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CROMWELLIANA 2024

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Editor: Dr Maxine Forshaw

CONTENTS

Editor's Note	5
Cromwell Day Address (September 2023) In Conversation with Oliver Cromwell by Dr Jonathan Fitzgibbons	6
Papers and essays on the theme of the Study Day at Huntingdon (October 2023): Parliament, Politics and People: The History of Parliament, House of Commons 1640–1660	
Introducing <i>The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1640–1660</i> by Dr Stephen K. Roberts	16
Synopsis of presentation 'Politics and Party in Tudor and Stuart England' by Dr David Scott	26
'High places are slippery': Charles Fleetwood, John Disbrowe and the fall of the House of Cromwell by Dr Patrick Little	28
Blood and Marriage: why kin mattered to Oliver Cromwell by Professor John Morrill	48
Custards and cushions: new evidence for Oliver Cromwell's sense of humour by Dr Patrick Little	57
Writings and Sources XXIII The Three Battles of Edgehill by Professor Peter Gaunt	62

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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.

Editor of *Cromwelliana*: Dr MAXINE FORSHAW, BSc, PhD

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CONTENTS (cont'd)

Isaac Foot's rejoinder to the Bishop of London, February 1949 by John Goldsmith	69
Cromwellian Britain XXXII 'That cage of violence and denne of thieves': Beeston Castle, Cheshire by Professor Peter Gaunt	76
The Schools' Essay Prize-winner 2023 To what extent was the outbreak of civil war in England in 1642 caused by disputes over religion? by Hattie Filmore	93
Book Reviews	99
<i>Creating Memory: Historical Fiction and the English Civil Wars</i> by Farah Mendlesohn	
<i>Financing the English Revolution in Worcestershire: the sales of confiscated church and crown property, 1646–60</i> by Stephen K. Roberts	
<i>Oliver Cromwell's Kin, 1643–1726: The Private and Public Worlds of the English Revolution and Restoration</i> by David Farr	
<i>Early Modern Wales, c.1536–c.1689: Ambiguous Nationhood</i> by Lloyd Bowen	
<i>The Blazing World: a New History of Revolutionary England</i> by Jonathan Healey	
<i>The Town Well Fortified: the fortresses of the Civil Wars in Britain, 1639–1660</i> by David Flinham	
Reviews by Professor Peter Gaunt, Dr Miranda Malins, Professor John Morrill, Stuart Orme and Dr Ismini Pells	

CONTENTS (cont'd)

Bibliography of Books		115
by Dr Charlotte Young		
Bibliography of Journals		121
by Professor Peter Gaunt		
Plate 1	A very imaginative seventeenth- or eighteenth-century reconstruction of how Beeston Castle might have looked in its medieval heyday.	76
Plate 2	A much more realistic engraving of Beeston Castle from the south, as represented by the Buck brothers in the first half of the eighteenth century.	77
Plate 3	A nineteenth-century sketch plan of the castle, included in George Ormerod's <i>History of the County Palatine and City of Chester</i> .	78
Plate 4	The spectacular view from the inner ward, looking west-north-west across the Cheshire plain towards Chester and the Mersey and Dee estuaries.	80
Plate 5	Taken from the modern bridge giving access from the outer into the inner ward.	82
Plate 6	The inner ward, looking south-east.	83
Plate 7	Looking north from the outer towards the inner ward.	84
Plate 8	A contemporary woodcut of Sir William Brereton, Parliament's commander-in-chief in Cheshire.	86
Plate 9	Taken from the outer ward, looking towards the inner ward.	90

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Opinions expressed herein are solely those of the contributors and do not express the views or opinions of the Cromwell Association.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

2023 saw the publication of The History of Parliament Trust's *The House of Commons 1640–1660*, a huge undertaking, the result of over 25 years of effort, which culminated in a nine-volume set; this contains detailed biographies of over 1800 MPs and studies of over 320 constituencies.

This achievement was celebrated at the Cromwell Association's study day in October last year and forms the core of this year's journal. As sometimes happens with events such as this, some presentations were either not suitable for conversion into papers or had been promised for publication elsewhere. I am therefore especially grateful to Dr Stephen Roberts and Professor John Morrill for their contributions to this section of the journal which enabled this to become a coherent, themed item.

The cover of this edition reflects *The House of Commons 1640–1660* with a variety of MPs' names chosen, some perhaps more familiar than others. Note that their spelling is the same as that used in the History of Parliament's volumes for this period.

On a personal note, as editor of the journal for over 10 years now, I would like to give my warm thanks to Professor Peter Gaunt who has just stood down as president of the Association and who was chairman for many years previously. During this time, Peter has contributed many papers to the journal, all of them highly readable and entertaining, and all in his inimitable style.

Maxine Forshaw

Erratum *Cromwelliana* 2023: in the article 'Picturing Regicide: the Execution of Charles I' by Dr Stephen Brogan, Plate 4 on page 110 – the image was transposed and appeared the wrong way round, due to an error in the publishing process. However, note that the detail of this picture, appearing on the cover, is correctly orientated.

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 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

by Dr Jonathan Fitzgibbons

‘It was about this time [in November 1652], in a fair evening, I being walking in St James’s Park ... that the Lord General Cromwell met me in the Park ... he saluted me with more than ordinary courtesy, and desired me to walk aside with him, that we might have some private discourse together ... he and I being alone, he began the discourse betwixt us, which was to this effect.

Oliver Cromwell: My Lord Whitelocke, I know your faithfulness and engagement in the same good cause with myself and the rest of our friends, and I know your ability in judgement, and your particular friendship and affection for me ... therefore I desire to advise with you in the main and most important affairs relating to our present condition.

Bulstrode Whitelocke: Your Excellency hath known me long, and I think will say that you never knew any unfaithfulness or breach of trust by me...

Cromwell: ...I can trust you with my life, and the most secret matters relating to our business, and to that end, I have now desired a little private discourse with you; and really (my lord) there is very great cause for us to consider the dangerous condition we are all in ... That the Lord having given us an entire conquest over our enemies, we should not now hazard all again by our private janglings, and bring those mischiefs upon ourselves, which our enemies could never do...

Whitelocke: I confess the danger we are in by these extravagancies and inordinate powers, is more than I doubt is generally apprehended...

Cromwell: My Lord, there is little hopes of a good settlement to be made by [this Parliament], really there is not, but a great deal of fear, that they will destroy again, what the Lord hath done graciously for them and us. We all forget God, and God will forget us, and give us up to confusion ... some course must be thought on to curb and restrain them or we shall be ruined by them.

Whitelocke: We ourselves have acknowledged them the supreme power, and taken our commissions and authority in the highest concernments from

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

them, and how to restrain or curb them after this, it will be hard to find out a way for it.

Cromwell: What if a man should take upon him to be king?

Whitelocke: I think that remedy would be worse than the disease.

Cromwell: Why do you think so?

Whitelocke: As to your own person the title of king would be of no advantage because you have the full kingly power in you already ... So that I apprehend indeed less envy and danger, and pomp, but not less power and real opportunities of doing good, in your being General than would be if you had assumed the title of king.

Cromwell: ...I think you have much reason for what you propound; but it is a matter of so high importance and difficulty, that it deserves more time of consideration and debate than is at present allowed us...

With this the General broke off, and went to other company, and so into Whitehall, seeming, by his countenance and carriage, displeased with what I had said; yet (to give him his due) I never heard that he objected it against me, in any public meeting afterwards.¹

—

I am sorry to say that the title of today's address should have come with a disclaimer: the Lord Protector will not be joining us in person (or from beyond the grave). And yet, three hundred and sixty-five years after his death, we can still, just about, hear Cromwell's 'voice'. We can hear it in his letters, in his speeches and in those reports of conversations that will be my focus today. I say 'just about' because, leafing through the latest edition of Cromwell's *Letters, Writings, and Speeches*, one of the things that strikes me is just how much is missing.² As John Morrill would put it, the silences are deafening.³ Most of Cromwell's words are lost to us. His surviving letters can only be a portion of those he wrote; his speeches represent only the smallest fraction of the words he actually uttered during his lifetime. So much obviously passed between Cromwell and others unnoticed and

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

unrecorded, especially before his rise to public prominence. Even as Lord Protector, Cromwell thrived on informality and improvisation. In private meetings, he was familiar and relaxed with his confidants, ‘laying aside his greatness’ he encouraged his company to chat, ‘make verses’ and smoke pipes before turning attention to serious business.⁴ If this way of governing exemplified Cromwell’s common touch, it did not lend itself to formal record keeping.

It is for this reason that reports of private conversations with Cromwell like the one with which we began this address, recorded by the parliamentarian MP and lawyer Bulstrode Whitelocke, are so tantalising. They seem to offer us a rare glimpse of the real Cromwell, dare one say it, warts and all. In the case of Whitelocke’s account of the conversation in St James’s Park in late 1652, not only can we listen in on Cromwell’s frustrations with the torpid rule of the Rump Parliament, but we also hear him thinking out loud the constitutional solutions he had in mind.

Yet, we must acknowledge that such accounts are as treacherous as they are invaluable. Most obviously, there are technical grounds for doubting their accuracy. Recording early modern speech was not easy. We know that Cromwell’s orations to Parliament as Lord Protector were usually taken by a team of stenographers who conferred to agree on a finished text.⁵ This was clearly impossible for private conversations. Unless we are to believe that Whitelocke walked through St James’s Park with quill in hand, he cannot have taken notes as the words were uttered. Whitelocke probably had a decent memory. After all, as a good puritan, he made a habit of memorising and noting down the contents of sermons, while his legal training necessitated the honing of skills in summarising and reporting court proceedings. But it is reasonable to presume that, even if he noted the conversation soon after it occurred, he still could not have recalled every detail verbatim.

In reality, Whitelocke did not write up his account until a decade after the conversation took place. It formed part of his memoirs, or ‘Annales of his life’ as he styled them, written during that most depressing period of British history, the restoration of Stuart monarchy.⁶ The ‘Annales’, Whitelocke claimed, were written primarily for the edification of his children, sixteen of

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

whom were still living in 1660. His habit of including conversations ‘dialogue wise’ as he termed it, was out of a desire to educate and entertain.⁷ Not unlike Cromwell, Whitelocke had enjoyed a grammar school and university education that involved training in the arts of debate and rhetoric and was permeated by classical and humanist texts structured in dialogue format. It made perfect sense that Whitelocke should routinely turn to dialogues in his memoirs to instruct and edify his children.

Yet, if considerations of genre and audience explain the format in which Whitelocke presented his conversation with Cromwell, it seems probable that the political circumstances in which he wrote moulded its contents. Perhaps he had an eye on his political rehabilitation. Excluded from public office at the Restoration, the very act of writing his memoirs speaks to the fact that Whitelocke had plenty of time on his hands. We know he had few notes to work from: his wife burned many of his private papers as a precautionary measure on the eve of Charles II’s return.⁸ In these circumstances, one is left to wonder whether, when composing his memoirs, Whitelocke exercised his imagination as much as his memory. Did he, quite literally, put words in Cromwell’s mouth to suit the political realities of the 1660s?

While no earlier notes of the 1652 conversation survive for comparison, some clues are provided by a surviving portion of Whitelocke’s memoirs composed during the Protectorate that covers the period from late 1653 to mid 1654 when he served as ambassador to Sweden. While there, Whitelocke kept notes of the conversations he had with Swedish dignitaries which he then wrote up into a larger account in the late 1650s. Crucially, this was subsequently rewritten after the Restoration with significant alterations to those passages relating to the Stuarts and Cromwell.⁹

An appropriate example of Whitelocke’s editorial practices, given our setting today, is a conversation he purportedly had with the Swedish Queen Christina concerning Charles II’s performance at the Battle of Worcester. In the version written before the Restoration, Whitelocke told the Queen how Charles II ‘the king of Scots’ was ‘in person both in the field and in the Town from whence he escaped’. Christina replied ‘in some passion, that it was very strange he would outlive that day’ and that rather than abandon his troops,

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

he should have fought on and ‘died in the battle’. When rewriting this conversation after 1660, Whitelocke gave a far more flattering account of Charles II’s valour: ‘the king was in person; both in the field and in the Town, in the hottest engagement, and expressed good courage and conduct; and when, by the fortune of war, his men left him, he was forced to leave’.¹⁰ The Queen’s subsequent outburst at Charles’s cowardice was quietly deleted.

This example demonstrates that Whitelocke was quite prepared to rewrite his own words, and those of his interlocutors, to suit the political realities of the Restoration. It is surely not unreasonable to presume a similar thing happened when he recalled his conversations with Cromwell. In fact, several details of the St James’s Park meeting seem doubtful on closer inspection. Most problematic is Cromwell’s searching question ‘what if a man should take upon him to be king?’ and Whitelocke’s tepid response that kingship was both undesirable and unnecessary. This exchange seems bizarre once we consider both Whitelocke and Cromwell’s subsequent actions. After all, in early 1657, a little over four years after this purported conversation took place, it was Whitelocke who chaired the committee of ninety-nine MPs tasked with trying to convince Oliver to accept Parliament’s offer of kingship. During the ‘kingship debates’ their roles were completely reversed: it was Whitelocke who told Cromwell repeatedly that kingship was a legal necessity while Cromwell famously refused the Crown. One cannot help but feel that in composing, or rather fabricating, the St James’s conversation in his post-Restoration memoirs, Whitelocke sought to muddy the waters by suggesting that, deep-down, he never *really* wanted Cromwell to be king while also hinting that Oliver secretly wanted it all along.¹¹

Similar motives were surely at play in Whitelocke’s revelation in a later portion of the same conversation that he urged Cromwell not only to shun all thoughts of kingship, but to open negotiations to put Charles Stuart on the throne instead. He claimed that he asked Cromwell:

to consider the condition of the King of Scots, who hath a right by law to the Crown of England ... By a private Treaty with him, you may secure yourself, and your friends and their fortunes. You may make yourself and your posterity as great and permanent ... as ever any subject was...¹²

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

Again, this speaks more to Whitelocke's circumstances after 1660 and his bitter rivalry with the loathsome architect of the Restoration, George Monck.¹³ In effect, Whitelocke wanted to claim he sought Charles II's return more than seven years before Monck had the wherewithal to bring it about.

So, there are both technical and contextual grounds to doubt the accuracy of Whitelocke's account. But even if details were fabricated, I think that this and the many other, equally dubious, records of private conversations with Cromwell can still tell us something about how he operated.

For one thing, they give an impression of the way that Cromwell talked: how he convinced and captivated others with his words. Whitelocke habitually recreated the accents and peculiarities of speech of his interlocutors, producing some memorable results when recounting discussions with Scottish politicians or humble country servants. While he does not give Cromwell a distinctive accent, he evidently sought to capture some of his mannerisms. Particularly noticeable is the use of repetition for emphasis, and an overabundant use of the words 'really' and 'indeed', all of which are familiar enough from Cromwell's reported speeches. There are also moments when Whitelocke catches a particularly vivid Cromwellian turn of phrase, such as during a conversation in September 1653 when Cromwell promised to look after Whitelocke's interests while he was away on the Swedish embassy: he vowed to 'stick as close to you as your skin is to your flesh'.¹⁴ Even if we count Whitelocke among the earliest writers of Cromwellian historical fiction, he had the advantage of first-hand knowledge of the man and his mannerisms to give his account authenticity.

Another thing we notice in Whitelocke's account is Cromwell's physical accessibility. Of course, it was a common trope to portray tyrants as being closeted away in their palaces, deaf to the complaints of their subjects. Cromwell was no Charles I: he was remarkably, even recklessly (given the many assassination attempts against him), accessible to the public. When in London, he was regularly seen taking the air in Hyde Park or, as in Whitelocke's case, St James's Park. He seems to have relished being seen, being accessible, and talking to others. As Derek Hirst has noted, public recognition of Cromwell's accessibility was reflected in the striking volume

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

of petitions directed to Cromwell by people from all walks of life.¹⁵ They believed him to be a man who would listen, who could help.

The other thing we notice about those various conversations that have been committed to paper, whatever their accuracy, is that Cromwell apparently sought out and engaged with people from a wide range of political and religious persuasions. Just to take examples from the new edition of *Letters, Writings and Speeches*, we find him conversing with Royalists, with Levellers, with Fifth Monarchists, with Quakers, with Commonwealthsmen. Of course, like Whitelocke's account, all of these records are to a greater or lesser degree, retrospective. Their authors generally had axes to grind, they saw in Cromwell a symbol (or scapegoat) for the frustration of their own religious and political agendas. Most of them claimed to have been utterly taken in by Cromwell, beguiled by his easy manner, seeing only too late that his aim all along was to deceive them.

Unfortunately (some might say conveniently) I do not have time to get into the issue of Cromwell's sincerity, or duplicity; but I do not think we need to take Ronald Hutton's line that Cromwell was a practised liar to appreciate that he was an accomplished politician.¹⁶ He certainly knew when to listen and when to turn a blind eye. He canvassed others' points of view and tried to talk them around to his. This should hardly surprise us: he knew that the only way to achieve 'healing and settling' after a divisive civil war, was to build bridges, to open dialogues, to bring people along with him. But, one senses that for Cromwell there was also a deeper religious significance to this search for consensus. If the early modern mind habitually saw division, of which civil war was the most dramatic manifestation, as punishment for sin, then unity was a blessing from God. 'Let us be doing, but let us be united in our doing', as Cromwell famously told the General Council of the Army at Putney.¹⁷ He was dismayed by the differences those debates revealed: 'there hath been several contradictions in what hath been spoken, but certainly God is not the Author of Contradictions'.¹⁸ Even if details in Whitelocke's 1652 account are largely fabricated, it still captures the essence of Cromwell's perennial concern over division: 'We all forget God, and God will forget us, and give us up to confusion'.

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

And perhaps there is no better way to conclude this address on Cromwellian conversations than by turning to Oliver's most important interlocutor: God. After all, Cromwell routinely spoke to his God through prayer. In turn, whether through his readings of scripture or divine providence, Cromwell felt the Lord speaking to him, guiding him. Undoubtedly, God spoke most clearly to Cromwell through victory on the battlefield, including his 'crowning mercy' here at Worcester in 1651.¹⁹ More unnerving were those passages in the decade that followed when it seemed that God no longer responded. Most notably, after Cromwell assumed power there appeared to be 'a great silence in Heaven, as if God were pleased to stand still and be as a looker on', as Sir Henry Vane put it in his stinging rebuke of the Protectorate in 1656.²⁰ It should hardly surprise us that in his later years Cromwell increasingly referred to Psalm 85, our final reading today. Appropriately enough, it presents a dialogue with the Almighty, framed around a set of searching questions that long for an answer: 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he *will* speak peace unto his people, and to his saints'.

Three hundred and sixty-five years ago today, the day before his death, Cromwell still hoped for peace: 'pardon thy foolish people ... love them, and bless them, and give them rest ... And give me Rest for Jesus Christ his sake'.²¹ One hopes that final prayer was heard – and answered.²²

¹ British Library, Additional MS 37345, fols. 240v–243v. The printed account of this conversation in Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs* (London, 1681/2), pp. 523–6, which was subsequently reproduced in a new edition by Oxford University Press in 4 volumes in 1853 (vol 3., pp. 468–75), contains many errors.

² John Morrill et al. (eds), *The Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (3 vols., Oxford UP, 2022).

³ John Morrill, 'Rewriting Cromwell: A Case of Deafening Silences', *Canadian Journal of History*, 38:3 (2003), pp. 553–578.

⁴ Ruth Spalding (ed.), *The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke, 1605–1675* (Oxford, 1990), p. 464: entry for 2 May 1657.

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

- ⁵ See discussion on this point in Jonathan Fitzgibbons, ‘Recording, Reporting and Printing the Cromwellian “Kingship Debates” of 1657’, *Historical Research*, 89:245 (2016), pp. 486–509.
- ⁶ For a detailed discussion of Whitelocke’s memoirs, including the likely date and probable relationship of the various surviving manuscripts, see Blair Worden, ‘The “Diary” of Bulstrode Whitelocke’, *English Historical Review*, 108:426 (1993), pp. 122–134.
- ⁷ BL, Add. MS 53726, fol. 48r.
- ⁸ Spalding (ed.), *Diary*, p. 559.
- ⁹ I am currently preparing an edition of this important manuscript for publication. Deleted passages quoted below have been recovered thanks to the assistance of spectral imaging equipment in the British Library’s photography laboratories.
- ¹⁰ Bulstrode Whitelocke, *A Journal of the Swedish Embassy*, ed. Charles Morton (2 vols., London, 1772), i., 255: entry for 26 Dec. 1653.
- ¹¹ For further discussion on this point see Jonathan Fitzgibbons, ‘“To settle a government without something of Monarchy in it”: Bulstrode Whitelocke’s Memoirs and the Reinvention of the Interregnum’, *English Historical Review*, 137:586 (2022), pp. 677–681.
- ¹² BL, Add. MS 37345, fol. 243r.
- ¹³ For more on Monck’s feud with Whitelocke, see Fitzgibbons, ‘Bulstrode Whitelocke’s Memoirs’, pp. 657, 681–3.
- ¹⁴ *Swedish Embassy*, ed. Morton, i., 34.
- ¹⁵ Derek Hirst, ‘Making Contact: Petitions and the English Republic’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45:1 (2006), 26–50.
- ¹⁶ Ronald Hutton, *The Making of Oliver Cromwell* (Yale, 2021).
- ¹⁷ Morrill et al. (eds), *Letters, Writings, and Speeches*, i., 455 (29 Oct 1647).
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, i., 469 (1 Nov. 1647).
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ii., 491.
- ²⁰ Sir Henry Vane, *A Healing Question propounded and resolved* (London, 1656), p. 22.
- ²¹ Morrill et al. (eds), *Letters, Writings, and Speeches*, iii., 521.
- ²² For a more detailed discussion of Bulstrode Whitelocke’s memoirs and the problems of his ‘conversations’ with Oliver Cromwell, see Jonathan Fitzgibbons, ‘“To settle a government without something of Monarchy in it”: Bulstrode Whitelocke’s Memoirs and the Reinvention of the Interregnum’, *English Historical Review*, 137:586 (2022), pp. 655–691, which can be downloaded for free at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceac126>.

CROMWELL DAY ADDRESS 2023
IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVER CROMWELL

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INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:* *THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660*

by Dr Stephen K. Roberts

For over twenty years, the History of Parliament's published survey of the House of Commons had provided complete coverage from 1509 to 1832 – with one notable exception. That gap was made good with the publication in 2023 of *The House of Commons 1640–1660*. In nine volumes, this is the largest set the History of Parliament has produced so far. Running to little short of seven million words and nearly 9,000 pages, these volumes contain biographies of every person who sat in the House of Commons, or in the Parliament when it consisted of only one House, during the turbulent times of the British civil wars and their aftermath, the Commonwealth or English republic (1649–53), and the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell (1653–58).

As with every set of History of Parliament volumes, Volume One is an Introductory Survey, guiding readers through some of the most important themes in the history of the Commons in the period. During part of the period covered by these volumes, Parliament was not only a legislative and judicial body, but an executive authority, running the country. Therefore, and uniquely in History of Parliament volumes to date, there are also articles on the most important of the executive committees of the Long Parliament: during the 1640s the mainspring of Parliament's grip on government.

The project was active over many years. It began in a small way during the early 1980s, when preparatory work was begun by Peter Hasler, the Director, or General Editor as he was then styled. Only during the 1990s were sufficient resources directed towards the project to enable the creation of a team of five full-time historians to concentrate on the production of articles, and that was subsequently the size of the team which saw the project through to completion. In all, over the whole life of the project, some 12 historians worked full time on it at one point or another.

Such was (and is) the contested nature of parliamentary history in this period, that even the number of Parliaments, and for that matter the essence of what constitutes a Parliament, are open to question. Should the Nominated Assembly of 1653, unelected but summoned only on the authority of the then lord general, Oliver Cromwell, be called a Parliament? And when in 1659 the 'rump' of the Long Parliament, purged by the army of over 100

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

members in December 1648, reassembled after the collapse of the protectorate of Cromwell's son, Richard – was that a new Parliament, and what was its legitimacy? It was certainly different in size and complexion from the original Long Parliament which first met in November 1640.

