

The Putney Debates of 1647

The Army, the Levellers and the English State

Edited by

Michael Mendle



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 2001

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2001

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Plantin 10/12 *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 65015 1 hardback

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page vii
<i>Notes on the contributors</i>	viii
<i>Editor's acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Textual note and abbreviations</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
MICHAEL MENDLE	
Part 1 The Putney debates: the artefact	
2 The survival of the manuscript	19
LESLEY LE CLAIRE	
3 Reading, and writing, the text of the Putney debates	36
FRANCES HENDERSON	
Part 2 The Putney debates and their contexts	
4 The debates from the perspective of the army	53
AUSTIN WOOLRYCH	
5 The army, the state and the soldier in the English civil war	79
BARBARA DONAGAN	
6 The case of the armie truly re-stated	103
JOHN MORRILL AND PHILIP BAKER	
7 Putney's pronouns: identity and indemnity in the great debate	125
MICHAEL MENDLE	
8 <i>The Agreements of the people</i> and their political contexts, 1647–1649	148
IAN GENTLES	

- 9 From Reading to Whitehall: Henry Ireton's journey 175
BARBARA TAFT

Part 3 Levellers and 'Levellerism' in history and historiography

- 10 'The poorest she': women and citizenship in early modern
England 197
PATRICIA CRAWFORD
- 11 The Leveller legacy: from the Restoration to the Exclusion
Crisis 219
TIM HARRIS
- 12 Puritanism, liberty and the Putney debates 241
WILLIAM LAMONT
- 13 The Levellers in history and memory, c. 1660–1960 256
BLAIR WORDEN
- 14 The true Leveller's standard revisited: an afterword 283
J. G. A. POCOCK

- Index* 292

Illustrations

- The opening page of the Putney debates (after the title page), cover
Worcester College, Oxford, Ms. 65.
By kind permission of Worcester College, Oxford
- From a 1667 pack of playing cards, *The knavery of the Rump.* page 212
*By the kind permission of Guildhall Library: Worshipful Company of
Makers of Playing Cards Collection.*

1 Introduction

Michael Mendle

By the middle of the twentieth century, the events at the centre of this volume, the debates of the army held at Putney late in October and on the first day of November 1647, became a fixture of the popular consciousness of the seventeenth century. The rights of the ‘the poorest hee’ spoken for by Colonel Rainborough stand only a little beneath Oliver, the regicide and Restoration in the British public imagination. But it is rather astonishing that this ever happened. The debates at Putney, laced with undercurrents of unrest and possible sedition and mutiny, received scant treatment in the newsbooks of the day, and what little emerged was the work of Pollyanna. *The Moderate Intelligencer* for 28 October–4 November reported that on the 28th, ‘A great assembly was this day at Putney Church, where was debated matters of high concernment . . . there was resolution taken to meet the next day and proceed, and first to put up supplications to God for a good issue’. For 29 October, the newsbook reported that: ‘the Councill sate this day at *Putney*, whose proceedings . . . was to appoint a Committee to agree upon something, and bring it in . . .’.¹ Other newsbooks were even more coy: the debates of 28 and 29 October were not ‘thought fit to mention untill the further sense of the Generall Councill be knowne’, ‘not thought fit to be presented to the publique view’, ‘not thought fit to be communicated’.² It was, all in all, close to a news blackout.³ Shortly after the tense days of recorded debate, the Leveller organisation managed to emit a printed text of *An agreement of the people* and a few other pieces of that kidney, yet no direct account of the proceedings ever surfaced in the press or, indeed, any sustained manuscript account.

¹ *The Moderate Intelligencer*, no. 137, 28 Oct.–4 Nov. 1647, 1345–6.

² Successively, *A Perfect Diurnall*, no. 222, 25–30 Oct. 1647, 1787; *The Perfect Weekly Account*, no. 43, 26 Oct.–2 Nov. 1647, sig. S2v; *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, no. 232, 26 Oct.–2 Nov. 1647, 715.

³ See Austin Woolrych, *Soldiers and statesmen* (Oxford, 1987), 226 and nn. 44, 243, for the sparseness, circumspectness and mincing delicacy of contemporary news accounts of the proceedings at Putney. By contrast, however, *An agreement of the people* was widely available as a text and in summary, with two early free-standing editions and several summaries or substantial extracts in the newsbooks.

Only after the Restoration, in 1662, did Sir William Clarke transcribe his shorthand notes and produce what became part of Clarke Ms. 65 of the library of Worcester College, Oxford. As deftly recounted in this volume by Lesley Le Claire, that volume and its fellows lay almost entirely unnoticed by a historian until Charles Firth followed up a suggestion of the college librarian, Henry Pottinger. The result, of course, was Firth's edition, for the Camden Society, of the Clarke papers. The first volume, containing the debates at Putney as well as those at Reading (July 1647) and Whitehall (1648) and much other material, appeared in 1891. Yet printed publication hardly made the debates an item of public currency. While Firth provided an exemplary and sustained 'Preface' (or, rather, introduction) of some seventy pages to the volume, replete with detailed and page-referenced discussion of the sources within, there was no table of contents, running heads or index.⁴ Unintroduced document followed unintroduced document, occasionally so seamlessly that a reader needed to read with care simply to see where one item ended and another began. A greyer and more imposing volume could scarcely be imagined, nor one more physically approximating Thomas Carlyle's caricature of the output of 'the Dryasdust Publishing Societies'.⁵ Two other great seventeenth-century sources, Sir Simonds D'Ewes' diary of the Long Parliament and the Thomason tracts at the British Museum, as it then was, had already been canonised (and both owed much to the propaganda activities on their behalf by Thomas Carlyle),⁶ but Firth undertook no such public campaign on behalf of the Putney debates.

