# The English Revolution in Historiographical Perspective

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Three hundred years have passed since native Englishmen last made war on each other. Yet, even after the Restoration of the House of Stuart, a great struggle of interpretation continued; men felt compelled to explain the war, its causes, circumstances, and results. Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) observed that all history is contemporary history. One need search no further for the truth of this dictum than the prodigious corpus of scholarly disputation seeking to interpret the English Revolution. Each century has provided fresh insights into the war, and the literature on this conflict serves to remind us that a historian's writing reveals as much about the writer as it does about the subject. The task at hand is to fashion a description of the scholars who have investigated those civil distempers which gripped England in the mid-seventeenth century, striving, by this, to understand more of the subject by examining the examiners.

The study of the English Revolution is a case study of historiographical dispute–a veritable panoply of learned pyrotechnics. Any analysis of this subject is complicated by the emotional investment common to those writing about civil conflict on their native soil; objectivity tends to suffer. This requires unhesitating skepticism when dealing with interpretive writing. Despite the ritualistic protestations of pure and disinterested analysis, purged of any partisan presupposition, authors rarely become, as Edward Hyde, First Earl of Clarendon (1609-74), claimed to be, free from "any of those passions which naturally transport men with prejudice towards the persons whom they are obliged to mention, and whose actions

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they are at liberty to censure.''[1]

The historiography of the English Civil War can be divided into four general phases, each dominated by a certain school of interpretation. The first phase developed during the years following the Restoration and reflected the triumph of the Stuarts. The second phase encompassed most of the eighteenth, all of the nineteenth, and a portion of the twentieth centuries. During this period the Revolution was seen as a natural and beneficial stage in the long struggle by Englishmen to establish their constitutional rights. The third interpretive phase emerged in the twentieth century after the two world wars and reflected the powerful currents of upheaval and social change in the twentieth century. No longer were historians content to rely simply upon the single paradigm of political phenomena in explaining the Revolution; instead, a plethora of social, economic, religious, and demographic factors joined, and sometimes supplanted, the study of constitutional conflict. The final phase, one that continues today, restores to the discussion the element of Puritan religious and political ideology. Time and space considerations preclude an exhaustive survey of each period; therefore, several representative historians have been chosen to illustrate the interpretive struggle within each phase.

## PHASE ONE: ROYALISM TRIUMPHANT

Writing in the early 1680's, John Nalson (c. 1638-86) represents an extreme example of renascent royalism; his was polemical writing at its penetrating best. The very title of his work, *Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State from the Beginning of the Scotch Rebellion in the Year 1639 to the Murder of King Charles I,* belies any denial of bias. In reality Nalson harbored a most emphatic hostility to the aims and actions of those (parliamentarians) ''who, under the smooth surface of pretenses to maintain Liberty, Property, Protestant religion, and Privileges of Parliament, betrayed us into the most deplorable shipwreck that ever England saw,'' and who also

> endeavoured to render his Majesty the aggressor and themselves engaged in a defensive war for the liberty of the subject, the laws of the land and the true Protestant religion . . . but betrayed the easy people into rebellion, and the nation into ruin.

Nalson concluded ''true loyalty to their prince is both their interest and their duty, as they are men, christians and Englishmen,'' but their actions ''pretenses to religion and Reformation'' simply cover for the most dangerous kind of rebellion.[2]

If Nalson was to fix the blame for the war on misguided parliamentarians in general, Thomas Hobbes (1586-1679) was far more specific. He believed the Civil War to be, first of all, an attempt to reorder economic priorities to benefit a rising middle class. This group, restive under crown taxation, seized the levers of power.[3] Of more importance, the Civil War became a struggle for sovereignty, initially between king and parliament and then the army and parliament. Hobbes asserted that, in their idealism, Parliament's champions erroneously viewed England as a mixed monarchy and their own institution as a check on royal pretention. In his view supreme power is never mixed; it must always be absolute whether wielded by Parliament or king. "There can be no government where there is more than one sovereign."[4] The perpetrators of this revolution according to Hobbes were conspirators from the universities, spawning grounds for the worst sort of sedition. Hobbes felt these institutions were corrupting the body politic by sending out hoards of subversive lawyers and especially Presbyterian clerics who from their pulpits agitated the people to take up arms against the king. They encouraged the people to resist whenever Charles did anything contrary to Scripture which, in turn, sundered the kingdom and robbed the monarchy of much of its sovereignty. Hobbes desired for England a single national church firmly governed in both doctrine and government by the hands of civil authority; the powers of the universities, lawyers, and clergy were to be severely restricted by an all powerful, even totalitarian, state.[5]

