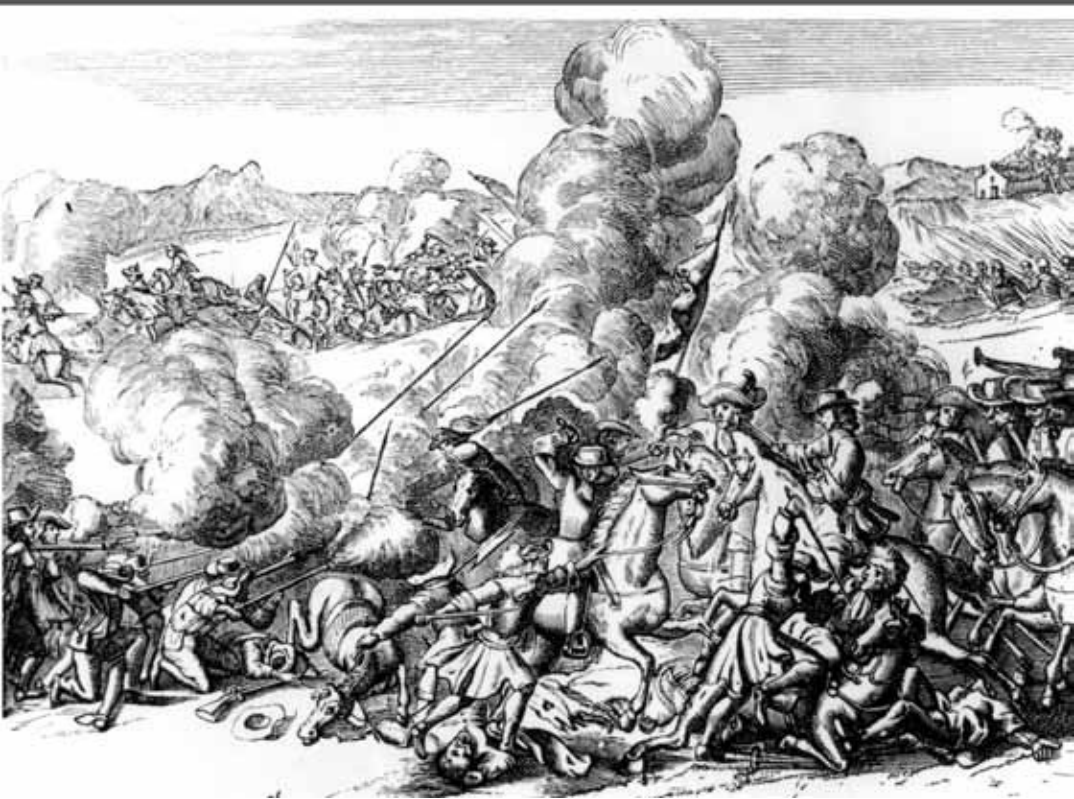
ROUTLEDGE

CHRISTOPHER L. SCOTT

The Maligned Militia

The West Country Militia of the Monmouth Rebellion, 1685



THE MALIGNED MILITIA

This page has been left blank intentionally

The Maligned Militia

The West Country Militia of the Monmouth Rebellion, 1685

CHRISTOPHER L. SCOTT

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2015 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:
Scott, Christopher L.
The maligned militia : the west country militia of the Monmouth Rebellion, 1685 / by Christopher L. Scott.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4724-3771-6 (hardcover)
1. Monmouth's Rebellion, 1685. 2. Great Britain–Militia–History–17th century. I. Title.
DA 448.9.S55 2015
941.06'7–dc23

2014027131

ISBN 9781472437716 (hbk)
ISBN 9781315555768 (ebk)

Contents

List of Figures

This page has been left blank intentionally

List of Tables

Abbreviations

Record Offices

CRO	Cornwall Record Office, Truro
DRO	Dorset Record Office, Dorchester
ERO	Devon Record Office, Exeter
GRO	Gloucestershire Record Office, Gloucester
HRO	Hampshire Record Office, Winchester
ORO	Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxford
PRO	Dorset Record Office, Poole
SRO	Somerset Record Office, Taunton
TNA	The National Archive, Kew
W&SHC	Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham

Libraries

BCL	Bath City Library
BL	British Library
SBL	Swindon Borough Library
SCL	Salisbury City Library

Museums

BlM	Blake Museum, Bridgwater
BM	British Museum
DTM	Devizes Town Museum
HTM	Honiton Town Library
NAM	National Amy Museum

Publications

CSPD	Calendar of State Papers, Domestic
CSPT	Calendar of State Papers, Treasury
SoR	Statutes of the Realm

Societies

BT	Battlefields Trust
HA	Historical Association
IGBG	International Guild of Battlefield Guides
RHS	Royal Historical Society
SAHR	Society for Army Historical Research

Preface

My fascination with the militia of the Monmouth Rebellion began in 1985 during the 300th Anniversary Commemorations, when the civil war re-enactment regiment which I ran was employed by the cider brewer Gaymers to promote their wares. We marched through the major towns of the West Country dressed as royal troops of 1685 and gave public readings of James II's declaration against the Duke of Monmouth, before distributing the sponsor's samples in pewter pots. As part of the research for the project I read the pro-royalist accounts of the rebellion, especially the writings of John Churchill and Louis Duras, Earl of Feversham.