In the Parliaments that met between 1640 and 1660, counting the so-called Short Parliament of April 1640 as the first, and the Parliament of Richard Cromwell in 1659 as the last, there were 1,803 MPs elected to either the House of Commons or its equivalent during the commonwealth and protectorate, a single chamber Parliament. This also includes the Nominated Assembly of 1653, sometimes called the Barebones Parliament, to which 140 members were summoned by Oliver Cromwell, not elected. Only two active members of the lord protector's version of the House of Lords, the 'Other House', had not previously been elected or summoned to the Commons or its equivalent. The lives of these two non-elected individuals, Thomas Belasyse (2nd Viscount Fauconberg) and Archibald Johnston of Wariston, have been included in the volumes as an appendix, as have those of two others deemed anomalous because they were elected but seem never to have taken their seats: Henry Frederick Howard, Lord Maltravers, of Arundel Castle, and Sampson Lort of Pembrokeshire. Including the anomalies, therefore, the grand total of biographies in the volumes is 1,805.

The number of constituency articles included, 329, exceeds any in preceding chronological periods covered by the History of Parliament. This not least because for the first time, Members representing Scottish and Irish constituencies sat in the English House of Commons from 1653. For each constituency, details of the franchise are supplied, and names listed: of the MPs who in elections succeeded and, where known, of their rivals who failed. In each case, the character of an election is traced, whether it was an agreement by the gentry or a hard-fought contest by factions, whether a result imposed from afar, or an outcome reflecting live local issues. Was election or selection the dominant principle at work when parliamentary representatives were chosen?

Answers to these and many other posers are to be found in these volumes, chiefly through the 1,805 biographies and 329 constituency articles which form the core of the work. Every individual, however great or minor, has

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:* *THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660*

been identified, with one or two exceptions where remaining doubts have been recorded – in the hope that someone one day might dispel the few remaining wisps of mystery. Only one, the MP for Wigan in 1659, lacks a forename for certainty: was he Raufe or Robert Markland? No such doubts surround the vast majority of Members whose lives are charted in these pages.

The Process: how did we tackle this enormous challenge?

Every life has been researched according to a rigorous and systematic process of enquiry. Starting with details of an individual's life and death dates, his family background, marriage details and numbers of children are recorded if available, moving on to his educational and employment experiences. In the narrative of any biography, priority is given to the Member's parliamentary career, then to his wider public life. The subjects of some of our biographies are better known for attainments in fields other than the parliamentary – Andrew Marvell as a poet, Sir Thomas Fairfax as a soldier, for example – so our biographies supply a less well-explored dimension to the lives of these figures. Naturally, the lives of the political titans of the period will be found here: Oliver Cromwell of course (and his sons and other relatives who sat), John Pym, Edward Hyde (later the Earl of Clarendon), Sir Henry Vane (father and son); but also, equally fascinatingly, those in the Commons who commanded no admirers or detractors, whose careers in Parliament were slight and largely anonymous, but who in aggregate contributed to the make-up of the House during a remarkable period of its history. What follows is a closer look at the methodology of the life-writing process.

There must be more than one way of writing the biographies of MPs but in this Section of the History of Parliament, as in others, the life of every MP has been subject to the same research and writing method. In an earlier period of the History's existence, 'prosopography', the quasi-scientific study of collective biography, was fashionable among the leading champions of the project like Sir Lewis Namier (1888–1960). Few would now share the confidence of the Namierites about the potential of prosopography to answer all the questions about political groups in history. Even so, to subject the life of each of our MPs to the same process of investigation is to ensure

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

a consistency of approach across the project. It also contributes to securing a standard of accuracy and quality.

Many sources, in print and in manuscript, were trawled for every one of the 1,805 lives included. Given the diversity of personal background and the varying public profiles among them, ranging from those who led the Commons to those who rarely attended, or sat mutely when they did, this was sometimes a short and sometimes a very long procedure, in which serendipity played a part. But common to every research exercise for a biography were three avenues of inquiry, leading us from the private to the parliamentary life. The first is to establish the life-facts common to humanity: the facts of ancestry and birth, marriage, parenthood, death and burial. For nearly all our MPs, at least some of these facts are known; only for a very small number were we completely unable with any confidence to pin anything down about their identity. Comparatively recently, a huge volume of material central to pinpointing life events with greater accuracy than ever before has become available through electronic resources, and extensive use was made of these in the later stages of the project.

The second of these common processes was to produce a profile of our subject's public life as a whole, as the great majority of MPs had been active in some public field before election. Even those in the civil war period who had risen socially 'without trace' to enter the House were, or had been, army officers or committeemen or traders; and those with no public profile at all before arriving in the Commons were likely to be the sons of county gentry, educated privately and in the shadow of their fathers before they embarked on a parliamentary career, aged 21 or in some rare cases (and in defiance of precedent and unwritten rule) younger. We were often able to trace the progress of an individual through office in, for example, an urban corporation, or a City of London livery company; or through commissions in the officer corps of the parliamentarian army, or in county government. What these milestones in an individual's career tell us of him sometimes becomes clear in the context of the completed biography, but as often as not both author and readers are left to speculate whether they are evidence of determination, energy, sociability, manipulativenness, mere good fortune or some blend of these.

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:* *THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660*

The third common exercise was the systematic study of the Commons and Lords Journals. The first in the series of Commons Journals runs from 1547 to 1629, and in its printed version extends to 932 pages. For the period between April 1640 and the restoration of Charles II in 1660 there are seven volumes in printed form, and the coverage of sittings between April 1640 and mid-March 1643 alone runs to 1,004 printed pages. This is the first age of the full record of proceedings, stimulated chiefly by the sheer volume and complexity of business. The historian can identify every entry for an individual MP in the Journals, and weigh its significance or insignificance, and it becomes possible, if not advisable, to write an account of a parliamentary career entirely on the basis of appearances in the Journal. The more entries, the more active an MP can be judged to be. Unfortunately, in most cases, to create a coherent and plausible account from notes of committee appointments, tellerships and reports is to construct a misleading and factitious biography, essential though the Journals are as primary evidence.

The significance of diaries as a resource

Other than the official record of Parliament, enshrined in the Journals of Commons and Lords, probably the most significant type of source quarried by the team was the parliamentary or private diary. ‘Diary’ is the word used conventionally to describe this kind of writing, though it encompasses a range of manuscript writings, marked by a variety of styles. The most immediate are the diaries written by serving members of the House of Commons, on a daily basis, on the day of the events they describe, or very shortly afterwards, and the most useful are the diaries sustained over a significant length of time. Though there are significant gaps in coverage, the surviving diaries of Walter Yonge, MP for Honiton, run from September 1642 to December 1645. That of Laurence Whitaker, MP for Okehampton, covers the period October 1642 to June 1647. Sir Simonds D’Ewes, MP for Sudbury, not only kept a diary of events in the Commons from November 1640 to November 1645, but also kept a diary in Latin which from January 1644 complemented his parliamentary diary. For the following decade, the supply of diaries nearly dries up, but the most important of the 1650s are the diaries of Thomas Burton, MP for Westmorland, surviving for the duration of the two Cromwellian Parliaments in which he sat, those of 1656 and 1659.

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

Yonge, a strongly providentialist puritan in outlook, sought to create a chronicle of public events. In 1642–3 he highlighted reports of the civil war that flooded into Westminster from all over England, the lurid ones attracting more of his attention. As civil war deepened, so Yonge began to take more notice of speeches in the Commons, trying to capture, often in a broken form hard to penetrate fully, the essence of MPs' speeches that made their mark on him. His primary interest remained in the public affairs of the west of England, but his diaries reveal next to nothing of the character of Walter Yonge himself. He even describes himself in the third person – in lists of committees he records: 'Mr Yonge'. Whitaker adopted a comparable impersonal register of voice which is apparent in his diary. He habitually uses the plural personal pronoun 'we' to describe events in the House, but rarely the singular 'I': and then only to record reports he made to the House, never his own thoughts or feelings. Of all the diarists, Whitaker was the closest to power, because of his chairmanships of committees, but was also the most impersonal in his writing, as if he were striving to create a journal of record after the model of the Commons Journal itself.

Sir Simonds D'Ewes, as is well known, is the most revealing of his own character and purposes in diarizing. As disillusionment with the drift of parliamentary politics set in, D'Ewes devoted less time to his diaries, so that they became reduced in scope and coverage, containing a growing number of unflattering references in them to colleagues, and dismissals by D'Ewes of whole areas of parliamentary business as trivial. Burton's diary, championed by a former president of our Association, Ivan Roots, is a treasure trove of speeches made by Members of the 1656 and 1659 Parliaments. Burton was more interested in regional legislation rather than great affairs of state, so perhaps his limited range of interests qualified him for the role of dispassionate diarist. His six volumes, in a crabbed hand, focus on MPs' speeches, which he somehow took down almost verbatim, seemingly writing virtually as members were on their feet speaking. The principle of self-effacement once more asserted itself in the case of Burton, whose diaries reveal almost nothing of their author's politics.

Our broad findings

What has been created in the nine-volume set is a major resource for historians and casual researchers alike, with interest well beyond the

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

parliamentary or political. Its impact on thinking about the period will surely be huge, though not immediate. Here it is appropriate only to highlight some innovative areas of interpretation to emerge, beginning with a negative one, along ‘the dog that didn’t bark’ lines. We know that in the period immediately following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 there were many disputed parliamentary elections, rival candidates with attendant supporters vying for dominance in shires and boroughs. Historian Mark Kishlansky contrasted this with the period before 1629, when in his view MPs were usually ‘selected’, meaning that they were chosen by local agreement among a narrow group of locally powerful individuals or corporate bodies. Kishlansky saw the 1640s and 1650s as the crucial period when selection turned to election, and the election process was strongly coloured by national politics. Our findings do not, generally speaking, bear that out. Contests were likely to be sharper in boroughs than in the counties, because local interests tended to be more intense and contending groups more readily organised, but local contexts remain a very strong element in explaining the course of elections. When opposition to the crown was organised, as it was in the elections of autumn 1640, there were limits to it, and at the height of factional rivalry at Westminster after the first civil war (the so-called recruiter elections 1645–8), only 15 per cent of by-elections were serious contests. Even in elections in the 1650s where conflicts were more numerous and intense, local issues not national political ones remained an important dimension.

How did MPs organise themselves when at Westminster? Most of the scholarship on this has until now rested on the work of the American historian J H Hexter, who studied the behaviour of MPs in the early years of the Long Parliament, using methods that owed much to the example pioneered for the eighteenth century by Lewis Namier. Hexter’s book, *The Reign of King Pym*, has dominated the thinking on party in the Long Parliament since it was first published in 1941. Hexter’s thesis was simple: in 1642–3, in the Commons there were two coherent opposed groups of MPs, whose members could be identified and listed: a war party, wanting a decisive victory over the king, and a peace party that wanted accommodation with him. But according to Hexter a third group of individuals emerged: MPs who could cross from one pole to another, but still act in a coherent way – these he called the middle group.

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

Our findings don't support the case for the existence of any enduring middle group, or even of a middle group that cohered at all. Instead, the cumulative evidence of the biographies offers scope for tracing the evolution of parties from the junto of 1640–2, with its weighty presence in the House of Lords, to the Presbyterian and Independent factions which, from the closing months of 1644, dominated parliamentary politics. It's a story of evolving reconfigurations of groupings of MPs as responses to the complexities of unfolding political events. There is insufficient space here to trace that process. The key issues on which MPs divided into factions included of course the desired outcome of negotiations with the king, but also attitudes towards the alliance with the Scots and the response to the emergence of the New Model Army as a political force.

Should these groupings of MPs be called parties or merely factions? A number of strands of evidence suggest the presence of a degree of coherence, cohesion and support for the Presbyterians and Independents beyond Parliament. First, the make-up of organisations outside Westminster was inflected with party. These included for example the New Model Army, the military units outside the New Model, the church, the City of London and the corporations of other cities. Secondly, a large surviving corpus of pamphlets and newspapers addressed to a party readership is evidence of the extension of party sentiment and adherence beyond Parliament. Thirdly, we can point to the longevity of some of these groups, for example the viability of the Independents as an effective political entity between early 1645 and late 1648. So, although Hexter's middle group doesn't survive subsection to intensive research, the concept of party does, and it's impossible to trawl through the biographies in these volumes without encountering party labels being used as a tool to explain the trajectory of political careers.

A distinctive feature of the period is the growth of parliamentary power, in response to the peculiar circumstances of the civil war with the king and his supporters. The characteristic mechanism for the growth of executive power was the committee, a group of MPs enjoying delegated authority over particular aspects of business, with extensive powers to implement action, meeting regularly and often drawing on the services of professional staff. The first committees of Parliament to be given powers to conduct state business were established for both Houses in the autumn of 1641, for a time-

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

limited period of six weeks while the king was in Scotland and thus out of the kingdom – a kind of corporate regency. That these Recess Committees could be set up conveys a sense of Parliament's determination to play a role in running the country after more than a decade when no Parliaments met at all.

Once relations between king and Parliament broke down irretrievably, Parliament quickly capitalised on the committee, in a corporate body the natural instrument of delegated authority and accountable responsibility, as the tool for building a war machine. Within nine months of a supreme committee, the Committee of Safety, being created, some further six major committees were established to direct or oversee important areas of public activity. When Parliament's war effort against the king faltered in the summer of 1643, another six major executive committees were set up.

The primary purpose of all these bodies was to support Parliament's land and sea forces, whether by imposing direct taxation in the form of the assessment, or indirect taxation in the form of the excise. Committees managed the army and navy. Committees imposed penal taxes on Parliament's enemies, and seized their property. Some were committees of both Houses; some were Commons only; some were confined in their remit to Westminster only, the power of others reached deep into the English and Welsh countryside.

Two committees stood out as unusual in their construction, and are worthy of brief mention here. Firstly, the Committee for Taking the Accounts of the Kingdom, set up in 1644, was unique in that no MP was a member of it, even though it was set up by Parliament and was accountable to it. It was a measure of the self-confidence and resilience of the Commons that it could even try to adhere to the principle that no-one financially accountable to Parliament should be an auditor of its huge range of financial accounts. Secondly, the Committee for Examinations was remarkable as the most protean of committees, with a striking capacity for shape-shifting. It was set up as the main investigative body of the Commons, taking to itself very extensive powers – including arrest and detention, disarming Catholics, paying rewards to people who seized arms or horses for Parliament. It lent itself to abuses, and in a deliberate show of seeming to listen to criticism, the

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:* *THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660*

Commons disbanded it in 1646, only to quietly diffuse its powers over time to other bodies.

The experience of the Committee for Examinations notwithstanding, there were generally limits to the powers of committees and their members. Committeemen had no power to act as individuals outside meetings, unlike JPs for example. No committee members directly benefited from the injections of cash raised by the sales of confiscated crown and church property. Many committees were vulnerable to changes in the political wind. This was especially true of the committees of state, on paper the supreme directive bodies negotiating on Parliament's behalf, but in reality unable to quickly change their structure to meet rapidly changing circumstances, and lacking access to their own funds.

There was jockeying between committees for political dominance, fed by a climate of faction at Westminster. A committee was a natural focal point for faction. As often as not, faction brought them into being and was an essential aspect of their complexion. The achievements of some of these committees were in some respects enduring, particularly in the way they supported what would be inherited first by Lord Protector Cromwell and ultimately by Charles II as a major European army and navy. The committees of the Long Parliament successfully harnessed professional interests in finance and overseas commerce, even if they shouldn't be viewed uncritically as the forerunners of a disinterested public service.

Parliamentary power

Turning now to the consequences of the build-up of parliamentary power, which took the form of executive authority building through the 1640s. On the face of things, the supremacy of Parliament came in January 1649 with the declaration in the Commons that 'the people are the original of all just power' and that the House of Commons, being representatives of the people, 'have the supreme power'. The trial and execution of the king quickly followed. But immediately after creation of the Commonwealth, power began to slip away from Parliament to bodies to which it had delegated authority, starting with Parliament's council of state. The history of Parliament through the 1650s is the story of growing extra-parliamentary executive power in conflict with Parliament and those who championed the

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

cause of Parliament as it had been framed in the early years of the civil war, or as they imagined it to have been framed. The stoutest champions of Parliament against the king in the first civil war came from south-east England; and in parliamentary elections under the protectorate so did those electors most resistant to government-sponsored candidates.

When the 1654 Parliament assembled, it tried as a body to attempt to resist the tide of greater executive power, with a bill which would among other things have taken back Parliament's power to regulate its own membership, but this was unsuccessful. Cromwell dismissed the Parliament without a single bill being passed. Only in 1659, after the death of Oliver Cromwell and when the succession had passed to his son Richard, was there anything like a free Parliament. With 568 seats, the largest ever assembly up to that time, and constitutional changes thrashed out in the Parliament of 1656–8, the 1659 Parliament recovered the power to regulate its own membership, an authority that had been steadily undermined since the later 1640s. On this occasion, however, as many readers of *Cromwelliana* will know, it was a weak executive rather than an obstructive Parliament that can be judged responsible for a short and unproductive assembly – after a transfer of power from an all-powerful father (Oliver) to his untested son (Richard).

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It will be many years before the scholarship contained in the nine volumes fully percolates down to writing on the period, and so it seems almost facetious to identify one big take-away point emerging from the whole work. If there is one, it is not the prevalence of local conflicts at parliamentary election time, which readers might have expected to discover in this period well known for revolution, turbulence and 'world turned upside down'. This turns out not to be the big reveal of our volumes. Rather, it's the rise of executive governmental power by Parliament that's the most striking and dominant theme, with the subsequent diminishing by that executive (the Cromwellian governments) of the parent body (Parliament) that had brought it into being. As a result, the legacy after 1660 of the build-up of state power by Parliament has to be traced in the history of monarchical government not in the history of Parliament itself.

INTRODUCING *THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT:*
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS 1640–1660

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by Dr David Scott

A synopsis of his presentation at the study day:

In this paper, the author argued that the first age of ‘party’ in England was not, as most historians have insisted, the later Restoration period, but the 1640s. Factionalism at court and in the localities during the Tudor and early Stuart periods was sometimes intense but generally short-lived and tied to the attainment of specific rewards or policies. It was not until the 1640s that many of the political identities, behaviours and structures that constituted a recognisable party-political system first came together in Parliament.

Under the impact of collapsing royal government and the outbreak of civil war in 1642, the nation divided into opposing military camps and, at Westminster, into rival political parties. Although these groups took shape centrally and comprised small cliques of leading politicians, they developed contrasting programmes for national settlement and acquired distinct followings in the localities. Party leaders used the press and propaganda, bribery and management to secure voting majorities in the two Houses and public support for their policies. Parties for the first time became ends in themselves, committed to the maintenance of a particular way of government and to imposing and then sustaining a permanent shift in constitutional relations between Parliament and the crown and between England and the other Stuart kingdoms.

This first age of party did not survive the establishment in 1649 of a republican regime. But the partisan politicking of the 1640s fed into and entrenched the divisions that the civil war had opened at all levels of society. Well-organised and durable groups of former roundheads and royalists, of Anglicans and puritan dissenters, did political battle in communities throughout England by the early 1660s, purging each other from local office with unprecedented frequency. The political culture and mentalities that emerged during the 1640s would rend England’s body politic for centuries to come.

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‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

by Dr Patrick Little

The great irony of the brief protectorate of Richard Cromwell was that it was brought down not by his enemies but by members of his own family. Richard’s brother-in-law, Charles Fleetwood, and his uncle, John Disbrowe, led the coup that forcibly closed the third protectorate Parliament in April 1659. After months of tensions between the army and the various civilian factions that supported Richard, matters came to a head when Parliament tried to curb the power of the military. The end was brutal. On 22 April, Disbrowe went to the protector with a group of fellow officers, ‘and told him that if he would dissolve his Parliament, the officers would take care of him; but that, if he refused so to do, they would do it without him, and leave him to shift for himself’.¹ Richard at first refused, and Disbrowe then resorted to threats, telling him ‘that he was not in a position even to defer for an hour the execution of the resolution which the army had adopted’.² When Richard did not comply, the officers, led by Fleetwood and Disbrowe, made their move. The third protectorate Parliament was dissolved the same day, within a month Richard was forced to resign as protector, and the Cromwellian protectorate came to an abrupt end.

Yet it would be a mistake to see the fall of the protectorate as being a short-term phenomenon, a crisis that came to a head only after Richard Cromwell had become lord protector after his father’s death in September 1658. It is no secret that political tensions had existed during Oliver Cromwell’s regime, and much ink has been spilt in exploring such problems as the dissatisfaction of the army and religious radicals with a settlement that looked like a betrayal of ‘the Good Old Cause’ – a retreat from Revolution. Recently, historians have also looked at the other side of the equation: the rise of a civilian clique that pushed for further reform to the protectorate; the development of a protectoral court with quasi-royal trappings; the increasing efforts to accommodate the old parliamentarians, usually termed the ‘country’ or ‘Presbyterian’ interest, bitterly opposed to military rule. Kingship – or at least a hereditary protectorate based on old principles – became the rallying cry for those opposed to the army. It has even been suggested that Oliver Cromwell was beginning to come round to their way of thinking, not least in the hope of safeguarding the future of the Cromwell family. But even he

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

did not foresee that the greatest threat to the Cromwellian regime came from within the family circle itself.

As will already be obvious from this outline, much depends on the personal relationships between the main players in this drama. When it comes to high politics, one benefit of the *History of Parliament’s* concentration on biographical studies is that full attention is given to those secondary characters who otherwise appear only as walk-on parts. Each is considered on his own terms. This approach also allows the political ‘leads’ to be reconsidered from a range of different perspectives, through the eyes of those around them, rather than (as so often) simply taking their own word for it. It might be argued that it is only now, when we have detailed biographies of men like Charles Fleetwood and John Disbrowe, that we can fully understand Oliver Cromwell. This paper uses the newly-published biographies of Fleetwood and Disbrowe to trace the longer-term causes of the collapse of the Cromwellian regime, by looking at their, at times fraught, relations not with Richard, but with Oliver.

I

John Disbrowe was Oliver Cromwell’s younger contemporary (he was born in 1608, when Oliver was nine) and in 1636 became his brother-in-law, marrying his second youngest sister, Jane Cromwell. The Disbrowes were a minor gentry family from Eltisley in Cambridgeshire, and presumably knew the Cromwells socially; but little is known of the personal relationship between the two men until the early months of the civil war, when Cromwell raised his troop of horse for Parliament and chose Disbrowe as his quartermaster. In April 1643 Disbrowe became a captain in Cromwell’s newly-raised regiment of horse, and he was promoted to major later in the year. He retained his rank on the creation of the New Model Army in April 1645 but transferred to another regiment, going on to serve at Naseby and in the New Model Army’s advance into the south-west. In 1649 he was assigned to defend the western counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset, and as a result did not join Cromwell’s expeditions to Ireland and Scotland. However, the relationship between the two men remained strong. On receiving news of the decisive battle of Dunbar in September 1650, Disbrowe wrote to Cromwell in terms that reveal not only the similarity of

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

their religious viewpoints, but also his awareness of the dangers that success might bring.

Truly, Sir, these dealings of our God call for an acknowledgement of all our mercies to himself; he alone is the Lord of Hosts, your victories have been given you of himself; it is himself that hath raised you up amongst men, and hath called you to high employments; he hath been very good to you. Certainly, where much is given, much is required; and so long as we are made to own our God in our mercies, so long will he own us in continuing mercies. Sir, high places are slippery, except God establish our goings. He hath been very faithful to us, and I trust will still do us good himself, help us to trust in him, and then, I am sure, we shall not be ashamed.

Disbrowe ended the letter with a message from his wife, who ‘desires to have her hearty love presented to you’, adding to them the warmest wishes of ‘he who desires a share in your prayers and forgets not you, and is your loving brother’.³

Disbrowe continued to be a staunch supporter of Cromwell over the next few years. He defended the forced closure of the Rump Parliament in April 1653, and in December of that year he assisted moves to close down the radical Nominated Assembly (or ‘Barebone’s Parliament’) when it threatened to get out of control. He was an obvious choice for the council of the new lord protector. Thereafter, Disbrowe was a stolid and reliable – if unexciting – member of the Cromwellian elite. He served conscientiously on the protectoral council, defended the regime during the 1654–5 Parliament, and in early 1655, as commander of the western counties, played the pivotal role in putting down the Penruddock rebellion – the desperate attempt by royalists to overthrow the Cromwellian government. In the summer of 1655, there is no doubt that Disbrowe and Cromwell were close political allies and firm friends, as well as being brothers-in-law. Even Disbrowe’s involvement in planning the disastrous ‘Western Design’ – the failed attempt to take the Caribbean island of San Domingo from the Spanish in the spring of 1655 – had not affected relations between them. Yet, by the end of the year, a serious divide was growing between the two men.

