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## The Clubmen: Revolt, Violence, and Radical Neutrality

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Clubmen were men from the English countryside who became armed vigilantes to keep order in their communities during the Civil War between Parliamentarians and Royalists. They claimed that both sides were tearing apart communities, crippling non-combatants with taxes, stealing livestock, and even committing murder. Some of the Clubmen preferred or even supported one side or the other in the Civil War. Nevertheless, the Clubmen became fully realized as a separate movement in the spring of 1645. By then the Civil War had gone on for almost three years. Did that mean that their neutrality—their defining attribute—was not as solidified as they believed? Or was it merely a pragmatic approach to the problem of being caught between two armies, who had been fighting for years by the point the Clubmen truly organized themselves into a militant group. The armed Clubmen, seemingly paradoxically, espoused peace and strict neutrality. Was this neutrality deeply held or just a façade? This paper suggests their anti-military vigilantism characterized a mini-revolution within the larger revolution. This small revolution was divisive, popular, and backed up with force. The Clubmen aired their grievances and stated their mission just as any other revolutionary force would. The Clubmen were a conservative, populist movement whose radical neutrality fermented within the Civil War itself. While they were a notable case in the Civil War, they were hardly an unheard of trend in seventeenth century Europe.<sup>1</sup>



English Civil War Woodcut

The revolt of the Clubmen sprung up seemingly quickly and dissipated just as quickly when the New Model Army consolidated its power.<sup>2</sup> In revolutions, events tend to happen quickly with movements flaring up and being silenced within the course of a couple of months. To see where this movement would fit into the greater theory of revolutions, it is helpful to look at the work of historian Geoffrey Parker, who examines revolutions around the world. Parker concludes that “[t]hree scenarios provoked serious popular revolts with the greatest frequency: a failed harvest; the

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<sup>1</sup> The historiography on the Clubmen includes works such as David Underdown, “The Chalk and the Cheese: Contrasts among the English Clubmen,” *Past & Present*, no. 85 (1979): 373-380; John Stephen Morrill, *Revolt in the Provinces: The People of England and the Tragedies of War, 1630-1648* (London: Longman, 1999); R. Hutton, “The Worcestershire Clubmen in the English Civil War,” *Midland History* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1979): 39-49; and John Staab, “Riotous or Revolutionary: The Clubmen during the English Civil War” *Historia*, 12 (2003): 47-54. Staab argues that the Clubmen were riotous rather than revolutionary, but here, I will be arguing precisely the opposite: that the Clubmen were through their actions at least in some way revolutionary.

<sup>2</sup> It should perhaps be noted that historians have speculated on the revolutionary nature of the NMA itself because of its status as an army drawn from the citizenry, and its ties to the Leveller movement. Such works include Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1984); and Mark A. Kishlansky, *The Rise of the New Model Army* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

arrival of troops requiring food and lodging; and the imposition of either a new tax or increases in an existing tax.”<sup>3</sup>

The Clubmen, as farmers, were affected by all of these to some degree in their lifetimes, but the particular stated grievance that they claimed drove them was the third: the problems of having to feed and lodge the soldiers that they did not want to support. Taxes and famines aggravated this problem even further. This is evidenced in Underdown’s work about the situation in Sussex. “The Club rising was confined, not surprisingly, to the west. It had both internal and external origins. Chichester and Arundel rapes had suffered badly in the war, and had complained about free quarter by parliamentary troops in January 1645,” Underdown explains.<sup>4</sup> Another aggravating factor was the Civil War already underway. Farmers had to deal with both the armies of King Charles and the armies of Parliament. Some echoes of this kind of action driving revolution could be seen in the American Revolution with the frustration brought about by the quartering of the English army’s soldiers (note the third Article of the U.S. Constitution which forbids this). The Clubmen had to contend with something worse than a single English army: two English armies.