This had a profound effect upon my approach to studying military history because, although until then a dedicated West Countryman and latter-day Monmouth supporter, reading the accounts written by the traditional enemy opened my eyes to the folly of seeing events only through the eyes of one side in a military struggle. It also caused me to become even more critical of what was repeated in history books. As the creator of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides' Validation Programme, I found myself frequently asking candidates presenting stories of battles to tell their audiences not only about the enemy perspective and which sources of enemy information they had consulted, but also to give their reasons for believing the sources they had read.

Moreover this questioning of the veracity of what is written in history books led to a growing appreciation of how bias and personal agendas play a part in most accounts. Reading round the Monmouth Rebellion, I found that the militia regiments which took part in the campaign were often sweepingly dismissed as ineffective and were proclaimed useless as military bodies. There seemed to be universal condemnation. This was therefore either a fundamental truth or a repeated myth that had, by repetition, been accepted as truth.[1] In all probability for such a generalisation to apply to such a wide number of regiments from a spread of locations was unlikely, and the sweeping dismissal of the militia of 1685 was seldom substantiated by contemporary evidence beyond the oft-repeated and selected comments of John Churchill. I wanted to know

[1] Given that most history is a story agreed.

what other contemporaries thought of the institution, especially the officers who commanded these county forces and those who reported to the Parliament which authorised the collection of their funding.

My conclusions, drawn from my research of a variety of documents from both national and West Country sources, might give an alternative view to that generally expressed about the late-seventeenth-century militia. However, rather than them being construed as revisionist, I prefer to think of them as the outcomes of the first time the subject has been properly investigated.

Acknowledgements

No book can be undertaken without the help of professional and amateur assistance and I am indebted to an array of public servants, colleagues, and friends who have unstintingly given their help and support over the years. I would like to thank all the members of the various institutions I visited or contacted who have been helpful. Regrettably I have not kept lists of places or names, but if any reader works or has worked in a library, archive, museum, muniment room or record office and has assisted with an obscure militia enquiry, or dealt with a letter concerning Restoration county history or politics, or indeed has shared stories or discoveries with a stranger – I thank you all. I wish to thank specifically the Defence Academy Library (DCMT), Shrivenham, especially Mrs Wendy Buckle and Ms Amanda Smith for their unsurpassable skill in tracking down and borrowing obscure volumes and articles for my use, and Mr Ian MacKay for his taking over of this role; his cheerful banter and continued interest were a great help. Friendly and supportive library staff make all the difference to the rather isolated world of the researcher.

I am extremely grateful to my PhD supervisor, the late Professor Richard Holmes. His formidable knowledge of the period, and the assistance and guidance so frequently and unreservedly given, were all of immense value, as were his shared discoveries and thoughts on the personality and career of John Churchill. I also greatly appreciated the interest shown in my work by Dr. Peter Caddick-Adams who acted as my supervisor for the final phases of my studies when Professor Holmes tragically died. I would like to thank Cranfield University for their generous bursary and the Society for Army Historical Research for their grant.

In addition to those who helped directly I would also like to thank my friends in The Battlefields Trust for their continued support and proffered ideas about sources and interpretation. Similar thanks are due to my colleagues in the International Guild of Battlefield Guides who always forgive my obsession with pre-petrol engine days and frequent references to the Battle of Sedgemoor. The confidence derived from the support of these two learned and enthusiastic bodies is beyond measure. I am also grateful to Dr. John Kirkaldy who, as my Open

University tutor, encouraged me on the path of lifelong learning; this book is in no small way a result of his influence. Similarly I would like to acknowledge the interest ignited in me for military history by Donald Featherstone who, with Roger Snell, took me on annual explorations of the battlefields of Europe for many years. I also thank the late David Chandler, who, apart from being a doyen of the Sedgemoor campaign and a great friend, aroused my fascination with the events of 1685 and who was always a source of much-valued, jovial inspiration. I am also very grateful to Tom Gray of Ashgate for his interest in this project and to Dave Ryan of Partizan Press for his permission to use his commissioned illustrations. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Eric Gruber von Arni, to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude for giving me access to his library of rare volumes and for being so liberal with his own research time to conduct investigations on my behalf. Alongside him I thank Dr. Andrew Phillipson whose continual support and questioning of my reasoning and my text I valued immensely. I also thank my editor, Tricia Craggs, and Dr David Blackmore of Doncaster for his expertise and friendship.

Without the work and support of these people and institutions this work would not have been possible. However, my deepest thanks go to my wife, Pamela Golding MA, formerly of New College, Swindon ... for everything.

Conventions

Dates prior to 1752 are recorded in Old Style with the year beginning 1 January not 25 March. All monetary values and measurements stated are traditional English and Imperial. The plural form lord lieutenants is used throughout.

The use of capital letters for military ranks or civil offices is restricted to references made to specific people or offices.

