Socio-Economic Status, the English Civil War, and Oliver Cromwell

Socio-Economic Status and the Civil War.

An analysis of the socio-economic status of participants in the civil war is fraught with difficulty. Information on the elites is relatively easy to obtain, but data on rank-and-file members of political and religious groups is largely lacking.[1] Although statistical analysis is virtually impossible, literary evidence is abundant but often very partisan given the nature of the civil war. There is also the difficulty of significant changes in the adherents to parliament and the crown, so that for example more than two-fifths of the Commons and the majority of the Lords left Westminster for the king's cause in 1642.[2] Also, there were major changes in the social structure of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which affected the social composition of supporters of the crown and parliament:

> ... between 1540 and 1640 ... The number of peers rose from 60 to 160; baronets and knights from 500 to 1400; esquires from perhaps 800 to 3,000; and armigerous gentry from perhaps 5,000 to 15,000 ... This numerical expansion was made possible mainly by the transfer of huge quantities of landed property first from the church to the crown and then from the crown to the laity, mostly gentry, in a series of massive sales to pay for foreign wars.[3]

The House of Commons itself changed during this period, so that it grew from approximately 300 members to about 500, and the gentry component in it rose from about 50 per cent to approximately 75 per cent.[4] Throughout the civil war there were major changes in the numbers of adherents to the parliamentarian and royalist armies, making it difficult to carry our statistical analysis of membership numbers. The alignment of forces of 1640 was different from that of 1642, by which time large number of former parliamentarians had moved over to royalism. There were changes again in 1648, when conservative elements among parliamentarians, designated as Presbyterians, switched back into support for the king.[5] Many of those who had supported parliament on constitutional grounds in 1640, like Sir Edward Hyde, transferred their allegiance in 1642, whereas those who supported parliament on religious grounds tended to continue to support the parliamentary cause.[6]

The most significant change in parliament occurred in December 1648 when 'under the command of Colonel Thomas Pride, the army purged the House of Commons of any opposition (some 100 MPs were excluded, 45 who were actually arrested – others prudently removed themselves). It was the remaining "Rump" of around 70 MPs who would address the matter of bringing the King to trial.'[7]

There were also major changes in demographic and economic conditions during the second half of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. Population grew by over 30 per cent in the period 1570-1609 and prices more than doubled between 1550 and

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[1] Underdown, *Revel*, pp. viii, 183-184; C. Holmes, *The Eastern Association in the English Civil War*, 1974, p. 172.
[2] R Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution*, 1998, p. 45.
[3] L. Stone, *Causes of the English Revolution, 1529-1640*, 1986, pp. 72, 73.
[4] Ibid, p. 92.
[5] Ibid, p. 34.
[6] Ibid, p., 143.
[7] D. Flintham, *Civil War London*. 2017, p. 41.

1600.[8] Lawrence Stone noted the changes that had taken place in English society during the sixteenth century as a result of population growth: 'the excess supply of labour relative to demand not only increased unemployment, but forced down real wages to an alarming degree ... [there was] a polarisation of society into rich and poor: the upper classes became relatively more numerous and their real incomes rose; the poor also became more numerous and their real incomes fell.'[9]

Recent research by Alexandra Shepard using church court depositions indicates that wealth inequality increased markedly during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Table 4: Median Wealth in England, Deflated to 1550-1559 Values, by Social Group Over Time.[10]

	1550-74	1575-99	1600-24	1625-49
Gentry (N = 367)	£16.00	£8.00	£59.30	£50.00
Yeomen (N = 1104)	£5.34	£7.27	£23.92	£50.00
Craft/Trade (N = 2185)	£2.40	£1.40	£2.99	£5.00
Husbandmen (N = 2127)	£4.00	£3.37	£5.93	£5.00
Labourers (N = 273)	£1.58	£1.35	£1.36	£1.03

Although the gentry increased their wealth – increasing by about three times – the yeomen's wealth had grown nearly ten times, while labourers' worth decreased slightly. There was little change among husbandmen and a doubling of wealth among craft/tradesmen. This data suggests that this was a period of 'the rise of the yeomanry' during the first half of the seventeenth century. Wrightson has summarized the situation of the yeomen as follows:

> Like the gentry, they benefited from low labour costs as employers, while as large-scale producers they stood to gain from rising prices ... Again, like the gentry, they took a thoroughly rational and calculating attitude towards profit ... often ambitious, aggressive, [and] small capitalists ... [they experienced] gradually rising living standards, the rebuilding of farmhouses and their stocking with goods of increasing sophistication and comfort.[11]

These changes had a significant effect on the relationships between different social classes. Village elites composed of local gentry and prosperous yeomen farmers and tradesmen began to attempt to control the impoverished and unruly elements of the poor.[12]

> Long before the civil war, especially in towns and pasture regions where cloth-working or other industrial pursuits were available, the growing gulf between the people 'of credit and reputation' and their less prosperous neighbours was reflected in the emergence of parish elites who saw it as their duty to discipline the poor into godliness and industriousness, and who found in puritan teaching (broadly defined) their guide and inspiration. Along with reformist elements of the gentry

[8] E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England & Wales*, 1981; B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstracts of British Historical Statistics*, 1971, pp. 484-486; J. Thirsk, 'The farming regions', pp. 857, 858, 1861; E.H. Phelps-Brown and S.V. Hopkins, 'Seven centuries of the prices of consumables compared with builders' wage rates' in E.M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Essays in Economic History,* Volume 2, 1962, pp. 193-195.
[8] L. Stone, 'Social mobility in England, 1500-1700', *Past and Present*, Volume 33, 1966, pp. 26-29, 49
[9] Data from *Perceptions of Worth and Social Status in Early Modern England*, ESRC Reference Number RES-000-23-1111.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 134, 135.
[12] Manning, *The English People*, p. 46; K. Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 168-73, 181.

and clergy, they mounted a campaign against the traditional culture of the lower orders.[13]

