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“The Gear Rout”: The Cornish Rising of 1648 and the Second Civil War¹

Mark Stoye

In July 1648 John Bond, Master of the Savoy, delivered a thanksgiving sermon to the House of Commons, in which he praised God for the series of victories that the New Model Army had recently won in many parts of England and Wales. The tangled, multi-layered conflict known to posterity as the Second Civil War was still raging, rebel forces were holding out in Colchester and the Scottish army of the Engagement was marching south, but Bond—anxious to buoy up the Army’s allies and to cast down the spirits of its enemies—did everything he could to emphasise the universality of the recent successes. “The garment of gladnesse reacheth all over. . .the Land,” he declaimed, “the robe [of victory] reacheth from. . .Northumberland in the North, to. . .Sussex in the South. . .[and] from Dover. . .in the East, to Pensands, the utmost part of Cornwall, in the West.” Bond’s reference to Penzance would have struck a chord with many of his listeners, for accounts of an insurgent defeat in the little Cornish town had been read out in the House some weeks before.² Yet, from that day to this, the rising at Penzance—and indeed the entire “Western dimension” of the Second Civil War have been largely forgotten.

Most general histories of the period pass over the Cornish insurrection of May 1648 in silence, or in a sentence or two at best.³ Even Robert Ashton, whose magisterial study of the Second Civil War has done so much to enhance our understanding of the conflict, has little to say about events in Cornwall⁴, and consideration of the rising has so far been left to local historians.⁵ This is surprising, partly because the revolt was an important episode in its own right, but also because an analysis of its causes can contribute much to the ongoing

¹I am most grateful to G. W. Bernard, Lord St. Levan, Michael J. Moore, Philip Payton, and R. E. Stoye for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. It was first presented at St. Michael’s Mount, Cornwall, in May 1999.

²John Bond, *Eschol, Or Grapes Among Thorns* (13 July 1648), p. 24; and *Journal of the House of Commons* [hereafter cited as CJ], 5, p. 576.

³See, for example, Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, 4 vols. (1901), 4: 145.

⁴Robert Ashton, *Counter-Revolution: The Second Civil War and its Origins* (1994), pp. 363, 425–29.

⁵See Mary Coate, *Cornwall in the Great Civil War and Interregnum* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 237–41; and James C. A. Whetter, “Anthony Gubbs of Penzance: Sufferer in the Parliamentary Cause,” *Old Cornwall* 7 (1967–72): 160–69.

debate about the nature of the Second Civil War. Many scholars continue to see that conflict as “a revolt of the provinces”, as a series of essentially localist insurrections, born out of the exasperation that the inhabitants of allegedly inward-looking “county communities” had felt at unprecedented central interference in their affairs.⁶ Others stress the ideological dimensions of the risings, and point to the central role of royalist activists in planning and directing them.⁷ Implicit in both approaches is the belief that what went on in each of the revolts of 1648 was much the same. What has never been considered before is the possibility that, in Cornwall and Wales at least, the Second Civil War may have possessed a specifically ethnic undertow, and that the insurrections in these areas should be viewed through a “British,” rather than a purely English, lens. This article will argue that, while the Cornish revolt exhibited many of the same characteristics as those that took place elsewhere, it also possessed a dynamic of its own, and was, in many ways, distinct. To fully understand the events of 1648, it will be suggested, we need to focus carefully on the dissonance that existed between the voices of the various rebel groups.

I

In January 1648 England’s parliamentary rulers faced troubles on every hand. The Scots were planning to invade, royalist irreconcilables were stirring, and the recent decision to break off negotiations with the captive Charles I had caused the old division in the parliamentary ranks between presbyterians and independents to resurface. Disturbances were widely anticipated and, at Parliament’s direction, the Lord General of the New Model Army, Sir Thomas Fairfax, had begun to provide for the security of the realm. Military command of the West Country—an especially sensitive region—was entrusted to one of Fairfax’s most reliable officers, Colonel Sir Hardress Waller. Sir Hardress had family connections in Devon and had spent the winter of 1645/46 campaigning there.⁸

⁶See, for example, Alan Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (1966), pp. 219–20, 228–30 and ch. 7; Ivan Roots, *The Great Rebellion* (1988), p. 127; David Underdown, *Pride’s Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 94, 98; John Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War* (1976), pp. 126–28; idem, “Introduction,” in idem, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War* (1986), p. 25; and John Kenyon, *The Civil Wars of England* (1988), p. 179.

⁷See Brian Lyndon, “Essex and the King’s Cause in 1648,” *Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 17–19, 27–28, 37–38; Brian Lyndon, “The South and the Start of the Second Civil War,” *History* 71 (1986): 400, 405, 407; and, more generally, Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*.

⁸On Waller, see *Dictionary of National Biography*; John Adair, *Roundhead General: The Campaigns of Sir William Waller* (1997), pp. 4, 11; and Mark Stoyle, *From Deliverance to Destruction: Rebellion and Civil War in an English City* (Exeter, 1996), pp. 128–35.