As one can imagine, the views of Hobbes did not receive universal acclaim. Ironically, some of his most vigorous opponents were, in fact, royalists. Considering the abuse to which they were subjected during the revolutionary years it is surprising that they were so antagonistic to unfettered royal sovereignty. The most prominent of these was the Earl of Clarendon. With his *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, the historiography of the Revolution entered a new stage of development. His was the first comprehensive, methodical approach to the events of the war. Clarendon sought to bring objective analysis to bear on the events in which he was a prominent participant. That he failed is less due to his intent than to the near impossibility of appraising the circumstances in which he was closely involved. Nevertheless, Clarendon displayed great literary craftsmanship in the individual character studies he developed along the way. Yet those studies also confirm his failure to achieve impartiality. Royalists are by no means whitewashed but generally receive the benefit of the doubt. King Charles I (1600-49) was ill-served by incompetent ministers. His lack of self-confidence led him to rely on unskillful men whose affection he confused with ability.[6] Thomas Wentworth, First Earl of Strafford, had great skill in judging people but failed to listen to them. He was extremely able but, in the end, was brought to

his knees by his own pride.[7] Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645) was the victim of Calvinists who called every man they did not love a papist; he was a loyal and brilliant churchman whose abilities far out-weighed any defects his critics might enumerate.[8]

This sympathetic tone was notably absent when Clarendon examined the king's opponents. John Hampden (1594-1643), one of the powerful parliamentary Puritan leaders, was a man of deceptive cunning. Civil, modest, and outwardly humble, he disarmingly sought the counsel of others, and by this device he won them to his own principles and inclinations. In his death the nation knew a measure of deliverance.[9] Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) earned a grudging salute even though he brought about great wickedness. Possessing "a great spirit, an admirable circumspection and . . . a magnanimous resolution," he reduced England, Scotland, and Ireland to absolute obedience. He demonstrated some of the virtues which cause some men in history to be praised but, in the last analysis, was a brave, bad man.[10] Ultimately Clarendon joined Hobbes in laying the war's cause at the feet of fanatic Puritan clergymen who goaded men into action by their incendiary preaching. While he failed to achieve a truly impartial account, his writings were the ruminations of a partisan sycophant. In the end he produced a broadly based work of serious history and avoided, as best he could, the temptation to ignore the good things in his opponents or the bad things in his friends.[11]

## PHASE TWO: THE WHIGS PREVAIL

Clarendon completed his history in the 1670s but prohibited its publication until after his death; he felt the passage of time would contribute to a more dispassionate appraisal of the war. The royalists who followed him had no such scruples and used his work to vindicate their position. Thus, Clarendon's discriminating approach was employed almost as a royalist party tract and became the target of Whig historians; unfortunately, partisanship too often became the pattern in historical writing. As the eighteenth century began, like-minded Englishmen started to coalesce into informal political groups in order to develop programs and work toward common goals. While these groups were not rigid, they were beginning to take on the trappings of what would later be called political parties. The writing of history therefore began to reflect more and more the partisan disposition of the authors. England, at this time, had two major political traditions, Tory and Whig.

The Tory tradition encouraged a less restricted monarch and a love of the Church of England, with a strong accompanying prejudice against non-conformity, and found its greatest strength out in the counties in the powerful alliance of squire and country parson.

The Whig coalition was far more complex. It possessed elements of lingering republicanism, non-conformity in religion, and powerful commercial interests. It generally championed parliamentary ascendancy and primarily drew strength from urban centers. As historians, the Whigs were essentially political in their orientation and portrayed England's history as a steady, unimpeached progression from primitive anarchy, through absolutism, to what became liberal democratic government. Along the way the nation developed embryonic representative institutions which, in the wake of the so-called Glorious Revolution (1688), blossomed into the full-blown democracy we know today.

This partisan historical writing began to take on a decidedly bitter tone. For example, consider the debate between Laurence Echard (c. 1670-1730) and John Oldmixon (1673-1743) during the reign of Queen Anne. Echard issued his *History of England* between 1707 and 1718 and blamed the Civil War on several "popular and discontented" Puritan leaders. If they had not been active, he wrote, England would have been spared its great disaster.[12] Echard's writing quickly provoked a storm of opposition and foremost in the chorus of denunciation was John Oldmixon. In his *Critical History of England During the Reigns of the House of Stuart,* he declared firmly against those who would write history for history's sake. Self-consciously he set out to "justify the proceedings of the present age by those of the past." The Tories, and Echard first among them, treat the Parliamentarians as "so many rebels, and vindicate or extenuate all King Charles I's invasions of the rights and liberties of the subject [as though] . . . all our fathers and we had said and done of liberty spiritual and temporal was unsaid and undone." He gives as an example Echard's treatment of Archbishop Laud.

> The reader will find so many panegyrics on Bishop Laud that if he had really been a saint and a martyr, as he represents him, he could not have said more of him; whereas there's nothing so certain in his character as Pride, Cruelty, Bigotry, and invincible Obstinacy.

