

## Turncoats and Renegadoes: Changing Sides during the English Civil Wars

**Review Number:**

1434

**Publish date:**

Thursday, 13 June, 2013

**Author:**

Andrew Hopper

**ISBN:**

9780199575855

**Date of Publication:**

2012

**Price:**

£65.00

**Pages:**

272pp.

**Publisher:**

Oxford University Press

**Publisher url:**

[http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199575855.do#\\_UbmXkPk4sb0](http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199575855.do#_UbmXkPk4sb0)

**Place of Publication:**

Oxford

**Reviewer:**

Elliot Vernon

The question of the nature of allegiance in the English Civil Wars has been a perennial issue for at least three generations of professional academics. The high point of the allegiance question was arguably in the late 1960s and 1970s when research comparing the allegiance choices of contemporaries with their social origins undermined the notion that the English Civil War was a class war fought by a rising 'middle class' of gentlemen against an fading *ancien régime*. The dramatic effects of this research arguable gave rise to 'revisionism' by re-opening the debate on what caused the English Civil War to spiral beyond a mere rebellion to 'the' English revolution.

Further studies into allegiance have also yielded profitable information. These range from the enlightening investigations of Anthony Fletcher into the nature of 'neutralism' (which turned out to be anything but) to David Underdown's (albeit not entirely successful) attempt to link the issue of allegiance to a soft form of ecological determinism based on patterns of agriculture and local industry. In addition the work of Clive Holmes, Peter Lake, Richard Cust and Ann Hughes has shown how allegiance could be based on immediate localist responses as well as the interaction between local and national politics. Most recently Rachel Weil, Mike Braddick and Jason McElligott have raised fresh questions about allegiance. Professor Weil has reminded us that the concept of allegiance as a category has a *longue durée* in itself and that this pre-history cannot be isolated from the period 1640–60. Braddick, realising the problems that a static concept of 'allegiance' can yield in a period when the world was turned upside down, has raised the alternative concept

of the study of specific mobilisations. In a similar vein, Jason McElligott has revived calls for a history of side changing as a means of reopening the question of why people engaged their lives and fortunes in England's 'intestinal' civil wars.

Dr McElligott's call has been answered by Andrew Hopper, whose previous work on Sir Thomas Fairfax situates him as ideally suited to explore questions of the politico-military nature of side changing. Hopper has also had the fortune of being able to access a wealth of recent work by, amongst others, Barbara Donagan, John Walter, John Adamson and the two-volume collective project on royalism initiated by Jason McElligott and David L. Smith, all of which figure prominently in *Turncoats and Renegadoes*.

Like Hopper's work on Fairfax, *Turncoats and Renegadoes* is divided into two parts, splitting a narrative and wider thematic analysis of the turncoat. The first part explores side changing amongst aristocrats, parliament men, professional military officers and rank and file soldiers as well as chronological and regional patterns of allegiance. This section is intentionally limited chronologically to the period of the first civil war, a period, Hopper argues, when it is still possible to describe 'parliamentarianism' and 'royalism' as relatively unified 'sides'. The second part of the book attempts to tell the cultural history of the civil war turncoat, exploring the well known culture of early modern oath taking, the presentation of treachery in propaganda, the importance of honour and reputation and the development of legal mechanisms to respond to treachery.

In his analysis of side changing among the differing segments of mid 17th-century society, Dr Hopper focuses on a number of key case studies, as well as commenting on less well known figures. Throughout these chapters he is keen to recognise the difficulty of finding formal deterministic rules as to the nature of side changing and is sensitive to recognising the complex interplay of conscience, honour, self interest and duty in each individual case study. The primary case study in his chapter on aristocratic turncoats is that of Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, half brother to the Earl of Warwick, an important parliamentarian 'junto' peer and a multiple side changer. Holland appears always something of a contradictory character, being a courtier who was a favourite of the Roman Catholic Queen Henrietta-Maria, but considered by contemporaries to be a genuinely godly Calvinist with a deep sentiment of anti-popery. Hopper explores Holland's initial defection to the king's party in summer 1643 as originating in the functional radicalisation of the parliamentarian war effort that caused many parliamentarian aristocrats to face a crisis pitting their duty (and expectation) of personal service to the king against their desire for a constitutional settlement. This group included Holland, and the turn of events in 1643 meant that he had become estranged from those at Westminster, though he soon found that he was equally alienated from those around the king at Oxford. Holland's return to Westminster in late 1643 came after much political wrangling. Isolated by the suspicions of those at Westminster he returned, fatefully, to the king's side in the second civil war of 1648, a change that would lead to his execution by the new Republican regime on 9 March 1649.

