

# OLIVER CROMWELL

New Perspectives

*Edited by Patrick Little*





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# Oliver Cromwell

New Perspectives

*Edited by*

PATRICK LITTLE

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# Abbreviations

A&O	C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (eds), <i>The Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660</i> (3 vols., Oxford, 1911)
Abbott	W. C. Abbott (ed.), <i>The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell</i> (4 vols., Harvard, 1937–47).
Add.	Additional
BL	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
<i>Burton Diary</i>	J. T. Rutt (ed.), <i>The Diary of Thomas Burton Esq</i> (4 vols., 1828)
CCAM	M. A. E. Green (ed.), <i>Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for the Advance of Money, 1642–56</i> (3 vols., 1888)
CCC	M. A. E. Green (ed.), <i>Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding, 1643–1660</i> (5 vols., 1889–92)
CCSP	O. Ogle, W. H. Bliss and F. J. Routledge (eds), <i>Calendar of Clarendon State Papers</i> (5 vols., Oxford, 1869–1932)
CJ	<i>Journal of the House of Commons</i>
Clarendon, <i>Rebellion</i>	Edward, Earl of Clarendon, <i>The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England</i> , ed. W. D. Macray (6 vols., Oxford, 1888).
<i>Clarke Papers</i>	C. H. Firth and F. Henderson (eds), <i>The Clarke Papers</i> (5 vols., 1891, 1894, 1899, 1901, 2005)
Coward, <i>Cromwell</i>	Barry Coward, <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> (Harlow, 1991)
CSPD	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic</i>
CSPI	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Ireland</i>
CSPV	<i>Calendar of State papers, Venetian</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library

Davis, <i>Cromwell</i>	J. C. Davis, <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> (2001)
Eg.	Egerton (BL)
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Firth, <i>Cromwell</i>	C. H. Firth, <i>Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England</i> (1900)
Gardiner, <i>Constitutional Documents</i>	S. R. Gardiner, <i>Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625–1660</i> (3rd edn. Oxford, 1906)
Gaunt, <i>Cromwell</i>	Peter Gaunt, <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> (Oxford, 1996)
Harl.	Harleian (BL)
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HMC</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission</i>
<i>LJ</i>	<i>Journal of the House of Lords</i>
Lomas–Carlyle	S. C. Lomas (ed.), <i>The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, with Elucidations by Thomas Carlyle</i> (3 vols., 1904)
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
<i>Nicholas Papers</i>	G. F. Warner (ed.), <i>The Nicholas Papers</i> (4 vols., 1886, 1893, 1897, 1920).
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NLW	National Library of Wales
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>Old DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>PJ</i>	W. H. Coates, Anne Steele Young and Vernon F. Snow (eds), <i>The Private Journals of the Long Parliament</i> (3 vols., Yale, 1982–92)
<i>Procs. LP</i>	Maija Jansson (ed.), <i>Proceedings in the Opening Session of the Long Parliament</i> (7 vols., Rochester NY, 2000–2007)
RO	Record Office
<i>TNA</i>	The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew
<i>TSP</i>	Thomas Birch (ed.), <i>A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Esq</i> (7 vols., 1742)
<i>Whitelocke Diary</i>	Ruth Spalding (ed.), <i>The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke, 1605–1675</i> (Oxford, 1990)

Note:

Unless otherwise stated, all places of publication are London. Spelling has been modernised, and dates are old style, but with the year beginning on 1 January.

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# Introduction

Patrick Little

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Another book on Oliver Cromwell—and especially one that claims to provide ‘new perspectives’—perhaps requires a certain amount of justification. Famously, Dr Johnson abandoned his plan to write a ‘Life of Oliver Cromwell . . . on discovering that all that can be told of him is already in print’, and, more than two centuries on, it is easy to agree with him.<sup>1</sup> John Morrill, in his study of Cromwell in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, calculates that since the protector’s death in 1658 ‘more than 160 full-length biographies have appeared, and more than 1000 separate publications bear his name’.<sup>2</sup> These works vary in quality and interpretation, of course, and it can be argued that each age has created its own image of Cromwell, from the Machiavellian villain of the Restoration and the non-conformist hero of the nineteenth century to the great dictator of the 1930s and 1940s and the betrayer of revolution of the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> The most recent interpretation, which emerged during the 1980s and continued into the early years of the twenty-first century, emphasises Cromwell’s religious motivation as the key to understanding the man and his career. This can be traced back to the ground-breaking research of Blair Worden, seconded by the work of John Morrill and Colin Davis, who explored Cromwell’s deeply held belief in God’s providential intervention in the world, his intense engagement with the Bible, and the fundamental importance to him of ‘liberty of conscience’ among the Protestant sects.<sup>4</sup> Another strand of Cromwellian studies that developed at the same time originated with the work of Peter Gaunt on the protectorate, who argued that the council was a more important part of the protectoral regime than had previously been realised, and that Cromwell’s hands were tied by the need to maintain collective responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Combined with the increased emphasis on Cromwell’s religion, the result was to make the protector seem a somewhat other-worldly figure, semi-detached from power and