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

The initial cause of the rift concerned the rule of the major-generals. This scheme was set up after Penruddock’s rebellion to increase security in the localities by establishing ‘precincts’ ruled by major-generals with the support of local commissioners, and was policed by new militia units paid for by a ‘decimation tax’ on the property of suspected royalists with landed incomes of over £100. In August 1655 Disbrowe was among a small number of councillors who attended the protector to ‘perfect’ the scheme, and when the major-generals were chosen, he was confirmed as the governor of an expanded western precinct of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. Although it is usually considered to be the brainchild of another of Cromwell’s key advisers, General John Lambert, the model for the scheme was Disbrowe’s governorship of the West Country, and Disbrowe’s letters to Secretary John Thurloe in the immediate aftermath of the Penruddock rebellion reveal that his plans for reforming local security were already far advanced.

Disbrowe did not take up his duties as a new-style major-general until December 1655, but he soon became a dedicated and effective governor of the western counties. Crucially, Disbrowe was not content merely to obey orders – he sought to develop his role, and that of the other major-generals, further. As early as 15 December he told Thurloe that the decimation tax should be extended, for ‘there are more dangerous persons under £100 per annum than above’.⁴ Two weeks later he raised the matter with Cromwell directly, reporting that there had been some confusion among the commissioners in Wiltshire and Dorset about eligibility for the tax, and concerns that the rule being used was not that intended. ‘I must request this favour’, Disbrowe continued:

that your highness will order Mr Secretary to signify your approbation or disapprobation upon the instructions, because in some things I have exceeded my commission; and also that I may have an explanation in that clause, and have a clear ground to proceed upon.⁵

On 4 January 1656 Disbrowe again wrote to Thurloe with his concerns:

The objection I hinted unto his highness in my last I frequently meet withal, and therefore if the council see not cause to make those of the £50 p.a. or £500 personal estate liable to this additional tax, it will be

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

but expedient that an explanatory order of the council be sent to the commissioners in each county for their satisfaction therein.⁶

The council instructions to Disbrowe and his officers in the western counties had been finalised on 2 January, and he had evidently received them by 12 January, when he told Thurloe of his disappointment that decimation had not been extended: ‘for the council’s dissatisfaction in making persons of £50 p.a. liable to this additional tax, I shall not mention more, until I have had conference with the rest of the major-generals’.⁷

Apart from the general lack of ambition of Cromwell and his advisers to extend the scheme, Disbrowe’s chief complaint was the tendency of those at the centre to reduce the penalties imposed on individual royalists. In December 1655 he was forced to write to Cromwell directly, arguing that he doubted former royalists such as Lord Seymour and Sir James Thynne had changed their ways, despite their protestations. In January 1656, after he had purged the West Country borough corporations, Disbrowe asked Cromwell, ‘that if any addresses should be made in the behalf of any that I have lain aside, that his highness will favour me so far as to respite judgement until providence returns me to London’.⁸ On 19 January he warned Thurloe of the risks of exempting ‘hundreds of cavaliers’ from the tax, as it would leave them ‘as free to set up that corrupt interest as ever’, but added, rather stiffly, that he was bound to submit to the orders of his brother-in-law, for ‘whatever his highness’s pleasure is, if signified to me, it shall be observed’.⁹ Regardless of such warnings, Cromwell remained well-disposed towards individual petitioners. In January and February 1656 there were orders to discharge such notorious royalists as Lord Mohun from the decimation tax.¹⁰ Such decisions were a source of great frustration for Disbrowe, who shared the feeling of other major-generals that their work was being hindered by those who should have been supporting their efforts.

Worse was to follow at the end of 1656, as the second protectorate Parliament began its sitting. Disbrowe remained an honoured member of the Cromwell family – a point underlined in October, when his wife died and was given an elaborate funeral at Westminster Abbey, as befitted the sister of the lord protector; but he became increasingly concerned at the non-military, or ‘civilian’ advisers who now seemed to have Cromwell’s ear.

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

Against calls for reform, Disbrowe proposed doubling-down on the existing policies, particularly the major-generals’ scheme. This had long been Disbrowe’s ambition, and there are signs that he was again pushing for the scheme to be extended in the final weeks of 1656. On 20 November, for example, he was appointed, alongside Lambert and Fleetwood, to receive from the major-generals their views on the alteration of the establishment of the militia forces and other matters affecting regional government. This latest attempt by Disbrowe and his allies to strengthen the rule of the major-generals would lead, little more than a month later, to the introduction of a brand-new militia bill into the Commons, on 25 December. Addressing the House, Disbrowe offered a ‘short bill ... for continuance of a tax upon some people, for the maintenance of the militia. It will be for the security of your peace. It can fall upon no persons so fitly as upon those that occasion the charge. Let us lay the saddle upon the right horse’.¹¹

Disbrowe’s blunt little speech did not attract much support even in a House depleted by those surreptitiously enjoying the Christmas festivities. Indeed, in January 1657 it was reported that Disbrowe and Lambert, as the leading supporters of the major-generals, were strongly opposed by civilian courtiers and councillors, led by Oliver’s son-in-law, John Cleypool, supported by the Presbyterian and ‘country’ interest in the Commons, and by Irish and Scottish MPs led by another prominent civilian, the Irish peer, Roger Boyle, Lord Broghill. This was a loose coalition, based on a shared hatred of military rule across the British Isles, but it commanded a majority in Parliament. By 7 January Disbrowe was on the back foot, as his opponents insisted that the decimation tax was incompatible with the Act of Oblivion passed in 1652, which had promised to put aside further measures against quiescent former royalists. Disbrowe countered that the Act had not worked to prevent the Pendruddock rising: ‘tell me one man that discovered any part of the plot, but when we came to seek any houses for them, they were ready to excuse them and conceal them ... It is plain they have gone contrary to this Act of Oblivion’.¹² He also took the opportunity to recommend that the tax on royalists should be increased: ‘I think it is too light a tax, a decimation – I would have it higher’.¹³ This suggests that the need to change the way in which the militia was financed was at the heart of Disbrowe’s bill; an impression reinforced by his appointment, on 27 January, to a council committee to reconsider the funding of the new militia forces, in

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

consultation with the Army Committee. The attempt to redesign and strengthen the system was, however, destined to fail. The second reading of the militia bill was rejected by Parliament on 29 January, and the rule of the major-generals was effectively brought to an end.

It has been said that Disbrowe’s decision to ask Parliament to confirm decimation was ‘both unnecessary and ill-conceived’; but what Disbrowe wanted was not the confirmation of the tax but its extension, to bring more royalists under decimation and increase the funds available to the militia.¹⁴ He had been calling for such an extension from the winter of 1655–6. Then it had been stymied by Cromwell, who not only refused to increase the scope of the scheme but also to exclude important royalists from its strictures. Now it was the new men around Cromwell who were publicly opposed to the militia bill, and who rejoiced in the demise of the major-generals. How far had they been encouraged by Oliver? Could Disbrowe still trust his old friend?

II

Charles Fleetwood was of higher social standing than Disbrowe, as the son of Sir Miles Fleetwood of Aldwinckle in Northamptonshire. Ten years younger than Disbrowe, there was also a generational difference: Fleetwood was closer in age to Cromwell’s children. When civil war broke out, Fleetwood was among the young bucks who volunteered to serve in the lifeguard of the lord general, the Earl of Essex, and went on to serve at Edgehill and the first battle of Newbury; but in 1644 he joined the Eastern Association as a colonel, perhaps after falling out with Essex for religious reasons, as his regiment soon became known as one of ‘the chiefest praying and preaching regiments in the army’.¹⁵ Fleetwood served with distinction at Naseby in 1645 and at the siege of Oxford. In 1646 he was elected as recruiter MP for Marlborough, where he became a political ally of Cromwell and his son-in-law, Henry Ireton. Fleetwood did not accompany Cromwell to Ireland in 1649, but he did go with him to Scotland the following year, serving as Cromwell’s lieutenant-general and close adviser. He was one of the key commanders in the victory at Dunbar in September 1650, and during the Worcester campaign a year later, he was one of a handful of officers consulted by Cromwell, who commended him for his part in the battle. Fleetwood was the obvious man to become Bridget Ireton’s second husband

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

after the death of Henry, and in June 1652 he became Cromwell’s son-in-law. A month later, and with his father-in-law’s approval, Fleetwood was appointed lord deputy of Ireland.

Fleetwood began his tenure as commander-in-chief in Ireland with enthusiasm, confident that he had the full support of Cromwell in England. Cromwell was completely open in his early letters to his son-in-law, apologising in August 1653 for ‘thus unbowelling myself to you’, and mixing affectionate greetings to ‘thy dear wife’ and ‘thy little babe’ with complaints at the difficulty of his task (‘fain would I have my service accepted of the saints (if the Lord will) but it is not so’).¹⁶ Other signs of Cromwell’s approval followed. Fleetwood was added to the new council of state in July 1653, and was among the smaller group chosen as protectoral councillors in the following December.

In the early months of the protectorate, Fleetwood was as close, if not closer, to Oliver as John Disbrowe was. But like Disbrowe, it soon became clear that Fleetwood had very different views from his master on government policy. In Fleetwood’s case, the initial cause of tension was the Irish transplantation scheme, whereby Catholic landowners were resettled in the inhospitable western province of Connaught, making way for more prosperous areas to be granted to ‘adventurers’ who had given loans to Parliament, as well as soldiers entitled to arrears of pay and deserving members of the established settler community, known as the ‘Old Protestants’. This scheme had been instituted immediately after the conquest of Ireland was completed in 1653, and although Fleetwood had no part in its conception, he supported it wholeheartedly, not least because he wanted the soldiers who had secured Ireland to receive their reward. Yet by the spring of 1654 Fleetwood was concerned that decisions made at Whitehall about ‘the disposing of land’ were not acceptable to the officers. Worse still, the policy was being undermined by a steady drip of exceptions, pardons and concessions, many of them granted by the protector himself. Fleetwood’s complaints about this had only brought counter-claims that he had made his own exceptions and so could not point the finger of blame at others. His response, in May 1654, was one of outrage: ‘instead of thinking you in England blameworthy for disposing of lands, I am looked upon as most blameable, though I can call to mind but one that I have written for’; besides,

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

there was now talk that four particularly fertile counties around Dublin should be withdrawn from the army’s share, a decision that ‘I cannot think ... advisable’.¹⁷ In November 1654 Fleetwood brought matters to a head by issuing a general order that transplantation must take place by 1 March next.

The result was not what he had hoped for. Immediately after the closure of the first protectorate Parliament in January 1655, the entire policy came under attack, the way being paved by an Old Protestant, Vincent Gookin, whose book attacking the transplantation of Catholic tenants as well as landowners was condemned by Fleetwood as ‘very strange [and] scandalous’ and an attack on ‘those that did and now do serve the state here’.¹⁸ The transplantation scheme – which he now described as ‘our partial transplantation’ – limped on, with Fleetwood hoping that some progress might be made through the autonomous powers vested in the Irish council. In May 1655 he hoped that ‘the Lord will appear in owning it, though it hath been strangely obstructed and discouraged by the discountenance it hath received in England’.¹⁹ In July he claimed to have proof of his earlier fears ‘that the work of transplantation might receive some obstructions from England, through misrepresentations’, as settlement in the west of Ireland had been hampered by those who claimed to have orders ‘to keep Irish proprietors on their estates’.²⁰

Alongside the problems with the transplantation policy, tensions between Fleetwood and Cromwell had been growing steadily over the benefits of military rule and the need to widen the support base of the protectorate to include Presbyterians and even former royalists. The key to the survival of the regime, Fleetwood explained to Secretary Thurloe in July 1654, was ‘to take that good old way of solemn seeking of the Lord for counsel and strength’, but, he added, ‘I fear we have of late been too remiss in those near approaches. The Lord awaken us to our duty’.²¹ Shortly afterwards Fleetwood told Thurloe that he was content ‘to serve your highness and this precious cause’, but there was a hint that the two might not always be the same thing.²² At the end of September he was more open in his criticism: ‘I must say I am fearful of nothing so much as lest he [Cromwell] should be tempted and prevailed upon by that spirit, which I doubt too much rules and governs some men’s hearts’.²³

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

By mid-December 1654, as the first protectorate Parliament turned against the government, Fleetwood was again having doubts. Even though he protested that the army was still ‘firm to my lord protector’, he was increasingly aware that decisions about Ireland were being taken behind his back: ‘indeed, I think it somewhat strange, I should no more understand in anything more than what is communicable to everyone’. He suspected his enemies among the Old Protestants were briefing against him, and again he feared Cromwell’s resolves to resist such blandishments, telling Thurloe: ‘It is not everyone who pretends faithfulness will prove so, but the Lord, I trust, will ever keep his highness’s heart to the interest of good men ... I know his trials, difficulties and temptations are many’.²⁴ In February 1655 Fleetwood greeted orders to cashier four officers accused of disloyalty with dismay: ‘I am persuaded nothing but what my lord did suppose necessity could have satisfied his highness to have dealt so with these persons, who have been so eminently faithful to the public interest’.²⁵ The failure of Penruddock’s rising, shortly afterwards, was for him not an occasion for jubilation but repentance – a reminder that ‘trusting in an arm of flesh’ was not enough for ‘the Lord’s people’, ‘and confident I am, so long as the Lord keeps my lord protector on that principle, he will prosper’.²⁶

By June 1655 it was beginning to dawn on Cromwell that all was not well. His letter to Fleetwood of 22 June was oddly defensive, almost apologetic, and quite unlike his earlier communications. He begins with protestations of affection that appear stilted in comparison with his usual unguarded profusion: ‘I write not often. At once I desire thee to know, I most dearly love thee, and indeed my heart is plain to thee, as thy heart can well desire; let nothing shake thee in this’. He then hints at the distance that had grown between them personally, bemoaning the ‘wretched jealousies that are amongst us’, before insisting that ‘My heart is for the people of God; that the Lord knows, and I trust will (in due time) manifest’ – as if he had been accused of being otherwise. The point of the letter was to deny that the protector’s younger son, Henry Cromwell, was to be lord deputy of Ireland instead of Fleetwood, ‘which truly never entered into my heart’; but then, apparently unsolicited, Cromwell reveals another problem that he feared (or knew) was troubling Fleetwood: ‘The noise of my being crowned, etc are like malicious figments’. It is only at the very end of this curiously disjointed letter that Cromwell returns to the old intimacy, with love being sent to ‘dear

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

Biddy’ and the family.²⁷ More than any other piece of evidence, this letter reveals that relations between Cromwell and Fleetwood were in poor shape in the summer of 1655; and, crucially, that Fleetwood was deeply disappointed with his father-in-law, perhaps suspecting him of failing ‘the people of God’, even of coveting the crown.

Fleetwood returned from Ireland in September 1655, remaining lord deputy but passing the day-to-day government of the island to Henry Cromwell. This was a compromise by Oliver, but not one designed to soothe Fleetwood’s fears. Nevertheless, Fleetwood continued outwardly loyal, becoming one of the most important members of the protectoral council (and, incidentally, using his position to make Henry Cromwell’s life as governor of Ireland as difficult as possible). He was also made major-general of a precinct including Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, the Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; but unlike John Disbrowe, he did not rule in person as major-general, rather relying on deputies. Fleetwood was, nevertheless, a committed supporter of the major-generals. He kept in close contact with his deputies, offering them advice, and he praised the whole scheme in correspondence, boasting to Henry Cromwell in January 1656 that the work ‘goes on very thoroughly’.²⁸

In the second protectorate Parliament, Fleetwood was a supporter of the militia bill, introduced by Disbrowe on 25 December 1656, upon which the fate of the major-generals depended. He shared Disbrowe’s despair when the legislation was voted down on 29 January 1657. Its failure not only brought the major-generals’ rule to an end; it also further dented Fleetwood’s relationship with the protector, whose surprisingly lukewarm support for the scheme had allowed it to founder. Worse still, it was increasingly clear that instead of relying on his military advisers, Cromwell was now taking advice from civilians opposed in principle to military rule. According to Fleetwood’s old enemy, Vincent Gookin, writing immediately after the militia bill was voted down, Oliver also made a point of praising Henry Cromwell’s government in the presence of another councillor, Sir Gilbert Pykeringe, ‘who his highness well knows tells all to the lord deputy, therefore be assured it was spoken that it might be noted’.²⁹ Fleetwood was no longer privy to Cromwell’s counsels: he heard things at second hand. It seemed that in the new year of 1657 Cromwell had turned his back on his old friends and

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

was looking for a new direction for the protectorate. Fleetwood, like Disbrowe, could be forgiven for asking, could Oliver still be trusted?

III

What happened next must have confirmed the worst fears of Fleetwood and Disbrowe. On 23 February 1657, the civilians in the Commons introduced a new constitution, initially known as the ‘Remonstrance’, but soon renamed the ‘Humble Petition and Advice’. The new constitution threatened to abolish the protectorate and replace it with a hereditary monarchy, with a greatly reduced role for the military and a beefed-up Parliament formed of two chambers, the Commons and the ‘Other House’ – an ersatz House of Lords. According to Henry Cromwell, Disbrowe received news of the Remonstrance calmly – by contrast to the violent reaction of John Lambert and other senior officers.³⁰ But behind the scenes Disbrowe held a meeting of the major-generals at his lodgings, and there received a committee of army officers, ‘to acquaint them with the fears and jealousies that lay upon them in relation to the protector’s alteration of his title’, and this led to a conference in which Lambert ‘opened the substance of the bill for kingship’.³¹ There is no indication that Disbrowe attended the notorious, bad-tempered meeting between Cromwell and the officers on 27 February, but he was surely the intended target for the barbed question, referring to the militia bill: ‘who bid you go to the House with a bill, and there receive a foil?’³²

Fleetwood’s reaction to the Remonstrance was more emotional. In a snide letter to Henry Cromwell, of 24 February, he revealed his continuing uncertainty about the protector’s true motives:

The only hopes of honest men is that the Lord will so manage his highness’s heart in this business, who we know *hath* been a man of great prayer and faith, and to whom the Lord *hath* given much of his counsel in dark cases, and I trust will *still* own him with a more than ordinary presence of his at this time.³³

There was more than a hint of bitterness in Fleetwood’s use of the past tense (‘hath’, rather than ‘is’) when describing Cromwell’s prayer life and faith, not

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

to mention his access to the counsels of the Lord. Was the protector still to be counted among the godly?

Disbrowe and Fleetwood’s joint opposition to the Remonstrance brought the two men closer together. According to one commentator, the decision to defer the vote on kingship in the first article was designed ‘for the satisfaction of Fleetwood and Disbrowe, who I think will be now very firm and endeavour to convert their brethren’.³⁴ This was a forlorn hope. Any attempt to win over the senior officers only delayed the inevitable, as Parliament was unwilling to make substantial concessions, including over the wording of the first article. By the end of March Parliament had voted through the entirety of the new constitution, now entitled the Humble and Petition and Advice, including the offer of the crown to Oliver Cromwell.

The protector’s refusal to give an immediate answer to Parliament revived the hopes of Fleetwood and Disbrowe, but not for long. On 5 May Thurloe reported that the disillusion of the two men had reached new depths. ‘My lord deputy and General Disbrowe seem to be very much fixed against [Cromwell’s] being king, and speak of nothing but giving over their commands, and all their employments, if he doth accept that title’.³⁵ According to Edmund Ludlowe (who claimed to have heard it from Disbrowe himself), Cromwell had arranged a private meeting with Fleetwood and Disbrowe, ‘where he began to droll with them about monarchy, and speaking slightly of it, said it was but a feather in a man’s cap, and therefore wondered that men would not please the children, and permit them to enjoy their rattle’. The answer Cromwell received ‘was not at all suitable to his expectations or desires’, but he tried again shortly afterwards, only to receive a sharper retort from Disbrowe, ‘that he gave the cause and Cromwell’s family also for lost; adding that though he was resolved never to act against him, yet he would not act for him after that time’.³⁶ Ludlowe’s account is corroborated by a newsletter report that both Disbrowe and Fleetwood ‘did very earnestly press [Cromwell] against it, and the Lord Disbrowe told him that he had and would fight against kingship in any person whatsoever that should accept it’.³⁷ Any remaining sense of personal loyalty did not prevent Disbrowe and Fleetwood from involvement with the army officers’ petition on 8 May, although they were careful to ‘disown the knowledge of the petition in the House, yet they both perused it and saw it

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

and showed it my lord protector before ever it was presented to the House’.³⁸ It was this intervention by the army, backed by pressure from Disbrowe and Fleetwood, that played a significant role in Cromwell’s public refusal of the crown later on the same day.

IV

As so often in his career, Cromwell was able to defuse tensions, to use his personal charisma to persuade the doubters that everything was all right, in spite of appearances. In this case, the refusal of the crown brought Fleetwood and Disbrowe back into the protectoral fold almost immediately. Unlike John Lambert, they were not forced out of the protectoral council, and once again became important advisers of the protector from the summer of 1657. They were made members of the new upper chamber, the Other House, in the following December. In a sign of the improved personal relationship, in August 1657 Disbrowe was involved in the negotiations that led to the marriage of the protector’s daughter, Frances Cromwell, with Robert Rich, grandson of the 2nd Earl of Warwick. There were still occasional disagreements, and flashes of irritation, but curiously these mostly came from Oliver. When on 4 February 1658, Fleetwood questioned the dissolution of Parliament, Cromwell famously retorted, ‘you are a milksop; by the living God I will dissolve the House’.³⁹ Both Fleetwood and Disbrowe lamented the death of Oliver and publicly supported Richard when he succeeded to the protectorate in September 1658. Both played a prominent part in Oliver’s funeral procession that November.

Yet their ties to Richard Cromwell were in reality very weak. Richard had not played more than a cameo role in the civil wars. He had not shared the intensity of comradeship, the religious fervour of the New Model Army, the excitement of victories that could only be a sign of God’s providential approval. Nor was he in any sense a revolutionary. Instead, he was close to the civilian interest politically and inclined towards Presbyterian forms hated by the soldiers and sectaries of the New Model. After months of trying to make things work, Fleetwood and Disbrowe ultimately felt compelled to move against Richard, closing a Parliament that had tried to destroy the political power of the army. In doing so, they brought down Richard himself, ushered in a period of unstable rule under the restored Rump Parliament,

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

and triggered the events that ultimately, in May 1660, made their worst nightmare come true, with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.

As I have argued in this paper, this break down in relations was not confined to the protectorate of Richard Cromwell: the cracks were already there. As protector, Oliver Cromwell had had to make decisions which were unacceptable to many of his more radical friends and allies. Fleetwood had become worried by Cromwell’s leniency towards Irish royalists and his abandonment of the army interest; Disbrowe was concerned by a similarly soft attitude towards royalists in England, and the turning away from military rule in the localities: both began to suspect that Cromwell was being beguiled by those who offered him, and his family, the highest honours. They took a lot of persuading that Cromwell was not letting the side down – the side, in this case, being the army, and, by extension, the God whose providence had been their guide. The language of faith, of providence, of searching for God’s meaning, runs through the correspondence of Fleetwood and Disbrowe, as it does of Oliver himself.

This was in part a question of personal trust. How far could Oliver’s military friends and relations trust that he still adhered to the principles of the Revolution and the ‘Good Old Cause’? Did he still support the army that had brought victory after victory? Their fears certainly had a strong foundation: the rise of the civilian interest, and its influence over the protector, was not an illusion, dreamed up in a fit of religious enthusiasm. The growing importance of the protectoral court (which, incidentally, had no place for soldiers), the softening of the line on religion, the abandonment of the major-generals and the introduction of the Humble Petition and Advice, the accommodation of the Old Protestant interest in Ireland and former royalists in Scotland, all demonstrated that the tide was now running against the army interest and their friends. But the motive behind this change of direction was not the betrayal of the cause but the desire to see it continue and flourish, to ensure the political, social and religious gains would not be thrown away. From the mid-1650s, it was increasingly obvious to Oliver, if not to men like Fleetwood and Disbrowe, that a lasting regime could not be founded on military rule alone: compromises had to be made. As head of state, Oliver – and, in due course, Richard – had to bring ‘healing and settling’ to a divided country. Yet, for the senior officers, compromise was

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

out of the question: for them, only stronger military rule could bring future security. This split, between the realists and the fundamentalists, could not be resolved, and it was this that ultimately brought the fall of the House of Cromwell.