And, indeed, nowhere in the preface did Firth refer precisely to 'the Putney Debates' or 'the Putney debates', and nor did the text itself.⁷ Firth clearly appreciated their significance⁸ but the pages with their first heading ('Att the generall Council of Officers att Putney. 28 October, 1647') in simple Roman type were not perceived as a unit or topos. 'The Putney debates' did not yet exist.

They were (and remain) a 'tough read'. In chapter 3 Frances Henderson trains her unique mastery of Clarke's shorthand upon the

⁴ The index to the first volume appeared in the second, published in 1894.

⁵ 'An election to the Long Parliament', 392, 393. For Carlyle's attitudes to the book clubs, Heather Henderson, 'Carlyle and the book clubs: a new approach to publishing?', *Publishing History* 6 (1980), 37–62. See also Philippa Levine, *The amateur and the professional: antiquarians, historians and archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838–1886* (Cambridge, 1986), 41–5.

⁶ These activities are discussed in my forthcoming study of the construction and preservation of the historical memory of the seventeenth century, *Bottling the air: keeping and finding the seventeenth century*.

⁷ But see *CP* I:vii (the first page of the 'Preface'), where Firth describes the volume containing 'the debates of the Council of the Army in 1647' as 'the most valuable of all'.

⁸ See Blair Worden's essay, chapter 13, in this volume.

debates-as-text, revealing many of the causes of what all readers from Firth forward have known – that Clarke’s text ranges from the pellucid and seemingly nearly echoic to the irremediably obscure. Many of the speeches on the second day of debate – ‘franchise day’ – are so rich in idiom, in repetition and cadence, in turns of phrase that might easily be omitted with no loss of basic sense, that is hard not to feel the thrill of time-transport. Others are fragmentary and crabbed (as Dr Henderson shows, not least to Clarke), and seemed to Firth to require significant editorial conjecture, either by way of textual addition or by revising the order of sentences (see, for example, the last twenty pages of the recorded debates, *CP* I:387–406).

Yet the debates were readable, and did make their way into wider historical consciousness. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, in his *History of the great civil war 1642–1649* (first edition 1898–1901), took careful account of ‘a meeting of the Army Council . . . in Putney Church’, though his remarks, the highly analytic table of contents, running heads, and the index knew nothing of the ‘Putney debates’ under that or a similar name.⁹ Both G. P. Gooch’s *English democratic ideas in the seventeenth century* (first published in 1898) and T. C. Pease’s *The Leveller movement* (1916) treated them in some detail. But, again, they were not yet, *tout court*, ‘the Putney debates’. Gooch referred to ‘Clarke’s reports of the debates at Putney’, as well as to ‘the Putney meetings’ and the discussions ‘in the Council at Putney’ and ‘in the great meeting at Putney’. This seems close enough, but it did not quite stick. Pease wrote of the debates at Putney without once mentioning the venue. With minor changes of wording they are either ‘the army-council debates’ or debates ‘in the Council of the Army’.¹⁰ Clearly the critical and transformative moment was the initial publication, in 1938, of A. S. P. Woodhouse’s *Puritanism and liberty*, a volume commercially available to non-Camden subscribers, and prepared with an eye to accessibility. William Lamont’s essay in this volume (chapter 12), which joins Blair Worden’s (chapter 13) in exploring the ideological and cultural underpinnings of interest in the Levellers, particularly traces the impact of Woodhouse’s volume. As Professor Lamont points out, Woodhouse reified – and perhaps at the same time embalmed – those long blocks of grey text. Like Adam, Woodhouse gave names to things created but not

⁹ *History of the great civil war 1642–1649* (4 vols; first edn. 1898–1901; repr. 1965), III:382, and IV:index.

¹⁰ G. P. Gooch, *English democratic ideas in the seventeenth century* (1898, 2nd edn 1927), 129, 132, 136. T. C. Pease, *The Leveller movement* (1916, repr. 1965), 210, 215, 217, 218, 227. Perhaps it should be noted that Eduard Bernstein’s *Cromwell and communism*, trans. H. J. Stenning (1930), referred to ‘the “Conferences of Putney”’ (p. 67) but the accompanying note makes clear that this was not a settled usage, since it refers to the same discussions through a circumlocution.

yet (clearly) distinguished: the Reading debates, the Putney debates, the Whitehall debates. The Putney debates were subdivided in the table of contents by date, creating the all-but-irresistible urge to give the debates a dramatic structure, the first, second and third days metamorphosing into a play in three acts, a choice neither as automatic nor as innocent of consequence as it might seem, since the debates continued for days later, even though Clarke preserved almost nothing of their contents.