obsessed with the working of Providence. These two theories have proved useful to historians eager to attribute Cromwell's rise to something other than naked ambition. Furthermore, instead of overseeing a 'retreat from revolution' in the 1650s, Cromwell is seen as having retreated from the world, leaving the compromises and contradictions of the later period to be blamed on others.

The generally sympathetic biographies of the 1990s and early 2000s have been strongly influenced by both these ideas—although not all historians have accepted them uncritically—but the latest research on the protectorate has begun to question the validity of this approach.<sup>6</sup> For example, Blair Worden has questioned the strength of the council, arguing that Cromwell was very much in charge of the government in the 1650s, and that part of his political skill throughout his career was an ability to distance himself from unpopular or provocative decisions.<sup>7</sup> Cromwell's otherworldliness has also been challenged by new work on the protectoral court. Paul Hunneyball, in particular, has demonstrated that Cromwell was a driving force behind the increasing grandeur of the court, and that the quasi-regal tone was not something thrust upon him.<sup>8</sup> Such ideas undermine the accepted view of Cromwell as a distant, godly head of state, and they also have implications for our attitude to him during his earlier career. Another important development is the appearance in recent years of a number of scholarly biographies of those around Cromwell, including John Lambert, Henry Ireton, Sir Thomas Fairfax and Lord Broghill, as well as new research on Richard Cromwell.<sup>9</sup> There is no longer any excuse for seeing Cromwell in isolation, exaggerating his military or political abilities and playing up the uniqueness of his religious or ideological commitment. Together, these new developments suggest that the tectonic plates of Cromwellian studies are on the move once again; and it is within this context that this new volume should be read.

But why 'new perspectives'? The underlying problem with existing studies of Oliver Cromwell is their reliance on two collected editions: Thomas Carlyle's *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (as edited and updated by S. C. Lomas in the early twentieth century) and W. C. Abbott's *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, published in America in the 1930s and 1940s. The words of John Morrill, written apparently without irony, demonstrate the mesmeric effect of these collections:

All the serious biographers have drawn on very similar bodies of evidence. And although the judgement of the vast majority of his peers is harsh in its

assessment of his honesty, integrity, and credibility, historians have opted to take him much more at his own valuation, finding in his words an openness and striving that usually appeals and just sometimes appals.<sup>10</sup>

In this volume, the contributors have been careful not to take Cromwell's word for it. Both collected editions are used extensively in what follows—it would be perverse to do otherwise—but none of the chapters *relies* on either. Instead of seeing the world through Cromwell's eyes, the aim is to balance his own account with the view from without. The new 'perspectives' thus include views of Cromwell from Scotland and Wales, East Anglia and the backbenches at Westminster; from those who were intimate with him, such as his Steward relations, the Levellers, the members of the protectoral household and individuals such as John Thurloe and Richard Cromwell; and from unusual angles, whether looking at his interaction with Ireland before 1649, his relations with the Levellers in the same period or the 'pre-history' of the kingship debates of 1657. Gaps in the coverage are inevitable, but it is hoped that the overall effect will be to present something different, against which Cromwell's own writings and speeches can be compared, and his career reconsidered. The remainder of this introduction will consider the chapters individually, and then see how, taken together, they might provide new insights into Cromwell's career and character.

## I

Cromwell's rise from East Anglian obscurity to political importance has always fascinated historians. John Morrill's influential article on the 'making of Oliver Cromwell' demonstrates what can be done—although, as it turns out, his article is far from being the last word on the subject. Equally, there has been much interest in Cromwell's activities in the early years of the Long Parliament. His involvement in the first civil war has also attracted attention, as the period witnessed a crucial stage of his 'rise', from provincial to national importance. The first three chapters of this book revisit the problem of Cromwell's rise to power, but approach it from very different viewpoints from those usually adopted by historians.

