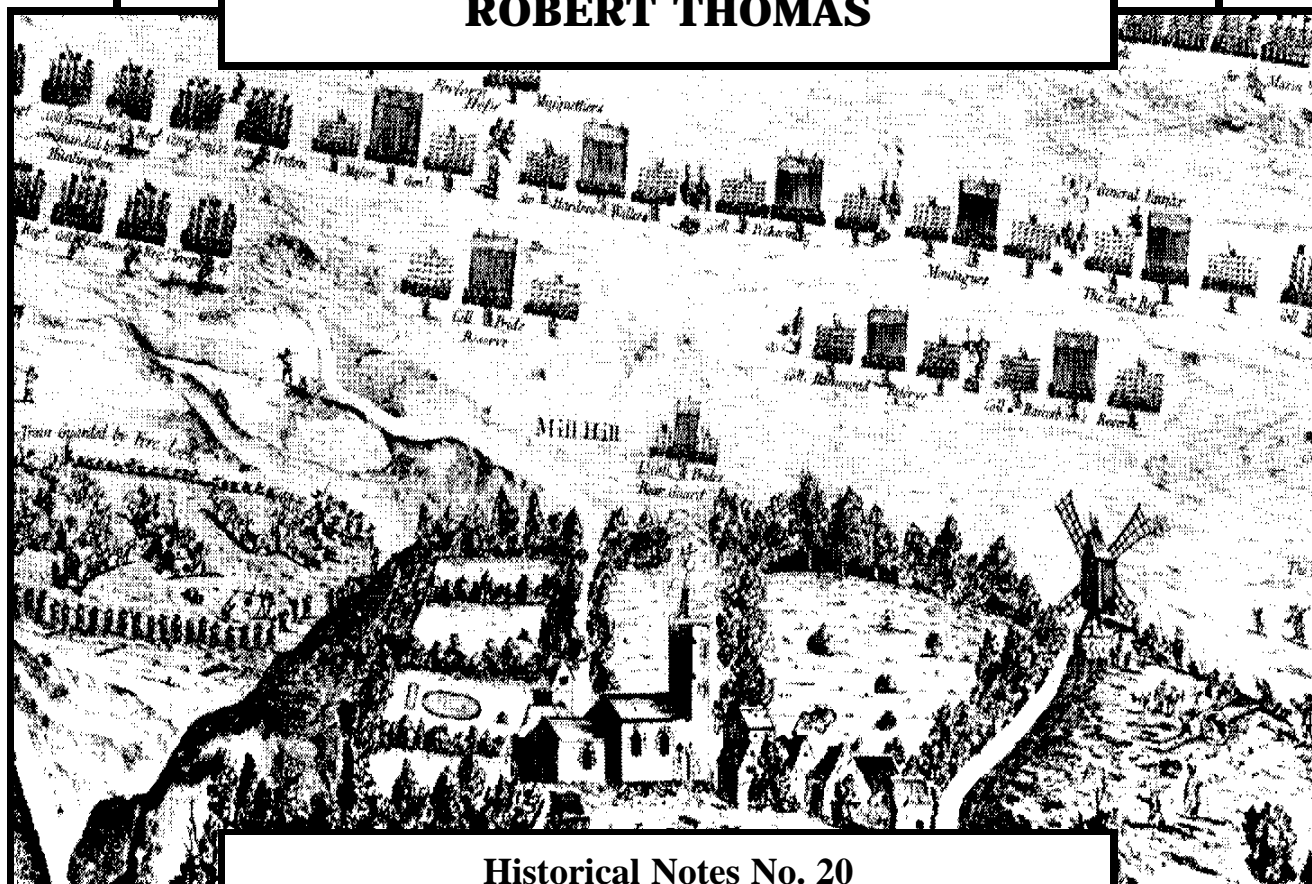




CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

ROBERT THOMAS



Historical Notes No. 20

ISSN 0267-7105 ISBN 1 85637 121 2

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance,
25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
www.libertarian.co.uk email: admin@libertarian.co.uk

© 1992: Libertarian Alliance; Robert Thomas.

Robert Thomas graduated in Archeology and Medieval History at Sheffield University,
and is now doing an M.Phil in Medieval History.

The views expressed in this publication are those of its author, and not necessarily
those of the Libertarian Alliance, its Committee, Advisory Council or subscribers.