After engaging Echard, Oldmixon proceeded to offer his own view of the war. Claiming to be above party considerations, he promised that the Stuart kings, as revealed in his history, were

> continually making breaches in this constitution and endeavouring utterly to subvert it . . . while their opponents were the only true sons of the Commonwealth . . . desperately hanging on to the liberty and property their princes were invading and violating.[13]

Echard and other Tory historians were soon swept away by a rising

tide of Whig historiography, of which Oldmixon appeared a strident example. Perhaps the best example of this school's more moderate tone was the work of Paul Rapin de Thoyras (1661-1725), a Huguenot émigré whose *Impartial History of England* represented a more cautious approach to the Revolution. And yet even his thesis is reasonably severe. He believed that from the beginning, Charles I and his ministers self-consciously attempted to establish an arbitrary government in England and, since the king's most apparent virtue was not sincerity, soon his mental reservations and ambiguity frustrated Parliament's willingness to trust his word and, from that point, peace became the beggar.[14]

Denounced by representatives of all parts of the political spectrum, David Hume (1711-76) was known as a Tory. Even if he was not pleased with that reputation, he certainly produced ammunition for the Tories' rhetorical battles. He asserted that without authority freedom cannot exist. He wished all to know, but the Whigs especially, that since government is instituted to provide justice, not liberty, their resistance to established authority was wrong-headed.[15]

In Hume's writings, Oliver Cromwell appeared as a fanatical hypocrite, the ecclesiastical Puritans as dupes of their own zeal, and all religious enthusiasm as expressions of human weakness producing great discord and much misery. His moderate Toryism is revealed in his assertions that Charles I was essentially not defective and that his address tended toward stateliness and formality corresponding to his high rank. It was the high idea of his own authority which made him incapable of submitting prudently to the spirit of liberty which began to prevail among his subjects.[16]

Despite attacks by all parties, Hume enjoyed immense success and popularity. His work was reprinted, re-edited, brought up to date and the like, well into the nineteenth century. Only then did a Whig historian rise who could break Hume's grasp on the popular imagination. Since he was a philosophical historian and, as such, reflected the spirit of the Age of Reason, his popularity could not survive the change of intellectual climate to romanticism. This shift and a growing nationalist temper drove Englishmen to seek an appropriate historical expression of this spirit, which they found in the work of Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800-59).

From the beginning Macaulay determined to supplant Hume as an interpretive force through a merciless critique of his predecessor. According to Lord Macaulay, Hume gave "prominence to all the circumstances which support his case; he glides lightly over those which are unfavorable to it." This approach needed to be replaced by a more balanced account which, of course, he offered to supply.[17]

In Macaulay, Whig historiography found its most enthusiastic advocate. Throwing caution to the winds, he embarked on a course devoid

of any attempt to apply impartiality to the examination of events. The Puritans who "roused the people to resistance and directed their measures through a long series of eventful years were no vulgar fanatics, rather, they were a brave, wise, useful body." Of Charles I's many faults,

> faithlessness was the chief cause of his disasters. He was, in truth, compelled by an incurable propensity to dark and crooked ways. Setting conscience aside, there is reason to believe that he was perfidious, not only from constitution and from habit, but also on principle."[18]

An unashamed and open Whig politician, Macaulay infused his historical writings with this prejudice. He was firmly convinced that parliamentary government, progress, civil liberty, and toleration were extraordinarily beneficial, and he set about to evangelize his readers. "The history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years [since 1688] is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement."[19]

Though continuing to fascinate the general population until World War I, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century serious scholars considered Macaulay's heavily partisan writings to be unhistorical in nature. Even those generally thought to be a part of his own tradition demanded a more academic or "scientific" approach take the place of Macaulay's form of literary history. During those decades several important developments helped transform the study of history into a more "exacting science." The increased accessibility of primary source material enabled scholars to attain a level of precision theretofore impossible. In a relatively short span of time the British Museum began systematic cataloguing, the first part of the *Calendar of State Papers* published (1856), the Public Record Office opened (1862), the Historical Manuscripts Commission was launched (1869), the *English Historical Review* began publication (1886), and, finally the study of modern history as a discipline in its own right grew out of the establishment of the Regius Professorships of History at Oxford and Cambridge (in 1871 and 1873 respectively). As a result, historians could transcend existing secondary sources by making careful manuscript research an essential part of their work.[20]

One of the first contributors in this new age in historical writing was Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886). Being an outsider was a distinct advantage to this German historian. He realized foreign and independent interpretations ought to support correct understandings of the home-grown variety. He was generally sympathetic to the Stuarts and unimpressed by Cromwell. According to Ranke, Charles I's chief error was his

lack of clear perception. If, during his lifetime, James had

> too high an idea of the strength of his opponents, Charles I certainly had too slight a one. He knew neither the depth of the lawful desires of Parliament nor the purport of the opposition already begun: he cherished splendid hopes when nearest to his ruin.[21]

It fell upon Samuel Rawson Gardiner (1829-1902) to unite the scientific method and the Whig interpretation of history into a single, large-scale work on the seventeenth century. Eschewing party labels he set out to find and demonstrate the truth. "I am not so vain as to suppose that I have always succeeded in doing justice to both [sides], but I have, at least, done my best not to misrepresent them."[22] Adhering closely to the chronological progress of events he hoped to describe accurately life under the early Stuarts and thereby avoid bias. Therefore, he searched the primary sources and based his history squarely upon them. This effort served only to prove that the scientific method of writing history still has subjective elements; the historian remains a part of the work. Not surprisingly, he portrayed a seventeenth-century England locked in a struggle for political and religious liberty.[23]

> The interest of English history in the seventeenth century lies in the efforts made to secure a double object—the control of the nation over its own destinies, and the liberty of the public expression of thought, without which parliamentary government is only a refined form of tyranny.[24]

Gardiner considered himself an English patriot and considered his native land the fountainhead of modern liberty.