In the first chapter, Simon Healy concentrates on one aspect of Cromwell's early life that has puzzled scholars: the background to his inheritance of the Ely leases from his maternal uncle, Sir Thomas Steward, in 1636. These leases, worth perhaps £300 per annum,

secured Cromwell's position as a gentleman—a position that had been in doubt since he had sold up his lands at Huntingdon and become a farmer in St Ives in 1631—and his relative prosperity allowed him to begin his political career as MP for Cambridge in 1640. Yet, as Healy has discovered, the Steward inheritance may have been of more than merely economic significance. Cromwell, impatient for the money coming to him, tried to have his uncle declared a lunatic; and when this ploy failed, the uncle retaliated by changing his will, saddling Cromwell with the repayment of all his debts. On the uncle's death, legal suits ensued, and it was only in October 1638 that Cromwell finally enjoyed the income that he so badly needed. In the same month he wrote the famous letter to his cousin, Mrs St John, proclaiming his assurance of salvation and his repentance of his past life. Healy links the two events, arguing that the letter was 'a semi-public *mea culpa*', acknowledging that Cromwell had committed 'a genuinely damning sin, for which he faced public humiliation as a greedy charlatan; but nevertheless, God elected to save him from disgrace'. This curious mixture of religion and money will become a common theme in many of the chapters that follow. The other important point that Healy makes is that Cromwell should not be studied in isolation. Indeed, 'the key question to be asked about Cromwell's early life is, what marked him out from his cohort'. Cromwell was hardly alone in being the son of a younger son, acutely aware that his own children might slip from the charmed circle of the gentry altogether; nor was he exceptional in being saved (financially, at least) by the death of a wealthy relative. What is striking is Cromwell's behaviour, which was far from ordinary. His sale of the Huntingdon lands in 1631 was eccentric indeed, and can only be explained by his hopes of 'greater expectations elsewhere'; yet instead of playing his cards carefully, Cromwell took a huge risk in trying to have Sir Thomas Steward declared a lunatic; furthermore, having got hold of the Ely leases, he did not keep them but, in October 1640, sold them back to the cathedral authorities. In these early years, Cromwell was already demonstrating 'a penchant for taking risks of a magnitude which would have staggered most of his contemporaries'.

Stephen Roberts, in his examination of Cromwell's career as an ordinary MP in the first two years of the Long Parliament, also compares him with his contemporaries. There is a danger in any study of Cromwell of singling him out from the mass of gentlemen and MPs, emphasising his lowliness as a backbencher and backwoodsman, while searching for signs of the greatness to come. In returning to the

bread and butter sources of the parliamentary historian—principally the *Journals* and the various diaries—Roberts takes a more measured and less anachronistic approach. Cromwell's activity in the Commons was often humdrum and unexceptional; like many other MPs he enjoyed 'a matrix of relations and other acquaintances in the House'; indeed, 'far from being an awkward loner... he was an animal that usually hunted with the pack'. Yet this picture of Cromwell as a team player, as a small cog in some 'opposition' machine, must be offset by a definite eccentricity in his approach. Cromwell is notable for his 'self-discipline in following things through', and 'once a topic had captured his attention, he was likely to stick with it'. This made him useful to outside petitioners and to the leaders in the Commons itself. His energy is also obvious—'seizing the initiative came naturally to Cromwell'—while his 'iconoclastic streak' and willingness to upset and provoke made him 'one to watch'. He leaped at new opportunities, especially after the recess in the autumn of 1641, when 'the deepening political crisis impelled him to decisive political activity'. Thus, although basically a team player, working not only with his East Anglian allies but also with other godly critics of the regime (notably Sir Robert Harley, Sir Henry Vane the younger and Denzil Holles), Cromwell can also be seen as a maverick in the House, whose apparent gaffes and blunders 'can be read as deliberate provocations of the staid, the complacent and smooth-mannered'. He was certainly no 'backbencher', being 'too busy, too controversial, too noticed by the diarists, too much in the thick of things'.