Historian Lawrence Stone, like Charles Tilly, believes that a revolution is invariably a type of internal war or, in this case, a civil war. Stone uses the term “internal war” which is a looser, more general term for a revolution. He writes: “an alternative formulation has recently been put forward by a group of social scientists working mainly at Princeton. They have dropped the word ‘revolution’ altogether and put ‘internal war’ in its place.” Stone defines this new formulation “as any attempt to alter state policy, rulers, or institutions by the use of violence, in societies where violent competition is not the norm and where well- defined institutional patterns exist.”<sup>5</sup> The concept of an internal war is a synthesis of a civil war and a revolution.

Several historians have examined the Clubmen phenomenon. David Underdown references a split within the clubmen, despite their proclaimed neutrality. Some scholars such as John Morrill cast doubt on whether the Clubmen were actually neutral. Underdown addresses this issue in his study “The Chalk and the Cheese”: “The Clubmen most friendly to the Royalist forces were those from the ‘chalk’—the nucleated settlements of the downlands. Those most friendly to the parliamentarians were from the fen-edge villages of the Somerset levels, from the clothing parishes of the wood-pasture region in the north of that county, and from the ‘cheese’ area of Wiltshire around Melksham and Chippen.”<sup>6</sup> The main difference of how these clubmen were divided regionally was that those sympathetic to the Royalists tended to be where there were fields, while the Parliamentary-sympathizing clubmen lived in forest or pasture areas.

Aside from Underdown’s theory, clubmen sympathies in the Civil War seem to follow no clear pattern. Officers on both sides of the Civil War received conflicting reports about the allegiance of Clubmen. Often those reports would later be proven inaccurate as in the case of the attack on Sir Lewis Dyne’s Royalist forces in South Dorset.<sup>7</sup> John Morrill argues the Clubmen’s loyalties depended on circumstances. Underdown notes that Morrill’s depiction of the clubmen resembles French peasant groups around the same period like the *Croquants* and the *Nu-Pieds*, which were similarly structured French peasant groups that revolted against the king of France only 3 years earlier.<sup>8</sup> The uprisings also bear some resemblance to the peasant uprisings during the 30 Years War in Bavaria and upper Austria. The Clubmen were vertically organized and came from all segments

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 512.

<sup>4</sup> Underdown, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Stone, “Theories of Revolution,” *World Politics* 18, no. 2 (1966): 159–76, 160.

<sup>6</sup> Underdown, 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

like many other populist movements. Members included not only peasant farmers, but also yeoman and local gentry.<sup>9</sup> Besides farmers and minor gentry, their ranks also had clergy who played a role in the leadership of the movement.

In this turbulent time, religion became much more populist, if historians are to believe the reports of the Ranters who gave their sermons in taverns. Christopher Hill dedicates a sizable portion of his *World Turned Upside Down* to this concept of the Ranters. He writes of Ranter and Welsh clergyman William Erbery: “It is clear that Erbery was very much at home in the world of taverns and tobacco in which many of the sects used to meet. Religion is now become the common discourse and table talk in every tavern and ale-house, men were complaining as early as 1641.”<sup>10</sup> Ranter ideas about religion were more radical than those of the Clubmen. Nevertheless, religion certainly played a role in the organization of the Clubmen uprisings. This contributed to their particular brand of radical localism that characterized the movement.

Clubmen mostly armed themselves with whatever they could get their hands on. They used bills, pikes, muskets, scythes, farming equipment, and yes—clubs. The term clubmen has also been used to refer to poorly equipped irregular troops that augmented Thomas Fairfax’s parliamentary troops in 1643, which can be the source of some confusion. Their arsenal was at least partially an anachronistic one by the mid-seventeenth century, which coupled with their lack of discipline and training compared to the New Model Army, would eventually lead to their downfall.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, the Clubmen were unsuccessful. However, despite their lack of success, their actions can be seen as revolutionary. Revolutionary action does not need to result in revolutionary change.