In spelling the text employs the use of the modern 'ise' rather than the 'ize' form of ending. The spelling of names often varied during the seventeenth century and many of those mentioned in the text appear in several formats in contemporary documents. The form chosen for each name is that used by a recent published authority, e.g., Rogers, M., *Montacute House* (Swindon: National Trust, 1991, reprinted 2004) refers to Colonel Edward Phelipps of the Somerset Militia although this surname can be read as Phelips, Pheilips, Pheillipps, Phillips, Philipps or Philips in original sources.

Quotations are preceded and ended by the use of the single parenthesis, whilst quotations of more than three lines in length are contained within a discrete paragraph of restricted width and close set type. Words from a foreign language are shown in italics.

This page has been left blank intentionally

Glossary

Terms used throughout the text which may need some explanation.

Ammunition	The propellant and projectiles involved in the use of firearms – usually black-powder and spherical lead balls of varying sizes.
Constable	A local authority officer representing the crown and the law in a designated area. Although a minor role at perish level this post carried status and influence at town or county level.
Contributors	Persons whose wealth was assessed by county authorities and deemed eligible to contribute towards the costs of the county militia. Also called finders because of their duty to find money, men and equipment.
Deputies	Men of wealth, social status and influence assisting the lord lieutenant in local administration. They were usually responsible for governing a portion of the county and managing the militia.
Division	An administrative region within a county – usually comprising a fourth or fifth of a county's hundreds and under the direct control of a deputy.
Hundred	An administrative region within a division and comprising a number of parishes.
Militia Money	A county-levied tax upon contributors to pay for the militia.
Musketeers	Soldiers trained in the use of single shot, muzzle-loading, smooth-bore firearms.
Officers	Men holding military rank and exercising authority over others. General officers: men holding the rank of brigadier and above; Senior field officers: colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors; Inferior officers: captains and captain-lieutenants; Junior officers: lieutenants, ensigns and cornets; Non-commissioned officers: quartermasters, sergeant-majors, sergeants and corporals.
Parish	An administrative region within a hundred. Ecclesiastical in origin, founded in law designed for the upkeep of a church.

Pikemen	Soldiers trained in the use of a 16-foot ash pole tipped with a razor-sharp point.
Trophy	A panoply of arms and accoutrements – an artistically arrayed display featuring flags, drums, halberds, muskets, pikes and roundshot. Not to be confused with an artefact captured from an enemy.
Trophy Money	A county fund levied upon contributors to pay for the flags, drums and ammunition used by the militia.

Chapter 1
Introduction

> We find but few historians, of all ages, who have been diligent enough in their search for truth; and it is their common method to take on trust what they deliver to the public, by which means a falsehood once received from a famed writer becomes traditional to posterity.[1]

The Restoration Militia played a major role in the life of the nation, and understanding what it was and how it functioned is important to understanding late-seventeenth-century England. The militia's role, administration and operations were central to many of the political, social, economic and religious frameworks of the period. Not only was it crucial to social control but it was also a vital factor in two key debates of the age: the rivalry for supremacy between the crown and Parliament, and the desirability of a standing army. Moreover the militia's structure was indicative of the close networks of family and factional influences on local and national government, and the financial policies and systems which enabled government and society to function. Understanding how the militia was formed and its historic tradition reveals a particular style of government and social control, whilst an investigation of those who commanded it and those who paid for it helps illustrate the values, attitudes and beliefs of the age. In addition, such understanding encompasses how contemporaries perceived their duty to the society in which they lived, and how they contributed to its defence. The militia was a major element in this relationship and this study also helps understand what people, great and small, expected from it.

Whilst this book focuses upon the military effectiveness of the militia, it must be borne in mind that it was essentially a civilian institution funded by local taxation and composed of non-military personnel, and therefore cannot be seen in isolation from the generic history of England during the post-Restoration years.

Strange as it may seem this organisation, so central to English society and national defence, has been repeatedly denigrated by generations of historians following King James II's pronouncement on its performance during the

---

[1] John Dryden, quoted in Potter, J., *Good King Richard?* (London: Constable, 1983), pp. 166–7.

Monmouth Rebellion that 'the Militia, which have hitherto been so much depended on, is not sufficient for such Occasions'.[2] Until that momentous royal utterance in Parliament in November 1685, apart from the occasional disagreement, the royal and militia forces were generally portrayed as mutually supportive and complimentary. However, for the past 325 years the image of an ineffective militia during the Monmouth Rebellion has been uncritically taken on trust. The common perception is of a sort of television's 'Dad's Army' force, of unsuitable part-timers with little ability or skill in comparison to royal army soldiers. Although being radically reappraised in the light of the role played by the Army Reserve in twenty-first-century British military involvement abroad, this pejorative view of non-regular troops persisted in uncritical comparisons between the Territorial Army and the Regular Army well into the twentieth century.