Cromwell may have spent 1640–1642 moving 'from being an outsider to being an insider' (in Roberts's words), but the radical streak that had characterised his behaviour in the 1630s clearly remained. In Chapter 3, Sue Sadler explores how that radicalism developed further, within the local, East Anglian, context, during the early years of the first civil war. In August 1642 Cromwell suddenly left the Commons and rushed back to Cambridge, where he raised a troop of horse and masterminded the interception of the college plate, which was being taken in convoys to the king's army at Nottingham. Thereafter he served with the earl of Essex at Edgehill, before returning to the fens to organise a desperate resistance against the royalists in the north, who might use the routes through from Lincolnshire to strike at the parliamentarian stronghold of East Anglia. This was the time of Cromwell's first military victories, at Crowland, Burghley House, Gainsborough and Winceby—the actions that brought him to public notice, and established him as a 'heroic and valiant' figure, a paladin

of parliament. It was also the period that made him controversial as a religious radical and (in the eyes of his enemies at least) a social revolutionary, and which led to his bitter row with his commander, the earl of Manchester, in November 1644. Sadler's perspective is that of a regional historian, and she seeks to put Cromwell into his local context by evaluating the claims of an anonymous 'opponent' who supplied Manchester with information about Cromwell's misdeeds in the fens. This 'opponent' (who can be identified as another parliamentarian soldier, William Dodson) claimed that Cromwell 'gloried in his command and promoted religious factionalism', taking credit for the work of others and deliberately playing up his role in victories to his own advantage. An analysis of the 'opponent's' claims suggests that there was more than a grain of truth in them. There is little doubt that Cromwell became skilled at propaganda during this period, or that he was capable of putting a 'spin' on events, to his own advantage. His victories, moreover, were not always strategically important, and his advancement of Independents and other religious radicals was deeply divisive. His status as a hero was not so obvious to those who had to work with him in the fens around Ely.

## II

Cromwell's increasingly strong attachment to Independency is key to understanding why he became such a controversial figure by the autumn of 1644. This militant brand of religion, with its emphasis on individual conscience rather than rigid rules imposed by a ministerial hierarchy, appealed to Cromwell the outsider; and it is not difficult to see why the more conservative parliamentarians in East Anglia saw this as not only religiously heterodox but also socially subversive. Such views bound Cromwell to a particular section of the army, and with the reorganisation that led to the creation of the New Model Army in the spring of 1645, that section came to the fore. The victory at Naseby in June of that year, the successes that followed and the eventual defeat of the royalists in the spring of 1646, were taken as a sign of divine pleasure in the New Model, and by extension, in the Independents that now dominated it.<sup>11</sup> Chapter 4 looks at a related subject: Cromwell's relationship with the Levellers, that loose group of radicals, inside the army and out, which called for religious reform to go hand-in-hand with political and social change. As Philip Baker emphasises, Cromwell had much in common

with the Leveller leaders—they were ‘natural allies rather than mortal enemies’—and his personal connections with John Lilburne dated from the very beginning of the Long Parliament (a point dealt with in detail by Stephen Roberts in Chapter 2). It was Cromwell who secured Lilburne’s commission in the Eastern Association army, and both men attacked the earl of Manchester in 1644. Lilburne refused to join the New Model (as he would not take the Covenant) and his relationship with Cromwell declined thereafter; but other Levellers, notably William Walwyn, remained on intimate terms with Cromwell at least until the summer of 1647. There are, in fact, good reasons for seeing the Putney debates in October 1647 as a forum for discussion between groups that agreed on broad principles, and disagreed only on details. In later months Cromwell and his son-in-law, Henry Ireton, did not oppose the Levellers on principle but for political reasons, especially when it became clear that their former allies were fomenting mutiny in the army. This is an important point, and one that fits well with the earlier chapters. From the Leveller perspective Cromwell remained a radical, even as his methods became more reactionary, and his refusal to compromise ever more pronounced.

### III

The relationship of Cromwell and the Levellers is of course but one strand of the complicated history of the later 1640s. The period saw the rise of the New Model as a political force; the great rift between the political Independents and Presbyterians at Westminster in 1647; the repeated attempts to negotiate with the king; the signing of the Engagement with the Scots; the second civil war and the purge of the Commons, led by Colonel Pride, in December 1648; the trial and execution of the king in January 1649: all have been studied and restudied in the last 30 years, and Cromwell’s part in them is well known.<sup>12</sup> Less obvious is the role of Ireland and Scotland and Wales in shaping Cromwell’s reaction to these events; and the next three chapters deal with this period as well as looking forward to the very different political landscape of the 1650s.