Woodhouse also felt obliged to go well beyond what Firth had done by way of editorial intervention.¹¹ Firth had sometimes added a word or phrase merely to improve style, acting as a kind of Victorian essay master. Woodhouse's interpolations were far less restrained. I remember, as a beginning research student first exposed to the debates through *Puritanism and liberty*, my wonderment at the editorial telepathy that allowed Woodhouse to read the mind of the debaters so perfectly as to supply not one or two words but whole extended phrases – would I ever manage to become as adept? Later scholars have generally, and rightly, recoiled from Woodhouse's excesses. While Olivier Lutaud's translation of parts of the debates into French understandably included glosses in the manner of stage directions,¹² most English-speaking scholars have resorted to the use of Firth's more austere edition. Gerald Aylmer's useful documentary collection, *The Levellers in the English revolution*, courageously took the minimalist step of publishing large extracts of the debates with only the tiniest amount of textual intervention.¹³

It was, however, Woodhouse's edition that most people encountered, especially in the long interval between 1891 (or whenever the stock of the volume ran out) and 1965, when the Camden volume was first reprinted.¹⁴ Modernised in spelling and punctuation, seemingly clairvoyant in its editorial emendation, and titled, trussed and divided, the debates were accessible, if not to Everyman, then to a considerable university public. That readership was probably enhanced by an order of magnitude through frequent anthologisation.

Yet the world that had embraced the Putney debates – from the naively, affirmatively democratic centre to the various Lefts – had become on their

¹¹ In fairness to Woodhouse, his editorial conventions and apparatus allowed for a more accurate reconstruction of the manuscript than did Firth's, and he denied that his was 'a less conservative text', *P&L*, [12].

¹² Olivier Lutaud, *Les Niveleurs, Cromwell, et la république* (1967); for example, a speech of Cromwell's in reply to one of Wildman's is tagged 'Cromwell (intervient, après un long silence: ton d'abord contrôlé, puis saccadé, furieux)'. The corresponding pages of Firth's edition are *CP*, I:269–71, of *P&L* (which Lutaud used as the basis of his edition), 30–2.

¹³ Gerald Aylmer (ed.), *The Levellers in the English revolution* (1975).

¹⁴ The paperback reissue of 1992 of volumes. I and II, under the aegis of Austin Woolrych, has regrettably gone out of print.

350th anniversary in 1997 in some ways as much a period piece as the debates themselves, and as necessary of historical reconstitution: the world turned upside down had become, finally, the world we had lost.¹⁵ Happily, the recovery of the historiographical Putney is one of the tasks undertaken here, directly by William Lamont and more broadly by Blair Worden. But had time wrong-footed the anniversary? At the Folger Library conference, which was the occasion of the first presentation of many of the essays presented here, it might have seemed so. Much more was said about the contexts and ramifications than the debates themselves. Was it that there was no more to say, that the debates had been talked to death? Or, instead, was the stillness a marker of reticence, as if the things that most needed utterance were embarrassing or self-convicting – the little heresies that engender their own hypocrisies of silence? Had the twin tsunamis of revisionism – Conrad Russell's on the front end of the seventeenth century, Jonathan Clark's on the rear – ruined the liberal and Left interpretative paradigms from which the occasion had gained meaning? Had Mark Kishlansky's pace-setting studies of the New Model Army, however modified by the subsequent researches of Ian Gentles and Austin Woolrych, toppled the colossus, and shown how *little* Putney was in its own day?¹⁶ Or was something even broader afoot – a cultural shift that had finally brought academe into loose synchrony with the wider neo-capitalist culture of the 'Anglo' world? How could Putney's 'poorest hee' expect to compete with the glitz and ever-present low-level eroticism of court studies? Had contemporary waves of disorder attuned modern historians not to the oppressiveness but the fragility of institutions, and awakened them to the anarchic tendencies in Leveller radicalism, an element seldom missed by hostile contemporaries, and far less easy to refute than the largely groundless charges of deliberate (rather than accidental) communism? Most worrisome to some, had Ireton been right?

As is the way of such things, fortunately, the embarrassment of the

¹⁵ The third edition (1998) of R. C. Richardson's *The debate on the English revolution* is rich in the nostalgia-driven elucidation of post-World War II scholarship up to the moment of the revisionists. See also the excellent introduction and bibliography in Andrew Sharp (ed.), *The English Levellers* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, 1998), vii–xxxiv.