The merging of interests between the gentry and prosperous yeomen and tradesmen makes it difficult to distinguish social statuses in this period.[14] One-hundred-and-two Yorkshiremen obtained coats of arms as gentlemen between 1558 and 1642 and roughly half of them were yeomen farmers. In Lancashire 202 families entered the gentry: 'the majority were prosperous yeomen.'[15] Gordon Batho concluded that 'there was no sharp distinction between lesser gentry and the richer yeomen ... In innumerable wills and legal documents of the age a man is described in one place as a yeoman and in another as a gentleman ...'[16]

Oliver Cromwell himself illustrates the ambiguity of status in this period. John Morrill has summarized the evidence as follows:

> ... his standing in St Ives was essentially that of a yeoman, a working farmer. He had moved down from the gentry to the 'middling sort' ... Despite his connections with ancient riches, Cromwell's economic status was much closer to that of the 'middling sort' than that to the country gentry and governors. He always lived in towns, not in a country manor house; and he worked for his living. He held no important local offices and had no tenants or others dependent upon him beyond a few household servants. When he pleaded for the selection of 'russet-coated captains who know what they are fighting for', and when he described his troopers as 'honest men, such as feared God', this was not the condescension of a radical member of the elite, but the pleas of a man on the margins of the gentry on behalf of those with whom he had had social discourse and daily communion for twenty years.[17]

There was a great deal of social mobility at this time, with many wealthy yeomen and tradesmen achieving gentry status during the first half of the seventeenth century.[18] Gentlemen and yeomen/tradesmen were educated together in local grammar schools and universities, and so shared similar cultural backgrounds.[19] There was also an increase in the literacy of both the gentry and the middle classes, whereas most husbandmen and labourers remained illiterate during this period.[20] Because of the fear of literacy amongst the 'lower sort', as early as 1543 parliament had stipulated that 'no women, nor artificers, prentices, journeymen, servingmen of the degrees of yeomen or under, husbandmen nor labourers shall read the Bible or New Testament in English to himself or any other, privately or openly.'[21] Hobbes had complained that 'after the Bible was translated into English, every man, nay every boy and wench, that could read English thought they spoke with God Almighty and understood what He said.'[22]

The fear that established authority had of the 'lower sort' obtaining literacy was

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[13] D. Underdown, *Revel*, *Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660,* 1957, pp. 275, 276.
[14] Hirst, *The Representative,* p. 4; see also O'Day, 'Universities', p. fn 19, p. 100; Wedgewood, *The King's War*, p. 205.
[15] Manning, *1649: The Crisis*, p. 58.
[16] Ibid.
[17] R. O' Day, 'Universities and professions in the early modern period', *oro.open.ac.uk*, pp. 83, 87, 101; Wrightson, *English Society,* pp. 89; 186, 191-193; Stone, *Causes*, pp. 74;
[18] Wrightson, *English Society*, p.27; see also Manning, *1649 The Crisis*, p. 51.
[19] R. O' Day, 'Universities and professions in the early modern period', *oro.open.ac.uk*, pp. 83, 87, 101; Wrightson, *English Society,* pp. 89; 186, 191-193; Stone, *Causes*, pp. 74;
[20] Wrightson, *English Society,* p. 191.

[21] D. Wilson, *The People and the Book: The Revolutionary Impact of the English Bible 1380-1611*, 1976, p. 87.
[22] Stone, *Causes*, p.101.

probably well-founded. As early as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries throughout southern and central England groups of Lollards met secretly in towns and villages to read or listen to readings of Scripture and to consider their contemporary application. Most of them came from the class of skilled, literate traders and craftsmen. They were masons, carpenters, wool-merchants and leatherworkers – men and women whose work took them long distances in search of employment and markets.

This was the classic socio-economic group associated with puritanism, but nevertheless there were many adherents of a higher status. When Prynne, Burton and Bastwick, martyrs to the Protestant cause who had been punished and exiled by the king, returned to London on the 28th November 1640, 'some three thousand coaches, and four thousand horsemen' were included in the crowd that welcomed them back to London.[23] During the building of the defensive wall around London, the people helping to build the wall included 'a great company of the common council and diverse other chief men of the city'.[24]

Nevertheless the evidence suggests that wealthy aldermen largely supported the crown: 'strong financial ties bound the wealthy citizens to the crown ... the court contented itself with the belief that the disturbances involved the meaner sort of people and that the affections of the better and main part of the city favoured the king.'[25] As a result of this belief, the king placed a guard to the approaches of the Commons with soldiers 'who disliked or despised the Londoners and officers who, being Westminster men, were friends and dependents of the Court.'[26]

Clarendon summarized his conclusions about the link between status and affiliation to crown or parliament:

> … though the people in general [favoured the king], (except in great towns and corporations, where, besides the natural malignity, the factious lecturers, and emissaries from the parliament, had poisoned the affections,) and especially those of quality, were loyally inclined ...[27]

Most contemporaries believed that the main support for parliament came from London and other corporate towns, with strong support from the middle sort.[28]

Lilly writing in 1651 described how the terms Cavalier and Roundhead originated:

> They [the Puritans] had their hair of their heads very few of them longer than their ears, whereupon it came to pass that those who usually with their cries attended at Westminster were by a nickname called *Roundheads*, and all that took part or appeared for his Majesty, *Cavaliers* ... However, the present hatred of the citizens was such unto gentlemen, especially courtiers, that few durst come into the city; or if they did, they were sure to receive affronts and be abused.[29]

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[23] D. Purkiss, *The English Civil War: A People's History,* 2007, p. 99.

[24] Ibid, p. 286.

[25] S. Porter and S. Marsh, *The Battle for London*, 2010, p. 9; see also D. Hirst, *The Representative of the People? Voting in England under the Early Stuarts*, 1975, p. 138; R. Ashton, *The City and the Court, 1603- 1643*, 1979, p. 206; Pearl, *London*, p. xi.

[26] C.V. Wedgwood, *The King's War*, *1641-1647*, 2001, p. 32.

[27] E. Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England Begun in the Year 1641*, Volume 2, 1888, p. 226.