Professional and amateur historians alike paint a picture of the late-seventeenth-century militia as unenthusiastic, ill-run, incompetent and ineffective. Chandler thought 'it had little to offer as a serious military force in time of emergency' whilst Manning even more forcefully states 'It was ... made abundantly clear that the militia was tactically useless, undisciplined and lacking in courage'.[3] Clifton reiterates James II's view of them saying 'The militia is a broken reed and should be discarded'.[4] Harris dismisses militia units stating 'they proved woefully inadequate; they were not only poorly trained and ill-equipped, but they also show a general reluctance to march against their neighbours who had joined the rebel force', whilst Tincey in describing the events of a skirmish at Keynsham says that a troop of militia stationed to secure the royal force's line of retreat were 'left well out of harm's way for fear they would not stand in a fight'.[5] Chenevix-Trench dubs them 'reluctant warriors'.[6] Anderson goes further and ignores the Restoration Militia completely, erroneously telling us that 'The

---

[2] The King's Speech to both Houses, 9th November 1685. History of Parliament Trust, *The History and Proceedings of the House of Commons: vol. 2, 1680–1695* (1742), URL: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=37642.

[3] Chandler, D., *Sedgemoor 1685: From Monmouth's Invasion to the Bloody Assizes* (London: Anthony Mott, 1985; reprinted Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1995), p. 187; Manning, R.B., *An Apprenticeship in Arms: The Origins of the British Army 1585–1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 304.

[4] Clifton, R., *The Last Popular Rebellion: The Western Rising of 1685* (Hounslow: Martin Temple Smith, 1984), p. 292.

[5] Harris, T., *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685–1720* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 70; Tincey, J., *Sedgemoor 1685: Marlborough's First Victory* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005), p. 65.

[6] Chenevix Trench, C., *The Western Rising: An Account of the Monmouth Rebellion* (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 144.

Militia had been founded in 1757'.[7] If the late-seventeenth-century militia were as militarily ineffective as these writers state, it is indeed curious as to why they were embodied in the first place and why they were maintained when they proved to be so useless?

In an attempt to answer this question, this book provides an analysis of available primary source material in both national and local repositories relating to the nature, operation and performance of the late seventeenth-century militia. It evaluates this new evidence within the framework of a constructed model of effectiveness drawn from the writings of contemporary and near-contemporary military commanders, and the expectations made of the militia by those who created and commanded it. By examining the content, weight and value of the evidence relating to each element in the constructed model the book elicits a better understanding of the military effectiveness of the West Country militia in 1685.

However, it is first necessary to examine if indeed this perception of ineffectiveness is widely held. Asked how he viewed the late-seventeenth-century militia, Dr Matthew Bennett, a senior lecturer at Sandhurst, replied 'I have always been under the impression that the militia was militarily ineffective. It is hard to shake the impression that they were often playing at being soldiers.'[8] Dr Eric Gruber von Arni, an authority on military medical services, thought 'the militia of the period could be likened to the TA in the early nineteen sixties – a gentlemen's club that had received little effective training for the job that they were intended for and, as a result, they responded badly during the rebellion'.[9] Alan Turton, former Curator of Basing House and author of several research publications on aspects of seventeenth-century armies, encapsulated the perception: 'The trouble with the militia was that the evidence shows that they were pretty useless.'[10] He also commented that 'It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the militia in the 1680s since they were not really put to the test until the Monmouth episode when the West Country contingents obviously had mixed loyalties.'[11] Former Registrar of the Royal Armouries and civil wars authority, Dr David Blackmore commented 'Most militias were a bit of a joke, with legal requirements complied

---

[7] Anderson. D., 'The Amateur Military Tradition in Britain...' *Mars & Clio* (the Newsletter of the British Commission for Military History), no. 23 (Autumn, 2008), p. 23.

[8] Bennett, M., email 23 November 2008. Matthew Bennett and the historians consulted gave permission for their views to be cited and were aware that this study might prove them incorrect.

[9] Gruber von Arni, E., email 20 November 2008.

[10] Turton, A., Basing, 19 January 2007.

[11] Turton, A., email 20 November 2008.

to with a nod and a wink.'[12] Dr Lesley Prince, formerly of Birmingham University, another expert on the seventeenth century and noted military vexillologist, wrote: 'Everything I've read about them leads me to believe them to have been ineffective, if not a liability.'[13] Dr Manfred Brod of Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education suggested: 'The militia county regiments were far inferior to the bodies of military volunteers, such as that raised from the dons and students of Oxford University. The fact that this unit had to be raised by the University indicates what a sorry and totally incapable lot the county militia was.'[14] The Bridgwater archivist reported that 'Nobody is interested in people who did nothing.'[15] Various public display panels featuring information about the Monmouth Rebellion across the West Country fail to mention the role of the militia, and the battlefield interpretation boards on Sedgemoor merely record the position of the Wiltshire Militia in the rear at Middlezoy. Richard Brunning, Senior Levels and Moors Heritage Officer, voiced the opinion: 'There is no need to waste time on the militia. They contributed nothing ...'. David Lane the Curator of the Bridgwater Museum, who wrote the briefing story for the Museum's Education Services booklet, said 'I am unaware that they contributed anything of significance to the campaign.'[16] The consensus of opinion from these cited examples and many others, indicates a shared perception of an ineffective militia.[17] So the question arises 'Where did this opinion come from?' Those cited above are from different backgrounds and areas of expertise, but they all share one unifying factor – they have all read the literature.

