

# A Military Historian's Civil War

by

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There is an old Spanish proverb to the effect that history is a cruel trick perpetuated on the dead by the living, which is something always to bear in mind when discussing the nature of history. Clearly, the causes of the three Civil Wars of 1642 to 1645, 1648, and 1651 are extraordinarily complex. They are still the subject of historical controversy. Clashes of interest, conviction, belief, and personality could not be resolved through the mechanisms of monarchy, parliament, justice, and local administration. The conflict has been characterised both as one of constitutional and religious convictions, and also as one of opposing social groups and economic interests. Some interpret the war as a result of the breakdown of royal institutions, either due to structural failure or maladministration. Others tend to trace an ideological incompatibility between the Crown's absolutism, and the belief in monarchy tempered by the rule of law on the part of its subjects, as well as in the division between those favouring more flexible and reforming Arminianism, and those favouring more rigid Puritanism as the basis for the development of the Protestant religion. Whatever the causes, however, the breakdown in the relationship between Crown and Parliament brought a prolonged period of conflict that impacted on all levels of society.

## Losses



190,000 deaths - 84,000 in military actions

To give that impact some context, average life expectancy even for aristocratic males was under 30 years of age in the 1650s and the number of deaths in England alone from plague between 1570 and 1670 at an estimated 660,000 was three and half times greater than the estimated death toll from the conflict between 1642 and 1660. Yet, we are still talking of an estimated 190,000 deaths as a result of the wars, 84,000 of them in military action of one kind or another although, of the military deaths, almost half occurred in minor actions and skirmishes in which less than 200 were killed.

Moreover, in a period in which ten harvests failed in the 15 years between 1645 and 1660, the impact of war added materially to disease, fire, flood and other natural disasters. Crops, horses and other livestock were requisitioned, communities forced to undertake labour for garrisons and to offer free quarter to soldiers, and the administration of local justice, poor relief and charitable institutions was all badly affected. During the Interregnum of 1649-60, there was also the attempted reordering of state, institutions, and society including suppression of popular festivals and pastimes, far greater financial impositions than those levied by the Crown before the wars, and new clergy and new religious practises. Not surprisingly, the so-called 'Clubmen' opposed to both sides had appeared in many southern counties during the course of the wars.

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Naturally enough, the complexity of causality and of events has long been the subject of historical enquiry and what I would like to do today is to look at the evolution of the historiography, particularly from the perspective of a military historian for the way in which we do look at the civil wars had been transformed over time. I will begin first by outlining briefly some general trends in the historiography before, secondly, also outlining the way in which the nature of military history itself has changed. Thirdly, I will put some flesh on the bones by turning specifically to the military historiography of the civil wars. Lastly, I will suggest where we go from here - particularly in terms of local history - before reaching a conclusion.

Historical fashions have changed over the time. In the late 1960s one of the main controversies when I was an undergraduate was still the so-called rise of the gentry debate involving historians such as R. H. Tawney, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Lawrence Stone. It was also still customary to some extent to quote traditional stories of peasants coming across one or other of the armies about to do battle and, when told that the King and Parliament were at war, remarking something to the effect that, 'Have them two fallen out then?' The study of the wars through the prism of the county community became common in the 1970s through the work of historians such as Alan Everitt and John Morrill as it was clear that they had a significant local impact. Morrill's *The Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and*

## The Rise of the Gentry

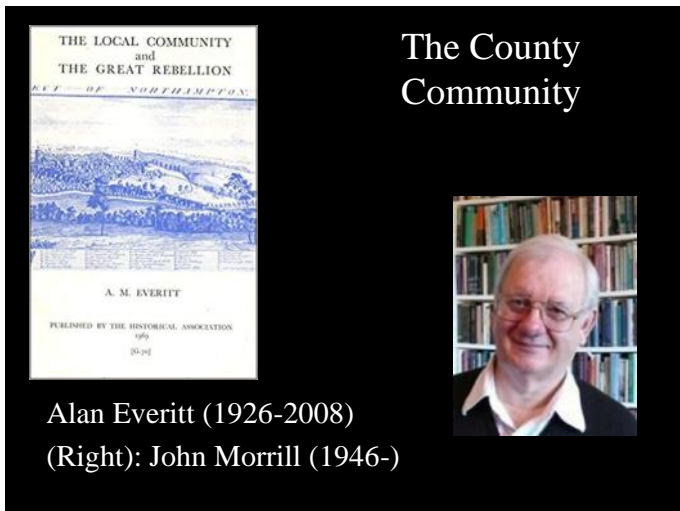


(Left): R. H. Tawney (1880-1962)