Director: Dr Chris R. Tame Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait
Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb

FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY



CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

ROBERT THOMAS

This year, 1992, marks the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the English Civil War. To the historians of the nineteenth century the Civil War was celebrated as an episode which was both heroic and tragic in its individual drama. To Tory historians the Royalist cause represented a noble but vain attempt to resist revolutionary enthusiasm and preserve the civil authority without which the concepts of liberty and property would be rendered meaningless. To Whig historians the Parliamentarians were making a stand for English individual liberty against the encroachments of a continental style absolutist monarchy. Twentieth century historians, however, take a bleaker view of the motivations of the Civil War's partisans. A commemorative article in the *Independent* on 18th August 1992 by the historian and Liberal Democrat peer, Conrad Russell, luridly entitled "The slumbering hatreds of the English", concludes that:

It [the war] was not fought for religious liberty, but between rival groups of persecutors ... the English resist this message because they are so determined to prove they are "tolerant".¹

I want to argue that, contrary to this negative judgment, the war was indeed fought for a constitutional ideal which was conservative in its resistance to innovation but also, in the context of its time, libertarian in its objection to central government control and taxation, its belief in the sanctity of individual property, and its championing of the peaceful operation of civil society. Both sides in the war took up arms to defend aspects of this ideal. The violent and revolutionary methods employed by Royalist and Parliamentarian partisans were, however, destructive of the very constitutional settlement they sought to preserve. Despite the disruption caused by the war and the ultimate victory of a revolutionary minority, the concept of civil society independent of the claims of the state persisted throughout the interregnum as a form of counter-culture with its own agenda.

THE BREAKDOWN OF CONSENSUS

The pre-civil war English political community believed that they were the inheritors of a constitution balanced between monarchy, lords and commons which was not just old but had existed from time immemorial, being confirmed as part of the Magna Carta and incorporating the ancient laws of the Anglo-Saxons which had been acknowledged by the Norman kings William and Henry I. Such a constitution formed an organic and indivisible whole. Opposition — as opposed to legitimate expression of grievance — within such a body politic was theoretically inconceivable. While there was no check on the power and prerogative of the king, it was expected that the king would respect the rule

of law and the traditional rights and liberties of his subjects. In a kingdom where the king lacked real coercive force or military establishment and where grants of taxation came through Parliament, a successful monarch could only rule with the consent of the commons.

Charles I, however, was not a successful monarch and under his rule the delicate balance of consensus, which had been largely maintained by his predecessors James I and Elizabeth, began to break down. From 1629-1640 Charles I ruled without calling Parliament. The subsequent alienation between the king and the rest of the body politic arose not only from this lack of consultation but also from the policies pursued by the king and his court during this period. It was a period which saw increasing attempts by royal power and the court to intervene in local civil society through such institutions as the administrative patent, the lieutenancy and the royal attempt to create what was ambitiously termed the "Exact militia", supervised by professional soldiers known as "muster masters". Royal power was sustained, in the absence of parliamentary supply, by methods of finance which were perceived as innovatory — though the king would claim archaic justification for such measures. Ship money, for instance, was not only perceived as a novel form of taxation but also served to strengthen centralised royal power. (It should, though, be said that Charles' attempts to strengthen the royal fleet did him little good. In 1642 the fleet defected *en masse* to the Parliamentarian cause).

Royal interference in religious affairs also served to alienate many otherwise loyal Puritans. It is important to understand that, prior to the personal rule of Charles I, Puritanism was not in any way an opposition movement opposed to the monarchy or the bishops. The Puritans believed rather in the need for a reformed Anglican church supervised by the bishops (who had proved their worth in the fires of the Marian persecution) and a godly Protestant monarch. During his personal rule, however, Charles I, and his archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud attempted to enforce religious uniformity through a brand of ultra-high church Anglicanism known as Arminianism, with a mixture of gross insensitivity and occasional brutality. Arminianism, or Laudianism as it was also known, with its emphasis on ritual, was widely regarded as crypto-Catholicism though in fact anti-Catholic laws were enforced with particular vigour under the Laudian episcopacy. Though some people who might be described as Puritan in their religious beliefs, such as Edmund Verney (who served and died as the royal standard bearer at the battle of Edgehill) and Ralph Hopton (who commanded the western Royalist armies), were active royalists during the civil war, the royal policies of the 1630s did much to convert Puritanism into an opposition force. The idea that the royal court was in

some way crypto-Catholic was reinforced by the royal foreign policy which favoured the Spanish Hapsburgs and the Holy Roman Empire at a time when the forces of European Protestantism were struggling for survival against the imperial Catholic armies.²

In 1640, however, after his failure to impose religious conformity on Scotland by military means Charles I was forced to call Parliament once again. At this point the English political community of lords and commons was broadly united in wanting to restore the ancient political settlement of England. Political opinion which fell outside this consensus could be dismissed as the work of a “Cabal” or conspiracy against national unity. This 1640 Parliament had no intention of infringing what they saw as the king’s traditional prerogatives, and the dreadful prospect of civil war was far from their minds.