¹⁶ Conrad Russell, *The causes of the English civil war* (Oxford, 1990); *The fall of the British monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford, 1991); and many of the essays collected in *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–1642* (London, 1990). J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and rebellion* (London, 1986). Mark Kishlansky, 'The army and the Levellers: the roads to Putney', *Hj* 22(4) (1979), 795–824; 'Consensus politics and the structure of debate at Putney', *JBS* 20(2) (1981), 50–69; 'Ideology and politics in the parliamentary armies, 1645–9' in John Morrill (ed.), *Reactions to the English civil war* (London, 1982), 163–83; *The rise of the New Model Army* (Oxford, 1979); 'What happened at Ware?', *Hj* 25 (1984), 827–39.

moment added impetus to the re-evaluation. The essays here, both those first presented at the conference and subsequently commissioned, devote appropriate attention both to the debates proper and their immediate circumstances, and to wider contexts. Those who write here have no party line to follow, are adherents of no single interpretive school, and, perhaps most notably, span several scholarly generations. Some disagree with others, both in the seemingly small but occasionally critical matters of attribution of key texts as well as in larger questions of historical hermeneutics. They concur, though, in sensing that not only has the last word not been said about Putney, but also that the kaleidoscope of time reveals as it also obscures, that re-examination of the debates and their multiple contexts and implications, including the variety of reactions to them, is a project necessary precisely as the easy consensus that permitted the repeated anthologisation of the same brief passages of an extended source document has dissolved. The contributors consider much that is relatively familiar, but also much that is quite new.

It is striking how little, until this volume, the text of the debate has itself been subjected to critical examination – a necessary but often routine procedure in editorial presentation, though here greatly complicated by the text's status as a transcription from underlying shorthand notes that have not survived. Dr Eric Sams, who used cryptographic techniques to crack Clarke's shorthand found elsewhere in Clarke's papers, reported briefly on it in his contribution to the introductory booklet accompanying the Harvester Press microfilm edition of the Clarke papers.¹⁷ But it has been left to Frances Henderson, and to her uniquely, to master Clarke's system; in this volume (chapter 3) she applies her knowledge to a consideration of the text of the debates. She has uncovered evidence of Clarke's own difficulties in 1662 in deciphering the notes of 1647, not all of which perhaps he personally took. Shorthand practice was a rapidly developing art in the mid-seventeenth century. Unlike nineteenth- and early twentieth-century systems, it was clearly dependent upon exceptional mental gifts: a highly retentive memory as well as great powers of concentration. Leading practitioners boasted of decades of expertise. Thus it is impossible to generalise from one case to all. Yet Clarke's own apparent stumbles in transcription should alert us to regard virtually every passage with caution; not least, to consider where on the spectrum of possibility a given speech or remark is to be placed, from near-verbatim transcription through wearied and occasionally failing attempts to catch a gist. How far Clarke 'smoothed' his text is also a live question. By the time he tran-

¹⁷ *Sir William Clarke manuscripts 1640–1664* (Brighton, 1979), 29–34.

scribed his notes, extended and apparently polished coverage of trials had created models and implicit standards. There was the late king's trial, which Clarke probably took or arranged to be taken in shorthand; there was, in the same year, Lilburne's 1649 trial; nearer to hand, the trials of the regicides, in the first of which Clarke himself had appeared as star witness.

Lesley Le Claire (chapter 2) provides a sensitive study of Clarke, as well as the fullest recounting of the history of his books and manuscripts. He is, as she says, a 'mysterious' man. A consummate bureaucrat trained to hear but not much to be seen, and an apparently adept trimmer, Clarke left surprisingly little trace of himself amidst all his collections, apart from frequent notations of book prices, both asked and paid. Le Claire reports a startling exception, a marginal notation in Clarke's copy of Charles' scaffold speech indicating his own presence upon that stage; was similar risk-taking entailed in Clarke's decision to transcribe the Putney debates? Did he, like George Thomason, have the ability to separate his own commitments from his collecting activities?¹⁸ In either case, affirmative answers suggest a determination to preserve a record for posterity, undoubtedly the strongest motive for collection of tracts and political manuscripts in the seventeenth century.

For Firth, amongst whose works were two studies in military history,¹⁹ the Putney debates, as the discussions at Reading and the more structured debates at Whitehall, were inseparable from their military venue. They were, to be sure, more than simply of military interest, but they were the discussions of soldiers. Something of that ethos was lost in the Woodhouse edition. Rightly (and Firth would have been last to disapprove), Woodhouse supplied a great deal of non-military documentary material; he and others who embarked upon the construction or reconstruction of the civil party of the Levellers set out to broaden, even to universalise, the context of Putney. It may fairly be said that until the work of Mark Kishlansky that mindset dominated the field. But it was Kishlansky's work that firmly restored the military setting to the Putney debates, and in the process markedly lowered both the civilian and the 'radical' profile of the supporters of *An agreement of the people*, the Leveller draft constitution that was the proximate 'cause' of the need for the discussions at Putney. Very powerfully, Kishlansky situated the debates at

¹⁸ Amongst the curiosities of Clarke's bound books is a printed indulgence blank (Worcester College BB. 1. 14, no. 7). One can only speculate what it meant to this godly man. The volume otherwise largely consists of anti-papist polemic from 1584 to 1648.

¹⁹ *Cromwell's army* (first edn 1902; repr. 1962); with Godfrey Davies, *The regimental history of Cromwell's army* (1940).

