

Turncoats and Defectors during the English Civil Wars

By Nicholas Gibson* 081600670 n.h.gibson@newcastle.ac.uk. Supervisor: Professor Jeremy Boulton.

Introduction

Why did people take sides during the English Civil Wars? The difficulty in answering that question satisfactorily has led recent scholars to examine the careers of those who switched allegiance during the conflicts - those often termed 'turncoats'. In recent years scholars have been focusing their attention particularly on Yorkshire turncoats.¹ The most prominent of these were: Sir Hugh Cholmley, Sir John Hotham, Captain John Hotham and James Graham, Marquis of Montrose. Despite such work, the motives of many of these individuals remain shrouded in mystery. Why did such men take the often perilous decision to change sides during the conflict? Studying the careers of such people enables the historian to explore uncover an often striking array of political, familial, financial and religious motives.

Aims

The main objective of this project was to examine the careers of turncoats during both the first and second English Civil Wars. These include: **Colonel Matthew Boynton, Colonel John Poyer** and **Colonel Henry Lilburne.** Such narratives were then analysed to uncover the motivations of these individuals, and to shed fresh light on the nature of allegiance in Revolutionary England. Comparisons would also be drawn to previously researched turncoats, mentioned earlier.

Method

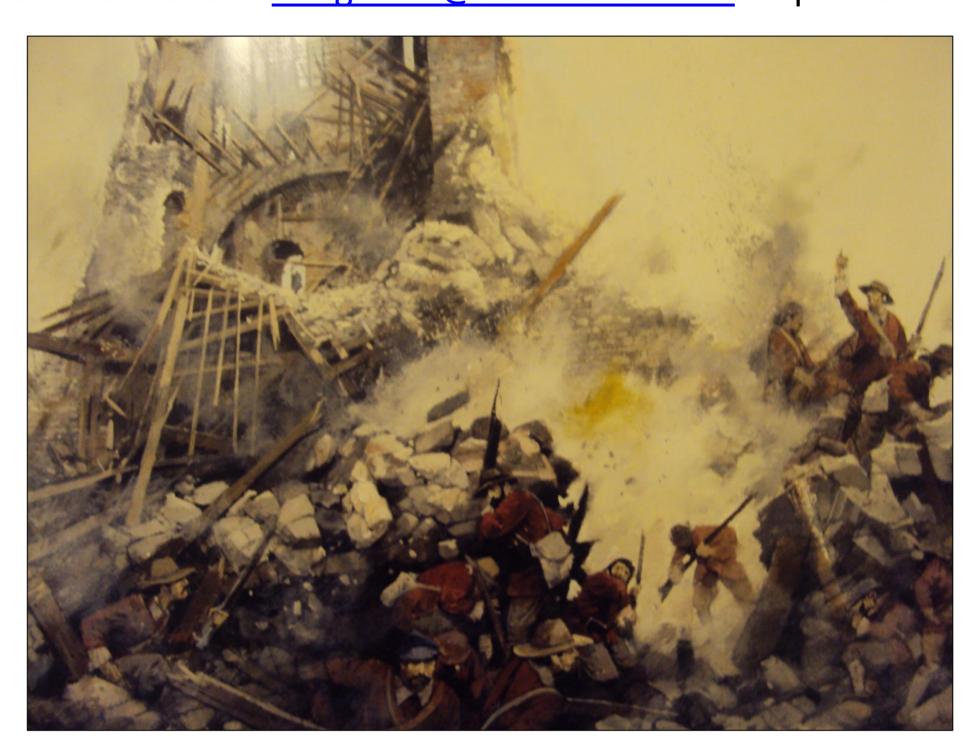
A number of detailed searches were conducted via the university library catalogue, JSTOR, EEBO, BBIH and A2A. This provided an accurate picture of relevant scholarship, what primary sources were available and where. R.H. Tawney stated a long time ago that a serious historian needs a stout pair of boots. It has recently been stated that 'that essential requirement has now come to include a British rail pass'.² Travel and accommodation were booked to enable travel to the following archives: Tyne and Wear Archive Services, Newcastle University Special Collections, Hull History Centre, The Parliamentary Archives and The National Archives. After visiting each repository, extensive notes were taken to construct each case study in as much detail as possible. As well as analysing primary manuscript sources, contemporary pamphlets were just as revealing about the motives and behaviour of turncoats.

Conclusions

With the case studies completed , many turncoats turn out to have been motivated by similar things, many of which have been noted by previous scholars. These include the roles of **pedigree**, **kinship** and **status**. New factors uncovered by this research, found in some but not all of the case studies, include **altruism**, **greed** and the **influence of royalty**. Some turncoats, in other words, changed sides simply because they were bribed to do so, or were over-awed by a personal approach from a member of the royal family. Others appear to have believed that changing sides would benefit those in their care.

Bibliography

- ¹ Binns, Jack, *Yorkshire in the Civil Wars*, (Pickering, Blackthorn Press, 2004). Hopper, Andrew, 'The Self-Fashioning of Gentry Turncoats during the English Civil Wars', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, 2 (2010), 237-257.
- ² Tittler, Robert, *Townspeople and Nation*, (California, Stanford University Press, 2001).



Above, The Siege of Scarborough Castle 1645, North Yorkshire. Reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper.