VIOLENT MINORITIES

In his book *The Revolt of the Provinces* John Morrill explains simply that “There could be no civil war before 1642 because there was no royalist party”.³ The political developments from 1640-1642 show a fracturing of this consensus and the development of rival parties within this parliament. It was this dissolution of the political nation which made the outbreak of the civil war possible. Broadly speaking the chief factor which made a Parliamentarian in 1640 a Royalist in 1642 was a sense that parliament under the leadership of John Pym was gathering to itself powers which were not traditionally its own. Furthermore there was a growing sense of disquiet amongst parliamentarian moderates at the fact that in order to acquire these powers Pym and his colleagues were increasingly relying on the violent and intimidatory methods of the London mob, whose actions were alien to all the normal means of political discourse.

Fundamental to Parliament’s continued accumulation of powers was a justifiable belief that the king could not be trusted not to try to roll back the parliamentary advances of 1640. Indeed while moderate parliamentarians might be unsettled by their leaders’ co-operation with the disorderly London mob constitutional royalists such as Falkland and Hyde found themselves keeping equally uncertain company. Even as the king sought to counter Pym’s influence in parliament by building up his own faction within the commons he was also exploring the option of regaining power by military means. To this end, he began during 1641 to gather about him a group of young men many of whom had served as mercenaries (mainly in the Protestant armies but also in some cases with the imperialist forces). The English Civil War has often been characterised as a war between “Cavaliers” and “Roundheads”. The term Cavalier was applied in 1642 to the professional soldiers that the king was gathering as his armed following. It was Spanish for horseman or soldier and implied that these men were the enemies of the godly people of Protestant England. The word “Roundhead” referred to the short haired apprentices who made up the most vocal elements of the London mob.⁴ While the committed Royalists and Parliamentarians were only ever a small minority within the general body politic, those elements termed Roundhead and Cavalier were themselves minorities within the parties. In January 1642, however it was the actions of these violent minorities which launched the whole country into civil war.

The decisive moment came when the king with his Cavalier henchmen attempted to launch a military coup involving the arrest of five leading members of parliament. The coup attempt was a shambolic failure and as a result the mob took to the streets, causing the king to flee and effectively securing London for the Parliamentarian cause.

This competition between rival minorities was repeated all across England during the Summer of 1642. The port of Chester opted to support the royalists in 1642 and remained a royalist stronghold until its desperate and starving population and garrison surrendered in 1646. In the past considerable socio-economic research has been done into why Chester was royalist when nearby Liverpool opted for parliament. More recently, it has been suggested that during the critical period in 1642 rival groups of armed partisans set out to seize control of Chester. Chester went royalist simply because the royalists arrived first.⁵ In Cornwall the rival parties were evenly balanced within the county and it was only the intervention of a small but determined group of royalists under Ralph Hopton, who had been expelled from Devon, which secured the county for the king.⁶ On a wider scale Marxist historians have often presented the apparent prevalence of royalism in the north and west of England, compared to support for Parliament in the south-east, as indicative of a conflict between feudalism and progressive capitalism. But royal support in the north may be more accurately be attributed to the royal presence in the midlands and the northern counties in 1642. Equally the king’s flight from London may help to account for the collapse of the Royalist party in the south-east and the prevalence of parliament.

THE IMPACT OF WAR

Partisans of both sides sought to reconcile their new roles as participants in political factions with the principles of the old order. With the Parliamentarians this initially meant insisting that they were not making war upon the king, but rather making war to free the king from his evil advisers. It was in order to preserve this fiction that the Earl of Essex, commander of the Parliamentarian forces, went to considerable trouble before the battle of Edgehill to prevent Parliamentarian officers from learning that the king was present in person with the Royalist army. Similarly the Royalists would argue that they were fighting not against Parliament but in order to allow Parliament to debate freely without the coercive influence of the present ruling clique. It was to emphasise the incomplete nature of the Parliament in London that in 1643 the king summoned his own assembly of peers and members of parliament in Oxford. Even later, when both sides had travelled far down their respective revolutionary paths, they still talked in terms of preserving traditional values. The new great seal of the republican government, for instance, talked of “The first year of freedom by God’s mercy restored”.⁷ Similarly the king on trial in 1649 portrayed himself as the guardian of authority and liberty, saying:

Truly I desire their [the English] liberty and freedom as much as anybody whomsoever ... If I had given way to an arbitrary way, for to have all laws changed according to the power of the sword, I need so not to have come here: and therefore I tell you that I am the martyr of the people.⁸