Putney within the matrix of army loyalty and discipline, its acute sense of honour (and, with that, responsibility), the political and military imperatives before and after Putney, and the abortive uprising (if that is what it was) at Ware.²⁰

Two contributors to this volume have elsewhere powerfully added to the appreciation of the military setting of the Putney debates, even as they resisted the sole application of Kishlansky's occasionally Occamist evidentiary razor. Both Austin Woolrych and Ian Gentles allow for a greater degree and a somewhat earlier onset of ideological division within the army, both see religious motives more actively in play, and as a consequence view the debates as a more menacing occasion than does Kishlansky. It must be said, however, that Kishlansky's interpretive structure remains something that no student of Putney can afford to dismiss, and few do. For this volume, Woolrych has contributed an essay (chapter 4) of exceptional clarity treating, from the army's perspective, the political narrative in the months leading up to the Putney debates as well as a reconstruction of the dynamics of the debate itself; any further treatment here would be an exercise in arrogance as much as supererogation. Barbara Donagan's analysis of the army's relation to parliament (chapter 5), to civilian law and to accepted military practice (the laws of war), exposes the more sensitive spots of what could otherwise be a functioning relationship and, particularly in the matter of soldiers' indemnity, provides the fullest treatment yet of the background to the precise constitutional crux that, Michael Mendle (chapter 7) argues, the Leveller draft constitution *An agreement of the people* was intended to resolve.

Indeed, one of the distinctive features of this volume is the centrality that several contributors attribute to the issue of indemnity, which constituted what for the soldier was probably the most difficult element in the transition from war to peace. In 1977 John Morrill identified indemnity as a principal issue in the 'Army of Revolt of 1647'; the issue was further reprised in articles by Robert Ashton and Ann Hughes, and received further analytic and statistical treatment that also placed indemnity in the broader context of army-civilian relations in Ian Gentles' *New Model Army*.²¹ But although the indemnity issue was long appreciated as a live

²⁰ Kishlansky, *Rise of the New Model Army*; 'What happened at Ware; 'Consensus politics' 'The army and the Levellers'. Professor Kishlansky's conclusions about the events at Ware have been rigorously challenged, especially by Professor Woolrych, *Soldiers and statesmen*, 283–6.

²¹ John Morrill, 'The army revolt of 1647', first published in A. Duke and C. Tamse (eds.), *Britain and the Netherlands*, vol. VI (1977) and republished in Morrill, *The nature of the English revolution* (London, 1993), 307–31; Robert Ashton, 'The problem of indemnity, 1647–1648' in Colin Jones et. al. (eds.), *Politics and people in revolutionary England* (Oxford, 1986), 117–40; Ann Hughes, 'Parliamentary tyranny? Indemnity proceedings

one at Putney, it was construed as an ignoble and particularist deviation from the 'larger' concerns of the day. Readers can see how integral, however, indemnity was to those grander interests.

Studies of the Levellers as well as of the army are heavily text-centred. The London Levellers were, to a great extent, media creatures; archival resources, apart from those found in the army debates of 1647 and 1648 and related documents, are rather scarce. They are known in very considerable measure through their own writings; even tracts and accounts hostile to the Levellers, in responding to their press output, paradoxically affirmed the centrality of the Levellers' own self-presentation. The army too was, in 1647, heavily press-oriented. Its several representations and addresses, like those of the 1642 'war of words' between the king and the Houses of Parliament, were public displays. Surviving army accounts show the outlays for press propaganda; to take one notable example, the publication of the New Model chaplain Joshua Sprigge's apolgia-cum-history of the army, *Anglia rediviva*, was subsidised by army funds.²² Radicals and leadership elements also had to communicate with the troops, which could also take printed form.

In such a logocentric but manifestly interested setting, there is little room for the death-of-the-author school of criticism. Necessary as accurate attribution is in studies of the Levellers and army opinion, it is notoriously difficult to do. Anonymous tracts abound; occasionally tracts were wilfully or ignorantly misattributed at the time of publication;²³ outright fraud was not unknown.²⁴ Few modern attempts at reattribution have won wide assent; scholarly prudence has also prompted frequent assertions of multiple authorship, which usually can neither be proved or disproved and sometimes have the air of attribution by majority vote. John Morrill and Philip Baker (chapter 6), thus, have been bold to argue with the conventional attribution to John Wildman of *The case of the armie truly*

and the impact of the civil war', *Midland History* 11 (1986), 49–78; Gentles, *New Model Army*, 120–39.

²² £150 of army funds were used to reimburse the London bookseller John Partridge 'for the Losses hee sustained by Anglia Rediviva' (Chequers Ms. 782 at Chequers Court, included in microfilm edition of Clarke papers, item 4/8, reel 17, fol. 42v, dated 5 May 1657 [*sic*, for 1647]).

²³ For one example, see p. 128 below.