'Every historical writer owes a debt to his predecessors in the field he is examining.'[18] Historians' conclusions and opinions form a platform for further development, but they have pitfalls, not the least being the quality and quantity of the research underpinning them. There is a danger in giving lasting credence to pronouncements which are subsequently disproved by newly discovered evidence. For example, a lecture in St Mary's Church, Bridgwater repeated the assertion that Monmouth observed the men in the royal camp at Westonzoyland from that church tower, yet nothing can be seen in detail at that distance from

---

12 Blackmore, D., email 21 November 2008.

13 Prince, L., email 6 May 2007.

14 Brod, M., 'James II and the Thames Valley Towns', *James II and the Glorious Revolution*, Rewley House, Oxford, 17 May 2008.

15 Comments recorded during a visit to the Blake Museum, July 2007.

16 Lane, D., Blake Museum, 5 July 2008.

17 See thesis (Cranfield University) for survey details and opinion samples taken.

18 Chandler, op. cit., p. 141.

that tower's viewing platform, even with powerful modern binoculars.[19] Akin to that lecture, some histories contain what can only be termed imaginative myths.

Contemporary Historians

There are few accounts of the Monmouth Rebellion which can be described as the work of contemporary historians; however, there are four major works which possibly can: those of Andrew Paschall, Gilbert Burnet, John Oldmixon and King James II.

Paschall was the Vicar of Chedzoy – a village on Sedgemoor – and, although he was absent during the events he recounts, he focused his study on the battle itself and paid scant regard to the militia who were not actually involved in the fighting. Paschall merely states '1,500 militiamen quarter in Middlezoy and Othery'.[20] Yet when he does comment upon their campaign performance he makes sweeping judgements: 'the Militia first in Dorset might easily have crushed that Serpent in the Egg ... Next in Devon which ... should have done more than run ... Lastly in Somerset where the Militia men did leave the country open.'[21] Regrettably being restricted to a paucity of news, Paschall's view of events is somewhat limited. He does not see the whole picture. Having mustered 4,000 men in Exeter, the Devon Militia could have crushed the revolt in its infancy in Lyme but its lord lieutenant was under orders not to attempt it. Nor did the Devon Militia run away at Axminster, as will be discussed later, although he is accurate in that the Somerset Militia left the county open.

The Reverend Gilbert Burnet was a staunch Whig and pro-Monmouth. He attended the leading Whig politician Lord William Russell on the scaffold and lost his various offices and appointments in 1684 after preaching an anti-Catholic sermon. When James II came to the throne Burnet fled to the Continent to live in Holland where he became a friend and chaplain to William of Orange, and took Dutch citizenship to avoid treason charges in England. Burnet came over with William in 1688 and delivered the coronation sermon. For all of which he was created Bishop of Salisbury and remained an influential

---

[19] Lane, B., Sedgemoor Conference, 5 July 2007. 'Prelude to Sedgemoor', St. Mary's Church, Bridgwater. Although modern development and Victorian railway embankments now obscure the direct line of sight, clear views across the countryside are possible. The distance to Westonzoyland is too far for the story that Monmouth recognised Dumbarton's Regiment by its facings to be true.

[20] Chandler, op. cit., p. 107.

[21] Paschall, A., *Narrative of... Rector of Chedzoy*, in Chandler, op. cit., pp. 106–10.

figure throughout the reigns of William and Mary, and Anne. His *History of His Own Time* was published in 1724 with a second volume in 1734. It aroused accusations of misrepresentation due to his anti-Catholic stance.[22] Burnet's views on the Monmouth Rebellion are mixed but he has very little good to say about the conduct of the royal forces including the militia, commenting that 'their ill affection appeared very evidently: many deserted, and all were cold in the service'.[23] He also states that at Bridport, in a fight between the rebels and the militia, 'the militia ran from them'.[24] It would appear Burnet deliberately wrote disparagingly of most aspects of James II's reign, and this included his militia.

John Oldmixon was a poet and playwright who was born and raised in Bridgwater where he witnessed some of the events of the Rebellion as a boy. His earliest work *Amores Britannici: Epistles Historical and Gallant* (1703) and the tragedy *The Governor of Cyprus* are poetic, romantic and highly dramatic. He was employed as a tract writer by the Whigs and his *Critical History of England* shows his bias. Oldmixon's political leanings and fondness for dramatic prose are also evident in his *History of England during the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* in which he describes the events of the Monmouth Rebellion.[25] Writing in the late 1720s, his recall of events 40 years previously when he was 12 years old is unlikely to have been perfect, as too must be the accuracy of the speeches he attributes to various people for which there are no other references, including the tale mentioned earlier of Monmouth ascending a church tower in Bridgwater to view the royal troops at Westonzoyland: '"I know those men," said Monmouth [upon seeing Dumbarton's Regiment] "they will fight. If I had but them, all would go well"'.[26]

Oldmixon's pro-Monmouth stance leads him to denigrate almost everything pro-James II. He makes much of a possible incident of the militiamen being deceived by accidental *faux-cannon* and sweepingly asserts mass desertion and defection which no contemporary witness corroborates:

> They had no sooner entered a narrow lane in their way than, observing the mouths of two or three hollow trees unluckily pointed to their front, they immediately

---

[22] Burnet, G., *History of His Own Time*, 2 vols (London: Ward, 1724).