When the English Civil War broke out England had enjoyed peace, apart from occasional and isolated rebellion and unrest, for over one hundred and fifty years. The pacific nature of early modern England stood in sharp contrast to the continent, which had been ravaged by ferocious religious and dynastic wars. Modern estimates put fatalities on both sides during the war at 185,000 — equivalent to 3.6 per cent of Britain's seventeenth century population. (By comparison only 2.6 per cent of Britain's population lost their lives during the First World War.) In places such as the midland village of Myddle, civil war casualties exceeded those suffered during the First World war, in absolute as well as relative terms. For the general population of England the civil war was a period of almost unmitigated catastrophe.⁹ The depths of the trauma suffered is suggested by the fact that in early 1643 numerous sightings were made by responsible citizens of ghostly armies contending in the skies near the battlefield of Edgehill — some witnesses claimed to have recognised men killed during the battle amongst the phantoms. Their claims were supported by royal courtiers sent by the king from Oxford and publicised in two pamphlets entitled "A New Years Wonder" and "A Great Wonder in Heaven". The contemporary explanation for these phenomena was that they were a sign of divine displeasure — a more modern explanation has tentatively suggested that these visions were a symptom of the psychological as well as political disruption being experienced by the English population.¹⁰ The overall result of this chaotic disruption was further to alienate the pre-war political community and to produce an increasingly centralised war effort, under the control of a minority with revolutionary aims.

The wartime loyalties of Sir Edward Dering in many ways epitomise the alienation of the traditional political community faced by a revolutionary situation. Dering had been a critic of the court in 1641, but defected to the royalist party in 1642 in response to the growing extremism of Pym's parliamentary faction. In 1644, however, Dering retired to his native Kent under the protection of Parliament complaining of the lack of moderation amongst the royalist party. It would seem that Dering found himself as uncomfortable amongst the austere parliamentary militants in London as he did among the drunken blaspheming Royalist officers who surrounded the king at Oxford.¹¹

AUTHORITY WITHOUT LEGITIMACY

The increasing centralisation of the war effort was marked by a movement away from military forces consisting of local militia and volunteers (which characterised the amateurish efforts of both sides at Edgehill) to centralised armies commanded by professional soldiers (such as were prevalent by the time of the battles at Marston Moor and Naseby). The development of this centralisation is best known amongst the parliamentary forces, where the local loyalties of the militias were overridden by the creation of regional Associations. (The habit of local militias of refusing to fight outside their county had plagued commanders on both sides during the war.) In late 1644 this centralisation was further increased by the formation of the New Model Army as a national army, with the successful eastern Association commanded by Oliver Cromwell at its core. The New Model Army, however, owed its success not to any Puritan zeal or political commitment, but to the fact

that, using the revenues of Parliament in London, was able to maintain and pay its soldiers with a regularity which the royalists were never able to match. Recognition of their decisive role in the closing stages of the war made the New Model Army increasingly conscious of its own political and military power. The power of the New Model Army was, however, always revolutionary and militant, based on their victorious force of arms.

Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the way in which, when he was taken from the custody of Parliament to negotiate with the army, the king asked the Junior officer, Cornet Joyce, who had come to escort him, by what authority Joyce acted. Joyce responded simply by pointing to his assembled soldiers. Effectively, from 1647-1660 the army was the real authority in the country, intervening with force to overcome counter-revolutionary forces within Parliament in 1647, to defeat royalist counter revolutionaries in 1648, and radically to purge parliament in 1649 in order to secure the conviction and execution of the king for treason. During the period of the interregnum it was the military rather than civil authority which remained decisive and ensured the survival of a government which had executed its king, abolished the house of lords and done away with the episcopacy. When in 1660 Charles II was invited back to England from his long exile on the continent, it was in response to the invitation of the army under general Monck, rather than because of any expression of national royalist enthusiasm. The revolutionary power of the army remained decisive until the end. Significantly, however, the victory of Parliament and the New Model Army saw a repetition of the centralising tendencies of the period of royal personal rule, writ large. The coercive power of the state was massively enhanced, with an English standing army being maintained for the first time. This coercive force was maintained by a massive increase in taxation. The state was also once again seeking to interfere actively in local religious practices endeavouring to impose "Godly" Puritan ministers approved by central government on country parishes.

Though the victorious New Model Army had political power, it never achieved legitimacy. It was this failure to achieve a recognised and legitimate constitutional settlement which finally prompted the army to abandon its hold on power and restore the Stuart kings. The isolation of the political and military elite which ruled from England from 1649 onwards is illustrated by two incidents which occurred during the trial of Charles I. As the trial opened, the charge was read out, and with it the claim that the king was being tried in the name of the "Good People of England". At that point a masked woman in the court gallery interrupted, shouting: "Not a half, Not a quarter, Oliver Cromwell is a traitor." As it was rumoured that the interruption was made by the notorious Royalist Lady Newburgh (though other observers believed the interruption to have been made by Lady Fairfax) it may have cut little ice with Cromwell or with any of the other regicide judges. Significantly, however, at the same time radicals at the opposite end of the political spectrum such as Algernon Sydney were also speaking out against the claims to legitimacy made by the court which tried Charles I. This coincidence of opinion is paralleled by the increasing use of the same arguments (though from a different ideological standpoint)

by Leveller and Royalist pamphleteers complaining about the arbitrary nature of Parliamentary rule.¹²