[28] An indication of where the city's sympathies lay was the return of four members opposed to the court in the election to the Long Parliament in October 1640.

[29] W. Lilly *The True History of King James I and Charles* I, 1715, pp. 55-56 – first published in 1651, p. 246. The association between puritanism and short hair was also found in New England where the rule was 'that none should wear their hair below their ears'. T. Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts*, Vol.1, 1936, pp. 130, 131. Some Baptists continued to prohibit long hair as late as 1689. See A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists,* 1947, p. 130.

Pepys in his diary frequently distinguished between citizens and gentlemen living in London; for example, at the end of December 1662 he wrote 'only not so well pleased with the company at the house today, which was full of Citizens, there hardly being a gentleman or woman in the house ...[30]

Baxter concluded that 'though it must be confessed that the public safety and liberty wrought very much with most, especially the nobility and gentry who adhered to Parliament, yet it was principally the difference about religion that filled up the Parliament's armies and put the resolution and valour into their soldiers, which carried them on in another manner than mercenary soldiers are carried on.'[31] There is evidence however of tensions between the aristocracy and gentry on the one hand and the middle classes during the outbreak of the civil war. The burden of ship money fell disproportionately on yeomanry and tradesmen, something which was highlighted by William Prynne in his attacks on the crown.[32] These tensions were exacerbated by the attitudes of the aristocracy and gentry towards the new middle classes.

The pretensions of yeomen to quality with gentry caused resentment amongst some gentlemen. 'The yeomanry' wrote Edward Chamberlayne ...'grow rich, and thereby so proud, insolent, and carless, that they neither give that humble respect and awful reverence which in other Kingdoms is usually given to nobility, gentry, and clergy' ... which has 'rendered them so distasteful ... even to their own gentry' that the latter sometimes wished that the yeomen's activities were less profitable or they were taxed more heavily.[33]

This is consistent with the patterns of wealth depicted in Shepard's analysis of church court depositions, whereby the yeomanry achieved parity with the gentry by the middle of the seventeenth century.

A number of scholars have noted the breaking of the alliance between the gentry and the middle classes, as the demands for political and religious reforms began to emerge.[34] However, this reflected some long-term tensions between these socio-economic groups. For example, as early as 1576, a clause was inserted in an Act of Parliament prohibiting West Country clothiers from buying more than 20 acres of land.[35]

In Somerset it was alleged that

... a great part of the estate of every farmer or substantial yeoman should be taken from them; alleging that some lords had said that £20 by the year was enough for any peasant to live by ... persuading the substantial yeomen and freeholders that at least two parts of their states would by that commission taken from them ... For though the gentlemen of ancient families estates in that county were for the most part well affected to the King ... yet there were people of inferior degree, who, by good husbandry, clothing, and other thriving arts, had gotten very great fortunes, and, by degrees getting themselves into the gentlemen's estates, were angry that they found not themselves in the same esteem and reputation with those whose estates they had ... These from the beginning were fast friends to the Parliament, and many of them were now entrusted by them as deputy-lieutenants in their new ordinance of the militia ...[36]

Likewise in Yorkshire when the king summoned the gentry of the county to York in May 1642, he omitted to summon the freeholders, who responded by claiming 'ourselves

[30] R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Volume 3, 1995, p. 295.
[31] Baxter, *Reliquiare Baxterianae*, pp. 30, 31.
[32] See Manning, *The English People*, pp. 10, 231.
[33] E. Chamberlayne, *Anglia Notitia*, 1672, pp. 61-63.
[34] Manning, *The English People*, p. 46
[35] L. Stone, *The Crisis of the* Aristocracy, 1965, p. 28.
[36] Hyde, *History,* Volume 2, p, 296.

equally interested in the common good of the county', and as a result 'did take boldness to come in person to York ... thereupon the doors of the meeting house were shut, we utterly excluded...[37]

Elsewhere 'Lord Paulet in opposition to the Militia at a combustion in *Wells* ... declared that it was not fit for any Yeomen to have allowed more than the poor Moitie of ten pounds a year ... when the power should be totally on their [the royalists'] side, they shall be compelled to live at that low allowance ... the people did not take the speech as onely directed to the Yeomen, but to all men under the degree of a Gentleman ... the Tradesmen and Merchants...'[38]

One Parliamentarian tract published in 1643 claimed

that this was proof that the royalists intended 'a government at discretion' after the French fashion, because 'the middle sort of people of England, and yeomanry' were the chief obstacles to such a change, and as they composed the main part of the militia, 'then by policy, or even plain force' they must be disarmed …[39]

This can be seen indirectly as a consequence of 'the rise of the yeomanry', creating increasing demands by yeomen for equal status with their aristocratic and gentry neighbours. This resulted in tension between these groups, leading on occasions to violence. For example, 'the cavaliers in Somersetshire have used violence on the yeomanry, and have turned them out of doors, and take their arms from them, the people seeing it could not suffer it, for if they prevail now they think they shall be slaves forever.'[40]

Fear was a leading component of the civil war. As we have seen, in London the king and many Members of Parliament and the House of Lords left London in early 1642 as a result of the fear of the population threatening them with violence and intimidation. Many of these members had originally supported parliament on constitutional grounds, but fear had driven them into the support of the king. Many Protestants feared Catholics, particularly after Spain's attempt to invade England during the late sixteenth century. In the provinces many of the aristocracy and gentry feared the threats from the poor and the increasing radicalism of the middle classes. And at a later stage of the war, the Presbyterians feared the increasing power of the radicals in the New Model Army.