Where the Clubmen came from before the year 1645 is a subject of some debate because their movement starts out as a series of populist revolts termed the “club revolts.” According to Mark Stoye, author of *Soldiers and Strangers*, which analyzed the English Civil War from an ethnic dimension, the first club revolt was a protest in West Shropshire, where over a thousand countrymen rose up in arms against the Dutch Colonel van Gerish whose troops were plundering around Bishop’s castle.<sup>12</sup> Part of the grievances against van Gerish was that he was Dutch and Clubmen wanted him expelled to be replaced with a native instead. Some local Royalists sympathized with the Clubmen as their grievances did seem justified. These foreign mercenaries in the king’s army further served to stoke popular rage towards the Royalists.<sup>13</sup> Shropshire was considered a Royalist county; however, even counties had divisions. The regions within these shires that supported the Royalists were called the “cheese” areas, while the Parliamentary areas were referred to as “chalk” areas. This is made most apparent in David Underdown’s work on the Clubmen: “The Chalk and the Cheese.” In the east and the lowlands, the Clubmen merely resisted taxation from the Royalists, but in west Shropshire, Clubmen led by Jeremy Powell of Clun were openly Parliamentary. Hampshire also had divisions: The Clubmen in the downs were Royalist, while the Clubmen in New Forest were Parliamentary. Not much is known about the ringleaders of the Clubmen. All historians of the English Civil War have is names from the Royalist arrest records.<sup>14</sup>

Strangely enough, when they were dispersed by Cromwell, the majority of the Clubmen were arrested—not killed by the Royalists or New Model Army. Particular challenges face historians studying populist behavior (like the Clubmen), in contrast to studying Cromwell or Parliament who

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>10</sup> Hill, 198.

<sup>11</sup> British Civil War Project, “Clubman Uprisings,” <http://bcw-project.org/military/english-civil-war/clubman-uprisings>, [accessed 14 December 2016].

<sup>12</sup> Mark Stoye, *Soldiers and Strangers: An Ethnic History of the English Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 102.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 102-103.

<sup>14</sup> Underdown, 47.

had pages upon pages of news books published on them. Most of what we can suppose about the Clubmen comes from sources like Parliamentary news books and letters from generals on their activities. These sources are wrought with both political and social biases. Outside of these works, of course, are the Clubmen's list of demands, which served as a type of mission statement for these bands.

There are a number of parallels to the Clubmen in seventeenth-century Europe alone, particularly around the period of the 30 Years War. Peter H. Wilson and Ian Roy have both written works that contrasted the 30 Years War with the English Civil War. It is an easy comparison to make as there were foreign soldiers in the English Civil War who "cut their teeth" in the 30 Years War, and there was a great deal of fear that England would become like Germany in the 30 Years War as the rules of conduct broke down around them. Mark Stoye theorized that the New Model Army's purely English nature served to Oliver Cromwell's advantage.<sup>15</sup> While there were a couple of foreigners in Cromwell's army, the Royalists had the overwhelming majority of them. One of the most infamous of the men who came from the 30 Years War to fight for the Royalists was Prince Rupert of the Rhine, who was said to have a demon dog and was responsible for a great many of the atrocities committed on the Royalist side.

Destructive raiding was common in the congested war zone around Gloucester. Massey, the governor of the city, found that he could not collect the Contribution for his garrison, but he could do great damage with it. He stopped all trade, where he could, up the Severn....A raid of a different kind was the punitive expedition launched by Rupert against the Clubmen in Herefordshire in March 1645. He took his cavalry through the county 'to refresh after the Dutch fashion', as he put it, by forcibly seizing men, money and supplies. There was ample warrant for his action, in his view, from the German wars.<sup>16</sup>