[23] Chandler, op. cit., p. 146.

[24] Ibid., p. 147.

[25] Oldmixon, J., *The History of England During the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* (London: Pemberton, 1730).

[26] Ibid., p. 703. This is copied by Macaulay, op. cit., vol. 1, ch. 5.

> turned tail and fled, every man to his own home, except such as staid for the Duke of Monmouth's coming, and then went in to him.[27]

Oldmixon's disposition is revealed in his frequent complaining that his services were unappreciated by those in power. A bitter and frustrated Whig, he saw the militia at the time of his writing in the 1700s as an inept, Tory-controlled body and most likely considered it and its historical counterparts fair game for jibes and criticism.[28] Oldmixon's work is unsubstantiated by reference and arguably the product of circumstantial reasoning; he reported on the militia in a manner likely to confirm his readers' opinions.

King James II was a keen historian who, mostly during his exile, wrote several histories of his own times, and his account of the rebellion displays an understandable anti-Monmouth bias.[29] Much of his information is derived from the plethora of reports and letters sent to Robert Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, Secretary to the Privy Council, and to himself, including detailed ones from his two senior military officers, Lieutenant General Louis Duras, Earl of Feversham the Commander-in-Chief in the West Country and his second-in-command Major General John Churchill. He was also privy to a lot of rebel information provided by Major Nathaniel Wade the erstwhile Adjutant General of Monmouth's rebel army, both from his confession and his battlefield tour discourse.[30] Although James gives a detailed account of Sedgemoor, he includes no reference to the role of the militia in the campaign. He wrote his history during 1686–87, long after he had embraced the anti-militia stance he promulgated in his November 1685 address to Parliament.[31]

All four major contemporary historians have a personal and political bias. Oldmixon and Burnet are pro-Monmouth and have little to say about the militia although when they mention it their remarks are condemnatory. Both published in the early eighteenth century, and their views of the militia of the 1680s are more applicable to the volunteers of the 1720s, perhaps confirming their readers' experience of the current force. Paschall, the royalist sympathiser,

---

[27] Ibid., p. 701.

[28] Western, J.R., *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

[29] *King James II's Account of the Battle of Sedgemoor*. BL, Harleian MS 6845. Also in Chandler, *Sedgemoor*. Chandler lists him as contemporary witness, but he was not present at any of the events.

[30] Wade was pardoned after turning King's Evidence and indeed conducted a battlefield tour of Sedgemoor for the king a year later.

[31] Historyof Parliament Trust. *The History and Proceedings of the House of Commons: vol. 2: 1680–1695* (1742).

ignores the militia, as does King James whose political anti-militia stance might well have ruled out any impartial evaluation of their performance. Paschall's lack of comment perhaps indicates he had no understanding of the importance of the militia's role in the campaign. These writers, for reasons of partisanship, self-interest or indeed simple ignorance, set in train the fashion for denigrating or ignoring the militia and its part in defeating the Monmouth Rebellion.

Political Histories

Thomas Babington Macaulay was a dominant figure of the mid Victorian era and typical of the historians of his times. His *History of England* appeared in 1849 and his own Liberal political leanings are easily discernible. He was clearly anti-Jacobite with strong Whig sympathies. His historical work is not always accurate and he is prone to picturesque descriptions that are dependent more upon imagination and dramatic potential than primary sources. For instance Macauley repeats a tale of the Monmouth Rebellion that he says came from Bishop Kennet, who had it from an officer of the Royal Regiment of Horse (Oxford's) in 1718. It is third hand. He could be accused of including it for emotional effect for it strikes a chord with stories of indignities wrought by infidels in foreign lands upon demure heroines of Empire:

> The report of the intended attack came to the ears of a young girl, who was zealous for the King. Though of modest character, she had the courage to resolve that she would herself bear the intelligence to Feversham. She stole out of Bridgwater, and made her way to the royal camp. But that camp was not a place where female innocence could be safe. Even the officers ... and the negligent general who commanded them, had indulged largely in wine, and were ready for any excess of licentiousness and cruelty. One of them seized the unhappy maiden, refused to listen to her errand, and brutally outraged her. She fled in agonies of rage and shame, leaving the wicked army to its doom.[32]

Macaulay also claimed to know the thoughts and motives of the players in his historical dramas, even claiming to be able to unmask their pretending. Thus he describes the relationship between the commander of the royal army and his second-in-command:

---

[32] Macaulay, op. cit., vol. 1, ch. 5, p. 703, citing Oldmixon.

> The lieutenant [Churchill] conscious of superior abilities and science, impatient of the control of a chief whom he despised [Feversham], and trembling for the fate of the army, nevertheless preserved his characteristic self-command, and dissembled his feelings so well that Feversham praised his submissive alacrity ...[33]

Macaulay makes generalised, unsupported statements about disloyalty of whole sections of the community as well as the Devon Militia. He writes of the Duke of Albemarle, Lord Lieutenant of Devon, being fearful that:

> Such was Monmouth's popularity among the common people of Devonshire that, if once the train bands had caught sight of his well known face and figure, they would have probably gone over to him in a body.[34]

It is necessary to question how Macaulay knows what Albemarle was thinking and upon what grounds he predicts not sporadic but complete desertion. It is also hard to believe that in an age of restricted visual imagery the average militia soldier would recognise Monmouth's face – at the most seen only once before during Monmouth's so-called royal progress through the West in August 1680.