> England was then, as she has always been, decidedly in advance, so far as political institutions are concerned, of the other nations of Europe.
>
> The English people had never entirely relinquished their control over their own destinies, nor had ever so put themselves like sheep into the hands of any king as to suffer themselves to be tended or shorn at his arbitrary will.
>
> Puritanism gave to the most self-centered the power which follows submission to law. [It] not only formed the strength of the opposition to Charles, [but] the strength of England itself.

Bearing these sentiments, usually associated with the Whig interpreta-

tion, despite his extraordinary literary and scholarly achievements, it is small wonder that Gardiner's work came to be called the story of the "PuritanRevolution."[25]

The influence of Gardiner and the traditional Whig stream of interpretation influenced twentieth-century historical thinking in the writings of Charles Harding Firth (1857-1936), Godfrey Davies (1892-1957), George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962), and, most recently, in literary spirit at least, Dame Cicely Veronica Wedgwood (b. 1910). But it is another school of interpretation, one severely removed from its predecessors in method and conclusion, that has most clearly dominated historiography in this century.[26]

## PHASE THREE: SOCIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Richard Henry Tawney (1880-1962) was no mere historian. He was a socialist and was one of the founders of the Labor Party. For Tawney history was not a source of "dead" information, but a means to understanding and a guide to action.[27] He represented a significant shift in the study of seventeenth-century England and, indeed, of history in general. Up to that point historians, royalist or Whig, literary or scientific, tended to focus on political developments alone. Tawney was not content to restrict his investigations simply to the way national leaders sought to influence political events; he believed this approach was inadequate because it "said so much and explained so little." Therefore, he began very early in his professional life to explore the economic and social history of revolutionary England because he felt it a crucial period in the shift of political and economic power between classes.[28]

For Tawney the Civil War represented a victory of large land owners over small-scale peasant farmers. In *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century,* he forever left behind the religio-political paradigm used by Gardiner to explain the revolution. The redistribution of monastic lands under the Tudors had strengthened the hand of the great landed proprietors, and with the war's destruction of the courts of prerogative, their victory was complete. The devices used by these landowners to increase their wealth (enclosure, evictions, rack-renting and the like) could be employed with impunity. Ironically, the poor had found their champion to be the monarch, and at the death of Charles the lower classes were left at the mercy of the aristocracy.[29]

To a generation raised on Gardiner (with a strong institutional memory of Lord Macaulay) Tawney's was a radical departure in historical thinking. He next began to explore the connection between religion and capitalism. Following Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Tawney sought to discover the distinctively Puritan ap-

proach to economic matters. Weber asserted a direct link between the Calvinist emphasis on savings and hard work and the development of capitalism. In *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* he expanded on Weber's thesis by stressing the inherent dualism in Calvinist (Puritan) thought. It had both revolutionary and conservative tendencies. While the Puritans believed Providence stood behind all the affairs of life, they would have been scandalized by a businessman permitted to get away with unethical conduct. God might sanctify convenient vices such as the aggressive acquisition of capital or the driving of laborers to their physical limits but He never would sanction theft, obvious greed, or dishonesty in weights, measures, or the value of currency.[30]

Tawney began to concentrate on the English Civil War in two articles that appeared in 1941. The first, an examination of *The Commonwealth of Oceana* by James Harrington (1611-77), asserted that the imbalance between political structure and economic reality caused the war. A combination of inflation and a real decrease in land prices severely injured the noble class of landowners. They paid more for commodities with income from land decreasing in value. This, in turn, gave rise to a new class of mobile, business-like gentry far more capable of taking advantage of an expanding market.[31]

He elaborated on this thesis in the second article and, in the process, provoked one of the great controversies in postwar historiography. In "The Rise of the Gentry," he described a noble class "reduced to living like rich beggars, in perpetual want," whose "influence, popularity and property" all disappeared at the same time. That noble class faced an upper middle-class gentry who caught the tide and, utilizing advanced business methods, floated to fortune. Tawney buttressed his argument with statistical evidence which demonstrated a fall in the number of manors held by the aristocracy with a corresponding increase in middle-sized estates.[32] His views incited a storm of contention over the disposition of seventeenth-century English gentry. In an increasingly acrimonious debate Lawrence Stone (b. 1919), Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper (b. 1914), John Phillips Cooper (1920-78), Christopher Hill (b. 1912), Perez Zagorin (b. 1920), and Jack H. Hexter (b. 1910),[33] would make major contributions to the discussion. Stone expanded on Tawney's thesis by pinning the blame for the aristocracy's decline on their over-expenditure.[34] Trevor-Roper savagely attacked Stone by pointing out the ephemeral nature of his statistical evidence. He followed up this assault with a more balanced account of his views in an article in *The Economic History Review* entitled "The Gentry, 1540-1640." His alternative paradigm of a declining "mere gentry," though supported by Cooper, was attacked by Hill and Zagorin for its lack of statistical evidence and for a rhetorical argument that left doubt as to the true identity of this "mere gentry."