There is ample evidence that the middle classes played a significant role in political developments in the English civil war, although the claim that the middle sort were the main supporters of parliament has been contested by a number of historians.[41] There is plenty of contemporary literary evidence to indicate that the middle classes played an important role in the support of parliament. Keith Wrightson has summarized this evidence**:**

London demonstrators against episcopacy in 1641 were characterized as being 'men of mean or a middle quality', as distinct from both 'aldermen, merchants or common councilmen' on the one

[37] C. Hill and E. Dell (eds.), *The Good Old Cause: The English Revolution of 1640-1660, Its Causes, Course and Consequences,* 1969, pp. 244, 245.
[38] *A Memento for Yeomen, Merchants, Citizens and All the Commons in England* (August 23, 1642, B.M. E 113 (13), pp. 4, 5.
[39] B. Manning, *Aristocrats, Plebeians and Revolution in England 1640-1660,* 1996 p. 69.
[40] B. Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution*, 1976,p. 328.
[41] The main proponent of the middle sort hypothesis is Manning in his *The English People*. The critics of this thesis have pointed out that many of the middle classes supported royalism or remained neutral. See J. Barry and C, Brooks **(**eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550- 1800*, 1994, p. 22; J. Morrill (ed.), *Reactions to the English Cicil War, 1642-1649,* 1982, p. 71.

hand, and the 'vulgar' on the other. In Worcester 'the middle sort of people' supported the parliamentarian cause. 'The middle and inferior sort of people' of Birmingham resisted Prince Rupert's advance in 1643 despite the defeatist fears of the 'better sort'. At Bristol 'the King's cause and party were favoured by two extremes in that city; the one the wealthy and powerful men, the other of the basest and lowest sort, but disgusted by the middle rank, the true and best citizens'. Such activism and the terms in which it was described were not confined to urban centres. In Somerset the royalists were said to consist of most of the gentry and their tenants, while parliament had the support of 'yeomen, farmers, petty freeholders, and such as use manufacturers that enrich the country', under the leadership of some gentlemen and others of lesser degree, who 'by good husbandry, clothing and other thriving arts, had gotten very great fortunes' In Gloucestershire the king was supported by both the rich and 'the needy multitude' who depended upon them. Parliament allegedly had the hearts of 'the yeomen, farmers, clothiers, and the whole middle rank of the people'. According to Lucy Hutchinson, 'most of the gentry' of Nottinghamshire 'were disaffected to the parliament', but 'most of the middle sort, the able substantial freeholders, and the other commons, who had not their dependence upon the malignant nobility and gentry, adhered to the parliament'. Again, Richard Baxter saw the king as finding support among most lords, knights and gentlemen of England, together with their tenants and 'most of the poorest people', while parliament had a minority of the gentry 'and the greatest part of the tradesmen and freeholders and the middle sort of men, especially in those corporations and countries which depend on clothing and such manufactures'.[42]

The critique of the thesis that the 'middle sort' were the chief supporters of parliament, has not allowed for the major support for parliament of the middle classes in London, who were the prime movers at the beginning of the civil war and were the mainstay of the New Model Army who shaped its outcome.

The turning point in the support of London for parliament occurred in elections held on December 21, 1641 to the Common Council brought in men with active parliamentary Puritan sympathies. These elections transformed the politics of London, and Clarendon attributed to them the king's departure from Whitehall early in January 1642.[43]

The takeover by radical elements of the Common Council in December 1641 'when that body was effectively captured by the radical party ... Now (wrote one later royalist sympathizer) outgoe all the grave, discreet, well-affected Citizens ... and in their Stead are chosen *Fowke* the Traytor, *Ryley* the Squeeking bodyes-maker, *Perkins* the Taylor, *Norminton* the Cutler, young beardless *Coulson* the Dyer, *Gill* the Wine-Cooper, and *Jupe* the Laten-man in *Crooked-Lane, Beadle* of the Ward ...'[44]

This was a time of revolutionary fervour:

when Alderman *Pennington* and Captain *Venne* brought down their Myrmidons to assault and terrified the Members of both Houses, whose faces or opinion they liked not ... when these rude multitudes published the names of Members of both Houses, as enemies of the Commonwealth, who would not agree to their frantic propositions; when the names of those were given by Members of the House, that they might be proscribed, and torn in pieces by those Multitudes, when many were driven away for fear of their lives from being present at those consultations?[45]

This resulted in 236 MPs leaving parliament in June 1642, mostly to join the King at York.[46] Class hostility grew during the civil war, often associated with religious radicalism: Positions in local and other authorities were increasingly held by wealthy

[42] K. Wrightson, 'Sorts of people in Tudor and Stuart England' in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, 1994, p. 46.
[43] Pearl, *London*, p. 132.
[44] Ashton, *The City*, pp. 205, 206.
[45] Ibid, p. 215. See also Stone, *Causes*, p.145.
[46] Stone, *Causes*, p.141.

members of the middle classes. The nobility and gentry who had supported parliament against the king found that they were neglected, and people of lower status were preferred for places of authority. Clarendon noted that

> The nobility and gentry who had advanced the credit and reputation of the Parliament by concurring with it against the King found themselves totally neglected, and the most inferior people preferred at all places of trust and profit.... most of those persons of condition, who ... had been seduced to do them [parliament] service throughout the kingdom, decline to appear longer in so detestable employment; and now a more inferior sort of the common people succeeded in those employments, who thereby exercised so great an insolence over those were in quality above them, and who always had a power over them, that was very grievous ... all distinction of quality being renounced. And they who were not above the condition of ordinary inferior constables six or seven years before, were now the justices of peace, sequestrators, and commissioners; who executed the commands of Parliament in all the counties of the kingdom with such rigour and tyranny as was natural for such persons to use over and towards those upon whom they had formerly looked at such a distance.[47]

Lucy the wife of Thomas Hutchinson tells 'how her husband, the parliamentary officer, found that his allies in Nottinghamshire distrusted civility, thinking it scarce possible for anyone to continue to be both a gentleman and a supporter of the godly interest.'[48]

In 1646 the Presbyterian Thomas Edwards declared that in the previous two years, and especially since parliament's victory at Naseby, the sectaries had in the most insolent and unheard-of manner abused 'all sorts and ranks of men even to the highest.'[49] Clarendon complained that the sects had 'discountenanced all forms of reverence and respect, as relics and marks of superstition.' In 1663 the Lord Mayor of London issued an order forbidding and repetition of the 'rudeness, affronts, and insolent behaviour' displayed by 'the unruly and meaner sort of people' during the Interregnum towards noblemen, gentlemen and persons of quality passing in their coaches or walking through the streets of the City. This 'undutifulness and contempt of their superiors', he claimed, had been encouraged by the 'late usurped powers.'