The quote here displays the kind of brutality brought by King Rupert to the shores of England. The passage also links the Clubmen to the experience of civilians and resisters in the 30 Years War. The 30 Years War resulted in the deaths of millions of Europeans. The war gave rise to this image of the soldier as a plunderer who comes into towns to take women and food and homes of the common people. Rupert's presence stirred fears that European violence was coming to England. These fears of amoral soldiers plundering the countryside for years drove the Clubmen to form their vigilante movement. These fears may not have been totally irrational as people involved in atrocities such as the ones in the 30 Years War were directly involved in attacks on their localities. While there was clearly a moralism and emotion in their response, their planning and organization indicates that this response was likely a pragmatic one. They saw keeping order in the face of these plundering soldiers—like the ones in the 30 Years War—as a civil duty. Parliamentary propaganda sought to paint the Royalist forces as akin to those plundering soldiers in the European wars, as historian Ian Roy suggests.<sup>17</sup> They could use Rupert's ties to the continental conflict as a type of advantage making his experience there as much of a liability as it was a boon. The Clubmen generally sprung up where the fighting was at its worst: in the South and West country and close to the Welsh border. Roy focuses on the effects of the war on the West country, particularly on the towns of the Severn valley, where Mark Stoye claims the first true Club revolt took place.<sup>18</sup> These congested areas beset by murders and raiding created ideal conditions for yet another revolt.

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<sup>15</sup> Stoye, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Roy, "England Turned Germany? The Aftermath of the Civil War in Its European Context," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (1978): 127–44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Like Ian Roy, Peter H. Wilson's *The 30 Years War: Europe's Tragedy* draws parallels between England and Germany. While the international implications each of the wars had for the Hapsburg dynasty might not have been felt directly by the Clubmen, both wars informed the view of the other and played a role in the modernization of Europe when it came to armies, war, and the creation of sharply defined sovereign nation states.<sup>19</sup> Wilson considered the English Civil War and the wars brought on by the Reformation to be forces of modernization. Both wars, claims Wilson, saw an element of popular opposition in the form of protests, even revolts which Wilson writes are "Clubman-like."<sup>20</sup> The first club revolt started out as a protest, but eventually turned to armed resistance and insurrection. Of the peasant revolt and popular acts of resistance in the 30 Years War, the most notable revolts were in Upper Austria and Bavaria. Sometimes these popular revolts are collectively known as the Peasants' War.

During the 30 Years War, there were numerous peasant protests. Like the Clubmen, these peasants led popular revolts that were crushed under the pressures of facing both sides of the conflict. Geoffrey Parker was also familiar with numerous popular uprisings throughout Europe in the Seventeenth Century in France, Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Styria, and Brandenburg-Kolmbach. In his book on the 30 Years War, Parker recounted the massacre of the peasants in neutral principality Brandenburg-Kulmbach:

Within a month of Breitenfeld, a letter arrived from Gustavus asking if he [Margrave Christian] were friend or foe. With the Swedish host advancing, there was no choice: on 31 October, Margrave Christian had an audience with the king, swore to be his ally against the emperor, and agreed to provide quarters and contributions for the army. The Margrave's subjects were thereby subjected to an unprecedented hardship at the hands of the troops, quartermasters and tax-collectors. When the peasants attempted to drive out the intruders, in November 1632, they were massacred: a chronicler who visited the site of the peasants' last stand was appalled to find the vineyards and fields red with blood, with corpses scattered in bizarre positions over a three-mile radius. Meanwhile the Margrave locked himself in his only defensible castle, the Plassenburg, and waited for the storm to subside. Such were the consequences for the former 'neutrals' of Sweden's victory at Breitenfeld.<sup>21</sup>

As with the Clubmen, the peasants and the Margrave himself advocated for peace and neutrality, but in the end, the professional army decimated them. Revolts like this one would continue throughout the 30 Years War and for another two years in Bavaria. The case of the Margrave mirrors the Clubmen's struggle in that they espoused neutrality but were in the end decimated by a professional army. In both cases they revolted against something that was perceived to be an injustice. This shows the perils of neutrality in a divisive conflict.