Note:

The endnotes are confined to quotations, which are in modernised spelling. For more details, see the biographies of John Disbrowe, Charles Fleetwood and Richard Cromwell in Stephen Roberts (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1640–1660* (Woodbridge, 2023). The historiography of Richard Cromwell is quite extensive. For a useful overview and pointers to further reading, see the essays in *Cromwelliana*, ser. ii. no. 7 (2010).

I did not have the opportunity to read David Farr’s *Oliver Cromwell’s Kin, 1643–1726: the Private and Public Worlds of the English Revolution and Restoration* (Routledge, 2023) as it was not published when I wrote this lecture.

This is the third and final essay in a short series investigating Oliver Cromwell’s relationships with his family; see also my ‘Cromwell and Sons: Oliver Cromwell’s intended legacy?’, in Jane A. Mills (ed.), *Cromwell’s Legacy* (Manchester, 2012), and ‘Cromwell and daughters: financing the marriage settlements of Mary and Frances Cromwell’, *Cromwelliana*, ser. iii. No. 10 (2021).

¹ C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow* (2 vols., Oxford, 1894), ii. 69; F. Guizot, *History of Richard Cromwell and the Restoration of Charles II* (2 vols., 1856), i. 370.

² Guizot, *Richard Cromwell*, i. 371; *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1659–61*, p. 13.

³ J. Nickolls (ed.), *Original letters and papers of state* (1743), pp. 26–7.

⁴ T. Birch (ed.), *A collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Esq* (7 vols., 1742) [hereafter *TSP*], iv. 320.

⁵ *TSP* iv. 360.

⁶ *TSP* iv. 391.

⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1655–6*, p. 102; *TSP* iv. 413.

⁸ *TSP* iv. 396.

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

- ⁹ TSP iv. 439.
- ¹⁰ TSP iv. 494.
- ¹¹ J.T. Rutt (ed.), *The diary of Thomas Burton* (4 vols., 1828), i. 230.
- ¹² *Burton's Diary*, i. 315–6.
- ¹³ *Burton's Diary*, i. 316.
- ¹⁴ Christopher Durston, *Cromwell's Major Generals: godly government during the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2001), p. 224.
- ¹⁵ H.G. Tibbutt (ed.), *The letter books of Samuel Luke, 1644–45* (1963), pp. 324, 328, 583.
- ¹⁶ John Morrill (ed.), *The Letters, Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (3 vols., Oxford, 2022), ii. 728–9.
- ¹⁷ TSP ii. 290–1.
- ¹⁸ TSP iii. 139.
- ¹⁹ TSP iii. 196, 468; W.C. Abbott (ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (4 vols., Cambridge Mass. 1937–47), iii. 687, 722.
- ²⁰ TSP iii. 612.
- ²¹ TSP ii. 445.
- ²² TSP ii. 530.
- ²³ TSP ii. 620.
- ²⁴ TSP iii. 23.
- ²⁵ TSP iii. 183.
- ²⁶ TSP iii. 245, 292, 305 (quotation on p. 292).
- ²⁷ Morrill (ed.), *Letters, Writings and Speeches*, iii. 203–5.
- ²⁸ TSP iv. 330; v. 328; Peter Gaunt (ed.), *The Correspondence of Henry Cromwell, 1655–1659* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 95, 129.
- ²⁹ TSP vi. 37.
- ³⁰ Gaunt (ed.), *Corresp. of Henry Cromwell*, pp. 203, 205.
- ³¹ C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Clarke papers* (4 vols., 1891–1901), iii. 92.
- ³² Morrill (ed.), *Letters, Writings and Speeches*, iii. 341.
- ³³ Gaunt (ed.), *Corresp. of Henry Cromwell*, p. 201 (my emphasis).
- ³⁴ Gaunt (ed.), *Corresp. of Henry Cromwell*, p. 214.
- ³⁵ TSP vi. 261.
- ³⁶ Firth (ed.), *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, ii. 24.
- ³⁷ *Clarke Pprs.* v. 261.
- ³⁸ Ludlow, *Mems.* ii. 25–6; Firth (ed.), *Clarke Papers*, v. 261.
- ³⁹ Abbott (ed.), *Writings and Speeches*, iv. 727–8.

‘HIGH PLACES ARE SLIPPERY’:
CHARLES FLEETWOOD, JOHN DISBROWE AND
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CROMWELL

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BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

by Professor John Morrill

There has been a surge of interest over the past decade or so on Cromwell's private life: his finances, his Welshness, his domestic life. I have chapters in my forthcoming biography on Oliver building on how, in preparing the new Cromwell edition of *Letters, Writings and Speeches* (for which see details in the further reading section at the end of this article). I could see clearly that he – brought up in a household of women, and living when not on campaign in a household of women (until near the end of his life his mother, for the last 37 years his wife, his sisters and his daughters; he had no adult brothers and no son living at home after the age of seven) – found it much easier to open up to women, to reveal his inner self, than he ever could to men. There is not a shred of evidence of difficulties in his relationship with his daughters, plenty in his relations with his sons and sons-in-law. And this has led me to look at his relations with his male cousins and with the men who married the women in his family – his aunts, sisters and daughters, fifteen of them.

In his excellent biography of Cromwell, the late Colin Davis saw Cromwell as devoted to 'three overlapping networks: his kindred, the godly and the patriots', and David Farr's recent study of *Oliver Cromwell's Kin, 1643–1726*, explores this theme, with a particular stress on three vital figures, each of whom he had difficulties with over time – Henry Ireton, Charles Fleetwood and John Disbrowe, the first two being sons-in-law, the third a brother-in-law. Drawing down much of interest from Chancery disputes and wills, Farr has much deepened the overlapping nature of these networks (and indeed shown how they persisted into the third generation after Cromwell's death). Inspired by this, I decided to use the nine volumes of the new *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1640–1660* volumes to explore the kinship links further.

I therefore assembled a group of 61 male kin who met one or more of the following criteria: that they were blood relatives (sons, uncles and first cousins, including on his mother's side), that they were married to his aunts, sisters, daughters, and finally those who were siblings of the above (this last group so far incomplete). A total of 53 of these appear in *The House of Commons 1640–1660* volumes. In other words, there were 53 MPs in one or more of the Long Parliament, Nominated Assembly, and the Protectorate

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

Parliaments. By the late 1640s, there were 28 MPs, not one of whom was secluded at Pride's Purge. There were only six in the Nominated Assembly, but 23 in the 1st Protectorate Parliament, none refusing the Oath of Recognition, and 27 in the 2nd Protectorate Parliament, not one of them secluded although four may not have taken their seats, mainly because they were out of the country. This is in itself striking, and it suggests that there is an element of restraint on Cromwell's part not to exclude any member of his kin. About half of his kin elected to the Protectorate Parliaments owed their places in whole or in large part to Oliver's patronage, and others to the calculation of electors that they could only gain from having an MP who had direct access to the head of state. Only one member of his family, a blood relative indeed, to whom he had been extremely close, walked away in 1653 and henceforth boycotted public life (without being an active opponent). We will return to him.

Few broke ranks on the major issues before Parliament in which Oliver had a strong personal interest. For example, no family member was a known active supporter of the proposed substitute constitution drawn up by the Parliament of 1654–5; once Cromwell had decided to abandon the major-generals, those not themselves major-generals came together to hasten their demise; and although the kinship group were conflicted and divided over the kingship in Feb–May 1657 (when Cromwell himself was internally conflicted), all of them were strong supporters of the Humble Petition and Advice and almost all of them were supporters of Richard Cromwell's succession. Only one of them split from Oliver's preferred line challenging the severe parliamentary treatment of James Nayler, another subject to which we will return. Not only were they as a group supportive of the Humble Petition and Advice, they were supportive of the creation of the 'Other House'. Indeed, of Cromwell's 70 nominations to the Other House, no less than 15 were his kin. Amongst his wider group of supporters several declined invitations to join the Other House. None of the kin group chose to do so.

Cromwell's kin included army officers, many of whom owed their more senior promotions to him. Many had signed up in 1642 and served in the Eastern Association armies before transferring to the New Model – most obviously his sons-in-law Henry Ireton, Charles Fleetwood, Francis Russell,

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

and his brother-in-law John Disbrowe. But many others had had royalist or strongly Presbyterian backgrounds and had then experienced favours from him which reminded them of the obligations of kinship and the rewards of loyalty. I am not (yet) in a position to calibrate how far the loyalty of men – like Henry Cromwell of Ramsey, William Lockhart the Scottish Engager who had fought against him at Preston, Thomas Bellasys, or staunch Presbyterians of the 1640s like Edmund Dunch or Sir John Barrington who became Protectoral loyalists – were motivated by a change of heart sweetened by courtesy and kindness or something more base, but I do feel confident to say that Cromwell offered the hand of friendship to those obligated to him by kinship because he was convinced it would be reciprocated – and of course some of them married into his family because they had become loyalists (Bellasys, Nathaniel Waterhouse, and some at least of the Walley family).

The bottom line is that at the very least Cromwell had a phalanx of relations by blood and marriage who were an important ballast in the Parliaments, and especially in the Parliament of 1656–7, the one session in which Parliament passed lots of commonwealth legislation that he approved of. Reading all *The House of Commons 1640–1660* biographies for my gathered group of the 53 kin back-to-back leaves us in no doubt of this.

Of course, kin were not the only people Cromwell reached out to in order to broaden the base of support for successive regimes. We recall that in the crisis of December 1648 his first thought was to the broaden the dangerously narrow base of support for his regime: Healing and Settling was a policy then as much as it was to be in the Protectorate. Cromwell's commitment to religious liberty was rooted in the belief that persecution was always counter-productive and he sought to keep avenues of communication always open, and so it was in building and broadening support for his regime. If, to use anachronistic shorthand, his religious policies sought to accommodate the Left, his constitutional policies sought to accommodate the Right.

Along the way he lost just one close friend amongst his kin. Valentine Walton, younger than Oliver by a few months, had been his childhood friend and companion, and Oliver supported him in a bitter and violent inheritance dispute in the early 1620s. Valentine had married Oliver's sister Margaret in

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

1617 and they had served side-by-side in the 1640s, and the tenderness of Cromwell's letter of condolence after Valentine's son died a heroic but hideous death at Marston Moor is well known. Valentine was MP for Huntingdonshire in the Long Parliament, sat in judgement on the king and signed the death warrant and then sat on Council of State from 1649–53, becoming an expert on naval affairs. But he abhorred the violent dissolution of the Rump and retired to his estates. As Andrew Barclay says in his *History of Parliament* life: 'Wauton terminated all his links with Cromwell purely out of political principle. Cromwell had betrayed the republic and could never be forgiven. It was for Wauton as simple as that'. The regime did not remove him from any of his local positions, but he was not to be reconciled. He was the only living in-law of Cromwell not to walk in his funeral procession. This itself is a startling demonstration of an important rule: that Cromwell was able to bring almost all his kin, scattered across the political spectrum in the 1640s as much as across the religious spectrum, and use their loyalty as an important glue in his governance. Nepotism some may say and may be right; prudence others may say. Both probably.

Let me give a few examples of how he wooed unlikely people who were his kin or into becoming his kin (bearing in mind that an analysis of his letters reveals a largely unrecognised commitment to accept and address pleas for the relaxation of tough penalties on former enemies – even in Ireland, most obviously in relation to sequestration and composition).

An obvious one to begin with. Robert Hammond, younger son in a gentry family who married into the Hampdens. His military career was one Cromwell would have disapproved of: he served in the army in Ireland in 1641–2, then in the regiment of the 'traitor' Sir John Hotham, the Earl of Essex's Lifeguard, and as a major in Massie's 'Presbyterian' brigade in the West. But he had then served alongside Cromwell in the year after Naseby and they became firm friends. He then refused to serve in Ireland but at Fairfax's request was made Governor of the Isle of Wight and thus became a very reluctant custodian of the king when he fled to Carisbrooke two months after Hammond arrived there. The friendly but anxious correspondence between them ended with Hammond's preference for orders from the Presbyterian Parliament than from his military colleagues in the crisis of the autumn of 1648 and his enforced removal from his position.

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

There is no doubt he deplored the Regicide and he too retired to his estates. But Cromwell kept in touch and gradually sought to entice him back; efforts redoubled after the Protectorate was established so that in June 1654 he was appointed to the Irish Council of State but died three weeks after arriving back in Dublin. There is little doubt he would have become Henry Cromwell's right-hand man. It is also worth noting that in 1650 he married Mary, daughter of John Hampden (and his cousin) and her brother was another reluctant kin relation of Cromwell (son of an aunt) wooed back into line during the debates on kingship to the extent that he was a last-minute addition to the list of members of the Other House.

And then there were the former royalists. Henry Cromwell of Upwood and Ramsey was a younger son of Cromwell's uncle and in the solidly royalist branch of the family, whose own house was sacked by Oliver's troops. The family was in dire financial straits in the late 1640s when Oliver stepped in and procured a major reduction in his composition fine. Gradually Henry built up a portfolio of local offices, and in 1654 he ran against the Montagu/Earl of Manchester's interest to represent Huntingdonshire in Parliament and came second. He proved himself in that Parliament and much more in the next as a supporter of the Protectorate but after securing a private audience with Oliver to explain his accusation that some major-generals had 'acted unjustly and against law' and to name names, the Protector made clear he had no hard feelings and presented him with his cloak and gloves. This added to his zeal and he became a supporter of kingship and of the Humble Petition and Advice.

Thomas Bellasys had a Catholic father and brothers who fought for the king. While he was in exile in Paris in the mid-1650s, he was identified by Cromwell's ambassador and nephew-in-law Sir William Lockhart as a man who could bring others with him if adequately courted. Sent back and interviewed by Thurloe, Bellasys had a meteoric rise which, within a year, saw him made a member of the Other House (one of only two not to have been previously in the Commons) and, in November 1657 he married Cromwell's daughter Mary. He was ultra-loyal.

Sir William Lockhart, together with his brothers George and John, and brother-in-law as well as cousin, another George, were all solid Covenanters

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

and supporters of the Scottish invasion of England in 1648. In fact Sir William, head of the family, was captured and imprisoned by Lambert after the battle of Preston. He fought with Prince Charles in 1651. But in 1652 he came to London as a representative of a commissioner for the treaty of union and his pragmatism impressed so much that he was one of the handful of Scots in the Nominated Assembly and then MP for Lanarkshire in 1656, by which time he was Cromwell's ambassador in Paris. He too was elevated to the Other House. Meanwhile, brother George was advancing to the position of Attorney General of Scotland, and agent for William in London, and cousin/brother-in-law George had become rector of Glasgow University and an enthusiastic supporter of Cromwellian kingship.

It is important to recognise that the children and siblings of Cromwell's close kin also proved a reliable part of the network – space prevents detail, but the obvious ones are Henry Ireton's brother John, Charles Fleetwood's brother George (elevated to the Other House), John Disbrowe's brother Samuel, as strong a supporter of the kingship as John was an opponent, and the three members of the Dunch family, related to Oliver through the marriage of one of them to Cromwell's aunt and another by marriage to Dorothy Maijor (Cromwell's daughter-in-law) – all walked in the funeral procession. And then there are the four Ingoldsby brothers, all sons of Cromwell's aunt. Two of them played important roles alongside Henry Cromwell in Ireland and all were solidly Cromwellian. I could go on and extend outwards to look at members of Cromwell's personal finance managers and Protectoral household clustered around the Isle of Ely – the lynchpin being Roger Whetstone of Whittlesey who in turn married into families whose daughters married into Cromwell's family, including John Jones. When Whetstone's daughter Levina married Richard Beke, a military man who had been sent as a 'minder' to Sweden with Whitelocke in 1653–4, the wedding took place in the palace of Whitehall with Cromwell present. Another group is centred in south Essex around the St John – Masham – Palavicino families, the most prominent, but not only member, being William Stane, whose brothers had been treasurers in Ely and who were interconnected with the Fleetwoods and Fairfax and whose role as a confidante of Cromwell has been undervalued. He was the only Stane to serve in Parliament and was a strong supporter of the major-generals. His family was also closely linked to members of Cromwell's mother's family, the Stewards. As you can see, there

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

is much more to do. But that there is a solid phalanx of kin and kin of kin working for the cause of Oliver is certain. It is a subject to be further explored.

Many of these men had personal ties to Henry Cromwell. The Maijor family apart, none are connected, until September 1658 when they almost all threw their lot in with him, to Richard Cromwell. What has struck me in preparing this paper, is how irrelevant he was.

Indeed, while the rest of the kin group worked closely together in the crisis over what to do with the offensively flamboyant Quaker, James Naylor, in December 1656 and January 1657, Richard Cromwell again comes across as an outlier. In the first few days, when Parliament was trying to decide what offence, if any, Naylor had committed when he rode into Bristol on a colt in apparent and blasphemous imitation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and whether they had the right to judge him or pass a law retrospectively to punish him, seven family members used procedural arguments to inhibit the rush to judgement and none spoke for urgency. In the second phase, as Parliament voted how extreme the penalties should be on the man they refused to allow to speak to them, only Edward Whalley argued for the death sentence but then for Naylor to be given the opportunity to recant and be saved; and when Disbrowe suggested that 'till we be of a better temper so as to hear one another speak with patience, I would have us lay this business aside', Whalley quickly backed him up. By the 15 December, sensing that things were going their way, John Jones, John Disbrowe and Henry Cromwell of Ramsey all wanted a thin house to vote on (and against) the death penalty. The next day they won the vote against the death penalty by 96-82. As the House voted heavily to two severe floggings, the boring of his tongue with a hot iron and other measures, four of the family sought to mitigate the various proposals (for example Edward Whalley pleaded for his lips but not his tongue to be slit) and Jones tried once more for punishment to be deferred until they had reached a firm conclusion of whether they were proceeding legislatively or judicially. On 17 December Charles Walley, Judge Advocate and brother of Edward, pleaded in vain that 'I hope, if this person should come and recant, you would accept it, more than all your judgments upon him; and it will answer more your ends. His reformation, I suppose, is the end of punishment. If you be satisfied in that, you need not sentence

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE: WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

him. I desire he may be heard'. On the 18th, with the first flogging imminent, Charles Whalley successfully proposed that Naylor should not be immediately pilloried for that 'will go near to kill him'. Two days later, Lambert, supported by Disbrowe and several others, said that Naylor was too 'sick' for the next stage of his suffering (the boring of his tongue) and successfully got all further punishment deferred for seven days during which he would be attended by physicians for his body and soul (five court preachers). Meanwhile, as anti-Quaker petitions poured in, Charles Whalley called in vain for them to be set aside, saying:

It is a hard thing to make a law against them. Some do acknowledge scripture, magistracy, and ministry; others, not. Good ministers is the only remedy to suppress them: only make a law against blasphemy, and let them that commit James Nayler's fault, have his punishment. But for their denying of the magistracy and ministry, you have laws against them already. Bind them to their good behaviour.

And then on 23 December, it took repeated efforts by family members to get the London petition for mercy heard (presented by Sprigge), and then councillors to get it considered. All this looks a bit too persistent and consistent to be chance. This smacks of co-ordination.

And so to the dissident member of the kinship group. Before being lobbied over dinner by the Lord Protector to remit the mutilation of Naylor, Thomas Burton reported that 'we were at dinner with Lord Richard Cromwell, per special invitation ... he for his part, was clear that Nayler ought to die'. And was Oliver, do we suppose, indifferent to this act of defiance by his son and at this point most definitely not his heir? We wonder why Oliver took it until his dying breath to nominate Richard as his successor. Or rather, it adds to the speculation that he made no nomination at all. But that is a debate for another day.

Further Reading

This essay draws principally on the biographies of MPs in S.K. Roberts (ed.), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1640–1660* (Boydell and Brewer, 9 vols., 2023); reference is also made to David Farr, *Oliver Cromwell's Kin 1643–1726: The Private and Public Worlds of the English Revolution and Restoration*

BLOOD AND MARRIAGE:
WHY KIN MATTERED TO OLIVER CROMWELL

(Routledge, 2023), reviewed in this edition of *Cromwelliana*. It also draws on John Morrill (Gen. Editor), *The Letters, Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (OUP, 3 vols., 2022). Material from this essay with full annotation will appear in a forthcoming volume celebrating the appearance of the nine 1640–1660 volumes, edited by Alex Beeton. My essay will be entitled ‘Oliver Cromwell and Parliament: Problems and Speculations’.

John Morrill is Emeritus Professor of British and Irish History at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Selwyn College. His short biography of Oliver Cromwell was published by OUP in 2006 and a long biography, based on the new edition of *The Letters, Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* he has edited, is being published by Bloomsbury. He was, for the 12 years leading up to the quatercentenary of Cromwell’s death, President of the Cromwell Association.

CUSTARDS AND CUSHIONS: NEW EVIDENCE FOR OLIVER CROMWELL'S SENSE OF HUMOUR

by Dr Patrick Little

Finding a new manuscript shedding light on the career and personality of Oliver Cromwell is a rare event indeed. It is extremely uncommon for new material by Cromwell himself – whether holograph or autograph – to be discovered. The historians preparing the new edition of Cromwell's *Letters, Writings and Speeches* found only a handful of genuinely new documents: their core task was instead tracking down the best texts, removing editorial encrustations, and providing scholarly introductions and annotations – producing 'a much better canon of Cromwell's recorded words', as John Morrill puts it.¹ When it comes to writings *about* Cromwell, the occasional new item does come to light, as with Peter Gaunt's discovery of a new version of the speech to the army officers on 27 February 1657, which appeared in an earlier edition of this journal.²

All the major collections have long ago been scoured by those seeking Cromwelliana, but sometimes material comes to light by serendipity, when researchers are looking for other things, and so it has in this case. A trawl by the staff of the *History of Parliament* through letters reporting on parliamentary affairs in the early 1640s held by Northamptonshire Record Office unearthed a stray letter discussing current events during 1653.³ The letter has been damaged, with part of it unreadable, but the contents can easily be gleaned from what remains. Mostly it concerns the latest developments in the negotiations that were to bring the first Dutch war to an end, but the middle section of the letter, thankfully mostly legible, concerns Oliver Cromwell directly. This is what it says:

The Gen[eral]: hath had fitts of the stone, of a loosenes, & cold, but, but [*sic*] fitts: he is not for counsells it apeares, especially in hot weather: & therfore declines them, & takes his pleasure, hee was ill tewsdai morning butt att noone <Deane Owen> maryed his <second son to Coll Russells> daughter, wher he was present, & all night he was at her lodging, wher shee lay yt night, throwing wine[,] water & custerds upon the ladyes, & cushins to boote, theis weare the prayers & sermons, but not the same yt the old purytans used to put up, for there children, when they en[tere]d that sacred life; we see how inconsistant old goodness & new greatnes are [blank] prayers & teares are for those in misery, not in glory.

CUSTARDS AND CUSHIONS: NEW EVIDENCE FOR OLIVER CROMWELL'S SENSE OF HUMOUR

The letter is undated (although the reference to the wedding happening 'tewsday morning' dates it to mid-May 1653 – the wedding between Henry Cromwell and Elizabeth Russell took place on 10 May). It is unsigned, and the author is unknown, although its survival in a collection of manuscript newsletters suggests that it performed the same function. Clearly the author was familiar with the inner workings of Whitehall. The references to Cromwell's illness and his absence from the Council of State help to solve a conundrum raised by W.C. Abbott: why, in 'the critical month of May', when hugely important business, such as the negotiations with the Dutch, the settlement of the government after the dissolution of the Rump, and the need to choose a new representative were pressing, did Cromwell attend no more than half the meetings?⁴ Kidney stones, 'loosenes' (diarrhoea), a cold and 'fitts' (possibly a recurrence of his old complaint, malaria) seem to be the answer, despite the cynicism of the writer, who suggested laziness was also a factor. The mention of 'Dean Owen' as officiant adds to the document's authenticity. Owen was a congregationalist minister who had been appointed dean of Christ Church and vice-chancellor of Oxford University by the commonwealth, on Cromwell's recommendation. He had accompanied Cromwell to Ireland and Scotland, and his sermon preached at the funeral of the general's son-in-law, Henry Ireton, in February 1652 had been published with a dedication to his 'very worthy friend', Henry Cromwell.⁵ It was thus entirely appropriate that he should play a role in Henry's wedding ceremony. From these circumstantial details, we may be confident that the letter and its contents are reliable.