²⁴ As, for one example among many, the massive fraud perpetuated by Edward Hyde in authoring *Two speeches made in the House of Peers, on Munday the 19 of December, for, and against Accommodation, the one by the earl of Pembroke, the other by the Lord Brooke* (London, 1642[43]). For the episode see Clarendon, *Life* (3 vols., Oxford, 1827), I:161–3 and Graham Roebuck, *Clarendon and cultural continuity: a bibliographical study* (New York, 1981), 79–80. The fraud still has its victims: see Conrad Russell, *The causes of the English civil war* (Oxford, 1990), 23, 58, 142; I count myself amongst the duped.

stated, an important, somewhat inflammatory tract nearly contemporaneous with *An agreement of the people*. *The case of the armie* clearly distressed Cromwell and Ireton at Putney; their assumption that John Wildman was the author has been taken at face value. Morrill and Baker make a case for Edward Sexby, a soldier perhaps more at the hub of a hypothetical flow-chart of army political activity than any other, but an individual who at this time, unlike in the 1650s, is rather a shadowy figure. Sexby fancied himself, it seems, as a master army propagandist;²⁵ he clearly was in touch with London radical elements; as a favoured agitator who had become a new agent, he had surprisingly close links to the military leadership, and had certainly not been hurt financially by that relationship.²⁶ Subject as he was to contrary pulls and of a mercurial temperament to boot, it is easy to see him both as the author or principal author of *The case of the armie truly stated*, which on Morrill and Baker's reading is an army-focused (if at spots Leveller-influenced) document, and the hothead and *enragé* of the debates. The Morrill–Baker argument makes new sense of the turns of rhetoric in the debates. So far as they could, Ireton and Cromwell would want to pin what they found objectionable in *The case of the armie* on the civilian outsider, rather than on Sexby, who even if they suspected his authorship was not lightly to be alienated; in other matters, though, they gave greater respect to *The cases of the armie's* less sweeping demands than to the constitutional earthquake of *An agreement*. The fly in the ointment of this strategy was Sexby himself, whose sense of offence at the social insults of Ireton scraped at the thin skin of army solidarity.

Henry Ireton's role is probably most in need of re-examination. Barbara Taft's essay (chapter 9) in one way, Ian Gentles' (chapter 8) in another, examine this Socrates of the debates. Like the Athenian, Ireton's mien antagonised those around him; like him, too, this thinker of considerable adroitness, lucidity and intellectual sophistication left virtually nothing in print behind him, save for a letter from Ireland and, notably but characteristically, his anonymous contributions to army formulas for settlement. Ireton is, of course, remembered for his unyielding assertion at Putney that property in land or, to much the same effect, what amounted to a 'freehold' of trading rights, was the foundation of civil society. The latter point is often not fully appreciated. Far from being a gesture of inclusion towards the non-landed bourgeoisie, Ireton's equation of land and membership in a closed, if municipal, corporation with

²⁵ See below, p. 127.

²⁶ Gentles, *New Model Army*, 176 and n. 275; some attention might also be focused on the payment of £296 made in November 1647 to 'seuerall Agitators for Ext. expenses' (Chequers Ms. 782, fol. 44v). The parallel entry in the accounts in *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 11 (1904), 145 identifies the payees as 'Agents'. Neither account specifically puts a date on the transactions.

trading privileges was as cruel a slap as any at the radicals. Amongst the strongest planks in the Leveller (as it would soon be called) platform was the demand for ‘free trade’. This was not an issue having to do with tariffs and customs duties, as the term is usually taken today; rather, it was about the right of those who lacked heritable, limited trading privileges to set up and conduct their business. Undoubtedly Ireton’s restriction cut to the quick of soldiers of raised political consciousness and ordinary background: what the property-restricted franchise meant to them was the denial of the prospect of their gaining entry, by political means, to the charmed circle of those permitted to trade. The intellectual springs of Ireton’s vision have yet to be positively identified. Richard Tuck, plausibly, finds Grotius lurking in the shadows.²⁷ Whether or not that can be more definitively established, it is an intriguing suggestion, for Ireton who far more obviously than the Levellers can be described as a ‘possessive individualist’²⁸ can also, in the manner of Grotius, be seen as a sort of ‘possessive communitarian’, in finding civil society and property to be Siamese twins.²⁹

But no less than the army radicals, Ireton was tented on a frame of contrary hopes and fears, and Ireton’s political role was not bounded by the lines in the sand that he drew at Putney. As Barbara Taft shows, Ireton was a committed religious Independent; he was also a firm adherent of the radical version of the case that parliament’s adherents took with them to war in 1642. Even at Putney he did not flinch from the position that the people could do anything that their safety required (although he also believed that the king and House of Lords possessed similar rights).³⁰ His outlook seems close in many respects in the spring and summer of 1647 to those with whom he would so differ in the autumn. But as author of, or at least the army’s point man for, *The heads of the proposals*, he was also the icon of their sense of betrayal. Tactless in debate, as quick to choler as Sexby, he also felt the urge to compromise, to nurture and sustain consensus. Barbara Taft’s essay, tracing Ireton’s words, as reported by Clarke, across the army discussions at Reading, Putney and Whitehall reports on

²⁷ Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and government 1572–1651* (1993), 246, where Selden is also noted as a possible influence. A problem for a ‘Grotian’ Ireton may ultimately be theological, for the Arminian (and naturalistic) commitments of Grotius cannot easily be squared with Ireton’s puritanism. It may be that Ireton’s assertions at Putney that he would accede to the destruction of king, Lords and property if he saw the hand of God going about it may represent his attempt to square the circle of natural society and providential activity; *CP*, I:296, 306, 322, 405. Earlier, Tuck canvassed the possible connection to Selden: “‘The ancient law of freedom’: John Selden and the civil war’ in John Morrill (ed.), *Reactions to the English civil war* (1982), 137–61, at 156.