The Swedes clashed with ordinary citizens on the continent. Not only was there the threat of violence, but there were also the immense costs of garrisoning their army. In Olmüt, which was about 200 km north of Lower Austria, a local town clerk wrote an account of the costs of garrisoning the army, which ran over 100,000 thaler. Expenses included: ransom, shoes and

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<sup>19</sup> Peter H. Wilson, "Kingdom Divided: The British and European Continental Conflicts Compared," in *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, ed. Michael J. Braddick (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 577.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 584.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years' War*, 2nd ed. (London: New York: Routledge, 1997), 127-28.

stockings, money for the commandant and other officers from the councilor's own pockets, 73 barrels of wine, hops, salt, construction costs, and brewing costs.<sup>22</sup>

The experience of the Swedes and others manifests the staggering economic costs to the people who dealt with these armies in addition to the constant threat of violence, pillaging—even rape. The financial burdens of the war were shifted to these civilians and in this the Clubmen and groups like them had a cause and something to revolt against.

A parliamentary newspaper reported on that first club revolt in West Shropshire in December of 1644: “They oppose Colonel Vagary [Vangeris] of the king’s army plundering and other exorbitances and have been treated by Sir Richard Lee, Mr. Francis Herbert, the two Baldwins and other commissioners to lay down their arms, but they refuse unless they have some satisfaction for plundering.”<sup>23</sup> This report exhibits the early actions and motivations of the Clubmen. They armed themselves in the face of the Parliamentary government which was still in the process of consolidating its power and was likely trying to establish a level of legitimacy by not interfering with the populace. They seemed to be open to dialogue with Parliament which is a stark contrast to what happened to people advocating neutrality in the 30 Years War. It is difficult to pinpoint the difference, but one likely, and often cited possibility was that in a civil war, there was no disconnect between the cultures, which in some way tempers the soldiers, particularly when it comes to civilian resistance. This report also serves to pinpoint the exact point and events of the first club revolt, however vague.

According to the parliamentary paper, the *Kingdom’s Weekly Intelligencer*, a group of gentry, clergy, and citizens had organized in Worcester in March of 1645 to give out a declaration and resolution. In this declaration, they had eight stated purposes. These included: maintaining the Church of England in the face of Catholicism, defending the king’s honor, and defending each other from soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Here the Clubmen’s words serve as a mission statement for the people of Worcester. They describe themselves in very general terms. These general terms are part of what paints their movement as a populist movement from the ground up. Worcester is one of the counties considered Royalist throughout the war. This shows, to an extent, when the Clubmen write about protecting the King, but they also wish to keep the status quo and the ideas of English law and precedent. At this point they do not mention peace, but a reference to a return to order with no overt animosity against one side or another.

Clubman risings were more widespread in Dorset, Wiltshire, and Somerset than other counties.<sup>25</sup> The Clubmen of Dorset and Wiltshire issued their own demands and resolutions: “We the miserable inhabitants of said counties being too deeply touched by the apprehension and sense of our past and present sufferings occasioned only by civil and unnatural wars within this kingdom.”<sup>26</sup>

This writing sheds yet more light on their motives and the misfortunes brought upon populations by the war. While the people in Worcester were concerned about taxes, these Clubmen in Dorset and Wiltshire expanded their demands to include grander ideas of peace and a return to the natural order of things. This amounted to a rallying call for restoring order, but also a statement opposing the two forces struggling for legitimacy. This would suggest that despite the conservative and localized nature of their movement, there were larger ideas at play. In places where the Clubmen

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<sup>22</sup> “Tagebuch des feindlichen Einfalls der Schwed in das Markgraftenthum Mähren während ihres Aufenthaltes in der Stadt Olmütz, 1642-1650“ (*The diary of Friedrich Flade, the Olmütz town clerk*), in: *The Thirty Years War: A Sourcebook*, ed., Peter Wilson, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 243-44.

<sup>23</sup> “Perfect Occurances of Parliament,” (27 December 1644), unpaginated, in *English Historical Documents*, 1297.

<sup>24</sup> “A declaration and resolution of the gentry, clergy, and other inhabitants of the northwest part of the county of Worcester,” *The Kingdom’s Weekly Intelligencer* (11-18 March 1645) in *English Historical Documents*, 1297-98.