This raises the question of Cromwell's boorish behaviour at his son's wedding. According to the letter, Cromwell was in the midst of the festivities, throwing wine, water and even custards (probably baked custards or custard pies) at the ladies who attended the festivities. These were followed by a volley of cushions. As the author says, such carryings-on seem 'inconsistant' with what you might expect from po-faced 'purytans'. Yet this account fits perfectly with another incident involving Cromwell, over four years later, at the wedding of his daughter, Frances, to Robert Rich, grandson of the Earl of Warwick. This was a private affair, with the Venetian resident complaining that domestic and foreign dignitaries were not invited, it being 'parents and friends only'.⁶ Although the story apparently originates with the groom's uncle, Hatton Rich, the version which survives comes from a much

CUSTARDS AND CUSHIONS: NEW EVIDENCE FOR OLIVER CROMWELL'S SENSE OF HUMOUR

less reliable source – a collection of tales, collected later by a royalist – but the details seem familiar:

The Protector threw about sack Posset among all the ladyes to soyle their rich clothes, which they tooke as a favor & also caste sweet-meates & dawbed all the stooles where they were to sitt with wett sweet meates & puld of[f] Riches his perucque, and would have throwne it into ye fire, but did not, yet he sate upon it.⁷

This account, taken from the original manuscript rather than later printings (which, for some reason, rendered 'caste' as 'wett'), and although wine was common to both (sack posset was a wine-based drink, traditional at weddings), the other projectiles differed. In place of custards, Cromwell was throwing sweetmeats and spreading them on the furniture, and rather than following up with cushions he targeted the fashionable periwig worn by the groom.

Historians have been decidedly sniffy about this and other accounts of Cromwell's sense of humour, with one authority dismissing accounts of 'crude, childish behaviour', saying that they 'generally rest upon a single author and cannot be corroborated'.⁸ The May 1653 evidence seems to provide this corroboration, at least when it comes to the 1657 wedding. Others scholars have taken the latter account more seriously. Roy Sherwood queries the reliability of the source, but suggests, 'if it were true, then it could be interpreted as yet more evidence of the re-establishment of traditions associated with royalty – having to endure a monarch's unreasonable behaviour without giving the impression that you may not be enjoying it as much as he is'. This bolsters his overarching thesis that Cromwell, as protector, was 'king in all but name'.⁹ Edward Holberton's aim is different, as he seeks to contrast such behaviour with the poetry and more formalised courtly entertainments that accompanied the weddings of Frances and her sister in 1657, and he comes to the conclusion that the incident reveals a protectoral court 'liable to volatile tensions over class, history and fashionability'.¹⁰ My own exploration of Cromwell's sense of humour also focuses on the contrast between his position and his burlesque behaviour, as 'it was perhaps the juxtaposition of Cromwell's forbidding reputation, and the dignity of high office, with such high-jinks that created the comic effect'.¹¹ The new document undermines all these theories, however. In May

CUSTARDS AND CUSHIONS: NEW EVIDENCE FOR OLIVER CROMWELL'S SENSE OF HUMOUR

1653 Cromwell was not lord protector. Although he was undoubtedly the most powerful man in the nation, he was not yet head of state, and did not enjoy the trappings of quasi-regal power: the palaces, the art collection, the household flunkies, the court ceremonial. Rather than being a sign of the increasingly monarchical nature of the protectorate – or the tensions that it created – it looks like such practical joking was personal to Cromwell.

And this is where cushions provide support. The May 1653 account, with its Cromwellian cushion-throwing also has a parallel case. In another source usually considered unreliable, the heavily-edited memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, in the summer of 1648 a conference between the officers and republicans ended when Cromwell ‘took up a cushion and flung it at my head, and then ran down the stairs’ to evade a cushion thrown back at him.¹² It seems that custards and cushions could be thrown by a general as much as by a protector. Although the May 1653 account strengthens the case for such incidents to be taken at face value, the reasons for Cromwell’s behaviour continue to elude us. It is clear that his distinctive brand of humour was not always welcomed by his friends (especially the ladies), or appreciated by his contemporaries (especially the royalists), but it is very difficult for us, with limited information, to come to any firm conclusions as to his motive. Was this just fun, or was something else going on? As usual when trying to fathom this most enigmatic of historical figures we remain puzzled, and Oliver has the last laugh.

Note: I am grateful to Joel Halcomb and Miranda Malins for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

¹ J. Morrill et al. (eds), *The Letters, Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (3 vols., Oxford 2022), i. p. 1.

² P. Gaunt, ‘Writings and Sources XV: New light on what Cromwell said to the officers on 27th February 1657’, *Cromwelliana* series 3, no. 2 (2013), pp. 121–42.

³ Northants RO, Montagu MS 191, ‘Letters on public events’ folder, no. 9. This document was discovered by my colleague, Dr David Scott, and I am grateful to him for bringing it to my attention. Many thanks also to Andrew North, archivist at Northants RO, for his help and advice.

CUSTARDS AND CUSHIONS: NEW EVIDENCE FOR OLIVER CROMWELL'S SENSE OF HUMOUR

- ⁴ W.C. Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (4 vols., New Haven, 1837–47), iii. 23.
- ⁵ J. Owen, *The labouring saints dismission to rest* (1652), A2, 9, 24 (E.654.3), quoted in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1640–60* (9 vols., 2023), vii. 481.
- ⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian Series*, 1657–9, p. 131.
- ⁷ BL, Harl. 991, p. 23; published in Abbott (ed.), *Writings and Speeches*, iv. 662.
- ⁸ P. Gaunt, *Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford, 1996), 117.
- ⁹ R. Sherwood, *Oliver Cromwell King in all but Name, 1653–1658* (Stroud, 1997), 112.
- ¹⁰ E. Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate: culture, politics and institutions* (Oxford, 2008), 145.
- ¹¹ P. Little, 'Oliver Cromwell's sense of humour', *Cromwelliana*, series 2, no 4 (2007), pp. 73–84.
- ¹² C.H. Firth (ed.), *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow* (2 vols., Oxford, 1894), i. 185.

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WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII

THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

by Professor Peter Gaunt

On Sunday 23 October 1642, in the first major engagement of the English civil war, the main parliamentary army under the Earl of Essex and the main royalist army under Charles I clashed on the plain below a key local landmark, a prominent hill and escarpment in southern Warwickshire, not far from the border with Oxfordshire. Contemporaries tended to refer to the battle as ‘Kineton fight’, taking that name from the biggest village close to the battlefield, though its standard name now is the battle of Edgehill.

The king, having gathered together an army over the summer and early autumn mainly in northern England, the north Midlands, parts of the borderlands with Wales and from Wales itself, had set off from Shrewsbury and was advancing in the direction of London; if he could regain his capital and the parliamentary HQ, it would be hard for his opponents to continue armed resistance to him. Meanwhile, the Earl of Essex, parliament’s appointee as its commander-in-chief, had raised an army in and around London, gathering further troops as he advanced across the south Midlands, as far as Worcester. On hearing news that the king and his army were on the move, Essex marched out from Worcester to engage his opponents, though by the time the two armies approached each other in southern Warwickshire the king had got to the south (the London side) of the parliamentary army. Charles turned to give battle, initially arraying his army across the top of Edgehill, in such a strong position that his enemies would not engage it, but then ordered his men to descend and to deploy on the plain below, an indication that he wished to give battle. The two armies deployed in lines parallel to each other, both arranged in what became the conventional formation for a formal, set-piece civil war battle: infantry (comprising blocks of musketeers and of pikemen) concentrated in the centre, cavalry on both wings and dragoons (troops who were initially mounted, enabling them to take advanced positions, but who then dismounted to fight) at the end of the line. Although as usual it is difficult to recover and reconstruct precise numbers, the two armies were probably quite evenly matched, with 14,000–15,000 men apiece.

The course and immediate outcome of the battle can be swiftly told. After an initial artillery exchange, battle proper began in early afternoon when both

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII

THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

wings of royalist cavalry moved forward to attack the opposing parliamentary cavalry. They were largely successful, mauling or breaking the parliamentary cavalry but then pursuing their opponents off the field and in search of plunder, including raiding the parliamentary baggage train, stationed well to the rear of the main parliamentary line. However, Essex kept his nerve and the centre of his army, comprising mainly foot but with some cavalry support, stood firm in engaging the advancing royalist foot and, in a hard fought contest, began to gain the upper hand; the parliamentarians pushed their opponents back and for a time captured some of the king's artillery pieces as well as the royal standard. Although returning royalist cavalry managed by the end of the day to stabilise the position of their infantry colleagues and to recover some losses, neither side had scored an outright victory when the failing light and nightfall brought the battle to a close.

Edgehill was a drawn battle. Each side lost a few hundred men, and some parliamentary cavalry units had been badly mauled, but both armies largely survived. After glaring at each other but not resuming battle on the following day, the two armies marched off in different directions, the king resuming his advance in the direction of the Thames valley and London, Essex initially pulling back into Warwick but then taking a Midlands route back to the capital. He re-entered London well ahead of the king and, bolstered by reinforcements from the capital, in November he blocked the king's advance to the west of London with a numerically superior force deployed at Turnham Green. Charles abandoned without a fight any hopes he had of capturing London and instead withdrew to Oxford, which became his wartime capital.

The (first) battle of Edgehill was and is significant both for what happened there and what did not, for what it was and what it was not. It was certainly neither the first armed clash of the civil war, nor the site of the first fatalities. There had been armed confrontations, fighting and resulting killings at Manchester in mid-July and again on a larger scale at the end of September 1642, at Kilsby, Chewton Mendip, Southam, Warwick and Portsmouth and Southsea during August, and around Sherborne and at Powick Bridge outside Worcester in September; in total maybe a couple of hundred or more soldiers and some civilians caught up in the fighting had perished in these

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII

THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

clashes which had preceded Edgehill. But in terms of scale, seriousness and casualty figures, Edgehill hugely overshadowed everything which had preceded it. It marked the point at which initial hesitation to fully commit to civil war and all that it stood for, very evident in many theatres over the summer and early autumn, was overcome and overwhelmed and when England really tipped into full (civil) warfare. Although the possibility of ending the confrontation via some sort of compromise settlement was not completely dead and continued to be explored through the rest of the war, resulting in formal if abortive and unsuccessful negotiations early in 1643 and again early in 1645, the commitment of both sides to battle at Edgehill not only ended the chance of avoiding full-scale war but also rendered prospects for quickly bringing it to a close via negotiation much less likely. Thousands of men on both sides had gained experience of battle and had been blooded and they had to some extent begun to be inured to the horrors of what civil war entailed.

That the battle was in essence drawn and indecisive, with both armies surviving substantially intact, was also key to shaping the civil war. Had either side scored a really decisive victory at Edgehill, had it resulted in a knockout blow which destroyed one army, had key figures on either side up to – and especially including – the king himself been killed or captured, the course of the war may have been changed or greatly shortened. As it was, the outcome of the battle, linked to the fizzling out of the king's advance on London over the following three weeks, led to a much longer war. We should be cautious, however, for even before Edgehill both sides had begun securing key towns and strongholds across England by stationing there small bodies of troops as garrisons and both sides had also begun raising other provincial forces, separate from the two armies which clashed at Edgehill. Nonetheless, the inconclusive outcome of that battle led on to and encouraged the 'regionalisation' or 'provincialisation' of the war, with the raising during the winter and spring of 1642–43 of more county or regional armies, the establishment of more garrisons and the carving up and militarisation by king and parliament of just about all of England and Wales. Once that process had happened, it made it far less likely that the civil war could be won or lost and wrapped up in a single battle or campaign, even if one of the main armies suffered a heavy defeat; it made it far more likely that

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII

THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

the war would develop into a rather dour, long drawn-out territorial conflict, fought across several different theatres, as indeed it did.

Within weeks of the battle of 23 October, the ground was contested afresh in the second battle of Edgehill. In January 1643 a pamphlet appeared in London, entitled *A Great Wonder in Heaven*, claiming that ‘in the very place where the battell was stricken, have since, and doth appeare, strange and portentuous Apparitions of two jarring and contrary Armies, ... it being certified by the men of most credit in those parts’, including a JP and a local minister. The first intimation of ghostly armies refighting Edgehill had occurred around Christmas, this source claimed, when during the night local shepherds and others first heard distant drums, then the noise of soldiers approaching and finally, before they had a chance to flee, they saw in the air the images of those soldiers, complete with horses, flags flying, drums beating, and muskets and cannons being discharged. The witnesses were able to identify the two forces as the armies of king and parliament and watched through the small hours as the battle was refought, starting with the royalists charging and apparently gaining the upper hand, only for the parliamentary troops to rally and force their opponents back – much as had occurred in the course of the real battle. After three or four hours the royalist army appeared to retreat and then vanished, while the parliamentary army for a time revelled in its apparent victory before also vanishing. The witnesses hurried to the local JP and minister who, with many other inhabitants, gathered on the battlefield in hope of a repeat show. They were not disappointed, for on Christmas night itself ‘in the same tumultuous warlike manner, the same two adverse Armies [appeared], fighting with as much spite and spleen as formerly’. After an interval of a week or so, the same spectacle was repeated on the following Saturday and Sunday nights, ‘with far greater tumult, fighting in the manner aforementioned for foure houres, or verie neere, ... performing the same actions of hostilitie and bloud-shed’. Reports reached the king in Oxford who dispatched several royalist officers and gentlemen to observe the next weekend performance. They too saw and heard the battle being refought, but they were also able to identify ‘divers of the apparitions or incorporeall substances by their faces, as that of Sir Edmund Varney [or Verney, the king’s standard-bearer who had been cut down and killed in the midst of the battle], and others that were there slaine; of which upon oath they made testimony to his Majestie’.

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII

THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

A similar London pamphlet of around the same time, *The New Yeares Wonder*, told a broadly consistent tale of the spectral armies fighting again the battle of and at Edgehill, though dressing up the account in more emotive and racy language than that of *A Great Wonder* and with some details changed. In this version the events were first witnessed during the afternoon of 1 January, though subsequent replays occurred mainly at night, with the spectral armies fading and vanishing at dawn; and it claimed that the groans from the wounded and dying soldiers were so loud that those living nearby were woken from their sleep and put in great fear. Some locals had reportedly speculated that the terrible sights and sounds were being provoked by the presence on the battlefield of the, as yet, unburied corpses of some of the fallen, leading to a careful search of the area and the burial of some bodies which were found. Perhaps this worked, for contemporary accounts indicate that the ghostly replaying of the battle became far less frequent during early 1643 and quite soon petered out.

The third battle of Edgehill is much more recent and ongoing and is being contested by military historians of the civil war. In the absence in almost all cases of surviving contemporary battle plans, and with the texts of various printed and archival narrative accounts, ranging from plentiful to limited and meagre, being closely analysed, it is not surprising that historians are often uncertain or disagree about specific details of most civil war engagements. It is quite common for there to be debates about exactly where one or both armies initially deployed, over which ground the fighting took place, and how the often scanty, vague and imprecise contemporary references to specific buildings and features then present in the environs and other topographical asides can be related to and mapped onto the modern landscape. But in recent years there have been particularly stark disagreements over the position and alignment of the two armies at the start of the battle of Edgehill. Drawing on, in this case, quite plentiful contemporary written accounts – more than twenty survive and, although a few seem to have been composed a little later, at least ten extant accounts by participants or other known or apparent eyewitnesses were written within a couple of months of the battle – most historians believe that the two armies deployed in parallel lines running north-east to south-west. In this interpretation, the royalists descended the Edgehill escarpment and deployed a little forward of but in line with the foot of the hill, which is on a north-east to south-west

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII

THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

alignment. That the parliamentarians deployed on the same alignment not only follows from contemporary accounts confirming that the two armies drew up facing each other, as would be the norm in a formal, set-piece battle of the time, but also from clear descriptions in several of the strictly contemporary accounts that the parliamentarian army arrayed along a very slight ridge and that the initial royalist advance and attack entailed the king's men ascending gently rising ground to engage their opponents. Although modern access to the battlefield has been restricted – much of the area is now under the control of the Ministry of Defence – those who have gained such access, or have carefully viewed the site, report that the slight ridge is still discernible, thus helping to confirm this reading of the alignment of parliament's army. That is the interpretation followed in most standard military histories of the war, including those of Peter Young and Richard Holmes, and also more recently by Malcolm Wanklyn in his works on the civil war (see, for example, *Decisive Battles of the English Civil War*, sketch map on p. 37).

However, the far more significant contribution made by archaeology in recent years to interpreting civil war actions, landscapes and environments, and in particular the systematic use of metal detectors across a battlefield to recover and to record the position of metallic remains of the engagement – especially iron shot fired by a range of guns, from artillery pieces to muskets and pistols – has led to some radical reinterpretations. Glenn Foard has been to the fore in this work and the resulting reinterpretations, in the case of Edgehill leading to a judiciously cautious but nonetheless quite radical suggestion that the two armies were deployed parallel to each other on an alignment much closer to north-west to south-east; in other words, compared to the traditional interpretation, swinging the two lines through not far short of ninety degrees and with the two armies aligned almost at right angles to the foot of the escarpment. (See, for example, Glenn Foard and Richard Morris, *The Archaeology of English Battlefields*, Fig. 7.22 on p. 125; in fairness the caption accompanying the map does note that it offers a 'conjectural reconstruction' of the armies' deployment and that 'significant uncertainties remain' given the very disturbed nature of the terrain in the wake of MOD use and building work.) Interestingly, the excellent website on Edgehill maintained by The Battlefields Trust currently shows the initial deployment somewhere between the two interpretations, much closer to a

WRITINGS AND SOURCES XXIII
THE THREE BATTLES OF EDGEHILL

north-south alignment (<http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/media/373.pdf>), while being careful to note (<http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/civil-war/battlepageview.asp?pageid=545>) and to show alternative interpretations (<http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/media/374.pdf>).

However, by no means all historians of the civil war, including the current author, have been convinced by this, and many continue to support and adhere to the more traditional interpretation (see Peter Gaunt, *The English Civil War: A Military History*, pp. 73–79 and p. 269 n. 64). The battle of Edgehill continues.

Peter Gaunt is Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Chester. A specialist on the civil war and on the politics and government of the 1650s, he has written or edited sixteen books, including several mainly military studies of the civil war and two (different) biographies of Oliver Cromwell. He is a past chairman and past president and currently a vice president of The Cromwell Association.

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON, FEBRUARY 1949

by John Goldsmith

Sunday 30th January 1949 was the tercentenary of the death of King Charles I, an event that did not go unnoticed by the organisations that sought, and in some cases still seek, to venerate him as King Charles the Martyr.

The Bishop of Kensington was present at a High Mass at St Thomas's in Regent Street, London, and a sermon was preached on the king by an American priest who claimed descent from the House of Stuart. At St Margaret's Church, Westminster, the Rector affirmed that Charles 'had sacrificed his life for the Church of England',¹ and wreaths from the Royal Martyr Church Union,² the Society of King Charles the Martyr,³ the Royalist Club and the Royal Stuart Society, amongst others, were laid at the foot of the equestrian statue of Charles I at the head of Whitehall.

The Royal Martyr Church Union also organised a service at St Paul's Cathedral which was held on the following Tuesday, 1st February, to further mark the occasion.⁴ The sermon was given by the Bishop of London, William Charles Wand (1885–1977), whose faith was Anglo-Catholic.⁵

The tone of the events to mark the tercentenary probably found little sympathy with Isaac Foot, one of the founders of the Cromwell Association, and its first chairman.⁶ Although one can be reasonably certain that Foot did not attend the service at St Paul's, he read a report of the service with great interest and was prompted to write an open letter to the Bishop, contesting his opinion of Cromwell.⁷ The letter was published in *The Observer* on Sunday 20th February 1949, the text of which is reproduced below.

Foot was neither a theologian nor a historian, but he was a passionate Cromwellian. This letter is a succinct expression of his view of his hero. Foot published very little even though as a Methodist lay preacher he must have given hundreds of sermons and, as a politician, hundreds of speeches. This letter has been noted previously, for example in the report on Foot's library when it was acquired on his death by the University of California which commends it for its 'scholarship, both historical and religious'.⁸

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
FEBRUARY 1949

Whether or not the services held to commemorate the death of King Charles were an encouragement to Foot to organise a service to commemorate the death of Cromwell is speculation, but is it coincidence that the first Association service took place in the same year?⁹

A press cutting of the letter was found recently in the late Roy Sherwood's copy of John Buchan's biography of Cromwell and was brought to my attention. It is such a passionate defence of Cromwell that it merits a wider readership than that of *The Observer* in February 1949.

—

Reproduction from *The Observer*, 20th February 1949

Note: sub-headings, italicisation and punctuation are true to the original printed letter.

CROMWELL: AN OPEN LETTER

To the LORD BISHOP OF LONDON from ISAAC FOOT

My Lord Bishop,

In the sermon you preached at St. Paul's on February 1, at the service arranged by the Royal Martyr Church Union, you are reported in the "Guardian" as having made the following references to Oliver Cromwell. Of him Clarendon, his enemy, wrote that "his greatness at home was but a shadow of the glory he had abroad." Your words were:—

Cromwell, in destroying the King, intended to destroy the religion which the King professed. In spite of all his boasted toleration, Cromwell set himself to extirpate popery and prelacy. The Church of England had no place in his scheme of toleration. ... Cromwell brought to the hearts of the English people such a hatred of despotism that their liberty had never been in such a danger again.

Your Lordship made use of words that have taken a great place in our history. Despotism, Liberty, Toleration, Popery, Prelacy, Religion. It is upon these words, and your use of them, that I desire, with all respect, to address some questions to your Lordship.

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
FEBRUARY 1949

Despotism. We have seen a good deal of that at one time and another, but does your Lordship know of any other "despot" in history who, hating arbitrary power, sought to divest himself of supreme personal authority, and to base his rule on a civil foundation?

Liberty. That, indeed, is a great word, but what liberty has your Lordship in mind? Was it the liberty under which John Bunyan served twelve years or so in Bedford gaol, or which sent Richard Baxter to prison under the sentence of Judge Jeffreys, or which brought in the torture of the thumbscrew and the boot to break the spirit of the Scottish Covenanters? All these "liberties" came after the despot Cromwell was in his grave and after the outrages upon his dead body.

AHEAD OF HIS TIME

Toleration. You speak of Cromwell's "boasted toleration". Why this disparaging epithet, my Lord? It is true that there were limits to Cromwell's toleration, but he lived in intolerant days, and can you tell us of any authoritative historian who does not agree that, in this respect, Cromwell was far ahead of his time? Do you not know of the risks he ran with his Parliaments and followers in going even as far as he did in his policy of toleration? Would you care to ask the Jewish community what they think of Cromwell's "boasted toleration"?

You speak of Cromwell's set purpose of extirpation. That a strong word – to root out, to destroy. Whom and what did Cromwell extirpate? To quote John Bunyan: "These are but generals, said Mr. Greatheart, come to particulars, man."

Popery. It is true that Cromwell was opposed to popery. So, indeed, were most of the Englishmen of his time. The Papacy was then one of the secular Powers, and between the Popes of that time and our nation there had been such enmity that Queen Elizabeth (during whose reign Cromwell was born) had been under a Papal ban for over thirty years, and English noblemen had been assured, on the highest authority, about this "guilty woman of England" that "whosoever sends her out of the world with the pious intention of doing God's service not only does not sin but gains merit." Some allowance must

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
FEBRUARY 1949

be made for the man who lived in days like those. He lived closer to the fires of Smithfield than you do, my Lord. Saint Bartholomew was to him a thing of yesterday, and the decimation of the Protestant Vaudois peasantry in the Piedmont valleys (whose only crime was the profession of their faith) happened whilst Cromwell was in power. We read of those sheep who were

*In their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled
Mother with Infant down the rocks....*

That, my Lord, to you and me is poetry, but in Cromwell's time the thing was actually happening, and the news cut the Protector's heart as if it had been the loss of his nearest kindred. And yet, even with this background, do you know of any English Catholics who were extirpated under Cromwell's rule? Are you not aware that the French Ambassador reported to his master that the Catholics were being better treated under Cromwell than they were under Charles I?