The civil war increased this hostility:

> ... the fury and license of the common people, who were in all places grown to that barbarity and rage against the nobility and gentry, (under the style of *cavaliers*,) that it was not safe for any to live at their houses who were taken notice of as no votaries to the Parliament.[50]

> The City authorities complained to the king that most of the disorders came not from them but 'from the unregulated and disorderly suburbs', located in 'the skirts of the city where the Lord Mayor and magistrates of London have neither power ... [and which were] fuller of the meaner sort of people.'[51] The reaction by wealthy merchants in London after 1643 accounted for the development of political Presbyterianism in the City.[52] Presbyterianism attracted both aristocrats and the gentry not only in London but elsewhere in the country, and contemporaries saw the Independents, Baptists and Quakers as the main source of the extreme and radical opposition to the crown.[53].

The Quakers turned out to be the most radical of the sects, including a refusal to pay

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[47] Hyde, *The History*, Volume 4, pp. 287, 315.
[48] L. Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel* Hutchinson, 1972, p. 132.
[49] Manning, *1649: The Crisis*, p. 321.
[50] K. Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England*, 2018, p. 322.
[51] Pearl, *London*, p. 129.
[52] Ibid, p.204.
[53] Jennings, *The Gathering*, p, 187.

tithes or to doth hats to superiors and recognize titles, which appeared extremely threatening to established authority. They also criticised the aristocracy and gentry, claiming that the latter owed their position to the 'Norman Yoke', seizing land and property by forceful dispossession.[54]

Although the Quakers had relatively humble origins – many of them had come from a Baptist background[55] – they were very literate and established their own libraries with printed books and tracts.[56] Although they eventually espoused pacifism, during the civil war period they were active in the parliamentary army.[57] All Puritan denominations appear to have had high levels of literacy, particularly the Presbyterians, many of whose ministers had university degrees.[58]

Socio-Economic Status and the Royalist and New Model Armies.

There is difficulty in analyzing the social status of the parliamentary army during the civil war because of its changing composition and numbers. In March 1649, the Commonwealth had 44,373 soldiers in England; in July 1652 it had nearly 70,000, whereas in February 1660, its numbers were fixed at 28,342.[59] This is less of a difficulty with the royalist army as it was in existence for only a relatively short period.

This essay will focus on the New Model Army, for which there is relatively full information. It was also the most radical of all of parliament's armies, playing the major role in the outcome of the war. According to Ian Gentiles, 'while the number of horse [in the New Model] remained fairly stable between roughly 5,000 and 6,500, the foot and the dragoons underwent violent fluctuations in numbers, from 18,000 to 7,000, owing to massive desertions. The men who stamped the New Model with a distinctive character were therefore a tight group numbering about 5,000 horse and 7,000 foot.'[60] It is these fluctuations which make statistical analysis so difficult, and it is therefore necessary to rely mainly on literary evidence.

The origin of the social status of the New Model Army lies in the recruitment of officers to the Eastern Association. One of the officers of the army, Dodson a native of the Isle of Ely, had served with Cromwell from the outbreak of the war, and described how Cromwell had packed the army with officers sympathetic to the sectaries – that in choosing officers for his own regiment, he had dismissed 'honest gentlemen and souldiers that ware stout in the cause', and replaced them 'with common men, pore and of meane parentage, onely – he would give them the title of godly pretious men'[61]. Whitelocke, another contemporary, described Cromwell's men 'as being mostly freeholders and freeholders' sons, who had engaged in this quarrel upon a matter of conscience.'[62]

However, there is some evidence that in the early years the aristocracy and gentry played a significant role in the parliamentary army. Baxter claimed that when 'the Earl of *Essex* came to *Worcester*, with many Lords and Knights, and in a flourishing

[54] B. Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, 1985, p. 39.
[55] Jennings, *The Gathering*, p.269; Reay, *The Quakers*, p. 20.
[56] Jennings, *The Gathering*, pp. 260, 261.
[57] Reay, *The Quakers*, pp. 41, 42, 50
[58] Jennings, *The Gathering,* p. 244*:*
[59] C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's Army,* 1902, pp. 34, 35.
[60] I. Gentiles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653,* 1992, p. 40.
[61] Holmes, *The Eastern*, p. 199.
[62] A. Fraser, *Cromwell Our Chief of Men,* 1974, p. 100.

[parliamentary] army, [they were] gallantly cloathed ...'[63] This was confirmed by another source which claimed that in the parliamentary army 'only seven of the new colonels were not gentlemen, and of nine of them were from noble families.'[64] This was in the early stages of the civil war when constitutional concerns were the dominant issues. In June 1647 there was a purge of conservative presbyterian officers from the army, including 'some of the most socially distinguished of the army's founders.'[65]

The discipline for which the New Model was famous for originated in the way Cromwell treated his troops. 'At Huntingdon, two troopers who tried to desert were whipped in the market place ... Colonel Cromwell had 2,000 brave men, well disciplined; no man swears but he pays his twelve pence; if he be drunk he is set in the stocks, or worse, if one call the other "Roundhead" he is cashiered ...'[66] This religious zeal was partly responsible for the discipline that the New Model Army showed in battle, allowing them to defeat royalist armies. However, this was also the result of harsh discipline 'including penalties for drunkenness and fornication; blasphemers [who] had their tongues pierced with a hot iron.'[67] The army also had a reputation for being 'the praying army',[68] and their religious faith along with their discipline 'explained why small handfuls of New Model soldiers were able to put much larger numbers of royalists to flight.' As the Venetian ambassador observed of the New Model, 'This much is certain that the troops live as precisely as if they were a brotherhood of monks ... It was observed in the late wars that when the royal forces gained a victory, they abandoned themselves to wine and debauchery, while those commanded by Cromwell, after their greatest successes were obliged to pray and fast.'[69]