(Middle): Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003)

(Right): Lawrence Stone (1919-1999)

*Radicals in the English Civil War, 1630-50* in 1976 was pioneering in establishing a framework for local studies, not least in its examination of the terms of rival local taxation and committee systems. It also offered examples of the documents to be found in national and local repositories.



## The County Community

Alan Everitt (1926-2008)

(Right): John Morrill (1946-)

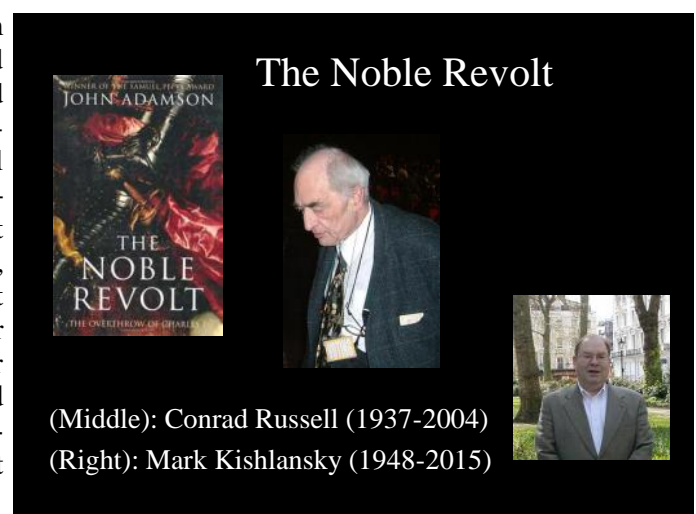


## The Wars of the Three Kingdoms

By contrast, in the 1980s, it was argued that county boundaries were not the sole arbiter of loyalties. Inevitably perhaps there was also the obsession of Marxist historians such as Christopher Hill and Brian Manning with revolutionary and class aspects of the Interregnum. To some extent the preoccupation of the 1970s and 1980s with local issues has been superseded by renewed interest in the complex causes and contexts of what are increasingly seen not as the English but as the British Civil Wars or the 'Wars of the Three Kingdoms' embracing England, Scotland and Ireland suggested by the titles of general studies such as those by Martyn Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland* from 1997; John Kenyon and Jane Ohlmeyer's edited collection, *The Civil Wars: A Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland* from 1998; James Scott Wheeler's *The Irish and British Wars* from 2002; and Ian Gentles's *The English Revolution and the Wars in the Three Kingdoms* from 2007. While looking ostensibly at England, Mark Stoye's *Soldiers and Strangers: An Ethnic History of the English Civil War* in 2005 was actually concerned with contemporary perspectives on what he termed 'outlanders' who were participants in the conflict in England, namely the Welsh, Scots, Irish and Cornish. Michael Braddick's *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* from 2008 is more wide ranging than the title would suggest.

There is, too, a sense of the wider European context, in which the continent was consumed by the religious conflicts of the Thirty Years War between 1618 and 1648. In some respects, the historiography of the 1990s also centred on renewed debate as to the impact of long-term causation as opposed to short-term contingency. A tendency then to stress the reluctance with which many took up arms has been followed more recently by more attention being devoted to the deliberate subversion of the King's authority by a small cabal of prominent noblemen and their associates, the reaction to that which led to the emergence of a 'King's party' in 1640 and 1641.