Hexter hastened to join the list in a critique of Trevor-Roper and even Tawney himself by accusing them of economic determinism. He suggested a military rather than economic explanation for the aristocracy's decline. The Tudors had robbed this class of their raison d'etre by creating a national rather than feudal military force. The medieval knight under military commission to his liege lord was, by the sixteenth century, a quaint anachronism.[35]

Stone had, if not the last word on the subject, certainly the most thorough in his massive volume *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1640.* Ironically, in view of the previous criticism of his work, he was attacked for his over-reliance upon statistical evidence. Nevertheless, Stone firmly asserted that the war came because the upper classes found themselves decimated in lands and prestige just at the moment a threatened monarchy needed their protection. The decline in the authority and power of the peers left Charles exposed and isolated and permitted the whole system to fall apart.[36]

If Tawney opened the door to an economic understanding of the English Revolution, the approach found its fullest expression in the work of Christopher Hill. While the former master stimulated endless debate by posing questions, Hill quite willingly answered them–with enthusiasm. His massive output contributed enormously to a deeper understanding of the seventeenth century. This contribution is even more remarkable considering the ideological burden under which Hill labored. Emerging from intellectual pubescence in the 1930's, like so many of his peers, Hill became an emotional Marxist; not the gritty, Stalinist type, but, in Tawney's formulation, more the doxological variety. This inclination, however, has not prevented Hill from producing a useful and prodigious corpus of work concerning the English Civil War.[37]

Hill's first publication on the Revolution echoed Soviet views of the "Puritan Revolution." The Soviets interpreted the revolt as a class struggle between a landed aristocracy and church on one hand and the bourgeoisie (urban merchants and progressive country gentry) on the other. In 1940 his contribution to a Marxist textbook on the war, *The English Revolution, 1640,* compared favorably the English and French revolutions as struggles in which new, capitalist orders arose and supplanted older feudal ones.

> The seventeenth-century English revolution changed the organization of society so as to make possible the full development of all the resources of that society. A transition to socialism will be necessary to secure the same result in England today.[38]

Hill, while recognizing the significant contributions of the Whig

historians (particularly Gardiner) spent his professional life trying to undermine their conclusions. He thinks only a Marxist interpretation which views the English Civil War as a bourgeois revolution fits the facts into a coherent story. In contrast to other social historians, he was not prepared, at least in his later writings, to reject completely the Whig formulation in favor of a purely materialistic paradigm. As an ideologue he sees the value and place ideas have in the affairs of life and in the *Economic Problems of the Church* warns against presenting the nation's conflict in a way too simply materialistic as "in terms of outs versus ins, country versus court gentry, the bourgeois versus a "social justice' state. . . . Puritanism would not have been the historical force it was if it had been a mere economic reflex." Hill's later work is largely an attempt to understand Puritanism and its role in England's Revolution and, at this point, reveals his salient departure from the Whig interpretation. He stresses the strong possibility of ideological motivation among the Puritans but considered it of secondary importance. Hill's primary interest is to demonstrate motivation supra-theological in nature, to find "some of the non-theological reasons which might lead men to oppose the Laudian regime in the English church [and indeed] the non-theological reasons for supporting the Puritans, or [even] for being a Puritan."[39]

Hill's first task was to define the term Puritan. He considers the use of the word often to be "an admirable refuge from clarity of thought." Originally a term of derision, it bore social and political as well as religious implications. As such, Puritanism became a mass movement of small employers fighting to survive in a world of growing competition. For them, frugality and hard work made the difference between prosperity and survival. To help them overcome their adversities Puritan clergymen combined with their theological insights a powerful emphasis on the Scriptural duty of working hard and the godliness of dignified labor. These small businessmen and artisans along with their pastors formed the backbone of Parliament's support; without their backing its victory would have been set at peril.[40]

These very conservative merchants, artisans, and other "middling sorts" did not easily come to abolish bishop, lord, and king. They were encouraged not only by Puritan preachers and writers but also by a host of essentially non-theologically oriented intellectuals. Bacon in science, Raleigh in political history, Coke in constitutional and legal theory, and a number of lesser figures, by their writings, helped undermine traditional belief in the permanence of the old order. Thus, scientific utilitarianism and radical Protestantism grew up side by side in the urban centers and combined to threaten the old regime.[41]