Chapter 5 examines the ‘pre-history’ of the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland in 1649 by reviewing Cromwell’s sometimes complex relationship with the island in earlier years. In doing so, it challenges the idea that when he arrived in Dublin in August 1649 Cromwell was ignorant of Irish affairs and guided merely by religious bigotry and hatred of Catholicism. In fact, Cromwell was very knowledgeable,

at least about earlier English attempts to address the Irish question, as he had been involved in plans to send expeditionary forces in 1642, 1645–1646, 1647 and 1648. When he went to Ireland as lord lieutenant in the summer of 1649 he was guided by these earlier experiences, both in planning his strategy and in relying on Irish Protestants as advisers and agents. Underlying this was Cromwell's investment in Ireland, which was both financial and religious in nature. Despite his precarious financial position, he had put a significant amount of his money into the Irish 'adventure' scheme in 1642, and he also looked to Ireland to provide him with a continuing military command—and salary—as the first civil war came to an end. Yet Cromwell's commitment went beyond that of a speculator. In 1642 his investment was 'a huge gamble' for a man in his unsettled financial position, and in 1646 and again in 1648 his promises to give up much-needed monetary awards to fund Irish expeditions were reckless by any standard. From Cromwell's point of view, however, these offers may have been intended 'as a sign of his selfless commitment to the cause and his trust in Providence', and also as a way of 'putting his financial survival into the hands of God'. There was nothing inherently hypocritical about this mixing of money and religion, as it was generally believed that God's favour would lead to success in the world as well as entry to the next. Certainly a belief in Providence was central to Cromwell's overriding ambition to reconquer Ireland, but it was not something that he first experienced in 1649. As his military ideas and understanding of the political situation matured, so did his religious conviction that 'God had brought him to Ireland, after humbling him by eight years of false-starts and missed opportunities'. It is this hard-won certainty that provides the background for Cromwell's terrible single-mindedness at the siege of Drogheda in the autumn of 1649.

Cromwell's relationship with Ireland was straightforward compared with his tense, complicated interaction with Scotland. The Scots had been allies of the godly in England in the early 1640s, and it was hoped that they might become so again, despite their refusal to accept what Cromwell and his friends knew to be right. Cromwell's military interventions in Scotland, in 1648 and 1650–1651, were not conducted with anger but with sorrow; instead of the zeal with which he faced the invasion of Ireland, Cromwell looked for allies among the Scots. He debated with them, pleaded with them to compromise, begged them to 'think it possible you may be mistaken'.<sup>13</sup> Cromwell's frustration with the Scots is well known, but Kirsteen MacKenzie, in

Chapter 6, considers the other side of the equation: the reaction of the Scottish covenanters to the rise to power of Cromwell. Tensions were apparent even before the Solemn League and Covenant, uniting the two nations in a religious and civil bond, was signed in September 1643, and Cromwell's record of cooperation with Scottish commanders during the first civil war was not a good one. The victory at Marston Moor in July 1644 was considered by Cromwell to be 'God's victory' and he believed that he himself was the 'instrument' of that victory; but the Scots had good reasons for seeing it as a joint effort—a victory of the 'covenanting interest'. Cromwell's attack on the Presbyterian earl of Manchester and the exclusion of Scots from the New Model Army confirmed opinions that Cromwell was an 'enemy of the Covenant'. Between 1648 and 1651 Scottish views of Cromwell changed as the political situation changed. His defeat of the 'engagers', the royalist supporters of the duke of Hamilton, was celebrated by the kirk faction, which saw Cromwell as a tool of Providence; but the execution of Charles I again turned the Scots against Cromwell. From then on his role was a negative one, as a 'severe instrument of punishment for all their sins'—most notably at Dunbar in September 1650. In this the covenanters were almost in agreement with Cromwell himself. The victory was a sign of God's judgement. For Cromwell it showed that he was right; for the Scots, God had ruled against them. The religious language used by both sides was strangely similar, and this serves to underline the parallels between them, and the oddity of their relationship. The foundation of the protectorate in 1653, MacKenzie tells us, was neither celebrated by the Scots, nor resisted, and the regime received support only from a minority, as it was clear that 'military force, not covenanted authority, was the root of the protector's power in Scotland'.