The debate on the 'noble revolt' involving historians such as John Adamson, Conrad Russell, Mark Kishlansky and Blair Worden from 2007 onwards became almost as heated as that on the rise of the gentry. For the general public perhaps, much of this has perhaps gone unnoticed and I still cherish something I heard when watching a Sealed Knot re-enactment some years ago. You will recall, of course, that in Sellars and Yeatman's *1066 and All That* back in 1930, Cavaliers were wrong but romantic and Roundheads right but repulsive. Well, there was a small boy and his mother close to me and in rather whining way he kept asking her 'Mummy what's the difference between Roundheads and Cavaliers?' In the end, exasperated by the constant question, the mother snapped, 'They've all got round heads but some wear hats'.



## The Noble Revolt

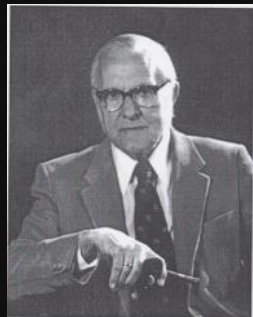
(Middle): Conrad Russell (1937-2004)

(Right): Mark Kishlansky (1948-2015)

Turning now to military historical writing, traditionally it was largely the preserve of military professionals who studied history because they believed it taught practical lessons. Indeed, it is probably the last form of history thought by some to be directly applicable to learning lessons and is still used as such in military academies. Its other common use was to support national stories of the past as illustrated by books such as the Rev. W. H. Fitchett's *Deeds that Won the Empire* in 1898. It also largely meant only decisive battles and campaigns and great captains in what has been characterised as the drum and trumpet school of military history. It tended to reduce military history to clichéd

narrative. In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, the so-called ‘new military history’ emerged with the increasing suggestion that war was not only the locomotive of history as Trotsky once remarked but also profoundly important as an agent of change at all levels.

## War and Society



(Left): Sir George Clark (1890-1979)  
(Right): Michael Roberts (1908-96)

The link between war and society is often attributed to Arthur Marwick in the 1970s but there were earlier proponents including Sir George Clark who suggested in *War and Society in the Seventeenth Century* in 1958 that war was a Europe-wide institution ‘for which provision was made throughout the ordering of social life’ and a ‘collision of societies’. Another early development was the concept of the so-called military revolution in the early modern period as proposed first by Michael Roberts in 1956. The debate has widened well beyond tactical, technological and organisational issues into one of growing sophistication concerning the complexity of the relationship between warfare, the rise and formation of the state, and the instruments of state power. Indeed, most early modern historians are agreed that some form of transformation or, rather, evolution in military affairs was crucial to the outcome of Euro-

pean history in terms of the emergence of modern state systems, even if they might hold varying opinions on precisely when and when it occurred. Roberts, for example, saw it emerging from the campaigns of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden after 1618 whereas Geoffrey Parker placed it in the French invasion of Italy with an artillery train in 1494.

Increasingly, therefore, military historians embraced the methodologies of others, integrating the military narrative within the wider political, socio-economic and cultural context. That has included examination of such as aspects as the ‘face of battle’, the role of women, and newer issues such as identity, memory and commemoration. In theory it has made military historians more acceptable within academe than in the past, although I have always appreciated the comment by one American military historian, John Lynn, on the remaining differences between military historians and some others: ‘Deconstruction means one thing to our cutting edge colleagues; to us, it just means something like carpet bombing.’

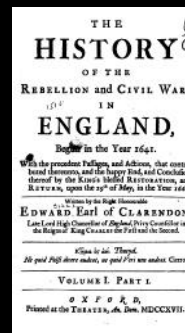
Well, to put some flesh on the bones, let me look at the evolution of the military historiography of the Civil Wars. In terms of traditional narrative, pride of place goes to the six volumes of the Earl of Clarendon’s *The History of the Great Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, which the then Sir Edward Hyde had begun in 1646 although the first volume was not published until 1702, 28 years after his death. Clarendon framed his narrative consciously in the belief that lessons were to be deduced from such a momentous war. Clarendon claimed there was ‘no untruth nor partiality towards persons or sides’ in his narrative. But he had been a key member of King Charles I’s Council, and his history was intended as a vindication of Royalist principles.

## Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (1609-74)



(Above): c. 1643 (by Dobson)

(Right): c.1666 (by Lely)



Equally Samuel Rawson Gardiner had an agenda in the five volumes of his *History of the Great Civil War, 1642-49*, published between 1886 and 1893 and constituting part of what was eventually a 19-volume history of the period from 1603 to 1660 although the last two volumes were completed by Sir Charles Firth in 1909. Gardiner was the ultimate Whig historian, his theme that of a Puritan Revolution paving the way for religious toleration and parliamentary democracy. It is worth noting, however, that Gardiner was scrupulous in trying to ascertain facts. Of his description of Edgehill, he writes, ‘The foregoing account of the battle cannot, of course, lay claim to absolute correctness, which is unattainable in any case, even when the witnesses are producible to be examined; but it is founded on a careful comparison of the existing evidence’.

## ‘Whigs’



(Left): Samuel Rawson Gardiner (1829-1902)  
(Middle): Sir Charles Firth (1857-1936)  
(Right): Dame Veronica Wedgwood (1910-97)



Thus, he used Clarendon; the memoirs of Bulstrode, Ludlow, and Warwick; the narrative from Thomas Carte's *Original Letters* taken from the papers of the Duke of Ormonde and published in 1739; and accounts by Fiennes, Holles and Wharton from the Thomason Tracts. Elsewhere, Gardiner also used sources such as Elliot Warburton's *Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers*, published in 1849 and which had used original letters. Interestingly, Gardiner's near contemporary, Sir Edward Creasey, whose *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* in 1851 was the ultimate exercise in the Whig approach to the preservation of liberties for posterity in battles, did not include any British battle between the defeat of the Armada in 1588 and Blenheim in 1704.

Amid his other work on the period, Sir Charles Firth himself published *Cromwell's Army: A History of the English Soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate* in 1902 based on his Ford Lectures at Oxford in 1900-01; and, with Godfrey Davies, *The Regimental History of Cromwell's Army*, which was posthumously published in 1940 four years after Firth's death. *Cromwell's Army* was comprehensive in its scope - everything from boots to battles as Ivan Roots once put it - because, as Firth indicated, 'a civil war is not only the conflict of opposing principles, but the shock of material forces'. It was analytical as well as descriptive with separate chapters on each arm of the New Model Army, pay, clothing and supply, provision for the sick and wounded, discipline, religion and politics. Interestingly for one of his times, Firth later said he regretted not looking at the army's impact on civilian life although he recognised, as the very last sentence had it, 'all that it bequeathed to English political life was a rooted aversion to standing armies and an abiding dread of military rule'. Incidentally, Firth and Davies did not have the original officers' list of the New Model Army, which was only found in the House of Lords Record Office in the late 1970s and not published until 2007.

Perhaps curiously, there was no more detailed work of the kind done by Firth and Davies for many years and the grand narrative tradition was continued by Dame Veronica Wedgwood whose *The King's War* was published in 1958. Interestingly, in trying to convey the perspective of those involved, she tramped the battlefields in the same season in which particular actions had occurred, suggesting that summers were typically English - cold and windy by day and wet by night - and the war fought mainly by amateurs, albeit often talented ones. In attention to battlefields, she was following in the steps of Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Burne's innovative approach. Burne deployed what he called 'inherent military probability' based on close attention to the actual terrain as a means of reconciling conflicting and often sparse accounts from the past in *The Battlefields of England* in 1951, and *More Battlefields of England* in 1952. In his chapter on Edgehill, for example, Burne paid close attention to changes in the landscape when compared to original accounts. As with Gardiner, his sources were the Thomason Tracts, Ludlow, Bulstrode, Carte, Warwick, and Warburton as well as some late Victorian articles.

## Inherent Military Probability



Lt. Colonel Alfred Burne (1886-1959)

(Right): Brigadier Peter Young (1915-88)



Burne's second volume was dedicated to the then Major Peter Young and, together, they published *The Great Civil War: A Military History of the First Civil War, 1642-46* in 1959. Subsequently, it was updated by Young and Richard Holmes as *The English Civil War: A Military History of the Three Civil Wars, 1642-51* in 1974. Purely military histories still appear such as Malcolm Wanklyn and Frank Jones's *A Military History of the English Civil War* in 2004 and Peter Gaunt's *The English Civil War: A Military History* in 2014.