SLEEVES OF LAWN

Prelacy. That is another resounding word in our history. Cromwell, it is true, was opposed to prelacy, and he thought he had very good reason. It was contrary to his reading of the New Testament (which he quoted, Mark x. 43-45), and the prelates, he said, had driven "poor and afflicted people" out of their native land to find in "howling wildernesses" a freedom of worship denied them at home. The opposition to the political power of the prelacy became so strong and so widespread that before the Civil War commenced, and when Oliver had been scarcely heard of, a Bill for the exclusion of the bishops from Parliament was passed by both Houses, and actually received the consent of King Charles. It is true that at the Restoration the bishops came back and were at once restored to their political power. Looking back, do you think that was a good thing for this country, my Lord, or a good thing even for religion? You will have read the description of the deplorable condition of religious life of this country a century or so after the Restoration, given us by Mark Pattison, churchman, scholar, Rector of Lincoln College. What but the political dependence of the prelacy made it

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
FEBRUARY 1949

possible for men in times of political controversy to write bitter lines like these?

*You reverend prelates, clothed in sleeves of lawn,
Too meek to murmur, and too proud to fawn,
Who, still submissive to their Maker's nod,
Adore their Sovereign and respect their God.*

Was the restoration of the episcopacy a good thing for Scotland? The bishops came back there as well it is true, but only for twelve years or so. Were there ever twelve such years in Scottish history? The word "prelacy" was written in blood across the face of Scotland.

BUCHAN'S VIEW

Religion. You speak of Cromwell being a destroyer of "the religion which the King professed." Not the King's Church, not his dogma, but his religion. That indeed is a heavy indictment. But where is the evidence? In that great library of yours at Fulham Palace I assume you have the book on Cromwell, written not many years ago by John Buchan, who was at one time the Lord High Commissioner of the Church of Scotland. John Buchan was a son of the Manse. He wrote of Cromwell as "the greatest of Englishmen" and "the greatest of English monarchs." What attracted him to Cromwell, he tells us, was the man's religion, and his book was the fruit of the study of a life-time. John Milton, to whom Cromwell was "our chief of men," spoke of Cromwell's religion and

*the strictness of his religious habits,
and the Innocence of his life;
cherishing in his breast the flame of piety. ...*

John Maidston, Cromwell's personal servant, said that his master "lived and died in comfortable communion with God. A larger soul, I think, hath seldom dwelt in a house of clay than his was."

Against all this we have to set your aspersion of Cromwell – this intolerant, extirpating despot, this enemy of religion. At St. Paul's, of all places, my Lord! That place with her sky-like dome and

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
FEBRUARY 1949

her breast

Filled with mementos, satiate with its part

Of grateful England's overflowing Dead.

Cromwell will survive your attack, my Lord, and I do not suppose that, following upon your words, his statue will be removed from the Reformation Monument at Geneva, or that La Digue de Cromwell, in the Vaudois Valley, will be disturbed, or that the Cromwell window in the Independence Hall at Philadelphia will now be covered. Oliver, in his lifetime, was never greatly troubled by the attacks made upon him, and, indeed, it is quite probable that he would have replied to you, my Lord, in the same words that were in his long, patient letter to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, on August 3, 1650 (one month before Dunbar):—

I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.

I am, my Lord,
Yours sincerely,
ISAAC FOOT.

The Observer 20th February 1949

¹ <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/259402311> *The Guardian* Monday Jan 31 1949. Page 4.

² The Royal Martyr Church Union (RMCU) is a Church of England devotional society dedicated to the restoration of the observance of King Charles the Martyr in the calendar of the Book of Common Prayer. Founded in 1906. In 1939 the RMCU funded the building of a church dedicated to King Charles in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire. For more information see <https://kcm-church.org.uk/history>

³ <https://skcm.org> The Society of King Charles the Martyr has similar aims to the RMCU, though it predates it, having been founded in 1894.

⁴ *The Guardian* Monday Jan 31 1949. Page 4 *ibid*.

⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31798>. Wand, (John) William Charles (1885–1977).

ISAAC FOOT'S REJOINDER TO THE BISHOP OF LONDON,
FEBRUARY 1949

- ⁶ Patrick Little, 'The Cromwell Association and its Presidents', *Cromwelliana* 2013, p28–9.
- ⁷ Frustratingly it has been impossible to locate the report to which Foot refers in the archive maintained by *Newspapers by Ancestry*. It does not appear in *The Manchester Guardian* between 2 February 1949 and 19 February 1949. The Research Manager of *The Guardian* was unable to find 'anything regarding the sermon' – email correspondence 3.4.2024. It is a mystery as to where Foot read the report.
- ⁸ Theodore G. Grieder, *The Isaac Foot Library: a report to the University of Santa Barbara, California* 1964.
- ⁹ *Cromwell Association Minute Book*, Huntingdon Archives, 4874/1. Council of the Association resolved on 14 July 1939 that 'permission to lay a wreath at the foot of Cromwell's statue on September 3rd should be sought'. There is no reference to holding a religious service of commemoration.

John Goldsmith is a former curator of the Cromwell Museum, and since 2016 has been the Chair of the Cromwell Association.

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

by Professor Peter Gaunt

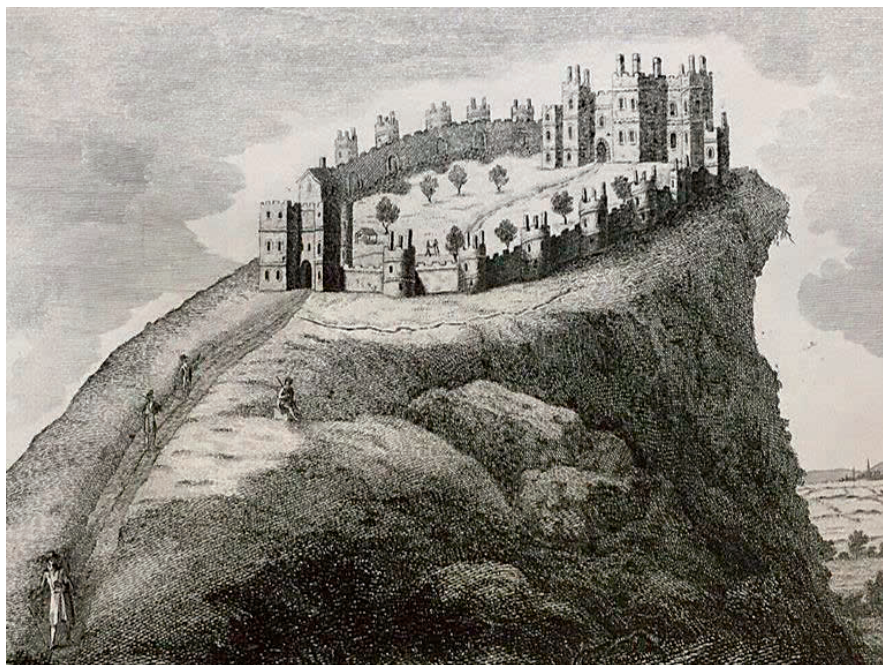


Plate 1: A very imaginative seventeenth- or eighteenth-century reconstruction of how Beeston Castle might have looked in its medieval heyday. In reality, the stone structures were never as tall, as grand or as imposing as suggested here and, like most images of the time, the dramatic nature of the rocky hill upon which the castle stands has been greatly exaggerated for artistic effect.

Beeston Castle stands on and encloses the gently sloping summit of an impressive local landmark in northern Cheshire, around ten miles east-south-east of Chester. It was built in the early thirteenth century on the northernmost of the Peckforton hills, themselves part of the longer sandstone ridge which divides Cheshire and which runs more or less north-south though the county. The very distinctive hill and crag upon which the castle stands have almost vertical, rocky faces on their north and west sides, while the southern slope is less precipitous but still steep. The hilltop site can be approached fairly easily, if still up a distinct slope, only from the east, and for that reason the castle's principal outer defences ran around the eastern and south-eastern sides of the flatter summit of the hill, with the outer

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

gatehouse positioned on the east side. The much smaller inner or upper ward of the castle was located at the north-west corner of the summit and at the highest point of the hill, around 525 feet above sea level, its north and west sides protected by rock faces which fall over 300 feet to the Cheshire plain below. The summit thus looks across much of that plain as well as over the nearby generally somewhat lower hills which continue the sandstone ridge. It affords sweeping and far-reaching views in all directions, across the Mersey estuary and well into Lancashire to the north, into Wales and the Clwydian range to the west, to the hills of north and central Shropshire to the south, and to the Peak District to the east.

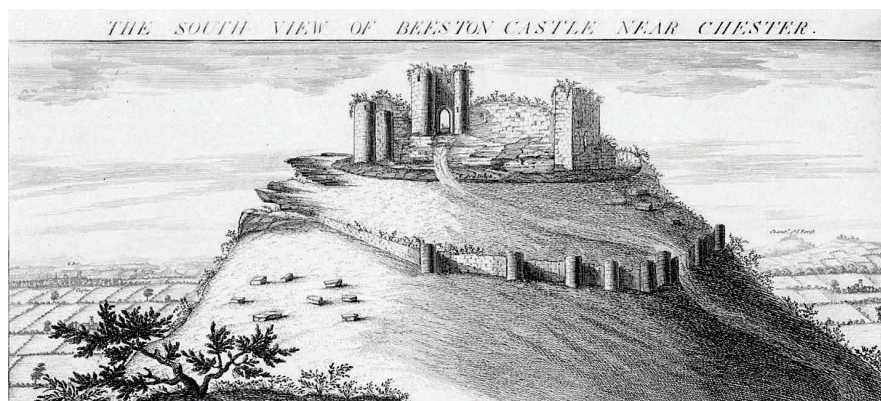


Plate 2: A much more realistic engraving of Beeston Castle from the south, as represented by the

Buck brothers in the first half of the eighteenth century. By that point the castle was clearly abandoned and semi-ruinous, though interestingly the image shows the southern curtain wall of the outer ward still more or less intact at that time. Again, the size and scale of the buildings of the inner ward have been exaggerated and there is clearly an element of artistic licence here.

Construction of the castle was started by Ranulf, sixth Earl of Chester, probably in or around 1220, soon after his return from crusade, and was one of a clutch of castles built or rebuilt by the earl on his extensive estates which stretched across the Midlands, including significant holdings in Staffordshire and Leicestershire, and on to Lincolnshire in the east. Beeston was probably incomplete at the time of the sixth earl's death in 1232 and more work was undertaken during the brief tenure of the seventh earl, Ranulf's nephew John. On his death in 1237 the castle and much of the property of the earldom were taken into royal hands. The castle remained crown property

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

for the remainder of the medieval period and through the sixteenth century. Royal expenditure on the castle in the 1240s, at a time of a renewed campaign against the native Welsh, might suggest that the castle was still incomplete then; there was a further burst of expenditure and resulting work in the early fourteenth century. Other than that, Beeston seems to have received little attention beyond routine maintenance and it had a quiet, fairly low-key history through the Middle Ages and beyond. It was kept in good order; there are intermittent references to a royal constable being in residence and it was certainly used from time to time as a prison to hold opponents of the crown. However, it is far from clear that it ever saw a bow or a gun fired in anger before it was caught up in the civil war of the mid-seventeenth century.

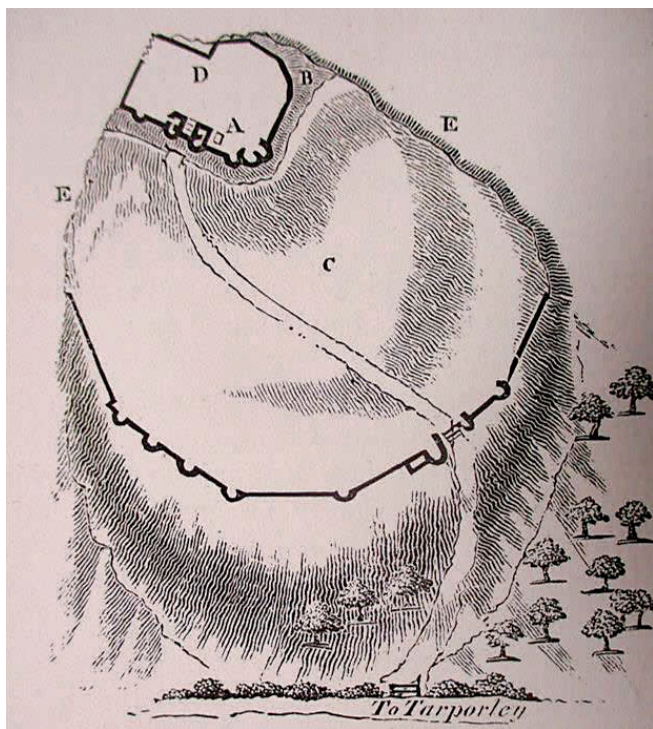


Plate 3: A nineteenth-century sketch plan of the castle, included in George Ormerod's *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*.

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

Beeston castle is unusual in being perched on top of a high hill. Although such a position might bring military strengths, in that it could not be overlooked and ensured that any attack had to be mounted uphill, it also presented significant problems in terms of bringing in and maintaining supplies and of ensuring a secure and reliable source of water. Furthermore, it meant that any soldiers stationed there would be quite distant from the resources and territory they might be seeking to guard and to control – settlements, rich farmland, fertile river valleys, strategically important fords and bridges, roads and road junctions and so on. Recent academic interpretations stress that in England the principal role of most medieval castles for most of the time was to serve as grand status symbols and as key components of lordly landscapes and of elite social life, far more than any offensive or defensive military purpose; such an interpretation is also inconsistent with siting castles in glorious isolation on remote and exposed hilltops. Thus Beeston is very unusual among Norman, Anglo-Norman and English castles built in England in being constructed in such a lofty and isolated spot, one that would have been far more typical of the native Welsh, who did tend to favour craggy hilltops for their stone castles.

(continues)

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE



Plate 4: The spectacular view from the inner ward, looking west-north-west across the Cheshire plain towards Chester and the Mersey and Dee estuaries.

There are some other peculiarities to Beeston. As a thirteenth-century castle, it is in the style favoured by that period. The age of most domestic and military arrangements being bound up together in a single, grand, stand-alone stone tower, the keep or donjon, had passed, and given way to what are now generally termed ‘enclosure’ type castles in which defensive capacities lay in a circuit of masonry curtain walls, reinforced at intervals by mural towers and with a generally twin-towered gatehouse allowing and controlling exit and entry. Beeston largely conforms to that arrangement, with the outer or lower ward (partly) surrounded by a curtain wall, complete with mural towers and a twin-towered gatehouse bonded into it, and with a separate and much smaller inner or upper ward protected by a shorter but complete circuit of curtain walls, again with mural towers and a twin-towered gatehouse. However, the roughly rectangular outer ward was enormous, much bigger than in most enclosure castles of the period, measuring nearly 900 feet east-west and approaching 600 feet north-south. It is likely that

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

when the castle was laid out and built in the 1220s, the defences of the outer ward deliberately followed the line of those of an Iron Age hill fort which had once crowned the hill, and that the desire to reuse the remaining prehistoric earthwork bank and ditch both shaped and determined the position and course of the castle’s outer defensive line and the expansive area it enclosed. That the outer line only ever ran along the east and south sides is understandable, as the ground falls away to more or less sheer rock faces to the north and west. Rather more curiously, the masonry defences now appear even more incomplete and to comprise a length of curtain wall running for around 650 feet along the east side of the ward, turning a corner and beginning to run along the south side of the outer ward; bonded into it are seven mural towers, equally spaced, all with rounded outer faces, a twin-towered gatehouse more or less in the middle of the eastern stretch of the wall and a further, small, slightly later and more roughly built square tower tucked next to the southern gatehouse tower. Although no longer standing or really evident above ground, the outer masonry curtain wall originally continued westwards along the whole southern side of the outer ward, up to the western cliff face, presumably with further mural towers – another five or possibly six if the regular spacing continued – but has since collapsed, was removed when the castle was slighted after the civil war, or has been lost through later quarrying.

The inner or upper ward was separated from the outer ward by a deep, flat-bottomed, U-shaped, rock-cut ditch running around its eastern and southern sides, ending at the cliff faces at its north and west extremities. The upper ward was accessed by a timber bridge across this dry ditch, leading to a twin-towered gatehouse positioned in the centre of the southern stretch of the inner curtain wall; a large, modern, single-span concrete bridge now gives visitors access at this point. Even though it was strongly protected by sheer rock faces on the north and west sides, the inner ward, which is again roughly rectangular in shape, was protected by a complete circuit of curtain wall,

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

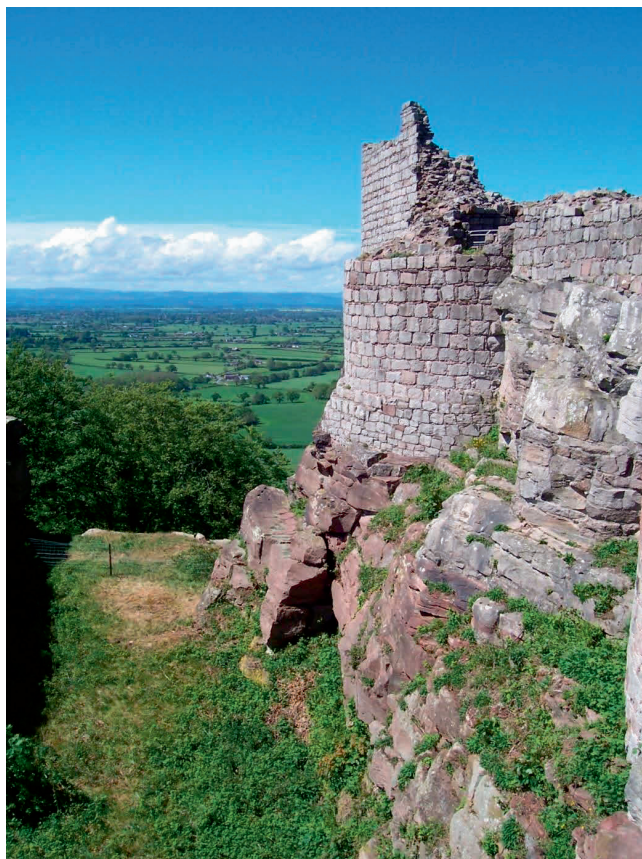


Plate 5: Taken from the modern bridge giving access from the outer into the inner ward, this photograph shows part of the rock-cut ditch which separated the two wards, ending at the sheer rock face on the west side, and a section of the curtain wall of the inner ward, including the ruins of the western mural tower.

though the three mural towers within it were all sited within the southern and eastern stretches of curtain wall. The inner ward also contained a very deep rock-cut well, originally over 350 feet deep, with another well, around 240 feet deep, in the outer ward. The two gatehouses and the various mural towers, especially the bigger, grander towers of the inner ward, could have provided some comfortable as well as more functional chambers; further and ancillary accommodation and covered spaces were presumably available in assorted timber-framed buildings, standing within the spacious outer

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

ward, of which no trace remains. But there is no evidence that the castle ever possessed either custom-made kitchens and high-status cooking arrangements, nor a grand hall, an essential public space where the lordly or royal owner of the castle could have entertained – certainly, there is no sign of either in the inner ward. Such accoutrements were seen as essential to a medieval elite lifestyle and the fact that Beeston lacks and seems never to have possessed them in turn suggests that the earls and kings who successively owned the castle never in fact resided there. That is another sign, perhaps, that the castle was never entirely completed, or maybe that it was not designed or finished off as an elite residence and was always intended for a lesser role – as an administrative centre for the earl’s estates in Cheshire, as a look-out position or as a royal garrison base and prison, rather than as a potential residence for the king and the royal family.



Plate 6: The inner ward, looking south-east. In the foreground is the well, the lower parts of which were cut through solid sandstone; beyond are the ruins of the south-east mural tower, and in the curtain wall on the far right (in deep shadow in this photograph) is a now blocked opening which may be one of the artillery gun ports cut into the earlier masonry during the civil war.

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE



Plate 7: Looking north from the outer towards the inner ward, the twin-towered inner gatehouse, now accessed by a modern bridge, was constructed from regular courses of stone, much of it the distinctive red sandstone of Cheshire's sandstone ridge.

Beeston Castle's quiet pre-civil war history is attributable in part to its very rural location, for it adjoined no town or even a significant village. The modern village of Beeston is a few hundred yards away, though it remains a small and very modest settlement. In the medieval and early modern period, there was no more than a scattering of farms and farmhouses around the foot of and close to the craggy hill upon which the castle stands. However, as it turned out, that location placed the castle on the front line for almost the whole of the main civil war.

Cheshire's allegiance as the civil war started was initially very uncertain and unclear, and although the king's presence in Chester for a few days in autumn 1642 meant that the county town, in north-west Cheshire, was thenceforth securely in royal hands, neutralism and antipathy to be drawn into the unfolding conflict was the dominant mood in most of the county during the

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

opening months of the war. However, the return to his home county of the MP Sir William Brereton, a determined and dynamic parliamentarian, at the head of a small body of troops mostly raised in, and brought with him from, the London area, transformed the situation. Entering the county from the eastern or Pennine side in January 1643 and mounting a short and overwhelmingly successful military campaign through the rest of the winter and early spring, by April 1643 Brereton had overwhelmed limited royalist resistance in the east and centre of the county and taken control of two-thirds or more of Cheshire. The king's supporters tended to fall back westwards as he advanced, seeking refuge in and around the county town, thus bolstering royalist control over the western part of the county – Chester itself and its more rural hinterland, the Dee Valley and the Wirral. The royalist position in western Cheshire was also reinforced by the strength of royalism in neighbouring north-east Wales and, indeed, across pretty much the whole of the Principality. Thereafter, Cheshire was a divided and contested county until very near the end of the war. Brereton became parliament's commander-in-chief and county boss of most of Cheshire, fairly secure in the east and centre of the county and with his HQ at Nantwich. The western parts of the county remained in the king's hands until very close to the end of the war, with a large royalist garrison installed in strongly-defended Chester and commanded by a string of royalist governors, most notably during the second half of the war by John, Lord Byron. Until at length in summer and autumn 1645 the parliamentarians were able to isolate, surround and besiege Chester, leading to its surrender early in 1646, Cheshire was a county divided by a remarkably durable and quite static line separating royalist territory in the west from parliamentarian territory in the centre and east. Beeston Castle stood more or less slap bang on this long-lasting and at least intermittently-contested frontier.

Brereton and his parliamentarian forces made the first move, though it is poorly documented. Our knowledge rests largely on an account, and that a brief one, written at the end of the war, once both Beeston and Chester had finally fallen, by Nathaniel Lancaster, a puritan-inclined and parliamentarian-supporting minister who served as a chaplain to Brereton's army during the war years. Additionally, as the incumbent of Tarporley, the nearest substantial settlement to Beeston, he was probably in a good position to know about what went on there. According to Lancaster, at some point early

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

in the war, probably during his initial campaign of late winter 1643, Brereton secured Beeston Castle, apparently without opposition, as it had not been held and fortified by the king’s men. ‘At the beginning of these warres, and many yeares before, this piece was no more than the skelliton, or bare anatomy of a castle, Sir William Brereton prizing it by the situation, caused the breaches to be made up with mud-walls, the well of the outer ward to be censed, and a few rooms erected, the old walls being the greatest part of the fabrick.’ The castle, which had been little used by the crown since the late medieval period, had been sold off into private hands at the beginning of the seventeenth century. John Leland had described it as ‘in ruins’ as early as the 1540s. But the curtain walls were evidently still largely standing at the time of the civil war, breaches in them could be adequately repaired not by rebuilding in stone but through patching with turf or earthworks, and in any case the position of the castle, even if it was partly dilapidated, afforded it enormous potential still. Doubtless, timber-framed accommodation for the new parliamentarian garrison which was installed by Brereton could quickly be constructed – there was no shortage of space in the expansive outer ward.



Plate 8: A contemporary woodcut of Sir William Brereton, Parliament’s commander-in-chief in Cheshire for almost the whole of the main civil war. Like Cromwell, he was exempted from the terms of the Self-Denying Ordinance and allowed to resume his command and campaigns, not least against Beeston Castle and Cheshire, in 1645–46, as shown in a collection of woodcuts of leading parliamentarian officers published slightly later in the 1640s.