Compared with Scotland and Ireland, Cromwell's relationship with Wales was deeply ambiguous. As Lloyd Bowen argues in Chapter 7, although there was no 'intense "special relationship" between Cromwell and the principality', bonds between the two were pronounced. Cromwell had been involved in religious reform in Wales in 1642 and returned to the cause in 1650, with the creation of the commission for the propagation of the gospel there; he acquired substantial estates in south Wales in the late 1640s; and he enjoyed Welsh ancestry (as Oliver Cromwell *alias* Williams) which 'remained significant throughout his life', reappearing in the iconography of the 1650s, and encouraging supplicants to emphasise that they too were Welshmen. There was a personal element in Cromwell's involvement



in Wales that was different from his zealous attitude towards Ireland or his coldness with the Scottish covenanters; but, Bowen warns us, this connection between Cromwell and Wales should not be pushed too far. There are parallels between Wales and Ireland that might be teased out, especially as both involved the unstable mixture of religion and money. When it came to Ireland, Cromwell made apparently rash investments to demonstrate his commitment to the cause, and in later years his lands in south Wales became 'a base from which earlier impulses of puritanism could be sustained'. Just as he had come to value the opinion of a tight circle of Irish Protestants, so Cromwell sought advice on Welsh policy from a small group of godly Welshmen, notably Philip Jones and Walter Cradock. Having said that, it is clear that Cromwell considered that the Welsh were ultimately redeemable, and in this they were perhaps closer in his eyes to the Catholic Irish. As Bowen says, the Welsh were not irreconcilable to the Cromwellian regime, but were rather seen as 'wayward brethren to be brought back into the fold', despite their lingering royalist sympathies. Like the Scots, however, they were not willing to meet Cromwell half-way, and his reliance on a small clique of the godly hampered attempts to broaden support as the 1650s continued. In this, the experience of Wales can also be seen as running in parallel to that of the English localities, governed by the notorious major-generals. Any attempt to suggest that Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the English regions shared a common experience during the Cromwellian protectorate would be decidedly premature. But the general failure of the regime to win 'hearts and minds' across all four nations leads us back to a suitably Cromwellian paradox: that in his 'golden years',<sup>14</sup> as lord protector of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland (1653–1658), he did not once leave London and its immediate surroundings.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV

The protectorate has only recently experienced a resurgence of interest after many years as the poor relation of Cromwellian studies (and, for that matter, of the civil war and interregnum era as a whole).<sup>16</sup> Instead of simplistic portrayals of the protectorate as the retreat from revolution, the forerunner of the Restoration, or as a period of conservative military rule, historians have now begun to cast their nets more widely. A recent collection of essays included such varied fare as a study of civic culture in towns, the response to the regime from

the literati in Wales and the role of art and architecture in fashioning the Cromwellian court.<sup>17</sup> The complexities of politics under the protectorate, and the difficulties faced by Cromwell in dealing with his parliaments, have also received their first comprehensive analysis in recent years.<sup>18</sup> The final three chapters in the present book take this new interest in the protectorate one stage further.

Andrew Barclay's chapter explores rather different aspects of Cromwell's court than those discussed elsewhere: not its outward show but its internal structures and procedures as a department of state; and the personal connection between the protector and his household servants. In fact, the two protectoral palaces at Whitehall and Hampton Court were used in a very similar way as under the monarchy, and, as Barclay puts it, 'the echo of the more traditional royal structure can only have been deliberate'. There were also close parallels between the personnel of the Cromwellian court and the former royal establishment. When these household officials are examined in detail, they prove to be a mixture of extended family and recent clients, with a smattering of more important politicians. Two groups are notable for their absence: those with a local connection with Cromwell before 1645 and the army officers who had been so close to him during the civil wars and remained among the most powerful men on the council. The exclusion of the latter group is most striking, as is the conclusion that 'the protectoral household was overwhelmingly staffed by civilians'—and there is even the likelihood that this was a deliberate policy as Cromwell 'may have hoped to use his court appointments to distance himself from the army'.

My own chapter on the prehistory of the offer of the crown to Cromwell also explores his apparent tensions with the army, through his relationship with another valued servant, the secretary of state (and head of intelligence), John Thurloe. Thurloe was behind a concerted attempt to prepare the ground for kingship in the early months of 1657, using as a pretext the failed plot to kill the protector, led by Miles Sindercombe. Thurloe's tactic was to use his control of foreign intelligence and the domestic newsbooks to create a climate of unrest, warning MPs that the government needed to be put on a more settled, civilian footing, while heightening fears among the military that a foreign invasion was imminent in order to head off any potential rebellion against the planned changes at the centre. It is suggested that Thurloe was thereby 'mounting an elaborate confidence trick with the army as the main target', and in this he was apparently aided and abetted by Cromwell himself. Overall, the fact that 'historians

agree that Thurloe and Cromwell acted as one' in other matters reinforces the suspicion that the protector was happy to dupe the army into obedience, and that he initially sought the crown—despite his famous rejection of it a few weeks later.