Wartime commando and post-war regimental commander in the Arab Legion, the larger than life Peter Young became head of military history at Sandhurst in 1959 and founder of the Sealed Knot in 1968. One of his colleagues at Sandhurst, John Adair, known particularly to us as biographer of Hampden, formed the Roundhead Association at the same time. Young retired from Sandhurst in 1969 primarily because, when the Academy Sergeant Major stepped out to take one Monday morning parade, most of the cadets were absent having been shipped up to Marston Moor to play the Roundheads at a Sealed Knot re-enactment over the weekend and had not returned. Again I remember seeing another Sealed Knot re-enactment, which I think was meant to be either Brentford or Turnham Green, in which it began with some Arab prince reviewing the troops. Who knows quite what the Arab prince made of it.

Another Sealed Knotter at Sandhurst was David Chandler, better known as an historian of the campaigns of Marlborough and Napoleon with a penchant for dressing up as Napoleon. On one occasion when we had moved out from Camberley to a village where an old friend of David lived and we invited him over for dinner, we were slightly late back and David was early and to my wife's horror we found him sitting on the front lawn in full cavalier costume.

Young, of course, made a particular study of orders of battle as illustrated in his accounts, *Edgehill, 1642: The Campaign and the Battle* in 1967; *Marston Moor, 1644: The Campaign and the Battle* in 1970; (with Margaret Toynbee) *Cropredy Bridge, 1644: The Campaign and the Battle* also in 1970); and *Naseby, 1645: The Campaign and the*



## Battlefields

*Battle* in 1985. In many respects, these were somewhat old-fashioned in impact as was Austin Woolrych's *Battles of the English Civil War* in 1961, and H. C. B. Roger's *Battles and Generals of the Civil Wars* in 1968. Although based on field work and making use of evolving archaeological investigations, it has to be said that other later works such as Peter Newman's *The Battle of Marston Moor* in 1981, Glenn Foard's *Naseby: The Decisive Campaign* in 1995 and Martin Matrix Evans, Peter Burton and Michael Westaway's *Naseby: English Civil War - June 1645* in 2002 also all fall within a certain tradition that is not entirely reflective of the wider trends of academic military history albeit that Foard devoted a chapter to the memorialisation of Naseby. Battles are also the focus, of course, of the Battlefields Trust, formed in 1993, whose work led to Historic England's Register of English Battlefields in 1995 with some valuable work done on preservation and signage.

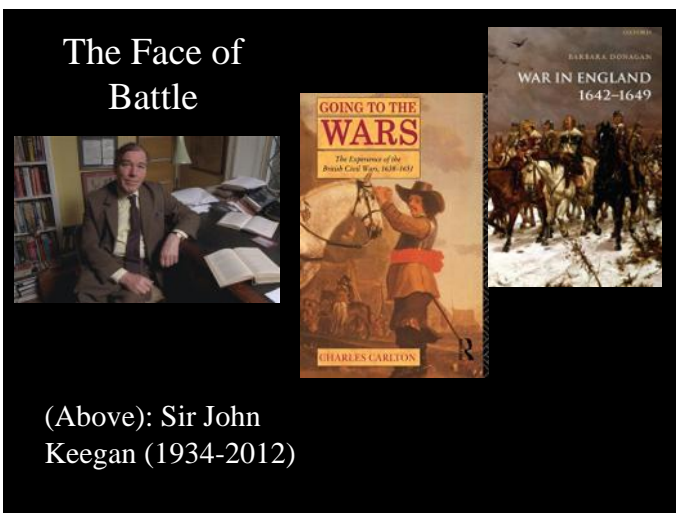
Indeed, despite my slight reservations on battlefield studies, there is still much to be learned of particular actions as in the ongoing debate on precisely where the Battle of Chalgrove, in which John Hampden was mortally wounded, took place in June 1643. Chalgrove is interesting for the way in which one amateur historian, the radically inclined George, Lord Nugent muddied the waters between the 1820s and 1840s. The biographer of John Hampden in 1832, Nugent had entirely to his own satisfaction discovered and exhumed Hampden's body in 1828 and thereby supposedly proved the entirely false story that Hampden had been mortally wounded by his own pistol bursting in his hand. Nugent then had a monument put up at Chalgrove in 1843 simply on land gifted for the purpose rather than where the action had occurred. He had form in this regard for he had also had bodies from the supposed 'Battle of Aylesbury' in November 1642 buried in the churchyard of Hardwick following their discovery at Holmans's Bridge in 1818. No such battle took place.