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

The royalist cause in western Cheshire was reinvigorated towards the end of the year with the landing along the Dee estuary of several thousand reinforcements who had crossed the Irish Sea to fight for the king on the mainland in the wake of the truce or cessation he had concluded with the Irish Catholics. Refreshed within Chester, they formed the core of an expanded royalist force which in mid-winter, and displaying a level of brutality hitherto not seen in the civil war within Cheshire, captured a string of parliamentary bases and outposts across the central parts of the county. In fact, this proved to be but a temporary boost to royalist fortunes in the county, for in late January 1644 much of this reinforced army was caught and torn to pieces in battle while it was unsuccessfully besieging Brereton’s HQ at Nantwich, and in the wake of the battle many of the surviving royalist troops who had lately crossed from Ireland either deserted or defected to parliament. Brereton was able quickly to recover most of the Cheshire bases he had recently lost, but not Beeston.

In mid-December 1643, Beeston Castle came under attack from the new Cheshire royalist army. At the time it was being held for parliament by a small garrison under the command of a governor, ‘Captaine [Thomas] Steele (a rough-hewn man, no souldier) whose care was more to see it repaired, victualled, and to live quietly there, than the safe custody of it’, or so Nathaniel Lancaster claimed in hindsight. ‘After it was well stored with provision, the army out of Ireland ... drew into Cheshire. Steele had as sufficient notice of the danger, as we of his negligence’, Lancaster continued. The royalists attacked before dawn on 13 December. A later tradition has it that the castle fell when the royalist Captain Sandford led a party of eight intrepid men in scaling the sheer cliff and then surprising and capturing the inner ward. It is an inherently improbable tale and is not borne out by the contemporary accounts, none of which explicitly refer to this dramatic and daring feat of mountaineering. More prosaically but more plausibly and consistent with the sources, Sandford and his party of eight firelocks probably managed first to get into the more lightly defended outer ward at some point and then to gain entry into the inner ward and take control of that ward. As Lancaster put it, ‘the enemie suddenly surprised the inner ward, where was nothing but stones, and a good prospect’. Another local writer who has left an account of the war in the county, Thomas Malbon, is a touch more expansive: ‘Captyn Sandford with 8 of his fyrelocks ... gott into the

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

upper warde of Beeston Castle, by a byeway, through treachery, as was supposed’. It may be that the bulk of the royalist force had been mounting a diversionary attack outside the outer gatehouse on the eastern side of the castle, distracting the governor and the bulk of his sixty-strong garrison. At that point, Steele seems to have decided to mount no further resistance and instead to relinquish control of the castle without further fighting. As Malbon related, ‘after a shorte parly betwixt them, [he] receyved Sandford into his lodginge in the lower warde (beinge a very stronge hold), where they dyned together and much beere was sente up into the heigher warde, by the saide Steele unto Sandfords soldyers, and after dyner an agreement was made betwixt them that Steele shold deliver upp the castle with all ammunycon, goods, provision and what els, presentlie to the said Captyn Sandford’, Steele and his sixty soldiers being allowed to leave with their colours but nothing else.

Steele, who by profession had been a cheese merchant in Cheshire, was deemed to be negligent and cowardly in surrendering such a strong and very well-supplied base so quickly and with little or no fight; he had not helped his cause when, immediately after the royalists took control of the upper ward and as related by Malbon, he dined with the royalist commander at his own stronghold in the lower ward – presumably the outer gatehouse – and also sent beer up to the royalists holding the inner ward. Steele was promptly arrested and imprisoned when he turned up in parliamentary Nantwich, in part to save him from being attacked and possibly lynched by fellow parliamentarians. He was tried in January 1644 by a military council of war, condemned and on 29 January executed in a walled enclosure near Nantwich church, shot while (again in Thomas Malbon’s words) ‘leanynge his backe to the crosse wall theire (after a very longe confession and repentance of his synnes made) by twoe comon soldyers, the one shott him in the belly and the other in his throate; whoe was presentlie carryed awaye, beinge laid in a coffyn standinge on the grounde by him’ and quickly buried in the adjoining graveyard. An autobiography by another local godly minister, Henry Newcome, claimed that, before his death, Steele had denied any treachery behind his surrender of the castle, while admitting that ‘God had taken away his courage’, though he also confessed to a past immoral lifestyle, travelling around the county as a cheese factor and taking the opportunity for ‘desperate sin’, frequenting an inn where, arriving late one evening, ‘the maid

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
'THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES':
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

of the house got up to let him in and was all bare and partly undressed; he took fire at this sight of her and offered lewdness to her, which she resisted not, and so whenever he came that way he lived in this sin with that woman'. An account printed in the royalist newspaper *Mercurius Aulicus* alleged that he had in fact confessed that he 'kept two young women for his own sinful delight'.

While the Cheshire royalist army suffered a stinging rebuff outside Nantwich in January 1644 and largely collapsed, the new royalist garrison installed in Beeston Castle the previous month proved more durable and remained in quiet and largely undisputed control of its new acquisition until near the end of the year. Not until November 1644 did Brereton threaten the castle in force, encouraged to do so by news that the royalist garrison was running short of supplies. Rather than launch an all-out assault or attempt to storm the castle, true to his usual preference for caution and for playing the long game, Brereton sought to blockade and besiege the castle. In mid-November he occupied and placed parliamentary troops in a number of farms and agricultural buildings around the foot of the hill, in the process also denying the king's men access to grain they had stored in barns there. The royalists attempted counter-strikes, in early December sending out a substantial party who descended the hill 'by a pryvatt waye' and surprised a body of parliamentarians who were 'very carelesse[ly] att dynner' in 'Owens house standinge att the foote of the castle hyll', killing most of them and setting the building on fire. The parliamentary operation continued, initially apparently as a loose blockade, which did not prevent the castle from being resupplied from time to time, but from summer 1645 onwards as an increasingly close siege which did shut off royalist supply lines. The parliamentarians constructed their own siege-works, including an earthwork fort, around the foot of the castle, some of them threateningly close to the castle's outer gatehouse. After eighteen weeks of a close but otherwise not very active siege – there was sporadic exchange of musket fire, though Nathaniel Lancaster gleefully claimed that a sympathetic gun-smith had entered the castle under guise of being a royalist supporter coming to overhaul their muskets, but instead had sabotaged their guns so that thereafter 'none could take such aim as to come near the mark' – the defenders were at length starved into surrender, 'brought to such extremities for want of provision'. When the king's men, comprising a governor and 56

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

troops, finally surrendered on terms in mid-November 1645, ‘there was neither meat, ale, nor beere found in the castle, save onely a peece of a turkey pye, two bisketts, a lyve peacock and a peahen’. According to another account, ‘they were brought so low that they had eaten their cattis and had not provision for that night’. Lancaster added a bitter postscript: ‘High conditions for a most bloody, insolent countrey-wasteing enemy, and them brought to such a starved condition. Their march [out, having surrendered] on the Sabbath occasioned the breach of that holy rest to many in the country, who attended their first opportunity to enquire after their plundered goods, stoard up in that cage of violence and denne of theives.’



Plate 9: Taken from the outer ward, looking towards the inner, this photograph conveys both the unusually large extent of the outer ward and the way that it slopes, albeit more gently than the steep hillsides below, rising up to the inner ward at the highest point of the summit.

Beeston Castle was slighted on parliament’s orders once the main civil war was over and it played no part in the renewed fighting of the later 1640s. The extensive ruins, now in the hands of Historic England, are open to the public

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

and fully accessible. There are a few features discernible which may reflect modifications undertaken when the castle was refortified during the civil war, including the thickening of part of the masonry of the curtain wall in the inner ward and various medieval arrow slits which have been either closed up or conversely slightly widened, perhaps to enable musketeers to fire out. Several apertures which appear to be gunports, permitting defensive artillery to be fired, have also been cut into the earlier walls, even though there is no evidence that the parliamentarian or royalist garrisons possessed ordnance or, indeed, that artillery played any part in civil war operations at Beeston. Further evidence of the castle’s role in the civil war has been revealed through archaeological work, especially a series of excavations undertaken between the late 1960s and mid-1980s which investigated much of the inner ward, a large area within and around the outer gatehouse, and further selected sites across the outer ward. A wide assemblage of artefacts dating from the civil war era were found, reflecting the reuse and reoccupation of the castle then and the day-to-day life of the garrison troops stationed there. They include genuine and forged coins of the reigns of James I and Charles I, gaming counters, pieces of pottery of variable quality from storage vessels, drinking vessels, plates and bowls, a book clasp, spurs, horseshoes, belt hooks, buckles, assorted keys, a heel from a boot, a handle from a glass vessel, pieces of broken glass beakers, knives, spoons, a powder flask nozzle, lead musket balls, parts of moulds in which musket balls could be cast and large numbers of clay tobacco pipes. Three human skeletons of young males were also found, buried in shallow graves tucked just inside the north curtain wall of the inner ward, at least two of them originally interred in coffins, all apparently dating from the period of the civil war.

Sources

The main contemporary sources drawn upon here, and from which the quotations are taken, are *Sir William Brereton’s Letter Sent to the Honourable William Lenthall*, which incorporates Nathaniel Lancaster’s *Chester’s Enlargement after Three Years Bondage* (1646); Thomas Malbon, *Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties*, ed. J. Hall (*Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 19, 1889); Henry Newcome, *The Autobiography of Henry Newcome*, ed. R. Parkinson (Chetham Society, first series, 26, 1852); the royalist newspaper *Mercurius Aulicus*; and material found in Sir William Brereton’s letter-books calendared by R.N. Dore, *The Letter Books of Sir*

CROMWELLIAN BRITAIN XXXII
‘THAT CAGE OF VIOLENCE AND DENNE OF THEIVES’:
BEESTON CASTLE, CHESHIRE

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TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE OUTBREAK OF CIVIL WAR IN ENGLAND IN 1642 CAUSED BY DISPUTES OVER RELIGION?

by Hattie Filmore

In 1642, religion and politics were inextricably entwined. While the outbreak of civil war was largely caused by disputes over religion, there were also constitutional crises and longer-term financial issues that divided Charles I and Parliament that cannot be dismissed. Ultimately, even though it was religion to the greatest extent, it was a combination of all three that resulted in civil war.

The medium-term causes of the Civil War were dominated by the 1637 Prayer Book Rebellion in Scotland and subsequent National Covenant of February 1638, indicating that disputes over religion were the main cause of civil war. When Charles I refused to yield to the Scottish Covenanters and demands of 'The Tables' who were rejecting the religious innovations of the Personal Rule, the First Bishops' War erupted. Under the inexperienced Earl of Arundel, England were defeated by Scotland. Comparatively, the Scottish retained their strong sense of unity thanks to their National Covenant and Presbyterian Kirk acting as wellsprings of national identity. That Charles I would attempt to impose the Anglican Prayer Book there demonstrates how ignorant the king was of Scotland; this incident serves as evidence of the king's arrogance that would later prevent him from negotiating with the Parliament and lead to the outbreak of civil war.

The deep opposition that emerged across Scotland, for example in the riot at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh, shows that religion was at the forefront of people's lives and loyalties at this period. Merely the king's attempt to impose episcopacy in Scotland was severe enough to result in the Bishops' Wars. Dissatisfied by the terms of the Pacification of Berwick and determined to fight again but short of money, Charles called the Short Parliament in April 1640. This drew to an end his period of Personal Rule and turned the direction of political developments away from absolutism, a prospect which many had feared due to the lack of Parliament and harsh enforcement of Laudianism. For example, though notably an extreme one, the case of Burton, Bastwick and Prynne in 1637. With Parliament in session,

the resentment from the king's Personal Rule could be released. The severity of religious disputes outside of Parliament is evidenced by the 1640 Root and Branch Petition, which was signed by 15,000 Londoners. It is important that the English people's resentment was focused on financial and political concerns as well as religious ones. Although in 1625 the king had been permitted to collect tonnage and poundage for one year only, he had continued to solicit the tax; this ongoing grievance was exacerbated by the king's use of fiscal feudalism and fiscal antiquarianism, for example through introducing an annual Ship Money tax. The Short Parliament, who refused to provide funds without an addressance of their grievances, was quickly dissolved; this could suggest that finance was of greater portent to the king in the medium term than the religious disputes in Scotland. The Treaty of Ripon that concluded the Second Bishops' War required England to pay £850 a day to the Scottish, a mounting pressure further indicative that finance was the crucial medium-term factor. That said, it was the religious riots in Scotland that enabled Parliament to meet and resentment over the Personal Rule to be unleashed in England. The king's recognition of the divisive nature of religion was shown by his decision to make protesting against the Anglican Prayer Book treasonable. Therefore, in the medium term, divisions that arose over religion, particularly in Scotland, were of greater significance to the outbreak of civil war than disputes over finance or politics.

On the other hand, it was political disputes in Westminster that had the greatest role in establishing the two sides to the Civil War in the short term. The Treaty of Ripon caused the Long Parliament to meet, which enabled Pym and his followers to galvanise their support. The Long Parliament served to dismantle the tools of the Personal Rule through a series of acts, such as the Triennial Act, Own Consent Act, and abolishment of the Courts of High Commission and Star Chamber. An unintended consequence of the abolishment of these religious courts was the removal of censorship, which they had controlled. Propaganda increased exponentially into the 'paper wars' and politicised the nation; this chain of events illustrates the entwined nature of politics and religion. While political concerns were at the forefront of disputes between the Long Parliament and King Charles I in the year following November 1640, the importance of religion should not be understated. Alongside Strafford and the Ship Money judges, Archbishop

Laud was amongst the impeachments of the Long Parliament. Throughout the Personal Rule, Laud had introduced innovations to the Church and a draconian enforcement of these hated religious practices. The communion table was moved to the chancel and decorated with ornate cloth, altar rails, and crucifixes as befitting Laud's belief in the Beauty of Holiness. However, the fears of Catholicism and absolutism that these religious innovations substantiated were widespread and deeply felt, as demonstrated by the 1627 altar controversy and Laud's impeachment. Despite Laud's punishment, it was Strafford who faced the greatest retribution. With news of the Army Plot and use of the intimidating London Mob, Pym was able to persuade the Commons, Lords, and king to sign Strafford's execution warrant. The king would never forgive Parliament for Wentworth's execution, which arose from parliamentary political innovations. Strafford's Bill of Attainder was passed by 204-59 votes, whereas the Root and Branch Bill, a redraft of the earlier petition, was passed by a narrower margin of 139-108 in the Commons and rejected in the Lords; this demonstrates that resentment over the politics of the king's Personal Rule was greater than that over Laudian religious practices. By dismantling the financial architecture of the Personal Rule, for example through the Ship Money Act and Tonnage and Poundage Act, the Long Parliament was able to resolve the majority of financial grievances by 1642. Therefore, while it could be argued that either religion or politics was central to the shorter-term disputes that escalated into civil war, finance certainly was not.

While there was a distinct political strand to the Irish Rebellion of October 1641, the roots of the revolt lay in religion which supports the notion that religion was at the core of events that would lead to civil war. Plantations, such as that in Ulster, had been settled by Protestant English and Presbyterian Scottish on confiscated Catholic land. So, the two sides of the conflict in Ireland were determined by religion. For many, the king's aloof response, combined with Phelim O'Neill's claim that Charles had ordered the massacres, proved that the king had effectuated the massacres. Atrocities such as the House at Shewic and the Bridge of Portadown Massacre spread into England through wood carvings and news-sheets, further exacerbating this climate of mistrust and unravelling the consensus that had emerged over the previous year. The Irish Rebellion was so significant because it created a crunch point over royal prerogative: Parliament was unwilling to allow the

king control of an army to crush the rebellion. Parliament's radical Militia Bill was highly contentious, persuading MPs such as Sir Ralph Hopton and Sir Arthur Capel to become Royalists. The initial compromise proffered, the Additional Instruction, escalated into the Grand Remonstrance, 206 articles on constitutional and religious reform which had to be accepted or rejected in their entirety. The Grand Remonstrance was passed in the Commons by a narrow 159-148 votes, but it was shelved before reaching the Lords. While the intensely divisive Grand Remonstrance served to change both religion and politics, other acts of Parliament passed during this period that concern religion suggest it was religious disputes that were central to debates of the time. For example, the Bishops' Exclusion Bill which received an extraordinary 30,000 signatures. The Irish Rebellion acted as a spark, triggering fears in England, legislation and divisions in Parliament, and questions over the king's royal prerogative to command the army. The religious conflict at the heart of the Irish Rebellion had far-reaching consequences indicating that, in 1641, religion was the central factor to the outbreak of civil war.

However, in the immediate short term of 1642, political disputes in Westminster were arguably more significant to the outbreak of civil war later that year. Following the Grand Remonstrance, Charles had been in a stalemate with Parliament. Until, in January 1642, the king marched with 500 soldiers to the House of Commons and broke parliamentary privilege by entering the chamber. The Failed Arrest of the Five MPs was greatly important to the outbreak of civil war because, in the aftermath, the king was forced to flee London for Hampton Court Palace. As many of his loyal supporters followed Charles out of the capital, the active politicians and influential people remaining in the city were, for the most part, radical and Parliamentarian. When the king's return was erroneously rumoured, citizens from London became willing to fight against him. The Buckinghamshire Uprising, in support of the Londoners, illustrates that sentiments against the king were felt strongly outside of the capital. Although the king was widely mistrusted, acts of parliamentary absolutism, such as the Militia Ordinance and Act of £400,000, particularly when combined with the anti-enclosure riots that erupted nationwide, caused such fear of disruption of the social order that many moderates pledged their commitment to the Royalist side. After the radical Nineteen Propositions and King's Answer, any chance of

negotiation between the two sides had dissolved. Across England, people were polarised as both sides armed and recruited. It was the political turmoil of 1642, catalysed by the Failed Arrest of the Five MPs, that led immediately to the outbreak of civil war; however, religion acted as an underlying driving force for both sides. Arguably the most important role religion played in the outbreak of civil war was King Charles I's obdurate faith in the Divine Right of Kings which prevented him from negotiating with Parliament and making concessions. Parliament, with their Nineteen Propositions and removal of Catholics from the House of Lords, were motivated by Puritan zeal. Similarly, the London Mob were radicalised by feelings of religious righteousness that escalated alongside the political extremity. In Ireland, the ongoing massacres, with their religious roots, provided a high-tension backdrop for events in England. Not as severe but nevertheless significant, Scottish commissioners who had travelled to London continued to advocate Presbyterianism and contributed to rising pressures. So, while it initially appears that political and constitutional disputes were the main factor contributing to the outbreak of civil war within this second set of trigger events, religion was actually at the core of the Parliamentary and Royalist division in 1642.

Overall, while disputes over religion were not the sole cause of the outbreak of civil war, they were undoubtedly the most important factor. The divisive nature of religious policies and practices in England, Scotland, and Ireland can be traced back through Charles I's Personal Rule. Comparatively, explicit and widespread political disputes did not arise until November 1640, when the Long Parliament was called into session. Although 1642 was dominated by events triggered by and creating disputes over politics, royal prerogative, and parliamentary privilege, religion was the underlying factor that influenced these attitudes and actions. Whereas religion and politics were so closely entangled in the 17th century that they were difficult to separate, finance can be considered as a more isolated, and altogether less significant, factor. That no financial issues were raised by the Nineteen Propositions demonstrates that the resentment caused by the king's financial policies during the Personal Rule had largely dissipated by 1642. On the other hand, religious and political debates were rife up to and throughout the Civil War. Ultimately, the outbreak of civil war was a result of religious disputes to a

greater extent than political disputes because the political disputes that arose were only escalations of long-standing, underlying religious differences.

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Farah Mendlesohn, *Creating Memory: Historical Fiction and the English Civil Wars*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. (337 pp.) ISBN 978-3030545369, £24.99 paperback.

reviewed by Dr Miranda Malins

The Civil Wars, which were bitterly contested in contemporary print, have continued to rage on the page ever since the last shot was fired. This is understandable given that, as Professor Mendlesohn puts it in her new book, the wars present ‘a contested history important to the national narrative’. We are familiar with this in academic and popular history, journalism and commentary, but there is another active theatre of this conflict we should not overlook: ‘Historical fiction about this period’, Mendlesohn writes, ‘is a genuine cultural battleground’.

In this rich survey, *Creating Memory: Historical Fiction and the English Civil Wars*, Mendlesohn explores this terrain and, in so doing, offers a holistic portrait of the Civil Wars and their cultural afterlife. Readers should not let the title of the series to which the book belongs, ‘Critical Approaches to Children’s Literature’, lull them into thinking it a work narrow or simplistic in reach. Mendlesohn takes a wide-ranging approach, noting the truth that ‘historical fiction is one of the gateway fictions to adulthood’ and that most of the authors covered ‘saw historical fiction as a way to teach history’. The resulting analysis tells us much both about the Civil War period itself and about the political, social and moral world of the succeeding generations of authors who made sense of it. The book’s opening premise is that the historical fiction tracks the changing historiography, or as the title of Chapter 3 has it, ‘As we understand history, so we understand fiction.’

The book examines 186 works of historical fiction covering the 1620s to 1688 and written over the course of 300 years: from Daniel Defoe’s 1720 *Memoirs of a Cavalier* to my own first novel *The Puritan Princess* of 2020. These are set within a sequence of lucid contextual essays which, in themselves, offer a succinct but sophisticated history of the Civil Wars. Ranging from ‘Great Men’ and ‘Great Battles’ and the narrative events of the Civil Wars and Commonwealth to their geographical reach across the three kingdoms, cultural landscape, religion and gender politics, these sections would provide

a perfect primer for the period for anyone, regardless of their interest in fiction.

The detailed readings of the individual historical novels are entertaining in themselves: it is a joy to gallop onto the battlefields with their heroes, eavesdrop on spies in the shadows, or draw up a chair to a family fireside. But of even more interest are the changing assumptions and social patterns the stories reveal and their relationships to historical texts. Mendlesohn explains that Defoe was able to write his *Memoirs of a Cavalier* because by the 1720s ‘the heat had seeped out of the argument enough to make room for fiction’. He was influenced by the real memoirs lately published from the period which, in turn, gave him ‘an ideal cloak for sly commentary’ if readers read his version ‘straight’ in the way they had the real memoirs. The resulting fiction is, to Mendlesohn, ‘an account far more aligned with Ludlow’s memoirs than with Clarendon’s, a parliamentary account in Royalist clothing.’

The Civil Wars had to wait another century before becoming a topic for novelists with Sir Walter Scott’s *Woodstock* (1826) setting up some of the patterns which recur in others’ work. Captain Frederick Maryatt’s *The Children of the New Forest* (1847) is perhaps the best known example of the genre and the first true children’s book in this survey. Like Scott, Maryatt constructed the mythos of the suffering royalist, but also impressed the wrongness of the Parliamentary cause upon children not through political discussion but an atrocity narrative. In this world, loyalty is all. To be a supporter of the king is to be part of the natural order so that only Parliamentary allegiance is deemed political. This explains why some Royalist texts contain no discussion of politics and struggle to understand the motivations of Parliamentarians as real. Mendlesohn credits this trend with influence upon the whole cultural landscape of civil war memorial, the imagery of which she sees as tilting Royalist with the intellectual landscape tilting Parliamentary. ‘Generally, when we look at the stories that are being told, the Royalist narratives ... convince by telling less, by offering little context and much imagery. In contrast, Parliamentary sources of all types offer more detail, more politics, more context, and crucially, more discussion.’

The conflict between loyalty and rebellion is often expressed in intergenerational duty. In the majority of these novels willingness to take one's lead from one's parents dominates: 'In text after text duty to follow one's father is more important than actually thinking.' We have to wait until the 1890s for a protagonist to resist their parents (something Mendlesohn sees as reflective of contemporary shifts in the understanding of childhood) and it is only in the 1920s, 1970s and 2010s that rebellion outweighed the call of duty overall. Women in these stories were particularly trapped by familial ties. Where characters do change sides it is usually women who do so to follow their men. In Dora McChesney's *Miriam Cromwell* (1897), Oliver's fictional niece is persuaded by an injured cavalier to take a message to Prince Rupert with whom she instantly falls in love. In Lawrence Cowen's *Bible and Sword* (1919), John Milton's first wife Mary and Oliver Cromwell's eldest daughter Bridget act as sleeper Royalist agents attempting to influence their men. With this perspective, the fact that Romance novels are predominantly Royalist is perhaps no surprise.