Hill is not without his critics. One telling criticism is Hill's propensity for special pleading. Trevor-Roper writes, "when we skim

through sources looking only for evidence as supports our case, we tend only to notice such and thus in spite of our efforts to be impartial, scholarship is transformed into advocacy.'' Hexter accused Hill of systematic ''source mining,'' of lumping evidence together in a preconceived pattern and vigorously asserted that,

> each historian lives under an especially heavy obligation to police himself. Far from just looking for evidence that may support his thesis, he needs to look for vulnerabilities in that thesis and to contrive means of testing them. For a historian of great erudition and vivid imagination to fail to do this is for him to fail his colleagues, to place on them a burden that should have been his. Christopher Hill so fails his colleagues. It is too bad.[42]

Others have faulted Hill's account of the Revolution as being one-sided because he tends to ignore the royalist faction and other groups that did not fit into his overall interpretive pattern. Groups such as the Clubmen are virtually ignored and those who tried to avoid side-taking, who simply wished to be left alone (perhaps the majority of Englishmen), are given little consideration.[43]

On the other hand, in addition to his massive output and stimulating interpretations, Christopher Hill has helped engineer a sea change in the way historians approach their work. He helped make it possible for historians to admit they have opinions, harbor prejudices and, yes, subscribe to a particular set of values. Hill was so obvious in his Marxist panegyrics and so refreshing in his interpretations that many scholars, from all parts of the political spectrum, came to feel more comfortable acknowledging their beliefs. In the three decades of Hill's prodigious output, when Marx and all his progeny held the academic world in thrall, one so brilliant and at the same time so obviously ideological in his approach has helped make it socially and academically permissible for numerous historians to concede that they have a point of view. In fact, this is a far healthier approach to the writing of history. Better to have all presuppositions out in the open than to have the reader labor under the illusion that a historian is some kind of machine into which facts are thrust and from which historical analysis emerges unsullied by cant, confusion, opinion, or bias. That has never been the case anyway; better to admit it and to concentrate on removing any special pleading lurking in the confines of one's scholarship. As Hexter points out, Hill fails his readers when he permits his ideology to undermine the integrity of his historical method. This does not mean he is making no positive contribution to historical understanding, but his work has been seriously compromised.

Whatever may be the defects of his methodology or conclusions one can not deny that the writing of history has been significantly changed. Perhaps Hill's single most important contribution to the study of history may be that he has helped reintroduce ideology as an important factor in historical interpretation. Ironically, Hill's method has a distinct affinity with the efforts of Gardiner, and indeed, even more horrible for a Marxist, those of Thomas Babbington Macaulay. Because of this it is possible to view him as a transitional scholar. While his work must be included in the ranks of the social historians, he also places great emphasis on the importance of ideology and must be included as a part of the next phase of Civil War interpretation.

## PHASE FOUR: THE RETURN OF IDEOLOGY

Perhaps because he was an ideologue himself, Hill labored long and hard to permit Puritans in the seventeenth century to be, well, Puritans. To deny these people acted at least partly on the basis of their religious convictions stretches the imagination. Yet, in reading many twentieth-century scholars one could conclude the Puritans had cleverly anticipated twentieth-century social-democratic ideals and then artfully veiled them under the guise of fanatical religious rhetoric. Hill restored a measure of sanity to this debate. He said Puritans were substantially motivated to act by religion. While he directed his main attention elsewhere, in the task of determining the non-theological reasons for being a Puritan, Hill acknowledged the presence of theology as a powerful and abiding force in stirring up the masses to revolt.

In recent years, several authors have added to this re-introduction of ideology as a paradigm of historical interpretation. Two of them have produced particularly stimulating works. Anthony Fletcher (b. 1945) in *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* and Caroline Hibbard (b. 1942) in *Charles I and the Popish Plot* have advanced two salient points.[44]

First, Puritan theological conviction emerged as a vitally important part of the mix of factors leading to the war. Hibbard and Fletcher do not deny socio-economic influences in their formulation. In fact, they insist that a true understanding is impossible without due consideration of economic deprivation and social dislocation, but they conclude mass movements over a long period of time are not sustained by disputes over rent-racking or inflation in the price of bread. People die for ideas.

Secondly, Puritan ideas became a means of organizing mass political support for Parliament. These ideas broke through the traditional English conservative reluctance to censure king or bishop. From that point, Puritan propaganda became the means of riveting the nation's attention to the evil deeds of the king's ministers and, ultimately, Charles

himself. By portraying the king and his men as the fountainhead of un-English innovation–theological (Arminianism), political (the subversion of rights during the personal rule), and treasonous (the devotion to a foreign power, i.e., the Papacy)–the Puritans used their ideas to drive the nation in the direction of war.[45]

## LOCAL STUDIES

No study of the English Revolution would be complete without an examination of the work of those whose focus of attention was local rather than national. While these authors do not always easily fit into the interpretive categories laid out above, their work provides important information and detail which aids the interpreters in their task. In recent years, a whole new corpus of work on local and regional aspects of the conflict has joined a formidable collection of older studies that purport to describe the Civil War in microcosm.