²⁸ The phrase, of course, of C. B. Macpherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism* (Oxford, 1962).

²⁹ See Tuck, *Philosophy and government*, 174–7, 178–9.

³⁰ *CP*, I:389–91 and ch. 7 below.

this most enigmatic character. Ian Gentles traces a similar evidentiary base, with an eye to the several subsequent revisions of the *Agreement of the people*. His essay demonstrates, first, the unmistakable hold a founding constitutional agreement had for the politically aware and, secondly, that the franchise issue, exquisitely sensitive in the recorded debates at Putney but negotiable then and afterwards, was not in the fore of the subsequent attempts to fashion a foundation agreement. Gentles urges us to refocus upon the ‘reserves’, the powers withheld from the otherwise omnicompetent parliament. The reserves – a remarkable and crisply terse feature of the first *Agreement* – had degenerated in the third *Agreement* to something like a radicals’ political wish-list. From one angle, the reserves appear as an emergent liberalism, a Bill of Rights before the fact; from another a programme of libertarianism and decentralisation, as Gentles describes it, that bordered on the nationally anarchic. Has the day come when the Levellers are perceived not primarily as proto-liberals or proto-socialists, but as the progenitors of contemporary America’s citizen militias? A cursory websearch reveals that, apart from the predictable academic niches, the memory of the Levellers is kept alive by the British Libertarian Alliance and a Colorado-based outfit interested in the legalisation of marijuana and (because of a court case connected with drug use) jury nullification.³¹

To ask of the influence of Putney in the later seventeenth century is the historian’s analogue to the Zen master’s puzzle of the sound of one hand clapping. Even ‘the Levellers’ as a category seems to have little resonance in the era of Restoration and exclusion. But two essays in this volume suggest that the question of Leveller ‘influence’ is intrinsically *mal posé*. To focus solely upon the most *outré* of Leveller positions – the universal franchise and destruction of king and House of Lords – is to miss two things. First, the Levellers could be rather flexible on the former issue; on the second matter individual Levellers disagreed and changed their minds, with respect to the king (there appears to be a greater consistency of hostility towards the Lords). To look in those places for a Leveller legacy is to buy into a caricature. Yet there were parts of the Leveller platform that were only an assertive and less compromising version of enduring universalising rhetorics – the birthright of Englishmen, the legal equivalency of all free men – which could and did link up with royalist assertions of the rule of law in the face of parliamentary and then army tyranny. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most influential of all Leveller-inspired or Leveller-related documents was not *An agreement of the people* but John

³¹ See the links at www.libertarian.org and www.levellers.org.

Lilburne's 1649 trial, in which Lilburne thumped that common-law Bible, Edward Coke's *Institutes*, at his judges.

But that is not all. The Levellers did not invent, did not monopolise, but did very much expand the range of popular political activity in London in the 1640s, just as they created a model for their century of the irrepressible pamphleteer. In this, unsurprisingly, they were sometimes matched by and sometimes associated with that other world of clandestine and semi-clandestine activists, the royalists. And, obviously, they did not spring from thin air. Richard Overton had before him the model of the Marprelate tracts, and, nearer to hand, the future Levellers drew upon the mass political activities of 1641 and 1642, when indeed such Leveller stalwarts as Lilburne, Overton, William Walwyn and the radical printer William Larnar cut their political teeth. Allowing these qualifications their full due, the public imagination grasped at the Levellers as activists who did not care to vet the social qualifications of their supporters and whose message was of political inclusion.

In this different light, the Levellers' influence emerges from the shadows; their ideas and actions were part of a larger matrix, which at times they expanded. As Patricia Crawford shows (chapter 10), active, participatory citizenship, like the myth of the freeborn Englishman, had a dynamic of inclusion that scraped against other logics of limitation and restriction; like the Christian sense of the spiritual equality of male and female, bond and free, the Leveller message, necessarily loosely construed, could not entirely be kept away from women. Perhaps it is better to say that Leveller notions and the participatory activities of non-elite women (if not quite the 'poorest shes') were part of the same universalising broth. And the Leveller political 'technology' co-ordinating press and crowd showed itself remarkably durable, much readier for use than the rusty musket over the hearth or the moth-eaten uniform in the chest. For all the differences, the 'Protestant joiner' of the exclusion era, Stephen College, is the political child of John Lilburne; in particular, College used (obviously with less success) Lilburne's 1649 trial both as a text in law and a model for behaviour.³² Tim Harris' treatment (chapter 11) of popular political activity from the Levellers' heyday into the era of

³² See *The arraignment, tryal and condemnation of Stephen Colledge for high-treason* (London, 1681). At 4–5, 7, 13, Lilburne's 1649 trial (also Stafford's) was repeatedly raised by College and replied to by North, LCJ and Sgt Jeffries, on the matters of counsel at trial, use of notes, and pleading guilty or not guilty; Coke was also used in Lilburne's fashion, mixed with talk of birthright. College's social background was an above- and below-the-table issue. See, for example, 24 (continued at 86, 93) on whether joiners should have pistols, a 'right' that College defends. The 'old' *Dictionary of national biography* article on College concludes with judgement of the man from his portrait: 'Although the features are plebeian, with high cheek-bones, coarse nose and mouth, long upper lip, and massive chin, he has an intelligent expression of eye, and is dressed above his station.'