While the prevalence of revolutionary attitudes within the Parliamentary coalition is well documented, the progress of the war had also brought about the increasing dominance of a revolutionary minority on the royalist side. In his book *The Royalist War Effort* Ronald Hutton argues that while the king's initial response to the problem of sustaining the war had been to appoint great territorial magnates (such as the Earl of Newcastle in the north east, the Earl of Derby in Lancashire and the north west, Lord Herbert in south east Wales and the Marches, Lord Capel in south west Wales, and Lord Hertford in south west England) to regional commands, and to give control of garrisons to the local gentry, the military failure of this strategy had led to the appointment of professional soldiers and military governors. Such men, who including the princes Rupert and Maurice, tended to favour an absolute victory of royal power by military means. Their rise coincided with the declining power of the royal peace party who favoured a negotiated constitutional settlement. (Secretary of State Falkland one of the most eloquent advocates of constitutional royalism was killed at the first battle of Newbury in September 1643.) Though at his trial in 1649 the king was to set himself up as the champion of the old ideals of order, liberty and property, there was by this time little practical sympathy for such views amongst the men who surrounded the king (or judging by his actions with the king himself).¹³

MILITANT NEUTRALISM

Thus far, civil society during the period of the civil war has been shown in an essentially passive role, collapsing before the militant methods of a revolutionary minority. Civil society dedicated to peaceful interaction lacked the commitment to violence and the ideology needed to justify such violence which would have been necessary to resist such revolutionary forces. There is, however, evidence from this period of active if unsuccessful attempts to defend the principles of civil society against the active partisans of both sides. Equally important is the evidence for successful passive resistance, which sought to preserve the values of civil society despite the depredations of warring armies and the encroachments of central government.

In the wake of the bloody stalemate of the battle of Edgehill, and as Englishmen were increasingly being forced to take sides, there was a rash of petition gathering in the counties. These petitions, rather than urging support for the war effort of any one side, supported the conclusion of a just peace between the two sides. While not all petitions were as even handed, the essentially neutralist and pacific nature of these petitions is shown by that composed in Hertfordshire, which stated that the county earnestly desired that some "means of accommodation be obtained" whereby both the king's honour and estate and parliament's just privileges be preserved. The organisers of this petition gathered some 4000 signatures from the local political community. As well as such petitioning, however, a more active form of neutralism also arose which sought to keep the peace by, if it was necessary, raising military force. In August 1642, for instance, a group of neutralist gentry in Cheshire declared that they would act against anyone who introduced the "dangerous and disloyal distinction" between king and parliament into the county. A similar decla-

ration was made by the Staffordshire Grand Jury and High Sheriff in November 1642. In Lincolnshire, neutralist gentry declared their aversion to both sides in the war and raised a cavalry force to keep the peace "Only amongst themselves". In his study on the subject, Dr John Morrill has found evidence of neutralism in twenty two counties and a number of boroughs. Ultimately, however, such neutralism, with its limited aim of preventing the outbreak of violence in the local area, could not compete with activists from the royal and parliamentary forces, who could call on help in the form of allies and resources on a national basis.¹⁴

Later in the war, however, such militant neutralism re-emerged, in the form of the irregular local militias known as Clubmen. The Clubmen have often been viewed as essentially a reaction to the disorder caused by underpaid and plundering soldiers. But examination of Clubmen petitions and statements has suggested the existence of an ideology going beyond simple material grievance. The programme of the West Sussex Clubmen, for instance, called for the maintenance of peace and the rule of law, supported traditional religion, and protested at the activities of the agencies of central government and at the levying of excessive taxation. The programme of these Clubmen was implicitly royalist in that proper royal power was a theoretical part of the old order, but this did not stop them opposing with military force those Royalist forces who opposed the civil order in their locality. The Worcestershire Clubmen for instance acted against Royalist soldiers in their area, not through any pro-Parliamentarian sentiment, but rather as part of an attempt to make the Royalists comply with the king's proclamations and regulations on military discipline. The Clubmen of Glamorganshire reacted against the depredations of Royalist soldiery in 1645, thus undermining the king's last attempt to resist the advance of the New Model Army. The same Glamorganshire irregulars also attempted — unsuccessfully — to expel the soldiers of the New Model Army, who had not only introduced new and onerous levels of taxation but were also attempting to supplant the traditional forms of religion with their own rigid puritanism. The Clubmen therefore stand out as an attempt by local civil society to insulate itself from the disruptive and unlawful attentions of rival armies. Such an insulation involved the preservation of the traditional rule of law and resistance to a central government which was trying to override it.