The defection of parliament men below the ranks of the aristocracy, after the initial flurry of those who supported the king's party in early 1642, was in some ways a more serious business, especially as the Oxford parliament of early 1644 could lay equal claim to being the representative parliament of the kingdom. These defections caused factional conflict over the war aims to deepen at Westminster and the crime for which Sir John Hotham and son were executed, that of secretly negotiating with royalists, soon became a basis by which factions could strategically tar their opponents with disloyalty. Factional politics seems to have been a key factor in determining whether those who strayed from perfect loyalty (or the good will of the controlling faction) could keep a foothold within Westminster's corridors of power. The accusations that Denzil Holles, the pro-peace MP, had secret negotiations with royalists led to his political isolation. On the other hand Sir Robert Pye could use his connection to John Hampden to avoid similar censure. Hopper points out that defections by royalist MPs to Westminster were fewer and had less drastic political consequences.

In the chapters on the defections of soldiers, Dr Hopper shows that varying factors could induce side changing, from being engaged to fight under false pretences to personal fear, need and desperation. For professional soldiers, career advancement and personal honour were further matters that could motivate a person to change sides. In addition, Dr Hopper includes an important discussion on Irish, Welsh, Cornish

and continental European soldiers, developing the study of what Mark Stoyle has termed the 'ethnic' dimension to the issue of loyalty.

In the first part of the book, Hopper is to be credited for his sensitivity to the importance of the individual and the particular, and thus his conclusions provide a nuanced exploration of the reasons for side changing amongst the actors in the English Civil War.

Moving away from the largely prosopographical study of the first part of the book, Hopper moves onto a more thematically driven cultural history of the turncoat. This part abandons the chronological limitation of the first civil war, choosing, where necessary, to go into the period of the English Republic. One underlying theme of this section is how the trope of the turncoat, in some sense symbolically linked to the pre-civil war mythology surrounding the 'papist' who refused to join with the wider English community, was developed both polemically and legally to ensure loyalty, or at least acquiescence, with the various civil war administrations. In a similar vein, printed propaganda drew on already existent languages of insult and inconstancy to define and condemn side changers. This in turn led those accused of being turncoats to develop a collective language to justify past behaviour. This was often crucial as the turncoat's ability to fashion their actions as honourable served as their best argument to prevent the loss of their estates and property.

Hopper's exploration of the legal changes relating to turncoats is particularly revealing in terms of the increasingly severe approach that parliament took towards those it considered to be traitors. The treachery of the Hothams, amongst others, set in chain a legal development of the notion of breach of trust and the incursion of military law into the justice system. These notions were developed to try and execute turncoats and, as Hopper points out, were ultimately used against Charles Stuart himself. Hopper reveals that a possible parallel development, that of death for breach of the Solemn League and Covenant, presumably on the authority of Romans 1:31–2, was not developed as a judicial tool against turncoats. The Covenant's association with Presbyterianism after 1646, and its promise to preserve the king's authority and person meant that its utility was limited as a judicial tool for disposing of traitors.

Finally, Hopper explores the question of the collapse of stable notions of 'the cause', be it parliamentary or royalist as the 1640s moved into the 1650s. One of Dr Hopper's case studies is the scaffold speech of the Welsh Presbyterian minister Christopher Love, who was executed for treason for communicating with the Scots by the Rump Parliament on 22 August 1651. Love's 'parliamentarian' credentials had been proved as the chaplain to Colonel John Venn's regiment at Windsor during the first civil war, and he inflamed the Uxbridge peace negotiations in January 1645 by calling for capital punishment against royalist leaders as a condition any treaty with the king. However, tracking the fragmentation of parliamentarianism into factionalism, in 1647 Love was singled out in a New Model regimental petition alongside Thomas Edwards as stirring up discord between the people and the army. With the army's military putsch of the Long Parliament in December 1648 and the execution of the king a month later, Love was to become one of the loudest critics of the Rump parliament as an unconstitutional and factional regime whose authority ultimately rested on the New Model's pikes and muskets. With such a public challenge coming from one who held a previously exemplary parliamentarian record during the Civil War, it comes as no surprise that the Rump was prepared to make a capital example of Love. As Hopper shows, the Rump's propagandists turned to the rhetoric of 'turncoat' to attempt to denounce Love, whose execution alienated many parliamentarians of a Presbyterian judgement and was still counted as a national sin requiring national repentance by the London turner Nehemiah Wallington in 1655. The notion of 'turncoat' and 'side changer' therefore had become a malleable one that, as the manifold alliances that made up parliamentarianism or royalism collapsed, could easily become a hammer with which to crush former allies and friends.

Dr Hopper's focus on the cultural history of politics in exploring the world of the side changer begs many questions, often of central importance to the emerging wider post-revisionist synthesis of the history of the English Civil War. If I have one criticism of the work, it is that this relatively short book (223 substantive pages) does not always fully answer the questions it raises. For example, I found myself wanting more detail on the emerging use of breach of trust in the legal response to the problem of the turn coat. I also desired a

greater exploration of the polemical and political use of 'turncoat' after the first civil war, especially after the collapse of recognisable parliamentary unity in 1647. These small issues aside, *Turncoats and Renegadoes* is an important and sensitive study of an issue that has been critically absent from the ongoing debate on allegiance and political culture in the English Civil War period.

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