Biography: Sir Hugh Cholmley

Sir Hugh Cholmley was a gentleman who resided in Whitby. He had many estates and great influence in the Yorkshire area and member of the 'Northern Gentlemen'. He for Scarborough, further strengthening his powerbase. When Civil War broke out Cholmley originally sided with Parliament. During the early stages of Civil War there was noted Royalist success. With Royalist forces drawing closer to his own estates, the option of defection seemed likely to preserve property and lives. Cholmley's motives were clear. He feared for his own estates, wealth and family. He also considered the lives of others living under his influence. The destructive nature of the Civil War also led to his disillusionment with Parliamentary politics. After his defection he suffered numerous slurs to his name. Ultimately he was charged with exile from one of his parliamentarian kinsmen. After the civil wars he returned to Whitby to restore his plundered estates and establish Whitby's mining and fishing community.



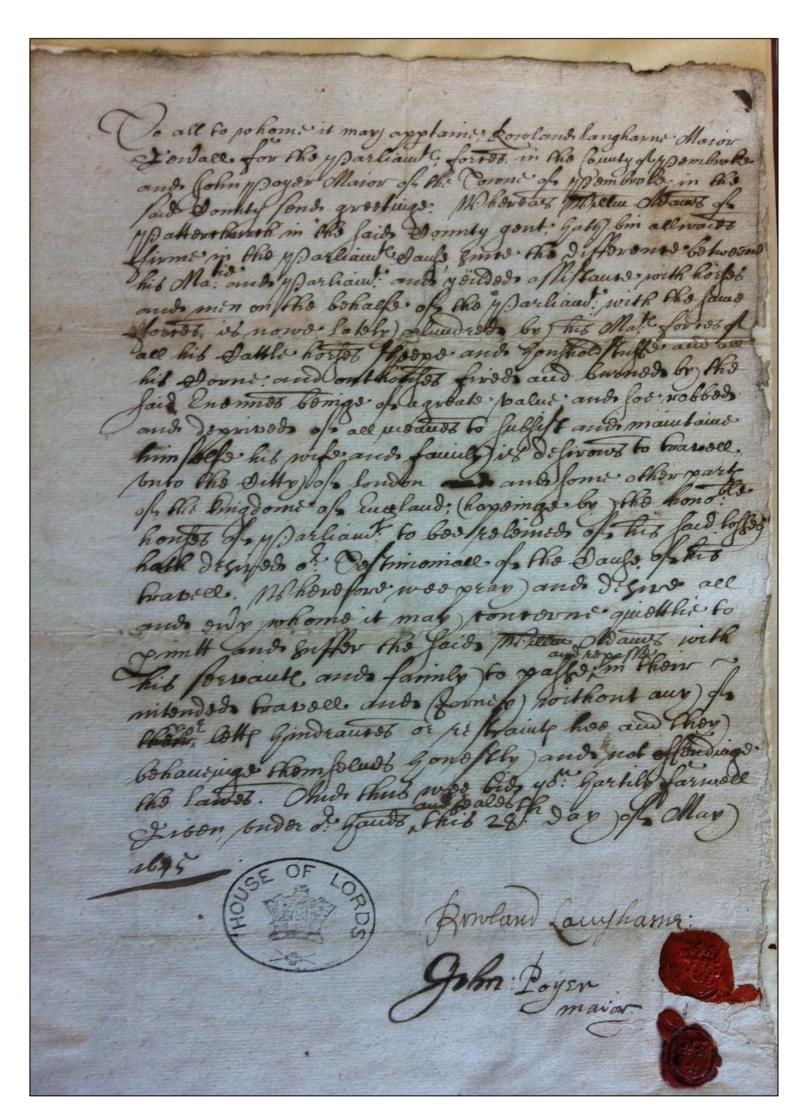
Sir Hugh Cholmley (1600-1657), C. 1640, artist unknown.

'perfidious unfaithful wretch'

The Humble pitico of William Dames of pater church in the Country of Compacts Ring. hat yo? piticion out of his affection to the parlam, and the raufe of gods them taken in kand, did in his own person with soutrall mon and horses his owner tharge, service under the foramed of Major Go Wall laughoron I for the advancement, of the Said Servis the Enimin boing in the Quentry Ist eluntarily give way for fricing of Timers of his houses of good grarly value the Subnots of pombooks, That for the firmitie of himselfe his wife I Philos. Roce was upon the Eminits approth toutragent of to Loans! house and flye into pombroke, where her being the morrylef 2 immit red his howfer and boum Irom and Parried away his wholle stock of attle and goods to the valin of 1000: at least. lat for the letter date of the Garison of pombroke being full of prople I his reliefe of himselfor his wife and thild being To friend of this olyhood, Rawing nothing Sift for their subfissfants, the pitinion with is wife and while took the samifit of ashipp being then in the harbor and for land on to make his advise to the honor howfis of parlant Some mans et Subfishans, whome to his great though her hath His most humble sute there fore unto go. hono. is (that his horefes its about iz: momths. 1 Bring burnt his whole stood plundred himselfe malah indebted and having no manies of suffistance, you willbow nothing thefit ef yo? arruftomed goodnes to the difstration, to take the petition Sad tondition into go! honothe Confiderations, and to a food kin Some uttife to Enable him to rediffer his howfis, that he me ome against bet in a posture of Linklyhoods to magnitaine him selfe his wife and family. . .

'Judas Cholmley'

'base treacherous apostate'



Primary Sources

To the left are examples of the numerous primary sources found in many of the record offices visited. Palaeographical skills are needed in order to appreciate importance of the sources. These two examples help illustrate one of the many reasons for John Poyer's defection in 1648. The first letter is from a soldier to parliament, describing his many problems and requesting compensation. The second letter from Poyer and a leading local general was accompanied with the first letter. It describes how the soldier fully deserves compensation. To help put these sources into context Poyer sent multiple petitions to parliament for more money to pay his and reimburse soldiers himself. This is one of his more more emotive attempts. This is also a good example illustrating the transitional elements of local and national politics.