A continuation of such sentiments can be seen in the aims of the insurgents who rose during the Second Civil War of 1648. While Royalist militants were certainly active during the 1648 war, much of that activity can be characterised as a series of local uprisings against central government interference and oppression. (There is evidence that Royalist activists who attached themselves to such localist uprisings and protests aroused considerable resentment amongst localist rebels.) Again, the insurgents appear to have been preoccupied with the restoration of a traditional order involving a conclusion of peace between king and parliament, the removal of the state's coercive power in the form of the New Model Army and other military forces, a reduction in taxation, and a return to the established rule of law. In Canterbury, disturbances arose out of an attempt by the local committee representing Parliament to prevent the traditional celebration of Christmas. The crushing of the

local and poorly co-ordinated rebellions of 1648 (along with the Scottish invasion of England of that same year) marks the cessation of large scale active resistance in England to the victorious revolutionary forces of Parliament and the army. It can be argued, however, that passive but more effective forms of resistance to innovation and revolution persisted throughout the interregnum, allowing civil society to continue its existence until its re-emergence after the Restoration of 1660.¹⁵

A NEW AND TERRIBLE THING

The prospect of civil war was greeted with horror and dread by the vast majority of the English population. Though England had itself long been at peace, the population was familiar with stories (some true and some untrue) about the atrocities and devastations taking place in Germany and in the Hapsburg lands, and it was feared that a similar situation would now arise in England. The Royalist Sir Marmaduke Langdale confided his fear that the Civil War would make England “The seat of war for all the nations of Christendom” and petitioners in Norfolk told MPs that they feared England would become “A spectacle of German devastation”.¹⁶

In part such fears were justified. Many parts of England, particularly in the disputed territories of the Midlands and the North, were devastated by the war and, as has been explained earlier, massive casualties were sustained. Atrocities did take place. After Naseby the victorious New Model Army massacred female camp followers from the royal baggage train. In 1643 some twenty pro-parliamentarian civilians were massacred at the village of Barthomley in Cheshire. (The king was later charged with responsibility for this massacre during his trial in 1649, despite the fact that he was many miles from the area when the incident took place.) In 1644 the royalists sacked Bolton and Prince Rupert’s soldiers, enraged by their losses, killed a number of townsfolk, estimates of numbers dead ranging from 200 to 1800. While such incidents were horrifying and brutal, they were small scale and isolated in comparison to the acts of military terror which characterised continental warfare. This contrast is illustrated by the way that Parliamentary propagandists compared the actions of the Cavaliers at Brentford to the actions of the Imperial armies at Magdeburg. At Magdeburg the entire town with a population of 70,000 had been systematically reduced to ashes with its population suffering rape and murder. At Brentford no civilian life appears to have been lost. All that happened was that the Cavaliers broke some windows, burned several houses and got rather drunk. One of the overwhelming characteristics of the war appears to have been the relative absence of atrocities, and attempts even by active partisans to maintain as much as possible the norms of civil behaviour in time of war. Thus the Royalist commander Ralph Hopton was able to tell his Parliamentary rival, William Waller, that “hostility cannot violate my friendship to your person ... God knows with what a sad sense I go upon this service and with what a perfect hatred I detest this war without an enemy”.¹⁷ It is significant that only three or four instances of torture were recorded throughout the entire war and there is evidence that instances of rape were punished according to strict military discipline.¹⁸ Where military action did go beyond the standards expected there is evidence of public outrage. The execution

of royalist officers and the deportation of royalist volunteers after the siege of Colchester was described by dismayed observers as “A new and terrible thing”. It would seem that the expected standards of civil society were able to place limits on military action. After the victory of Parliament, civil traditions operating in the localities were also able to restrain the interference of the state.

PASSIVE RESISTANCE

When in 1641 Parliament decided to remove the relatively recent innovations in Church ritual brought in by Archbishop Laud during the personal rule of Charles I (which even Falkland, who served as the Royalist war-time Secretary of State, described as “English Popery”) this move appears to have been greeted with enthusiasm and to have been rigorously enforced. When after 1643, however, the Parliamentary government started to attack the more fundamental aspects of Anglican ritual (such as use of the Prayer Book and the observation of traditional festivals such as Christmas and Easter) they began to encounter significant resistance, which appears to have arisen spontaneously out of the local community without guidance from former bishops or (before 1649) from the king. Despite the replacement of the Anglican Prayer Book by the Directory of Worship and the introduction of fines for its use in August 1645 the Prayer Book continued to be widely in use. The Dairies of John Evelyn record his attendance at services using the Prayer Book which took place in central London during the interregnum. Petitions from the puritan heartlands of Essex and London from the same period record that the Prayer Book was “Usually” in use in their areas. In some areas (particularly during the period between the First Civil War in 1646 and the execution of the king in 1649) when Parliament imposed “Godly” ministers on parishes, they met with considerable resistance from the parishioners. Cases of reintrusion (the reinstatement by the local parishioners of an Anglican minister excluded by Parliament) are recorded during this period from London (1647), Southwark (1649), Cambridgeshire, seven different parishes in Essex, and six parishes in Cheshire. In 1647 cases of reintrusion were so widespread that this phenomenon has been termed “The Prayer Book rebellion”. These recorded cases of reintrusion are notable for their occurrence in areas in which support for Parliament was strong during the Civil war.

