as acting as a conduit to her husband. At the same time, she was the keystone of the expanding Cromwell family and, it seems very likely, the stability at the heart of the Cromwell marriage. Whitehead makes a good case for Elizabeth the redoubtable, intelligent and capable woman, who provided Cromwell with security and love and enabled him to achieve all he did. As he concludes, 'she must have been a lady of remarkable character.'

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by Dr Jonathan Fitzgibbons

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