## Chalgrove

(Above): Hampden (attributed to Robert Walker)  
 (Middle): George, Lord Nugent (1789-1850), by Sir Thomas Lawrence  
 (Right): The Chalgrove Monument, 1843

following their discovery at Holmans's Bridge in 1818. No such battle took place.



## The Face of Battle

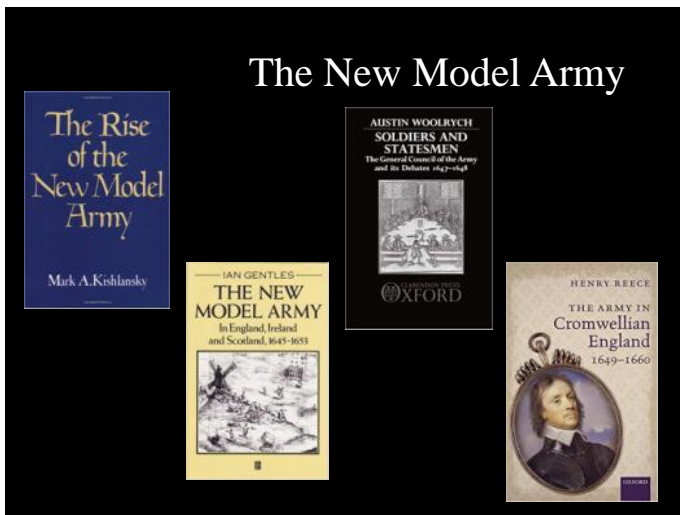
(Above): Sir John Keegan (1934-2012)

One should also add that one very significant development in military history directly relating to combat was the publication of John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* in 1976. Keegan sought to expose traditional and popular battle narratives to cultural and sociological analysis, drawing on such methodologies as anthropology and psychology. Keegan's case studies were Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme. Another member of staff at Sandhurst, he cordially hated David Chandler - it was reciprocated - and took some satisfaction from using some of Chandler's battle descriptions, which he dubbed as 'Second Empire Salon School' as examples of how not to write about combat. Keegan's success evoked many similar works including two excellent studies of the civil wars, namely Charles Carlton's *Going to the Wars* in 1992, Martyn Bennett's *The Civil Wars Experienced* in 2000. Barbara Donagan's *War in England, 1642-49* (2008) is equally valuable in exploring the experience of the wars while Peter Gaunt's *The Metamorphosis of War: The Human Experience of the English Civil Wars* is forthcoming.

Related to the wider trends in military historiography are the works that have looked closely at military organisation in the Royalist and Parliamentary armies and its wide impact since the 1970s. A number remain unpublished theses but there are studies of the Royalists by Ronald Hutton, Joyce Malcolm and Peter Newman as well as Clive Holmes on the Eastern Association. The New Model Army and its political and social roles have also been widely studied by scholars such as Mark Kishlansky, Ian Gentles, Roger Manning, Austin Woolrych, Christopher Durston, John Morrill, and Henry Reese.