Macaulay can also confuse his primary sources. He asserts that at Axminster 'Albemarle ... thought it advisable to retreat. The retreat soon became a rout', and he adds that 'The whole country was strewn with the arms and uniforms which the fugitives had thrown away; and, had Monmouth urged the pursuit with vigour, he would probably have taken Exeter without a blow.'[35] The Axminster incident will be discussed at length later, but suffice it to state here that no evidence has been found for anything other than an orderly withdrawal of the Devon Militia. The original reference to discarded guns and coats was actually made by Wade in his *Narrative* and refers to the Somersetshire not the Devonshire Militia.[36] As to the rebels taking Exeter, even if Macaulay erroneously believed that Albemarle's men were indeed dispersed, he ignores the fact that the Earl of Bath, Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall held the city with the Cornish Militia and that Churchill and his royal cavalry were also nearby. Moreover, the Exeter civil authorities were capable of independant robust action, as they proved by slamming their gates in the face of William of Orange's army three years later. To suggest Exeter could have been easily captured displays a lack of understanding of the military situation. Overall it is tempting to agree with

---

33 Ibid., citing Churchill to Clarendon, 4 July 1685.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Wade, N., *Narrative*, BL, Harleian MS 6845.

the 1930s historian John Paget who said 'Lord Macaulay is not to be trusted to narrate facts accurately, to state facts truly or to answer the judgement of history with impartiality.'[37]

Until he was challenged by more reliable historians, Macaulay's influence spread and many of his false statements moved from myth to fact in popular perception, being frequently quoted as evidence by modern authors of works on the Rebellion. For all his lofty reputation, Macaulay can display a tendency towards unfounded statements, prejudice and overuse of dramatic licence.

Ogg is one of the leading protagonists of the argument that the continuity of family influence was 'one of the fundamental things in English political life'.[38] To illustrate this strong relationship between family and politics in the West Country, he cited 'the Seymours in Devon, the Godolphins in Cornwall ... the Churchills in Dorset'.[39] These are families whose influence was felt near the top of the political and social ladder. He could have added that an even more pervasive feature of county politics was that these families wielded great power, not only through their landowning wealth but also through their local authority offices and posts as justices. Families like the Drakes, the Lutterells, the Strangways, the Portmans and the Wyndhams are important to this study because they also provided both the deputy lieutenants who administered the county militias and the officers who commanded them.

In his recording of the Monmouth Rebellion, Ogg bowed to others. He states that the story 'has been told by Macaulay with a dramatic intensity unmatched in historical literature and with an accuracy of detail which has withstood the scrutiny, often niggling, sometimes vituperative, of more than a century'.[40] For the campaign and battle, he recommends Sir Winston Churchill's *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, which is today regarded as somewhat biased, not least because Churchill was a descendant of the man he liked to call Duke John. For a biography of Monmouth, he recommends W.R. Emerson, who is rarely cited by other modern historians having been long superseded by more authoritative biographers.[41] Ogg might not be so damning in his evaluation of the militia, but he uncritically reiterates the judgements of Macaulay and the anti-militia

---

[37] Paget, J., The New Examen (London, 1934), p. 31, in Holmes, R., *Marlborough, England's Fragile Genius* (London: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 5.

[38] Ogg, D., *England in the Reign of James II and William III* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), p. 125.

[39] Ibid., p. 125.

[40] Ibid., p. 147.

[41] Ibid., pp. 146–7; Jeff Stats http://www.articlesbase.com/college-and-university-articles/sir-winston-churchill-106440.html.

opinions held by John Churchill restated by his descendant. Concerning encounters where the militia actually fought, Ogg states 'in skirmishes with the militia the rebels usually had the best of it'.[42] In fact the fights of Lyme Road and Ashill were inconclusive and at Bridport the rebels were actually beaten off by the militia. Ogg appears to take on trust that written by other writers and thus perpetuates misperceptions.

In 1985, Hutton identified a changing role of the militia during the Restoration period from that of national defence against external and internal threat, to that of cavalier crusading against the forces of republicanism and dissent.[43] Whether the officers and men of the militia saw their role in this light is not proven but such a perception is justified by the frequent government-initiated moves to suppress political and religious dissent. Hutton motivates the whole militia movement with the desire to avenge the ills suffered by the royalist factions in their communities. Given the often pro-cavalier stance of many of the families which officered the militia and some commanders such as Sir Edward Phelipps' harsh persecution of conventicles, it is a plausible theory but remains unproven and is applied somewhat sweepingly.