In the final chapter, Jason Peacey continues his systematic revision of our understanding of the career of Oliver's son and successor, Richard Cromwell, by looking at the relationship between the two men.<sup>19</sup> There was nothing strange about Richard's undistinguished early career: he was at first merely the younger son of a minor gentleman turned soldier, and only after the death of his two elder brothers and his father's rise to prominence in the later 1640s was he brought out from the shadows. It was only when Oliver was made protector in 1653 that Richard assumed a more public role, and not until 1657 that he became a national figure. According to this thesis, Oliver's 'plans for his son changed in entirely logical and understandable ways during this period' and in the end he was 'perfectly happy to prepare Richard for life on the highest stage'. It was the move to make the protectorate hereditary—an ambition that ran in parallel with the possibility of Oliver taking the crown—that made the big difference as the 1650s wore on, and Peacey identifies a 'fairly clear correlation between the growing willingness to make the protectorate hereditary and the more or less conscious enhancement of his [Richard's] status'.

The chapters on the protectorate dovetail together. Larger themes can easily be identified. First, these chapters reinforce the idea that Cromwell was the dominant force in his own government. He chose his own court officials and household servants, apparently keeping the army officers at arm's length; he seems to have encouraged Thurloe to push for the initial offer of the crown in February 1657; and he was actively grooming his son, Richard, to succeed him. These elements fit neatly with the current historiographical trend to reinstate Cromwell at the very centre of the protectorate, whether in council or through the grandeur of the court. The second theme that emerges is the increasing importance of the civilian interest as a serious rival to the army. This was a central argument in the recent book on the protectoral parliaments, and it reappears, and is endorsed, here. The civilians had unrivalled access to the protector through the court, and their cause was championed by both John Thurloe and Richard Cromwell. What is new here is the close identification of Oliver Cromwell himself with this particular faction. This is only half the story, however. Cromwell's cultivation of civilians had

its limits. He rejected the crown in the end, when he realised that the risk of incurring God's wrath outweighed the advantages of a return to the 'ancient constitution', and in doing so he not only upset the 'kinglings' but also mystified them. Thurloe was left in limbo as his 'confidence, so obvious in March [1657] suddenly evaporated in April'. Thereafter there were other signs that the civilians could not rely on Cromwell's unequivocal support. The council remained the stronghold of the army, and only John Lambert was sacked—leaving such powerful figures as Charles Fleetwood and John Disbrowe still in office. The new upper chamber of parliament, the 'Other House' personally appointed by Cromwell in the last days of 1657, had a strong military flavour. Far from giving the civilians *carte blanche*, it could be argued that Cromwell was intent on creating a balance of interests, which would ensure that he (and his successors) would continue to exercise the ultimate authority in the three nations.

## V

The ten chapters of this book provide a more or less chronological account of Oliver Cromwell's career, from the obscurity of the 1630s to his death, as head of state, in 1658. Certain overarching themes can be traced through many of the chapters, and as these provide interesting insights into Cromwell's character as well as his career, they are worth further discussion. The first concerns money. As Stephen Roberts has pointed out elsewhere, 'it is interesting that little work seems to have been done on his personal finances', and there is more than a suspicion that biographers have deliberately avoided this 'mundane, not to say grubby, topic'.<sup>20</sup> Here the question of Cromwell's finances resurfaces with surprising regularity: his greediness over the Steward inheritance; the way in which his involvement in Ireland was complicated by his concern to secure his investments and his military salary; the impact of the large land grants in south Wales on his relations with that country; and his particular closeness to (in Andrew Barclay's words) 'those who had... been looking after his money' during the protectorate. It would be wrong to extrapolate from this that Cromwell was entirely venal and self-serving, however. In three of the four cases listed, Cromwell's financial motives are less than straightforward. In the 1630s Healy is surely right to emphasise that Cromwell's financial crisis was thoroughly mixed up with his religious conversion. Giving way to greed had brought him to the lowest of moral ebbs, and yet even the 'chief of sinners' had found mercy at