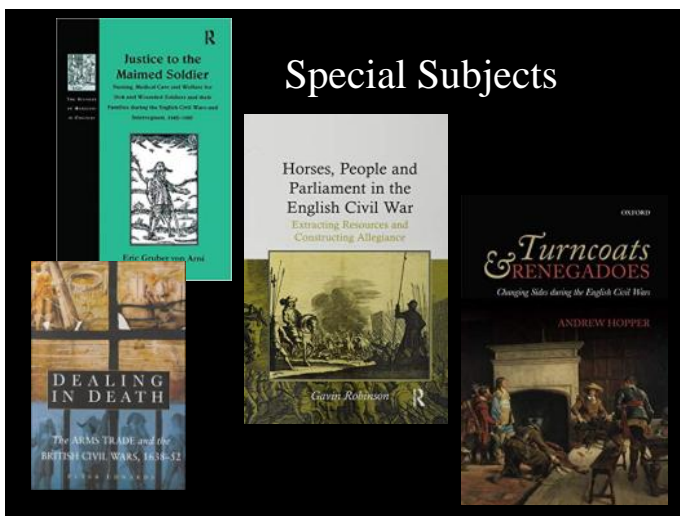
## The New Model Army



The debate on the military revolution and the relationship of the growth of armies to the growth of the state has also been raised in the British context not just by historians of the Henrician and Elizabethan periods such as Mark Fissel, Paul Hammer, David Grummitt and Steven Gunn. Fissel, Michael Braddick and James Scott Wheeler have concentrated on the Stuart period but also for the whole period between 1585 and 1702 there is also Roger Manning's *An Apprenticeship in Arms: the Origins of the British Army, 1585–1702* that sought in 2006 to establish the significance of the influence on an evolving professional officer corps of those who had experienced overseas service. One might add that there has been a particularly fruitful debate on the degree of military revolution experienced in Ireland in the Tudor and Stuart periods, Padraig Lenihan and James Scott Wheeler arguing that the real revolution on Celtic warfare

was Cromwell's military and financial organisation coupled with the sheer ruthlessness of his campaign in Ireland.

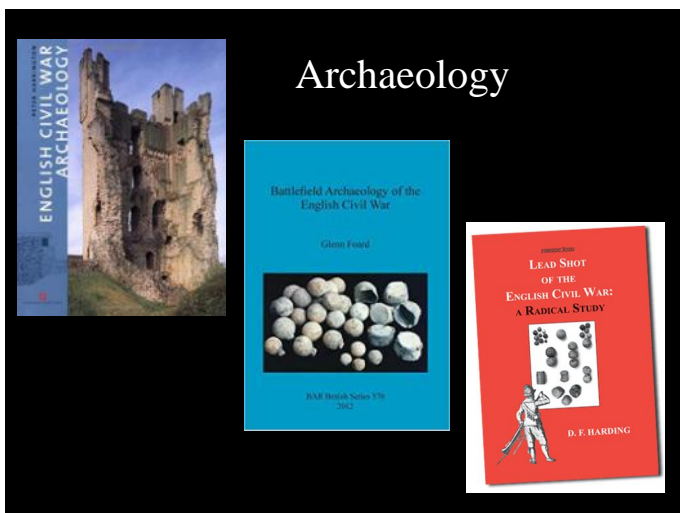
## Special Subjects



What is so refreshing about the widening of military history is the specialised aspects that have been covered since the 1990s. The list is impressive: Anne Laurence on Parliamentary Army chaplains; Anne Hughes on gender; Eric Gruber von Arni on medical care for sick and wounded soldiers and their families, Peter Edwards on the arms trade, Gavin Robinson on the supply of horses to the Parliamentary forces; John Ellis on military intelligence, Stephen Bull on artillery and ordnance, Andrew Hopper on turncoats and renegades, Stephen Porter on the destruction of buildings and other material property, and Barbara Donegan on such issues as accepted codes of military conduct and atrocities. There are other useful articles or unpublished dissertations on other aspects of logistics to add to some earlier works such as Ian Roy's two-volume edition of *The Royalist Ordnance Papers, 1642-46* published

in 1964 and 1975; and Margaret Toynbee's edition of *The Papers of Captain Henry Stevens, Waggonmaster to King Charles I* published in 1960-61.

## Archaeology



Surviving field remains of the war are covered in Peter Harrington, *English Civil War Archaeology* from 2004, which provides a useful introduction. It can now be supplemented by a substantial overview, Glenn Foard's *Battlefield Archaeology of the English Civil War* in 2012. As suggested earlier, Foard's book on Naseby was informed by archaeology and archaeological investigation in a Northamptonshire deer park used by cavalry for target practice and also resulted in D. F. Harding, *Lead Shot of the English Civil War: A Radical Study* in 2012.