The problems for the government in London of enforcing Puritan orthodoxy in areas of royalist strength must have been even greater. The continued strength of Anglicanism may be glimpsed from the fact that parish priests continued to seek out bishops in order to be ordained. Before his death in 1654 Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich, is recorded as having ordained over fifty men to serve in two dioceses alone. Bishop Skinner of Oxford was reputed to have ordained hundreds of clergy in the period after 1646. One of the most fiercely resisted elements of central government intrusion into local affairs was the attempt by Parliament to suppress the Anglican festivals of Christmas (which was declared a day of fasting in 1644), Easter and Rogantide. Records for the purchasing of bread and wine needed for the Christmas and Easter communion suggest that in 1646 these festivals were still being celebrated in 85 per cent of parishes. While this figure declined to 43 per cent by 1650 shortly after the execution it subsequently began to rise

again with the upward trend increasing throughout the interregnum. When on Christmas Day 1656 John Lambert justified the Decimation tax to be levied on known Royalists by saying that he knew that “Men of the Cavalierish sort were making merry over their Christmas Pies and drinking the health of the King of the Scots” he was acknowledging the failure of the revolution. The authorities during the interregnum seem to have underestimated the strength of popular feeling which attached to these rituals with their accretion of Protestant, Catholic and Pagan tradition and custom. Indeed, it has been suggested that the harder the central authorities tried to suppress such festivals the more their efforts were doomed to failure. In 1660 the return of the king was greeted by a spontaneous outburst of Anglican enthusiasm. However the king was not honoured unconditionally, but as an upholder of the old constitutional order of which Anglicanism and its tradition were a part. When James II was perceived to be deserting this constitutional balance in 1688 he was to discover the conditional nature of this Anglican royalism.¹⁹

THE TRADITION OF INDIVIDUALISM

The nature of the resistance by civil society both to the demands and exigencies of war, and to the strictures of central government, may in part have been determined by the conditions existing in England in the centuries prior to the civil war. Alan Macfarlane in his acclaimed work *The Origins of English Individualism*,²⁰ has detected an economic individualism prevalent in English society which can be traced back to the medieval period, and which helps to explain the strong capitalist and commercial element in English history. Such individualism would also have fundamental implications in terms of individual rights and liberties and the right to have liberty and property protected by the law. Such a combination of economic and socio-legal individualism has been traced by some recent historians back to the Anglo-Saxon period. The most notable book from this point of view is Richard Hodges’ *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement*,²¹ which stands out for its innovative use of the archaeological evidence. While some modern historians have found such conclusions controversial, the idea that English liberty could be traced back to the Anglo-Saxons would have been entirely unexceptional to any political thinker or propagandist of the seventeenth century, ranging from radicals such as John Lilburne to conservatives such as Edward Hyde.

It might be asked whether these characteristics of English civil society, of restraint towards property and person during time of unrest and reaction against the incursion of central government on civil society, can be identified in any preceding period. I would like briefly to digress from the seventeenth century in order to suggest that these characteristics are indeed evident. In the late fourteenth century a series of rebellions and uprisings broke out across Europe. Principal amongst these were the Jaquerie in France, the Ciompi rising in northern Italy, and the peasants revolt in England. The French Jaquerie stands out in sharp contrast to the English Peasants Revolt of 1381. In France the revolt was characterised by savage class warfare, with the killing of nobles and the rape of noblewomen. The nobility subsequently retaliated with brutal massacres of the peasantry. In England the Peasants Revolt was an almost entirely orderly expression of grievance, with the rebels

assembled in organised militia companies avowing their loyalty to the king. Class hatred would appear to have been absent from the Peasants Revolt and where attacks on individuals or property did take place they were directed against people who were associated with specific aspects of government policy. The most violent and revolutionary act of the St Albans rebels was to drain the abbott’s fish pond.