the hand of God. Cromwell's subsequent decision to sell up the Ely leases may have had a religious and political angle, and this can also be seen in his reinvestment of much of the money into extremely unwise, yet religiously unimpeachable, schemes such as the Irish adventure. Indeed, Cromwell's willingness to offer up his newly secured land grants and much-needed arrears payments in 1646 and 1648 appears to have been motivated by a desire to show commitment to the cause and his unlimited trust in Providence. Equally, Cromwell's Welsh lands were treated not so much as a source of income or of worldly pride (he rarely visited them), but as a resource for the godly, as a base from which to establish radical religion in the land of his fathers. It might almost be said that for Cromwell money was not an end in itself: more often than not it was a tool for the advancement of godly reformation. To dismiss the topic as 'mundane' or 'grubby' is to miss a very revealing area of Cromwell's character, and one that 'earths' his godliness in the real world.

Another, connected, theme is the sheer radicalism of Cromwell compared with many of his contemporaries, not only in his attitude to religion (which is invariably emphasised by modern biographers) but also his willingness to take risks. In his early career, this is most obvious in his astonishing decision to try to have the (evidently perfectly sane) Sir Thomas Steward declared a lunatic, but the sale of the Huntingdon lands in 1631 and the Ely leases in 1640 were scarcely less momentous gambles. In the first years of the Long Parliament, Cromwell may have learned to hunt with the parliamentary pack, but one suspects that he was chiefly useful for his 'iconoclastic streak', and his willingness to take on difficult cases. His pre-emptive strike against the Cambridge colleges in the summer of 1642, before the civil war had started in earnest, was also a big risk, and although his impetuosity would pay dividends on the battlefield, his political attack on his commanding officer, the earl of Manchester, could easily have seen him cashiered, or worse. This 'all or nothing' approach can also be seen in his support for the self-denying ordinance in 1645—a move that should have ended his own military career as well as that of his factional enemies. Against this background, Phil Baker is surely right to see Cromwell as having much in common with the radical Levellers; and that he turned against them, rather than their ideas, in the autumn of 1647. In a different way, Cromwell's radicalism also emerges from the fanatical determination—and willingness to take personal and financial risks—with which he approached Ireland both before and after August 1649.

Cromwell's reckless radicalism links into another aspect of his personality that can be seen in almost all the chapters of this book: a restlessness which verged on rootlessness. Again, we should be aware of just how unusual Cromwell was in comparison with his contemporaries. The gentry defined themselves in terms of lineage and of land—family tombs, ancestral seats and patrimonial estates were as important to them as family trees and kinship ties.<sup>21</sup> Cromwell, by contrast, insisted on moving on. The uprooting of his family from the patrimonial lands in Huntingdon and the sale of the Ely leases long held by his mother's family were eccentric, as they disassociated him from areas with which he had strong historical links, and in later years he seemed intent on kicking over the traces altogether. During the 1640s Cromwell's commitment to Independency superseded any loyalty he may have had to his wider kinship group, or to East Anglia as a whole. Local Presbyterians such as the 'opponent' William Dodson saw Cromwell not only as religiously and politically dangerous, but as a man who had turned his back on his roots, who no longer put the people of the fens before his own selfish ends. Cromwell's abrupt departure from East Anglia in 1644, to pursue a national agenda, merely confirmed this. Independency transcended locality as well as existing family or religious ties, and it was no coincidence that by the mid-1640s Cromwell had also dropped many of his closest political associates from the early months of the Long Parliament. His new radical friends were not to remain in favour for long, however. Cromwell's falling out of love with the Levellers began in 1645–1646, even if the process was not complete until the autumn of 1647. The years after the execution of the king saw Cromwell drop his republican allies one by one as his contempt for the Rump Parliament grew. Even the army—God's instrument in the wars of the 1640s—was not immune. By the mid-1650s Cromwell, by now lord protector, appears to have made a conscious effort to publicly distance himself from the army. His household was staffed by civilians not soldiers; his closest advisers were no longer senior officers; and it might be argued that by 1657 he had come to see the army as an obstacle, not only to 'healing and settling' but also to his own ambitions to be king. Yet in these final years, Cromwell's restlessness seems to have diminished. The footloose Cromwell was now settling himself and his family into the former royal palaces, carefully arranging for his son to succeed him, and rediscovering a Welsh genealogy that was more glorious—and more spurious—than anything East Anglia could offer. Was this the final re-invention? Had the 'restless Cromwell' finally come to rest?<sup>22</sup>