<sup>25</sup> Underdown, 29.

<sup>26</sup> “The Desires and Resolutions of the Clubmen of the Counties of Dorset and Wiltshire,” (1645), in *Historical Documents*, 1300.

were more concentrated, they used language that appears far more revolutionary than in areas like Worcestershire. Simply the act of not cooperating with both “governments” and taking up arms to become their own small paramilitary force could be considered a revolutionary act. The Clubmen in Wiltshire were not the only ones who made a statement calling for peace. The Clubmen did this on several occasions. They petitioned the king for peace which appeared in a Royalist news book.<sup>27</sup> The Somerset Clubmen petitioned that England go back to the status quo of Elizabethan times. The Somerset Clubmen made this clear when they proclaimed: “We stand for the Protestant religion as it was observed in Queen Elizabeth’s time.”<sup>28</sup>

In Herefordshire, the Parliamentary forces seemed to want to incorporate with the Herefordshire Clubmen and even see if they could get them to accept Parliamentary demands. Colonel Massey signed off on a letter to Sir Samuel Luke: “Bee it how it will I have used all the best arguments I can to move them to declare themselves for Parliament then they may have protection and authority for what they doe. Now their act is a perfect act of rebelling to be justified by noe Law or Statute and their confesion will be certaine.”<sup>29</sup> Herefordshire was one of the Royalist counties, but as was the case with Shropshire, there were sections near the forests that were considered sympathetic to the Parliamentary forces. Nevertheless, the very process of declaring neutrality in the face of a government vying for legitimacy was a provocative act even if they did have some vague sympathies for these militia groups. At a certain point, even if these Clubmen were thought to possibly be sympathetic to Parliament, they were in rebellion nonetheless.

The Sussex Clubmen in the fall of 1645 were considering more immediate and practical concerns with the remembrance of a series of infamous rapes. The stated goal for many of the Clubmen was their opposition to the soldiers who steal, rape, and pillage their way through the countryside. As is the case with the Parliament and the King’s forces, there was a constant search for legitimacy citing precedent in an appeal to the law. War, they claimed, was not only unnatural; it was illegal. In Sussex, they made their opposition to both sides explicit: “Wee desire in respect we have been these three yeares last past oppressed by free quarter of souldiers, plunder and other charges both by the royall and parliament amryes.”<sup>30</sup> The authorities in Sussex denounced the Sussex Clubmen as traitors, as well as “neuters” and “enemies to the Commonwealth.”<sup>31</sup> Towards the end of the English Civil War, it appears the Clubmen were the actual revolutionaries.

Sir Thomas Fairfax took credit for dispersing the Clubmen in August of 1645, and while there were club revolts that flared up later, the latter half of 1645 saw the end of the Clubmen as an organized movement. There was a degree of anger towards the Clubmen coming from some of the Parliamentarians. One claimed, in a firsthand account of the battle between Fairfax and the Clubmen, that Clubmen deserved to be hanged.<sup>32</sup> Parliament also used religious imagery in its battle against the Clubmen. In a time where religion dominated, every army believed God was on their side. This was evident in cleric Thomas Case’s sermon blasting the Clubmen.<sup>33</sup> After the Clubmen were rooted out of their castle, the soldier expressed hope that this was the end of these revolts. This suggests that for some, destroying all forms of opposition like the Clubmen was the goal of the New Model Army: ensure peace through dominance.

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<sup>27</sup> Morrill, 196.

<sup>28</sup> “A Copy of a Petition Commended to the Peace-Making Association in the West, 1644–1646,” in *Historical Documents*, 1301.

<sup>29</sup> “The Clubmen in Herefordshire. Cololnel Masey, Governor of Gloucester to Sire Samuel Luke,” 22 March 1645, in Morrill, 196.

<sup>30</sup> “Extracts from the petitions of the Sussex Clubmen,” 26 September 1645, in Morrill, 199.