The Peasants Revolt was partly a rebellion against taxation, but it was also a rising against the failure of government to use the taxes to pursue an effective foreign policy by winning battles against the French. Such a motivation suggests that a wide element of medieval political society was sufficiently sophisticated to resist and pass judgment on the conduct of government. A major underlying cause of the revolt was resentment and anger at the attempts of parliament to intervene in the operation of the local labour market at the behest of the nobility. It may not be a coincidence that, while the Poll Tax was a universal tax levied nationally, the majority of the rebels came from areas where the peasantry were the most prosperous and individualistic (and would suffer most from central intervention in the economy) such as Kent, Hertfordshire, London and Essex.

ANTI-STATIST IDEOLOGY

The Civil War, however, was not only shaped by England’s past but was also fundamental in shaping the political attitudes of the future. It taught that oppression could arise out of many sorts of power and not simply out of royal absolutism. Tyranny could also come from such representative institutions as Parliament or from such abstractions as “the people”. It also entrenched a deep seated suspicion of any military force attached to the state. From the disbandment of the republican army in 1660 to the present day, the army has been maintained as a relatively small force with a non-political tradition. One of Edmund Burke’s fears concerning the involvement of the British army in the American War of Independence was that the non-political status of the army would be eroded and that it would acquire a taste for crushing dissent by military means. The nineteenth century saw the rise of states organised for war, such as Germany, where small villages were equipped with massive rail links to facilitate the swift movement of troops across the country. Britain was by contrast almost a society organised to obstruct the conduct of war, with permission from each local authority through which they would pass being needed by troops seeking to cross the country by rail.²²

The civil war also convinced Tory and Whig thinkers such as David Hume and Edmund Burke of the dangers of any revolutionary enthusiasm, which could override the fundamental tenets of the rule of law. When Burke wrote his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* he looked back to the Civil War in order to understand what would happen in France rather than forward with any Cassandra like prophetic vision. The Restoration settlement of 1660 saw a large scale devolution of power away from the centre and to the localities. It was this dispersal of power towards intermediate institutions — the “little Platoons” — in which Edmund Burke placed his faith. Burke’s advocacy of the free market can be seen to owe much to new commercial and industrial influences arising in Britain, as well as to the influence of his friend, Adam Smith, but it may well also

look back further to an older suspicion of state interference in the workings of civil society.

THE PRACTICAL AND SPONTANEOUS DEFENCE BY MANY INDIVIDUALS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

This anti-statist ideology prevailed into the nineteenth century. Even Disraeli — who is so often used as the icon of the statist within the Conservative Party — subscribed to a philosophy based on free-trade and local autonomy.²³ Only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did this philosophy of liberty, which stemmed from the Whig tradition of which Burke is the epitome and with its roots in the struggles of the civil war, give way to new collectivist and statist philosophies. The Civil War, however, remains a period in which is witnessed not only the first articulated defence of English liberty by rival philosophers, but also the practical and spontaneous defence by many — sometimes unnamed — individuals of civil society, which is the soil from which freedom and liberty must grow.

REFERENCES

1. Conrad Russell, 'The Slumbering Hatreds of the English', *The Independent*, 18th August 1992.
2. Robert Ashton, *The English Civil War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1989, provides a detailed, thematic examination of the background to the war. The events preceding the outbreak of the war are covered in narrative form in C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's Peace*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1957.
3. John Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces*, Longman, London, 1976 (1980 edition), p. 13.
4. C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's War*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1958, p. 53.
5. Morrill, 1980, p. 46.
6. Ronald Hutton, 'The Royalist War Effort' in John Morrill, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p. 54.
7. Ashton, 1989, p. 351.
8. C. V. Wedgwood, *The Trial of Charles I*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1964, pp. 191-192.
9. Charles Carlton, 'The Impact of the Fighting', in John Morrill, ed., *The Impact of the English Civil War*, Collins and Brown, London, 1991.
10. Chris Durston, 'Phoney War — England Summer 1642', *History Today*, June 1992.
11. Ashton, 1989, p. 211.
12. Wedgwood, 1964, p. 99. Robert Ashton, 'From Cavalier to Roundhead Tyranny', in Morrill, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War*, op. cit., pp. 185-207.
13. Ronald Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort*, London, 1981, with paraphrase of same title in Morrill, ed., 1982, pp. 51-66.
14. Anthony Fletcher, 'The Coming of the War', in Morrill, ed., 1982, p. 41. Ashton, 1989, p. 259.
15. Ashton, 1989, pp. 259-262 and pp. 323-326.
16. Fletcher, 1982, pp. 34 and 42.
17. Wedgwood, 1958, pp. 142 and 226.
18. Carlton, 1991, p. 19.
19. John Morrill, 'The Church in England 1642-1649', in Morrill, ed., 1982.
20. Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1978.
21. Richard Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement*, Duckworth, London, 1989.
22. W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition*, Volume 1: *The Rise of Collectivism*, Routledge, London, 1983, p. 18.
23. John Vincent, *Disraeli*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990; and Greenleaf, 1983, Volume II, pp. 204-217.