The 1880s was, in Mendlesohn's view, the first 'golden age' of Civil War fiction, probably a reflection of the Victorians' obsession with the Stuarts. Prevailing views of the Civil Wars were shifting by now – with the work of Thomas Carlyle, S. R. Gardiner, C. H. Firth and others – so that the self-made Oliver Cromwell had become an increasingly heroic figure. Even for those unsympathetic to Cromwell, the Great Man reading of events made his inclusion in novels irresistible and it is striking how many fictional protagonists get to meet him face to face. The second golden age of Civil War fiction ran from the 1920s to the 1960s and expanded both the settings and analytical depth of the novels, reflecting the concerns of the 20th century and academic shifts. We see more home-front stories in this period, such as Daphne du Maurier's *The King's General* (1946), and a greater understanding of choices of allegiance. On the Parliamentarian side, boys still follow their fathers, but at least now they appear to understand why their fathers believe as they do. In place of canting hypocrites, Puritan characters, including Cromwell, become more fully rounded while Royalist opinions too are fleshed out. The focus on Cromwell also relents, with readers introduced to Sir Thomas Fairfax in Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Rider of the White Horse* (1959).

Strikingly, the Civil Wars fell completely out of fashion for historical fiction between 1977 and 2001. This was in marked contrast to the academic focus it received during these decades as a Marxist understanding of the war as class struggle gave way to localist history and analysis of religious and cultural behaviour. We had to wait 30 years to see the influence of this research in historical fiction, with the twenty-first century's 'more nuanced world building'. In particular, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate – for so long dismissed as the 'interregnum' – are now enjoying the attention they deserve both in historical research and the fiction that reflects this. Yet there are still more and richer stories that historical fiction could be telling about this complex period: stories that are more urban, more political, with characters from the lower classes or living with injury, or with a greater sense of the British, even international scope of the wars.

Three hundred years on, the Civil War in fiction is finally evening out. Superficially, Mendlesohn explains in examining the leanings of these 186 novels, 'the King wins the fictional argument' but over this period 'the balance of bias has shifted'. If we take the Royalist attitude that loyalty is so absolute that even to be neutral suggests an affiliation with Parliament and so add the neutral texts to the Parliamentary ones, then almost half of the texts are not supportive of the king to one degree or another. Certainly since the year 2000 the distribution has been more or less equal, but with romance remaining solidly cavalier. 'Currently', Mendlesohn concludes 'King and Parliament are running neck and neck', though notably 'Royalist-centred texts are far more likely to be published by major publishing houses'. Perhaps her assessment that Royalist texts have traditionally been preoccupied with social stability and Parliamentary ones with new opportunities is relevant in more ways than one.

Mendlesohn sees the present day as a renaissance in Civil War historical fiction which is a cause for great celebration. This is not only because popular attention paid to this period is always welcome but, as this fascinating book shows, because historical fiction is a rich genre within which to explore the complexities of both the mid-seventeenth century and our own time.

Stephen Roberts, *Financing the English Revolution in Worcestershire: The Sales of Confiscated Church and Crown Property, 1646–60*. Worcestershire Historical Society, Occasional Publications 14, 2023. (28 pp.) ISSN 0140-9913, £3 paperback (available direct from the Worcestershire Historical Society).

reviewed by Professor Peter Gaunt

This short card-bound publication springs from a lecture which the author gave to the Worcestershire Historical Society in autumn 2022. It provides a clear, crisp and thoroughly researched study of the origins, practicalities, course and outcomes of the series of sales within the county of various confiscated ecclesiastical and royal properties, as authorised by the Long Parliament and the Rump, in order to raise money for the state.

Each wave of sales is explored in turn, from the earliest, beginning in the latter half of 1646, just after the main civil war had ended and only a few weeks after royalist Worcester had surrendered, with the sale of episcopal (and archiepiscopal) properties. That was followed in turn by the sale of properties owned by deans and chapters and by the crown in and from 1649–50, with the more modest process of selling off the less valuable royal fee-farm rents bringing up the rear from 1650–51. (The post-war confiscation of the lands and properties of individual wealthy royalists and their subsequent sale, or in some cases their retention by their owners via compounding, is mentioned and briefly discussed here, but is not explored in any depth.) In each case, the framework and processes set out by the parliamentary statutes are outlined, generally involving surveyors and valuers working on the ground, other county officers who might deal with those wishing to buy, and often central, London-based bodies and officials with whom the sale would be finalised and enacted, at prices fixed at a multiple of the estimated annual rental value of the estate, those multipliers varying from between eight and thirteen times the annual value.

In order to reconstruct how these mechanisms worked within Worcestershire and the impact of the sales within the county, the analysis draws on a wealth of surviving archival sources, some of them, notably those relating to the sales of crown lands, in the National Archives, but many of them now to be found in the Worcestershire county archives. At the time of

the sales, the Bishop of Worcester held 17 manors within the county and the dean and chapter 28 manors, while the crown had only a scattering of estates in Worcestershire. Though noting that it is sometimes hard to compute the final and overall sums raised through the sales, Roberts suggests that episcopal properties in Worcestershire sold for around £24,000 in total, dean and chapter lands for around £45,000, crown lands for a little over £10,000 and fee-farm rents for around £8,000. However, it is also stressed that the money directly raised from these sales both in Worcestershire and nationally, while clearly substantial and helpful to the generally cash-strapped regimes of the later 1640s and the 1650s, represented only part of the value accruing from the process. Perhaps more importantly, it is suggested, it provided security and encouragement for further public loans to the state, especially from those who had already lent and who were invited to double their investment. With realistic and quite modest valuations and competitive prices, there was no shortage of purchasers of estates within Worcestershire, and no sign that, even in what had been a quite strongly royalist county, there was much reluctance to acquire from parliamentary regimes the estates that they had seized; the buyers are shown to be a mixture of existing tenants, who generally had first refusal, local families of good standing who were looking to advance, army officers, some local, others not, MPs in the Long Parliament, London merchants and City civic officers, and other speculators and investors with no known existing links to the county. The London merchant George Coney, who in 1654 took a stand against paying Protectoral customs duties, and Nicholas Lockyer, one of Oliver Cromwell's chaplains, were among those buying properties in Worcestershire.

This sharply-focused analysis, concise but thorough, not only provides a role model for, but also demonstrates the value of, county-based studies of the mechanisms and results of the post-war sale of confiscated church and crown land. In his valuable and pithy conclusion, the author reiterates his findings and also questions whether the state and the people got a good deal from all of this, noting how the impecunious regimes of the day sought generally short-term gains by selling off so much land quickly and for less than might have been squeezed from it. In a neat and maybe somewhat tongue-in-cheek ending, Roberts highlights the parallels of all this with the Thatcherite privatisation and sale of formerly nationalised industries in the

1980s and with the then-government's series of 'Tell Sid' TV ads plugging the process of flogging off the state's assets.

David Farr, ***Oliver Cromwell's Kin, 1643–1726: The private and public worlds of the English Revolution and Restoration***. Routledge, 2023. (x and 355 pp.) ISBN 978-1-032-40344-1, £130 hardback.

reviewed by Professor John Morrill

This utterly fascinating book is horrifically expensive, a price one normally associates with certain Dutch publishers. Happily there is an online Kindle version at Amazon for £38, and the title page of the hardback already offers the ISBN of a future paperback, so if you cannot get to a research library, all is not lost.

Over the past 20 years, while holding down a responsible school-teaching post, David Farr has produced major scholarly biographies of John Lambert (the subject of his Cambridge PhD), of Henry Ireton, of Thomas Harrison, of Hezekiah Haynes and a study of the Blackwell dynasty of financiers (as well as a series of off-shoot articles). Now he offers us a study of those men whose closeness to Cromwell and (importantly) to one another was formed and reinforced by marriage bonds. The main protagonists are Henry Ireton and Charles Fleetwood who were successively married to Oliver's eldest daughter, Bridget; and John Disbrowe, married to his sister, Jane. But importantly there is a lot of space devoted to their families – Ireton's brothers and children, Fleetwood's children by his first and second wife, and the relations of all members of these branches of the family with Cromwell's sons and *their* children, down into the eighteenth century. And the feisty Cromwell women, above all Bridget, emerge as significant actors in their own right. It is, to repeat myself, a fascinating read.

The book draws on a deeply impressive range of sources. At long last a *proper* study of the more than 100 surviving letters between Charles Fleetwood and Henry Cromwell, when they tried to let their familial ties compensate for very deep conflicts over how Ireland should be governed in the years when Charles was *de jure* Lord Deputy there and Henry *de facto* Lord Deputy. The

bibliography lists significant holdings in about 30 national and local archives and an intimidating list of printed sources. David Farr's scouring of Chancery Records (for aficionados, classes TNA C2-3, 5-11, 22, 93, 103) reveal a huge amount of information about the interconnectedness of members of the family supporting one another, and occasionally competing. Similarly, a deep trawl through wills reveals much about how they built up their fortunes in the 1650s and defended them after 1660. It also reveals how different branches are to be found acting as executors and beneficiaries of one another.

The persistence of loyalties forged in war, long after defeat and apparent dissolution, has never been so fully demonstrated. And other webs of connection linking this central group with the wider Cromwell affinities (of blood, marriage, and Eastern Anglian financial management) is further strengthened by looking at the marriages of close family members to one another, via London apprenticeships, and particular Independent or Baptist Congregationalists and preachers. The dedication of books by radical preachers and others to members of Cromwell's core group is especially revealing in the case of dedications to Bridget Cromwell-Ireton-Fleetwood.

The discussion on one such book leads on to an intimidatingly dense paragraph which leads on to a more relaxed general discussion. It begins at the end of a section on the religious texts – by men and women – dedicated to Bridget Cromwell-Fleetwood. William Allen had served in Cromwell's regiment at the end of the first Civil War and was one of the most prominent agitators at the Putney Debates. He later served as a senior officer in the army in Ireland. Amongst those he converted was his sister-in-law, herself connected to a pamphleteer who dedicated a work to Bridget. Allen was supported by the Fleetwoods in his travails with the authorities over his supposed role in publishing *Killing Noe Murder* (1657). Having established all this, David Farr continues:

Allen is also an example of a New Model soldier with kin links established through the Army. Allen was married to Elizabeth Huish, sister of Deborah Huish, married to Allen's fellow Baptist and Quarter-Master in Ireland, John Vernon. Vernon had been Ireton's secretary in Ireland and was another officer concerned to protect the influence of the Army. Indeed the various connections between the

New Model officers and Baptists in Ireland, reinforce how military and religious links could lead to kinship bonds. James Standish, who was Ireland's Treasurer in the 1650s was Allen's kin. At least three of Hewson's [Governor of Dublin's] daughters married Baptist officers, including Colonel Richard Lawrence and Major Henry Jones, brother of the Welsh Regicide, Colonel John Jones who was to marry into Cromwell's family.

Wow. And then more expansive paragraphs on the importance of such networks. This is a book which adds whole layers to our understanding of the dynamics of the 1650s and the long afterlife of the radical underground. I could do the same for the webs of connection of Henry Ireton's very different brothers, or, in contrast, Farr's careful analysis of the steady rise of John Claypole. In 1646 he married Cromwell's favourite (so it is said) daughter Elizabeth, wearing his puritanism quite lightly and making horse breeding and horsemanship a key to his closeness to the Lord Protector. Farr shows how he played a much more understated but important part in the civilianisation of the later Protectorate. This book, picaresque as it is at times, enriches our understanding both of the Protectorate and the long shadows that it cast. It is very well worth seeking out.

Lloyd Bowen, *Early Modern Wales, c.1536–c.1689: Ambiguous Nationhood*. University of Wales Press, 2022. (xiii + 286 pp.) ISBN 9781786839589, £16.99 paperback.

reviewed by Professor Peter Gaunt

Broad but scholarly studies of early modern Wales are not especially thick on the ground and this new book by an author who specialises in the civil war period, and who spoke at the Association's 2022 study day on the civil war in Wales, is to be especially welcomed on a number of grounds.

First, it is very attractively and elegantly written and presented, the engaging text providing not a straightforward narrative of the Principality over this period, but rather a series of thematic assessments. These cover the obvious, including politics, political outlooks and office-holding, the process and

impact of the Protestant Reformation (slow off the mark and gradual, but in the end effective and taken forward under Welsh leadership); also covered is the role of beliefs outside the state church, both Catholicism (which persisted, especially in some areas, though losing support by the seventeenth century) and Puritanism (outside a few centres and the circles of some charismatic Welsh preachers, not a strong force in seventeenth-century Wales, Bowen argues). However, more unusually, the author also explores, both in a dedicated chapter but also as a core theme running through the whole book, the interplay between the history and myths of Wales on the one hand and the image and self-image of the Welsh within the early modern British state on the other. This is developed further in chapters on language and society and on Welsh connections to the English, later British, monarchy based in London, as well as on Welsh populations living in England and beyond. In another chapter the author bravely explores what we know of women and gender in early modern Wales, even though to date that topic has generated only limited published work in a Welsh context. Accordingly, this chapter has a different feel and style from all the others, not so much a synthesis of existing work, but instead a series of case studies of women living in early modern Wales who have left some account of their lives and experiences.

Secondly, the book thoughtfully blends generally quite recent published work on Wales with the author's own new research drawn from contemporary sources. The approach, part synthesis, part source-based, works very well and allows Bowen to develop often innovative arguments. Hence, thirdly, this volume, published as part of a series entitled 'rethinking the history of Wales', which apparently will be pitched at encouraging fresh interpretations of and new perspectives on different periods in Welsh history, advances sometimes quite radical arguments and offers a genuinely new framework for understanding Tudor and Stuart Wales.

In the wake of the English-imposed so-called Acts of Union and the English-led Reformation at the beginning of the period under discussion, Bowen argues that the Welsh formed quite a distinctive outlook on their place within the changing English and wider British state. Resting, he believes, on a Welsh understanding of their own history and a 'foundation' myth – that they were descended from the first inhabitants of Britain, who

once occupied the whole of Britain, and that one day, as the true Britons, their time would come again – even as Welsh political independence and separateness faded in the early modern period, so the people of Wales were keen to play their (important, perhaps key) part within the wider English and British state. It is suggested that Welsh beliefs and identities led them not to a renewed drive for independence or detachment, but rather to supporting both Britishness and monarchy – all the more so after Henry Tudor, with his Welsh connections, established the new ruling dynasty in England and Wales, and when James VI and I, with his part-Tudor ancestry and at least some trace of Welsh Tudor blood in his veins, became the first in a line of British monarchs, so breathing new life into hopes that old Welsh myths would be fulfilled. A distinctive Welsh identity, born of their own history, geography, language, culture and so on, persisted through the early modern period, and the author is meticulous in exploring those aspects. However, he suggests that the overriding sentiment was for a Welsh role within Britain, integration rather than separation, and that this led on to a rather conservative loyalism to both monarchy and the reformed Church of England. All this feeds into the author's earlier arguments, set forth most clearly in his *The Politics of the Principality: Wales, c.1603–42*, stressing Welsh support for the crown and the established church in the early Stuart period, an outlook in which the Welsh gentry played the leading role, but in doing so only reflecting their communities and much wider and deeper Welsh sentiments, in turn explaining why royalism was so strong and dominant throughout almost the whole of the Principality when it came to civil war.

This is a rich and thoughtful study of early modern Wales, fizzing with ideas and arguments, many of them fresh, some of them – especially the interpretative line at the heart and core of the volume – ground-breaking and offering a potentially new framework for future work. It will be interesting to see whether other scholars of Tudor and Stuart Wales accept the thesis that Bowen advances so vigorously here and ground their work within it or whether they will choose to dispute it.

BOOK REVIEWS

Jonathan Healey, *The Blazing World: A New History of Revolutionary England*. Bloomsbury, 2023. (512 pp.) ISBN 978-1-5266-2165-8, £30 hardback.

reviewed by Dr Ismini Pells

In 1633, a Suffolk man by the name of Edmund Booth of the village of Holton found himself prosecuted by the church courts because ‘there was a fart let in the church in sermon time and he was vehemently suspected for the same’. What, one might wonder, has this to do with the revolutionary history of the seventeenth century which peaked with the Civil Wars and the (so-called) Glorious Revolution? Well, as Jonathan Healey explains in *The Blazing World: A New History of Revolutionary England*, rather more than you might have at first suspected. Healey’s presentation of the seventeenth century is one which acknowledges traditional explanations for the political crises of the times which rest on the long-term problems face by the Crowns, the personal shortcomings of individual monarchs, and the challenges faced by the Stuarts of ruling multiple kingdoms at once. But it is also a book which aims to explain how these crises were shaped by social changes such as the emergence of the literate ‘middling sorts’, a media revolution and ‘a simmering culture war between Puritans and their enemies’ (p. 3).

The seventeenth century has recently enjoyed a small but significant moment in popular publishing. Recent works including those by Jessie Childs, Paul Lay and Anna Keay have combined scholarly research with accessible prose and a nose for a good story to produce books which have successfully bridged the academic/popular gap. Interestingly, many of these works have also sought to tell their tales with an eye to the lives of those outside the traditional social elites. However, none of these matches the ambition of *The Blazing World*, to tell the tale of a whole century through the eyes of the people who lived through it.

While well-known characters take to the stage in *The Blazing World* and dominate the narrative, the performances which steal the show come from those who have long held fascination for social historians: those outside the traditional elites who were dismissed by their superiors as vulgar rabble but who had a horrible habit of influencing the outcome of political events. Along the way we meet Oliver Staines, a young servant from Cartmel in the

historic county of Lancashire (now in Cumbria) who caused a furore by bursting into the parish church in the middle of the Sunday service. He was dressed in his mistress's finery and 'married' in a mock ceremony to a fellow (male) servant, all in order to embarrass the visiting preacher who was at that moment in the midst of a sermon solemnly commemorating the first anniversary of the coronation of James I. There is the Ranter woman who in the 1650s claimed to have conceived a child by the Holy Ghost and the exasperated naval administrator who exclaimed in 1667, when the Second Anglo-Dutch War was not going according to plan, that 'I think the Devil shifts Dutchman!' The end result is a raucous, rollercoaster ride through the seventeenth century which is as engaging as it is witty.

However, there is a serious point to all the madness and mayhem. These are a people who are credited with engaging directly with political and constitutional, as well as religious, debates. These were a people who cared deeply about the issues of the day and even if their superiors did not care for their opinions, they ignored them at their peril. Political, social and cultural creativity counterbalances the division, destruction and disappointment. Life at the end of the seventeenth century, Healey argues, would have been in many ways unrecognisable to those living a hundred years earlier.

Yet is there anything about this century which would be recognisable to us today? In answering this question, Healey toes a thought-provoking but suitably cautious line. He warns us to remember that there is much that is alien about the period and 'Like the Cheshire Cat, it can tempt us with a familiar smile, but fades away before we can gain the measure of it' (p. 429). At the same time, running through the text is a subliminal challenge to readers to consider that 'Comparisons between our own society and those that came before are often rather excitable and over-blown, but it does seem worth thinking about what can happen when social change, cultural conflict and political mistakes combine. The answers are not always comforting, but neither are they uniformly negative' (p. 4). In that at least, in the current political climate, there may be some small hope for the future.

BOOK REVIEWS

David Flinham, *The Town Well Fortified: The Fortresses of the Civil Wars in Britain 1639–1660*. (Century of the Soldier 1618–1721, No. 110.) Helion, 2023. (246 pp.) ISBN 9781804513484, £29.95 paperback.

reviewed by Stuart Orme

Probably the most common form of significant military action during the Civil Wars of the 1640s was the siege, the taking of a fortified position, residence or settlement. Therefore, it perhaps seems odd that most military histories of the period tend to focus on major battles, despite their comparative rarity. Perhaps this is due to them being regarded as more significant in terms of the overall course of the war, or simply more exciting to reader and researcher alike.

It is welcome then that over the last couple of years this imbalance has begun to be redressed, with several new works looking at the importance of siege warfare in this period. Jessie Childs' excellent study of Basing House and its sieges during the Civil War, *The Siege of Loyalty House*, presented both a very human story and new research to enthusiasts for the period and the wider public alike.

I was therefore delighted to have the opportunity to read David Flinham's new survey of the fortifications of the civil war period, published by Helion in their now familiar series 'Century of the Soldier'. Flinham's credentials in producing this book are unimpeachable, having spent the last 30 years researching this subject, being a lead figure in the ongoing research into London's civil war fortifications and the 'King's Lynn under Siege' archaeological study. This project continues to produce a new understanding of how these complex earthwork defences were constructed.

The volume treads a fine line of navigating the path between providing an understandable overview to the informed general reader, whilst providing technical detail (without reaching the level of a scientific journal) that can satisfy those who might wish to dig deeper (pun intended). It begins with a comprehensive survey over the introduction and opening chapters as to the importance and use of fortifications and siege warfare during the period, including the role of geography in the siting and successful use of these

fortifications. Much of this focuses on the supply issues that armies on both sides found themselves with; much of Flintham's thesis as to which became the best fortified places during the conflict (particularly regarding King's Lynn) relates to those which were vital for supply. I also found it useful to think about this in relation to another recent Helion publication, Glenn Price's excellent *Soldiers and Civilians, Transport and Provisions: Early Modern Logistics and Supply Systems during the British Civil Wars* (Helion, 2023).

The opening chapters also take time to consider the medieval and Tudor antecedents to purpose-built civil war fortifications, many of which found themselves pressed into use again during the conflict. It also looks at the European influences on British fortifications, through treatises and publications on the subject, as well as knowledge imported from continental conflicts through Britons who had served abroad or European engineers who were hired in.

The main meat of the volume is in its central chapters, which look at the construction, design and location of these fortifications during the conflict. In the first of these areas Flintham uncovers new ground (near pun) with a detailed survey not only of the written sources (treatises and account books relating to the construction of these defences), but also the recent and very revealing archaeological discoveries at King's Lynn. Anyone who is under the impression that such earthworks were spoil from excavated ditches, simply thrown up to form an embankment in the manner of a Roman marching camp, will be greatly surprised by the evidence revealed as to the process and complexity of laying down these defences. Given that, it is perhaps small wonder that many of them, where not removed or covered by later development, still survive today.

The longest chapter gives an overview of where the most significant (and most visible) defences of the civil war were around the country, showing the sheer number of places that were fortified in a wide variety of ways – from repurposed medieval walls to the earthwork defences and sconces we most associate with the period, to the simple expedient of fortified bridges (as in Huntingdon) to control major routes and access. The lasting impression is the huge scale of defences from the 1640s, and how much ongoing research is being undertaken to uncover evidence in this neglected area as part of the

BOOK REVIEWS

Civil War Fortifications Register (CWFR). So far over 1,100 sites have been identified across Britain and Ireland relating to this period.

Later chapters look specifically at the classic types of fortification that proliferated during the wars: the bastion, earthwork and the sconce artillery fortifications, the best of which can still be seen today at Newark (the Queen's Sconce) and at Earith in Cambridgeshire. One chapter covers the fortifications of the two sides' respective capitals: London and Oxford. The final chapter may be of particular interest to Cromwell Association members, considering the new fortifications erected in Scotland and Ireland in the 1650s in the wake of the Cromwellian conquests there.

Helion are to be commended on the breadth of their 'Century of the Soldier' range. This volume avoids two of the occasional deficiencies of some of Helion's output, in that it has been well edited (a few volumes need better proofreading) and that it is well illustrated – largely thanks to contemporary illustrations in the author's collection as well as his photography and drawings.

My only criticism is that I really felt it could have benefitted from an index (a problem with many similar volumes) and that despite the comprehensive listing of fortified sites I would have liked a more detailed gazetteer. The latter is a minor niggle, as I know that is an ongoing project and will eventually happen through the CWFR website. Those quibbles aside, the book is well written and authoritative, and strongly recommended for anyone with even a passing interest in the subject matter – I already find it a very useful reference volume.

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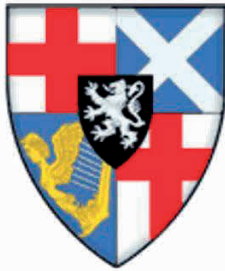
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