<sup>31</sup> Underdown, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Bowles, *The Proceedings of the Army under the Command of Sir Thomas Fairfax*, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / (London [England]: printed for Samuel Gellibrand, July 9, 1645., 1645), 5, (2337:06) *Early English Books Online* (London: Chadwyck-Healey).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Case, “Sermon Before Honourable House of Commons at Westminster, August 22, 1635,” in *Early English Books Online*.

Geoffrey Parker's analysis on why people revolt fits into how the Clubmen came into being and the conditions that brought them about. Expensive wars combined with lackluster harvests proved to be a powerful force in shaping the social and economic fabric of mid-seventeenth century British society. The Clubmen openly articulated their grievances with the soldiers from both sides. They chose a side by not taking sides and instead, in practice, ended up creating their own communities policed by themselves. They were a revolution within a revolution with the stated goal of bringing about peace and order by organizing and taking up arms against their government(s). The Clubmen were united by their common cause of radical neutrality, a nostalgia for the simpler era of Elizabeth, their status as lower class people, and their tenuous connection through the series of populist revolts in the west country. They lived their lives for three years where the fighting in the English Civil War was at its worst. Clubmen were radical because they opposed the largest forces in their society, while formulating their own internal doctrine. They articulated their grievances, had meetings, and organized. Their political consciousness was undoubtedly present as they cited their ideas concerning the war. They wanted peace. They wanted a return to old times, such as the Elizabethan era, particularly in a religious sense. Clubmen were locally focused and parochial to the point that they held sympathies with one side or another, some groups of Clubmen being openly Parliamentary or negotiating with one side at the very least.

The Clubmen did not appear from the ether, but, as was evident in their stated grievances, they were a part of an ongoing problem of how civilians often get treated by soldiers in war. The case of the 30 Years War showed the costs and difficulties of garrisoning soldiers, especially when times are lean. While England did not turn into Germany, it was easy for the English to imagine that it could. The brutality of the 30 Years War towards the peasants carried over and translated into the English Civil War, but there were some lessons learned from it, and it is not hard to see how some may have taken steps to keep this war from escalating to that point. The Clubmen were radical in that they thought they could demand conditions from both Parliament and the king. They armed themselves and questioned the legitimacy of both armies by not supporting one over the other. If they were not radical, they would not have posed a threat to the growing New Model Army. They were also a conservative or reactionary movement linked by a dislike of the papacy and a love of their old religion. The story of the Clubmen is one riddled with odd paradoxes, but as their stated motives and actions show, they were a small revolution in themselves, fermented by the same causes that bring revolutions and taking the same actions as revolutionaries.

The Clubmen saw themselves as practical people as well as peaceful people. They merely wanted to keep order for their women and children. Their wish was to return to a time that was simpler, more peaceful (at least in their minds). Even during a revolution, the English still managed to be concerned with what was practical and what was legal. Clubmen in all counties cited ancient laws to build upon precedents for their actions. They reached a point where they could not trust either side to protect their people and, because of that, in 1645 they hit a breaking point. The contrasts between Clubmen in different areas are not as notable as their similarities. Even within counties that supposedly leaned toward one major side or the other (Parliamentarians or Royalists), there existed an overarching preference for peace and order—a yearning that spawned the Clubmen. There is an axiom that picking no side is still picking a side, and that is precisely what the Clubmen did.

Clubmen conservatism was to such a degree that they could not in good conscience fully support either side because neither side had the capacity nor the will to return everything back to the Elizabethan era. Parliament and the Royalists had competing ideas of which way the country should go, but neither one of these appealed to the club and scythe wielding men on the farms who, while supporting neither of the two armies, embodied many aspects of both. Like the Royalists, they lionized the king and likely could not support the man's execution even with what Charles had done.



The Clubmen's words and actions set them apart from a mere food riot or peasant revolt in that they cited laws and precedents. In their communities, the Clubmen organized and enforced laws. By doing this, they formed little governments of their own. For the Clubmen to make peace and neutrality a defining part of their movement, they had to display it in both word and action. The sum of which makes them revolutionary.