Restoration and exclusion is a roadmap showing both the dead ends and the continuities. He stresses both activism and large notions of popular sovereignty. A recent essay by Quentin Skinner, while not addressing this issue directly, so reopens the notion of participatory politics that the social and cultural walls undoubtedly separating the high republicans and aristocratic Whig constitutionalists on one side and the populists on the other can now be seen to have some large chinks.³³

The largely unreported discussions at Putney after Clarke's account of three days seemed to move toward compromise. But underlying passions did not go away, and Cromwell and Fairfax faced a difficult situation at the army rendezvous at Corkbush Field near Ware on 15 November. Mutinous troops had pinned a text of the *Agreement* to their hats. Once, certainly, and perhaps twice on that difficult day Oliver Cromwell ventured into the midst of them and personally tried to pluck the offending papers off their hats.³⁴

Cromwell's actions can be fully explained by the exigencies of the moment. The leadership wanted soldiers to sign a remonstrance that, in effect, repudiated the *Agreement*; the taunting gesture of a mass of soldiers wearing the scorned *Agreement* as a badge of livery was in a military as well as political sense intolerable to Fairfax no less than to Cromwell. Perhaps, though, there is a story behind the story. The debates at Putney are battles of texts – *physical* texts. The army's 'book of declarations' was the source text of the 'engagements' that were the focus of the first day's debate. To the agents, they were also the memorial of the failure to keep them in the soldiers' interests, the source of the despair of *The case of the armie truly stated*.³⁵ Both books were also present in Putney Church and the quartermaster-general's quarters, the site of the second day's meetings.³⁶ But most inflammatory and most available of all was the *Agreement* itself. The constant references to it made by all the principal speakers as 'this paper' or 'that paper' suggest that it was in nearly every hand. Its physicality is to be sensed throughout. Cromwell on 28 October spoke tellingly of the utter absurdity, as he saw it, of crediting a press artefact of the last twenty-four hours (perhaps) with the standing of a constitution to alter the 'very Governement of the Kingedome . . . since itt was a Nation':

³³ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

³⁴ Woolrych, *Soldiers and statesmen*, 282–84, and Gentles, *New Model Army*, 223–4, review the evidence for these episodes, which were challenged by Kishlansky, 'What happened at Ware?' It is the second instance, with respect to Robert Lilburne's regiment, that is in dispute.

³⁵ *A declaration of the engagements, remonstrances, representations* (Oxford, 1647). Thomason dated this item [BL E. 409(25)] as 27 September 1647.

³⁶ Woolrych, *Soldiers and statesmen*, 230.

How do wee know if whilst wee are disputing these things another companie of men shall gather together, and shall putt out a paper as plausible perhaps as this? I doe nott know why itt might not be done by that time you have agreed upon this, or gott hands to itt, if that be the way. And not onely another, and another, butt many of this kinde.³⁷

And on 29 October, the day of the franchise debate, Ireton in exasperation but perhaps also in contempt said something that suggests that, on that day as well, the *Agreement* had already moved from text to emblem:

Wee speake to the paper, and to that matter of the paper, nott to persons; and I hope noe man is soe much engaged to the matter of the paper, I hope our persons, and our hearts, and judgements are not [so] *pinn'd to papers*, butt that wee are ready to heare what good or ill consequences will flow from it.³⁸

It is at least possible that the *Agreement*, obviously available as text, was also already pinned to the hats of its supporters.³⁹ One must suppose that would have added to the sense of outrage that Cromwell felt at Corkbush Field.⁴⁰

That corporeality, the physicality of the *Agreement* in the debates, is easy for modern onlookers of the debates to pass by, but it was the epicentre of the tension of the occasion. That all the freeborn men of England should subscribe to ‘*this paper*’ spoke to a boldness (though likely one born of fear) no less remarkable than similar moments of putting pen to paper: the regicides’ death warrant, the American Declaration of Independence. In one respect it was more: this was not to be the work of a few but, in principle, of all. The failure does not detract from the significance of the attempt, and the record of the occasion when it was so passionately discussed, for all its many imperfections, will never want for readers and admirers.

³⁷ *CP*, I:236, 237. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, I:310, emphasis added.

³⁹ Assuming, that is, that hats were worn inside Putney Church, which, given the Independent and sectarian commitments of most present, seems likely.

⁴⁰ Another intriguing if remote possibility is that the pinned *Agreements* at Corkbush Field were a taunting response to Ireton’s comment at Putney.