County histories of the war are not new. All along attempts were made to portray the political and military aspects of particular sections of the nation, but not until the 1930's did historians begin to break out of this rather rigid paradigm. Alfred Cecil Wood's examination of *Nottinghamshire in the Civil War* was just such an effort. He set out to delineate the social and economic aspects of a region trying to avoid begin engulfed in the great events swirling around it. He reaches the same judgment as Mary Coate whose study of Cornwall during the war concludes with the conviction that the war scarcely altered social or economic relationships in the counties; the more things changed, the more they stayed the same.[46]

Since 1945 the opening of county record offices, the increased availability of family papers, and the gentry controversy have stimulated the study of localities. Scholars began to mine regional records for clues that could help them interpret and understand the wider conflict. In the intervening years, several excellent studies have emerged which have expanded the understanding of seventeenth-century life.[47]

In *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion, 1640-1660,* Alan Milner Everitt described an England in 1640 that was less a centralized nation-state than a union of independent county-states, each with its own "distinct ethos and loyalty." The real changes came as local communities were gradually forced by the army and the various revolutionary governments, under the stress of war conditions, to merge into a national community.[48]

Of particular interest to political as well as economic historians has been Valerie Pearl's *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution: City Government and National Politics, 1625-1643.* The vital impact of the city of London on the fortunes of Parliament as well as its dominant

position in the life of English commerce and industry have given this study a position of prominence. Pearl concludes London's support for Parliament was not assured. The natural sympathy of the city's leadership in 1640 was royalist in nature. The great municipality only became the engine of Parliament's victory after the reigns of power had been wrested from her leaders in a coup d'etat masterminded by the Puritan commanders of parliament. No local community can be viewed as typical for the entire nation, but taken as a whole these studies have provided vital information to scholars, and as such have made a valuable contribution to the overall understanding of the war.[49]

## CONCLUSION

Over the last 300 years the English Civil War's interpretation has undergone substantial and continuing revision. Too often, a given generation of historians reflects, rather than challenges, the prejudices of their own time. This is not to say historians are pale reflections of their surroundings, indeed, sometimes the best historical insights are fashioned in a struggle against prevailing opinions. Nevertheless, a glance at the historiography will reveal that truly responsible practitioners of the craft are wary lest they write history soothing to the ears of their contemporaries alone. Not surprisingly, the royalist historians were ascendant during the heady days of Restoration and the Whiggish interpretation dominated during the great period of Whig political rule. Later, social historians arose in a period when the challenge to liberal institutions reached its greatest intensity, and, recently, the place of Puritan ideology regained status as an important interpretive paradigm in an era when conservative, neo-Puritan values were once again popular.

The study of the English Revolution continues. Every year excellent work by scholars expands our knowledge of the seventeenth century. The present paper, by examining the historiographical trends, clearly indicates the Civil War's profound effect on Englishmen. The Civil War remains a powerful force in the minds of scholars, subjects, and friendly observers alike and will continue to fascinate and inform as the years pass. As new ways of processing the evidence emerge new conclusions will force historians to re-evaluate their long held presuppositions about the seventeenth century. That is good. Since history is written by human beings who sometimes struggle without enthusiasm to subvert their own prejudices, the constant examination cannot but help to sharpen the understanding of this vitally important period in the development of English liberties and social institutions.

## ENDNOTES

1. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1843), 1:2; and idem, *Selections from the History of the Rebellion and the Civil Wars in England and the Life*, ed. Gregory Huehns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 2:3.

2. John Nalson, *Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State from the Beginning of the Scotch Rebellion in the Year 1639 to the Murder of King Charles I* (London: Printed for S. Mearne, 1682-83), 2:iii, lxxvii-lxxviii.

3. Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tonnies (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Company, 1969), 4.

4. R.C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 23.

5. Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 58. This type of national church, controlled by the government, is known as Erastian and takes its name from Erastus, a sixteenth-century Heidelberg physician. He wrote polemical treatises in opposition to the arbitrary use of excommunication by Calvinist clerics. Erastus believed the state should intervene and control the church to prevent this abuse of power by tyrannical churchmen.

6. Clarendon, *History*, 540-41, 447, 599; *Selections*, 6-7.

7. Clarendon, *History*, 102-4; *Selections*, 147.

8. Clarendon, *History*, 519; *Selections*, 118.

9. Clarendon, *Selections*, 166, 170.

10. Clarendon, *History*, 628, 637-38; *Selections*, 305-6, 355-58.

11. Clarendon, *History*, 295-98; *Selections*, 253-54.

12. Laurence Echard, *History of England* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1707-18), 2:980.

13. John Oldmixon, *Critical History of England During the Reigns of the House of Stuart* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1724-30), 2:ii-iii; 2:185; 2:iv, vii, viii.