I should add that one significant research project currently under way is the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded 'Welfare, Conflict and Memory' at the University of Leicester directed by Andrew Hopper with Ismini Pells as project manager. Like a pioneering article by Mark

Stoyle on Royalist veterans, this aims to examine how maimed soldiers and war widows obtained charitable relief and how they represented their military service. It will result in a supporting website and a comprehensive free searchable database with digital images of all surviving petitions, certificates supporting claims, court orders, and accounts of payments. It draws, therefore, on such sources as quarter sessions records throughout England and Wales.

The Leicester project is rooted very much in local sources and that brings me, lastly, to where we go from here for the question of impact brings us back to the different reactions to the coming of war in each locality; to the reasons why some chose to support one side or another, or neither; to the very different experiences of different communities. Local record societies have long published valuable editions relating to one or another aspect of the wars.

In my own case, I drew significant value from the publications relating to the lieutenantancy in my past work on the militia and in my work on Buckinghamshire from the letter books of Sir Samuel Luke, the parliamentary governor of Newport Pagnell, published in 1963 as a joint venture of the Historical Manuscripts Commission and Bedfordshire; the Buckinghamshire Contributions for Ireland of 1642 and Richard Grenville's Military Accounts published by Buckinghamshire in 1983; and Alan Thomson's edited volume on Civil War Hertfordshire published by Hertfordshire in 2007. In the case of Worcestershire, Malcolm Atkin's *Worcestershire Under Arms* from 2004 is almost entirely concerned with the Worcestershire militia and trained bands. While SP 28, the Commonwealth Exchequer Papers at the National Archives, are rather better catalogued than used to be the case, there are still much more to be gleaned from them for all counties.


**Projects**




Welfare, Conflict and Memory during and after the English Civil Wars 1642-1700  
[www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk](http://www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk)

I am struck by how far the publications of the Century of the Soldier conferences sponsored by the publisher Helion since 2015 have concentrated on the locality. The 2015 proceedings, *New Approaches to the Military History of the English Civil War*, for example, published papers on Shrewsbury and on Cheshire. The 2016 proceedings, *A New Way of Fighting: Professionalism in the English Civil War* included papers on the Leicestershire and the London Trained Bands. The 2017 proceedings, *Home and Away: The British Experience of War, 1618-1721* included Peter Gaunt's paper on campaigning and travelling. Helion has also published studies of Oxford and London during the war and there will be a Helion conference on the impact of the war on the Welsh marches later this year. Local studies, therefore, still have much to offer and the National Civil War Centre at Newark has also proved a focus for new work since its inception in 2015.

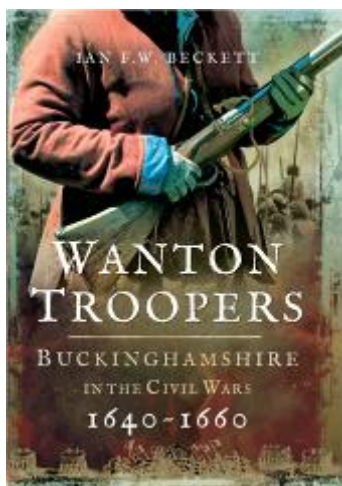
**Art and the Civil Wars**



Paintings by Ernest Crofts (1847-1911)

More generally, commemoration and memory would be a fruitful area for further study. There are some suggestive articles on memory of the wars together with Blair Worden's *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* from 2001, Matthew Neufeld's *The Civil Wars after 1660: Public Remembering in Late Stuart England* from 2013 and Edward Legon's *Revolution Remembered: Seditious Memories after the British Civil Wars*, published earlier this year. Dr Imogen Peck is also preparing a study for Oxford University Press. So would the contemporary and especially the later artistic representation of the wars by artists such as Ernest Crofts.

Thus, in so many ways, military history can be readily integrated into the wider political, socio-economic and cultural context of the conflicts in this country between 1642 and 1660. In the process, it has immeasurably enriched and improved our knowledge and understanding of a significant period in our history.



Ian Beckett's latest work is *Wanton Troopers*; a study of the Civil Wars in Buckinghamshire, published in 2015 by Pen and Sword