Fletcher more recently challenged the simplistic view of the militia as military bumblers.[44] However, although he concedes that by its very numbers and presence the militia limited Monmouth's Rebellion to the West Country, even Fletcher states that it disgraced itself in the face of the enemy.[45] Fletcher concentrates upon the evolution of the militia's role in local government but his suggestion that the militia actually might not have been as ineffective as was hitherto believed aroused the condemnation of Norrey, who did his best to refute this divergence from the accepted belief.[46] Yet Norrey too is prone to creating arguments based upon slender evidence such as his avowal that 'Epidemics of gout often accompanied notification of a deputies' meeting,' for which he cites only one incident from a single source.[47] An epidemic confined to one case? Norrey's work focuses upon local government and as the militia is its prime instrument of power he spends six pages ridiculing its organisation

---

42 Ogg, *James II and William III*, p. 147.

43 Hutton, R.E., *The Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

44 Fletcher, A., *Reform in the Provinces: The Government of Stuart England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

45 Ibid., p. 343.

46 Norrey, P.J., 'The Restoration Militia in Action: The Relationship between Central and Local Government in Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire 1660–1678', *Historical Journal*, 21(4) (1988), pp. 789–812.

47 BL, Add. MS 32.

and performance. Many of his examples derive from incidents in the very early years of the Restoration Militia when the institution was new, while others are blatantly erroneous and lead him to make the unproven assertion that 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion they [the militia] were at best paper tigers; unreliable, inefficient and certainly not a serious military force'.[48]

In his work concerning war, money and the English State, Brewer agrees with Namier that 'a great deal of what is peculiar in English History is due to the obvious fact that Great Britain is an island'.[49] His argument reflects upon the question of a reduced need for a military force due to the country not being an easy prey to invasion, stressing that under Cromwell and Charles II the navy become more important and that 'it was the combination of the militia with the major branch of the nation's military might, the royal navy' which prevented foreign invasion.[50] Concerning the militia's effectiveness, Brewer appreciates the militia was adequate for its role but militiamen 'were hardly the stuff of which great armies are made'. He also accuses the militia of being 'a largely ineffectual force which was rarely embodied and which therefore lacked military experience and expertise'.[51]

Histories of the British Army

Sir John Fortescue's ground-breaking work *A History of the British Army* condenses the early centuries into a single volume covering military history from Hastings in 1066 to the end of the Seven Years War in 1763.[52] Writing during the 1880s at a time when the structure and function of auxiliary forces was the subject of fierce debate, Fortescue makes just two references to the militia of the mid 1680s. The first concerns the continuance of the standing army in lieu of the militia: 'The courtiers had received their cue, and pointed to the flight of the western militia before Monmouth's raw levies as proof sufficient of its untrustworthiness. The fact indeed was self evident.'[53] The second undermines the militia's worth: 'The old howl of "No Standing Army" had been raised,

48 Norrey, op. cit., p. 795.

49 Brewer, J. *The Sinews of Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Namier, L.B., *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London, 1961), p. 7.

50 Brewer, op. cit., p. 53.

51 Ibid., pp. 9 and 30.

52 Fortescue, J.W., *A History of the British Army*, 20 vols (London: Macmillan, 1899–1930).

53 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 300.

and reams of puerile and pedantic nonsense had been written to prove that the militia was amply sufficient for England's needs.'[54] Why Fortescue adopted this view as fact is evident in his reference to the events of the Monmouth Rebellion. He writes, 'No reader, I am confidant, will blame me for leaving him with his Macaulay for the account of this insurrection.'[55] The power of such a statement to transform myth into truth in public perception is revealed in the Sandhurst doggerel, 'It must be true, it's in Oman and Fortescue'; this was irony by the 1980s, but perhaps not so for preceding generations.[56]

Rather than dismissing the militia in a few sentences several histories of the British Army have tackled the subject. However, most have done so as part of telling the story of the regular army in which the militia plays an integrated if minor role. Barnett's *Britain and Her Army* is typical of these works and although he makes frequent reference to the militia in general throughout the book, he confines his comments upon the late seventeenth-century militia to three pages.[57] He makes a passing remark as to the quality of the militia under Charles II saying that 'the only function it carried out effectively' was 'that of an amateur political police and riot force'.[58]

Barnett draws heavily upon Western, citing one interpretation of the action at Landguard Fort in June 1667 and the lack of musters in certain counties during the 1670s. He does not make reference to the political arguments used to lobby for the raising of a Select Militia or how they differed from the militia already established. He only champions the cause with the comment: 'A select force could be better trained in formed bodies and it could be kept in being during an emergency, whereas men of the ordinary militia were urgently needed at home.'[59] Barnett offers neither explanation for these assumptions nor any reasons as to why the ordinary militia which existed in formed bodies could not be trained, nor any reason why they should be tethered to their home counties in times of emergency. He settles instead for yet another attack on the militia by referring to the Select Militia as: 'The only effective element of the constitutional force.'[60] He does, however, make a telling comment that 'The militia ceased to be politically

[54] Ibid., p. 384.

[55] Ibid., p. 299.

[56] Griffiths. P. et al., WarDiG Dinner (Summer 1985).

[57] Barnett, C., *Britain and Her Army 1509–1970* (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 112 and 116–17.

[58] Ibid., p. 112.

[59] Barnett, op. cit., p. 117.

[60] Ibid.