14. Paul Rapin de Thoyras, *Impartial History of England*, trans. John Kelly (London: Printed by and for John Harrison, 1784), 2:464, 599, 800.

15. David Hume, *History of Great Britain. The Reigns of James I and Charles I* (London: Harmondsworth, Penguin Publishing Company, 1970), 8:323.

16. David Hume, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, ed. David Forbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 502-3, 328-29.

17. Thomas Babbington Macaulay, *Critical, Historical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), 420.

18. Thomas Babbington Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London: Longmans, Brown and Green, Publishers, 1889), 2:49-50; *History of England* (London: Dent Publishing Company, 1965-67), 2:63.

19. Macaulay, *History of England*, 2.

20. James Cottler Morison, *Macaulay* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1882), 70.

21. Leopold von Ranke, *History of England Chiefly in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 1:xi, xiv, 2:552-53.

22. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603-1642* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1889), 2:vi.

23. Richardson, *Debate*, 72.

24. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *The First Two Stuarts and the Puritan Revolution 1603-1660* (London: J.C. Scribner's Sons, 1888), v.

25. Gardiner, *History*, 2:197; 8:84-85; 2:9.

26. Firth, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, was designated by Gardiner to continue writing of story of revolutionary England. Davies taught at Trinity College, Oxford. Trevelyan, the grand nephew of Macaulay, studied at Cambridge and for many years was Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge. Dame Wedgwood spent a life of literary and scholarly exploration of the Stuart years. One of her most interesting projects was the examination and then reappraisal of the life of Strafford in *Strafford, 1593-1641* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), and *Thomas Wentworth, First Earl of Strafford, 1593-1641. A Revaluation* (London: J. Cape Publishing Company, 1971).

27. Richardson, *Debate*, 86.

28. N.B. Harte, ed., *The Study of Economic History* (London: Cass, 1970), 106.

29. Richard Henry Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1912), 399, 400.

30. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* (1904; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926; New York: New American Library, 1954).

31. Richard Henry Tawney, "Harrington's Interpretation of His Age," *Studies in History. British Academy Lectures*, ed. Lucy Sutherland (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 217.

32. Richard Henry Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry," *Economic History Review* 11 (1941): 1-38.

33. Stone received the B.A. and M.A. from Oxford and served many useful years as Dodge Professor of History at Princeton University. From 1946 Trevor-Roper taught at Christ Church College, Oxford. For many years Hill distinguished himself as a teacher at Balliol College, Oxford. Zagorin did his preparation at Harvard University (M.A. and Ph.D.) and serves as the Wilson Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Rochester. Hexter earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at Harvard University but moved to Yale University for teaching duties as the Charles S. Stille Professor of History.

34. Lawrence Stone, "The Anatomy of the Elizabethan Aristocracy," *Economic History Review* 18 (1948): 1-53 and "The Elizabethan Aristocracy: A Restatement," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 4 (1952): 302-21.

35. Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper, "The Gentry, 1540-1640," *Economic History Review*, Supplement 1 (1953); Christopher Hill, "Recent Interpretations of the Civil War," in *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958); Perez Zagorin, "The Social Interpretation of the English Revolution,"

*Journal of Economic History* 19 (1959), 376-401; Jack H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1962).

36. Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 7-8.

37. Christopher Hill, *R.H. Tawney and His Times. Socialism as Fellowship*, in R. Terrill's review, *Balliol Parish Magazine* (1974): 30-31.

38. Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 154; *The English Revolution: 1640* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 9, 82.

39. Christopher Hill, "Historians and the Rise of British Capitalism," *Science and Society* 14 (1950): 309-10; idem, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), x, xiii; idem, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolution England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), 9.

40. Hill, *Society and Puritianism*, 13, 134, 135, 138.

41. Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 291, 294, 314.

42. Trevor-Roper, review of "Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution," *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 73; Jack H. Hexter, "Christopher Hill," *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 October 1975, 1252.

43. See John Morrill, "Christopher Hill's Revolution," *History* 21:250; and David Underdown, "Christopher Hill," *Reviving the Revolution*, ed. Geoff Eley and William Hurt (London: Verso Publications, 1988), 338-39.

44. Fletcher is Professor of History at the University of Sheffield, and Hibbard, who received her Ph.D. at Yale, teaches now at the University of Illinois, Urbana.

45. Anthony Hibbard, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1987); Caroline Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

46. Wood, a student of C.H. Firth at Oxford, was the author of a history of the Levant trading company; Mary Coate, *Cornwall in the Great Civil War and Interregnum, 1642-1660. A Social and Political Study* (Truro: Barton Publishing Company, 1933), 1, 351-52; Alfred Cecil Wood, *Nottinghamshire in the Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), ix.

47. This is understandable, of course, for the focus of gentry life as well as information concerning the gentry is overwhelmingly local in nature.

48. Alan Milner Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion, 1640-1660* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1966), 17.

49. Valerie Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution: City Government and National Politics, 1625-1643* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 284. Pearl is president of New Hall College, Cambridge.