According to Anthony Fletcher, 'the instructions sent to [royalist] commissioners of array made it quite clear ... that the officers were all 'persons of quality' with considerable local estates.'[70] Cromwell largely concurred with this analysis, claiming that he had confronted Hampden about parliamentary soldiers in the early period of the civil war, stating that 'your troopers ... are most of them old decayed serving men and tapsters, and such kind of fellows, and, said I, their troopers are gentlemen's sons, younger sons, persons of quality: do you think that the spirits of such base and mean fellows will ever be able to encounter gentlemen that have honour, courage and resolution in them?'[71]

There is other evidence to confirm this statement. According to one source 'the King's forces in the windy summer morning looked magnificent, with bright fluttering banners of every colour and fantasy, as the light flashed from polished breastplates, glowed on damask banners, taffeta scarves and velvet cloaks.'[72] Cromwell was moved to prayer: 'When I saw the enemy draw up and march in gallant order towards us, and we a company of poor ignorant men ...'[73] According to Gentiles

All Charles's officers at Oxford from the rank of captain upwards, were of gentry or more exalted

[63] Baxter, *Reliquiare Baxterianae*, p. 42.
[64] D. Purkiss, *The English Civil War: A People's History*, 2007, p. 421.
[65] I. Gentiles, 'The New Model Officer Corps in 1647: a collective portrait', *Social History,* 22:2 (1997), p. 130.
[66] Ibid, p. 101.
[67] R. Tombs, *The English and their History,* 2015, p. 230.
[68] Ibid, p. 95.
[69] Relatzione of England by Giovanni Sagredo, 1656, Razzell**,** *The English Revolution*, p. 19.
[70] Fletcher, *The Outbreak,* p. 356.
[71] I. Roots (ed.), *Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 1989, p 134; G. Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War*, 1958, p. 60.
[72] Wedgwood, *The King's War*, p. 452.
[73] Ibid, p.452.

status. His regimental commanders early in the war were all noblemen or higher gentry. Throughout the whole royalist army fully 90 per cent of the regimental commanders were gentlemen or peers ... the practice of promoting men from the ranks, which was so common in the New Model, was wholly absent in the Oxford army.[74]

The difficulty in analysing the New Model's composition is that 'of the total officer corps in 1648, half came from backgrounds so obscure that no information can be recovered about them.'[75] However, Gentles who has made the most detailed study of them concluded that of the officers in 1647 'twenty-two – about 9 per cent of the total – are known to have had some form of higher education ... Thirty-seven men or about one-sixth ... are known to have risen from non-commissioned rank ... [and] a high proportion ... even at the rank of colonel, were men of relatively low social status ... it is the strongly urban character of the officer corps that is most striking.'[76]

These conclusions are confirmed by literary accounts by both royalists and parliamentarians. The royalist Denzil Holles, believed that the officers of the New Model Army 'from the general ... to the meanest sentinel, are not able to make a thousand a year lands; most of the colonels are tradesmen, brewers, tailors, goldsmiths, shoemakers and the like.'[77] According to another hostile contemporary account it claimed that if you 'Deduct the weavers, tailors, brewers, cobblers, tinkers, carmen, draymen, broom-men, and then give me a list of the gentlemen. Their names may be writ in text, within the compass of a single halfpenny.'[78] The Earl of Manchester wrote in 1645, that Cromwell had chosen for his army 'not such as were soldiers or men of estates, but such as were common men, poor and of mean parentage, only he would give them the title of godly, precious men.'[79] In August 1643 Cromwell justified his mode of selection in a famous speech.

It may be it provoked some spirits to see such plain men made captains of horse. It had been well that men of honour and birth had entered into these employments, but why do they not appear? Who would have hindered them? But since it was necessary the work must go on, better plain men than none. I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows than what you call a gentleman and is nothing else.[80]

In a vindication of the New Model from the charge of intending to sack London, published in the summer of 1647, it is asserted: 'There are verie few of us, but have most of this world's interest in the Citie of London, being chiefly and principally raised thence, and verie many, especially of our officers, being citizens themselves having their wives and children therein.'[81]

Samuel Pepys in his diary for the ninth December 1663 confirmed the role of London artisans and tradesmen in the New Model Army:

of all the old army now, you cannot see a man begging about the street. But what? You shall have this Captain turned a shoemaker, the lieutenant, a Baker; this, a brewer; that, a haberdasher; this common soldier, a porter; and every man in his apron and frock, etc, as if they had never done

[74] Gentiles, 'The New Model Officer Corps in 1647', p. 143.
[75] R. Hutton, *The British Republic 1549-1660*, 2000, p. 6.
[76] Gentiles, 'The New Model Officer Corps in 1647', pp. 135, 137, 140, 143,
[77] F. Maseres, 'Memoirs of Denzil Lord Holles', *Select Tract Relating to the Civil Wars in England in the Reign of Charles the First*, 1815, p. 277.
[78] *Mercurius Elencticus*, 7-14 June 1648.
[79] C. Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*, 1970, pp. 65, 66.
[80] Ibid, pp. 66, 67.
[81] C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's Army: a History of the English Soldier during the Civil War*, 1912, p. 47.

anything else – whereas the other [cavaliers] go with their belts and swords, swearing and cursing and stealing – running into people's houses, by force oftentimes, to carry away something. And this is the difference between the temper of one and the other. [82]

Previously on the 4th July 1663 while watching the royal army parade through London, he had observed that 'all these gay men [royalist horse and foot] are not the soldiers that must do the King's business, it being such as these that lost the old King all he had and were beat by the most ordinary fellows that could be.'[83]

It was the junior officers of the New Model who frequently undertook independent political action, such as Cornet Joyce's seizing of the king at Holdenbury and placing pressure on Cromwell and the senior officers to bring the king to trial and eventual execution.[84] The wealthy Presbyterians who dominated London's government at this time, attempted to block the New Amy's access to parliament in 1647, but this was thwarted by the army sweeping away the resistance of the trained bands.[85] The New Model was reinforced by volunteers raised by Skippon in the suburbs, who were 'predominantly servants and apprentices'.[86] It is no accident that the New Model had been able to gain access to London Bridge through Southwark, which had long been a support of the radicals both in parliament and the army. This culminated in the purging of parliament led by Colonel Pride, leaving a rump of about 70 Independent MPs.[87]

In order to confirm the low social status of the New Model, an analysis has been carried out to compare the socio-economic status through university attendance of Royalist and New Model officers during the civil war period. The essence of the analysis is to make a comparison using an identical methodology for both armies. It indicates that the Royalist officers were of significantly higher social status than those of the New Model, confirming the literary evidence reviewed above.

[82] Latham and Matthews, *The Diary*, Volume 4, 1995, pp. 373, 374.
[83] Ibid, p. 217.
[84] B. Coward, *Cromwell: Profiles in Power,* 1991, p. 50.
[85] J. T. Schroeder, 'London and the New Model Army, 1647', *The Historian*, Volume 19, No. 3, May 1957, p. 249.
[86] L. C. Nagel, *The Militia of London, 1641-1642,* D.Phil. Thesis, Kings College, University of London, p. 303.
[87] D. Flintham, *Civil War London*, 2017, p. 41.

Table 5: Proportions of Royalist and New Model Army Officers Graduating from Oxford and Cambridge Universities[88]*.*[222]

	Total In Sample	Number Graduating from Oxford	Number Graduating from Cambridge	Total Proportion Graduating
Royalist Officers, 1642-60	100	27	25	52%
New Model Officers, 1645-49	100	9	6	15%
New Model Officers, 1649-63	100	7	10	17%

There are probably too many false positives in all samples, as suggested by Gentles' finding that only nine per cent of New Model Army officers had received a higher education in 1648, including at the Inns of Court. This suggests that most of these officers were from non-gentry backgrounds.

Oliver Cromwell and the Election of the Long Parliament.

There has been much debate about the origins of the Long Parliament during the English Civil War. What has not been sufficiently realised is the importance of the nature of parliamentary constituencies and the way they affected the nature of Members of Parliament. In 1660 the House of Commons was made up of 39 English Counties and 201 English Boroughs.[89] These boroughs were dominated by corporations which are known to have been strongly associated with puritanism. For example, a Durham cleric urged the king in 1640 not to 'suffer little towns to grow big and anti-monarchy to boot, for where are all these pestilent nests of Puritans hatched, but in corporations.'[90] Consistent with this statement was Clarendon's conclusion that the chief opposition to the king lay in 'great towns and corporations … not only the citizens of London … but also the greatest part of all other cities and market towns of England.'[91]

Contemporaries were unanimous that the inhabitants of the towns of England were the chief supporters of parliament during the civil war, and that tradesmen were some of their most ardent supporters. For example, this was the conclusion of Parker in his *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie.* He wrote that

tis notorious that there is not any sort of people so inclinable to seditious practices as the

[88] The above figures are based on a hundred cases selecting the first five names in each alphabetical letter in the relevant biographical dictionaries, covering most alphabetical letters. Only names not appearing in C. Webb's *London Bawdy Court, Consistory Court of London,* Volume 1, 1703-13, 1999 were selected for analysis, in order to avoid common names. The royalist figures are taken from P.R. Newman, *Royalist Officers in England and Wales, 1642-1660: A Biographical Dictionary,* 1981; the New Model Army ones are derived from M. Waklyn, *The New Model Army, Volume 1, 1645-49*, 2015 and M. Waklyn, *The New Model Army, Volume 2, 1649-1663,* 2016. The search for university membership was made through the online alumni listings for both universities.

[89] UK Parliament Online.

[90] Derek Hirst, *The Representative of the People? – Voters and voting in England under the Early Stuarts*, 1975, p. 47.

[91] Hyde, *The History of the Rebellion*, Volume 2, 1888, pp. 236, 238.

trading part of a nation … And, if we reflect upon our late miserable distraction, tis easy to observe how the quarrel was chiefly hatched in the shop of tradesmen and cherished by the zeal of prentice-boys and city gossips.[92]

Baxter claimed that tradesmen explained their support for Parliament 'because they say the Tradesmen have a Correspondency with London, and so are gown to be more intelligent sort of Men.'[93] He also claimed that religious awareness was particularly strong 'among tradesmen and corporation inhabitants.'[94]

Given the importance of borough constituencies in the electoral process, and their links with puritanism, Pym's tour of these constituencies in 1640 involving the promotion of puritanism, becomes significant.[95] Anthony a Wood wrote that Pym 'rode about the country to promote elections of the Puritanical brethren to serve in Parliament.'[96]The role of corporations in the membership of the Long Parliament is confirmed by events after the ending of the civil war. In 1661, the Cavalier Parliament passed the Corporation Act, designed to exclude Presbyterians from office, and stipulating that 'no person could legally be elected to any office relating to the government of a city or corporation, unless he had within the previous twelve months received the sacrament of the "Lord's Supper" according to the rites of the Church of England.'[97]

This confirms the importance of boroughs and corporations in the Parliamentary cause, although elections were determined by a mixture of national and local issues. Cromwell's appointment as Member of Parliament for Cambridge in 1640 can be seen partly as a result of this process. The following is a contemporary account of how he was selected as a Member of Parliament:

… one Richard Tyms since Alderman at Cambridge[98] … [rode] to be at a Conventicle, (as he usually of every Sunday rode to the Isle of Ely to that purpose, having a brother who entertained them in his course), where he heard this Oliver, with such admiration … took such a liking to him, that from that time he did nothing but ruminate and meditate of the Man and his Gifts … this Richard Tyms before the Writs were issued … began to hammer in his head a project of getting him [Cromwell] chosen a Burgesse for Cambridge, himself being then but one of the 24, and with this device he presently repaired to one Mr Wildbore a Draper, a Kinsman of Cromwells and a Non-conformist likewise … to ask the advice of his Neighbour Ibbot a Tallow-Chandler whom he found working in his Frock … he told him, that the Mayor had power to make a Freeman, and saith he you know Mr Kitchman the Atturney (who was a Puritan likewise) … but the Mayor must not know the reason and design of it; for he is a perfect Royalist… Cromwell … came privately to Cambridge the day before, and took up his lodging at one

[92] C. Hill and E. Dell (eds), *The Good Old Cause: The English Revolution of 1640-1660, Its Cause, Course and Consequences,* 1969, p. 238.
[93] R. Baxter, *Reliquiare Baxterianae*, Part 3, 1696, p. 30.
[94] Ibid, p. 27. Weber wrote 'with great regularity we find the most genuine adherents of Puritanism among the classes which were rising from a lowly status, the small bourgeois and farmers.' Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* 1904, p. 174.
[95] Hirst, *The Representative,* p. 147.
[96] S. Reed Brett, *John Pym*, 1940, p.156.
[97] *Corporation Act 1661*, Wikipedia. For a detailed account as to how to Corporation Act affected three Kentish towns, see Colin Lee, 'Fanatic magistrates: religious and political conflict in three Kentish boroughs, 1680-1684', *The Historical Journal*, 35 (1991).
[98] Richard Tyms was 'described as a glover, but he went on to earn his living as a fellmonger, probably trading in cattle hides rather than sheep skins.' Andrew Barclay, *The Election of Cromwell: The Making of a Politician* (2011), p. 61.

Almond's a Grocer[99] … and a Fortnight after another Common-hall was called for the said Election of Burgesses … and Mr Mutis a Councillor [was called], and he had the Votes of a great many, all of them Royalists … lastly our Oliver was named, and the Faction bauled as if they were mad, and by a plurality of voces carried it clear…[100]

According to Heath 'the Estate of his Uncle fell to him [Cromwell] and that at last (though wasted and gone) rendered him a Candidate for the ensuing Parliament.'[101] Cromwell was nominated by puritans on the local Cambridge council, and the nature of the corporation is indicated by its post-restoration history. In 1662 'the puritan corporation was drastically purged. The mayor, seven aldermen and 13 of the common council were removed.'[102] At least six of the seven aldermen were tradesmen, and as Andrew Barclay has written 'pretty much all members of the Cambridge corporation in this period were tradesmen resident in the town.'[103]

Also, the description of the supporters for Cromwell's election - a fellmonger, a draper, a tallow chandler and an attorney - suggests that there was an important role for tradesmen in the election of Cromwell. This perhaps explains why this socio-economic group was so central to the foundation of the New Model Army. It is indicated by a speech that Cromwell made in 1651 when Charles II threatened to invade England with a Scottish army:

Cromwell announced to the army that, if he should fall, England would witness a universal crisis and change the numerous colonels, in all their splendour, who were once tailors, goldsmiths, and carpenters [and] would have to make way for the nobility and courtiers.[104]

Cromwell himself was of a very modest socio-economic background.[105] Heath gave the following account as to how Cromwell's status had deteriorated:[106]

Oliver had run himself out of that little Patrimony he had, and brought his Mother to the same near ruine …he fell to his old trade, and frequented his old haunts, consumed his money in tipling… his Estate still decaying, he bestook himself at last to a Farm … took Servants, and bought him all utensils and Materials, as Ploughs, Carts, etc. … scarce half a Crop ever reared itself upon his Grounde, so that he was (after five years time) glad to abandon it, and set a friend of his to be the Tenant for the remainder of his time.[107]

Cromwell's family had practised the trade of brewing, described by Heath as follows:

tis resorted Oliver kept a Brew-House, that is a mistake; for, the Brew-house was kept in his Father's time, and managed by his Mother and his Father's Servants … the Accompts being alwayes given to the Mistris, who after her Husbands death did continue in the same

[99] According to Dugdale, Cromwell had 'mean lodgings in Cambridge, at the time he was chosen burgess for the long parliament.' William Dugdale, *Short view of the late Troubles* (1681), p. 460.
[100] James Heath, *Flagellum: or the Life, Birth and Death of O. Cromwell* (1665), pp. 18-21. Andrew Barclay has written: 'The account of the Cambridge election in *Flagellum* has so far proved to be surprisingly accurate. Most of the details about the various individuals involved in it have been either confirmed or have, at the very least been shown to be plausible.' Barclay, *The Election of Cromwell*, p.115.
[101] Heath, *Flagellum*, p. 16.
[102] 'Cambridge Borough' *History of Parliament*, 1660-1690.
[103] Personal communication.
[104] 'Relatzione of England by Giovanni Sagredo, 1656 in Edward and Peter Razzell, *The English Revolution: a Contemporary Study of the English Civil War* (1999), p. 19.
[105] In 1628 Cromwell's 'subsidy by rating of £4 in goods was little more than that of Huntingdon's leading tradesmen.' Members Biographies, *The History of Parliament, 1609-1629*; Oliver Cromwell.
[106] A. Barclay, *Electing Cromwell: The Making of a Politician*, 2011, p. 10.
[107] Heath, *Flagellum*, pp. 11-15.

Employment and Calling of a Brewer; and thought it is no disparagement to sustain the Estate and Port of a Younger Brother as Mr Robert Cromwell was …[108]

In 1664 a Mr Rawdon visited Huntingdon and confirmed the existence of a brewery associated with the Cromwell family:

Mr Rawdon, visiting the town five or six years after the Protector's death, saw the brewhouse, which was yet still standing, in which Cromwell 'played the brewer for some years… the brook at Hinchin, running through their premisses at Huntingdon, offered clear convenience for malting and brewing …[109]

It is unclear whether Cromwell was directly involved in the brewery, and the first account suggests that the brewery was managed by Cromwell's mother, but that his father was also involved in the business. Cromwell was supported by artisans and tradesmen in his election to parliament, linked to his own socio-economic status. This was reflected in the employment of russet-coated officers in his army, and his origins were a critical factor in the creation of the New Model Army, a key part in the history of the Long Parliament.

[108] Heath, *Flagellum*, pp. 8-10.
[109] Robert Davies, *The Life of Marmaduke* (1863), p.112,