He was well-qualified to assume the role of military overlord in the West, therefore, and the forces that had been assigned to him were comparatively strong.⁹

Nevertheless, Waller faced a daunting task. Cornwall was notoriously disaffected, while Devon, too, contained many “malignant” pockets.¹⁰ Opposition to fiscal demands was growing, particularly in Devon, which felt itself to be heavily over-taxed, and even as Waller marched into the county a petition against free-quarter and assessment was circulating.¹¹ More threatening still was the disaffection among the local garrison troops. In late 1647 Parliament, desperate to reduce the spiralling cost of soldiers’ wages, had ordered that all superfluous (or “supernumerary”) troops across the kingdom should be disbanded, and given two month’s pay towards their arrears. The soldiers of the western garrisons—including Plymouth in Devon and Pendennis Castle in Cornwall—were offered only half this amount. Enraged, they resolved neither to disband nor to hand over their garrisons until the money that was owing to them had been paid.¹² Confronted with this multiplicity of problems, Sir Hardress can hardly have been cheered by his reception at Exeter, the regional capital. The citizens, already burdened with a permanent garrison, were not prepared to support Waller’s men as well, and they made bitter representations to Parliament. Anxious to placate local opinion, Waller ordered most of his men to seek quarter elsewhere.¹³ Plymouth was clearly out of the question—the angry garrison had refused point-blank to admit any of Waller’s troops¹⁴—so Sir Hardress quartered his men in the local market towns instead. Over the next few weeks he did what he could to defuse the simmering tension in his western fiefdom. Yet, across the Bristol Channel, rebellion was already at hand.

At Pembroke Castle in South Wales the governor, John Poyer, had long been growing disenchanted with his political masters, and when, in early 1648, he

⁹See *Journal of the House of Lords* [hereafter cited as LJ], 10, p. 268; and Bodleian Library, Oxford [hereafter cited as Bod.], Tanner Mss, 57, No. 69, f. 127.

¹⁰Mark Stoye, *Loyalty and Locality: Popular Allegiance in Devon during the English Civil War* (Exeter, 1994), pp. 232–38, and ch. 3.

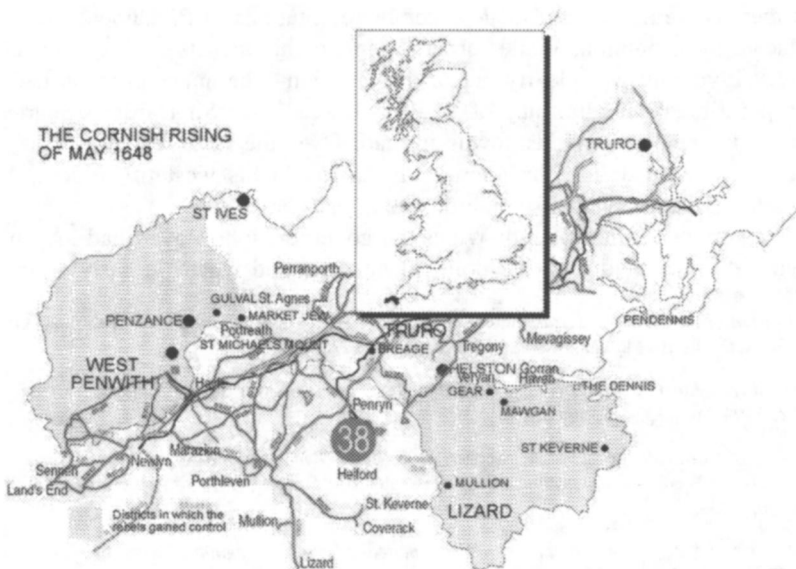
¹¹See Coate, *Cornwall*, pp. 221–24; Stephen K. Roberts, *Recovery and Restoration in an English County: Devon Local Administration, 1646–70* (Exeter, 1985), pp. 1–11; and Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, pp. 120–21.

¹²C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2 vols. (1978), 1: 1053; Bod., Clarendon Mss, 30, f.273.

¹³Bod., Tanner Mss, 57, f.127; Devon Record Office, Exeter, Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/9 (1647–55), f.8.

¹⁴Plymouth continued to keep Waller’s troops at arm’s length for some months, see Historical Manuscripts Commission [hereafter cited as HMC], 13th report, appendix 1, Portland Mss, 1, p. 466.

was ordered to disband his garrison and hand the castle over to another officer, he refused to obey. Instead, Poyer bade defiance to the forces that had been sent to replace him, and demanded that his arrears be paid in full. When these demands were not met, Poyer sallied out of the castle and routed the troops of his putative successor. In the wake of the mutineers' success, other discontented soldiers came flocking in to join them, together with hundreds of local countrymen. By late March much of South Wales was up in arms—and many believed that Cornwall would soon follow.¹⁵ On 26 March it was reported that “men. . .much fear the West,” while the Venetian Ambassador went so far as to aver that “the people of Wales and Cornwall are rising in favour of the King.”¹⁶ He exaggerated, but southwestern malcontents were certainly plotting¹⁷—and in Cornwall, as in Wales, mutiny had broken out among the local garrison troops.



¹⁵On Poyer's Rising, see Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, esp. pp. 416–22; Peter Gaunt, *A Nation under Siege: The Civil War in Wales* (London, 1991), pp. 66–71; and J. R. Phillips, *Memoirs of the Civil War in Wales and the Marches*, 2 vols. (1874), 1: 392–402 and 2: 344–357.

¹⁶Calendar of State Papers, Domestic [hereafter cited as CSPD], 1648–49, p. 37; and Calendar of State Papers, Venetian [hereafter cited as CSPV], 1647–52, p. 52.

¹⁷Samuel R. Gardiner, ed., *Hamilton Papers* (Camden Society, New Series 27, 1880), p. 171.

The trouble centered on Pendennis Castle, where Colonel Richard Fortescue and his men were refusing to disband until they had been paid their arrears. According to one source, the mutiny began when the garrison soldiers seized on the “commissioners appoynted to pay and discharge them. . .and brought them prisoners into the Castle.” The kidnapping of civilian commissioners was a tactic that had often been employed by mutinous soldiers before¹⁸, but Fortescue’s refusal to give up the castle to Fairfax’s appointee seemed more ominous. One source suggested that his defiance had been directly inspired by Poyer’s example, while another claimed that the discontented soldiers in Cornwall were “holding out a hand to the governor of Pembroke.”¹⁹ Hints of a connection between Fortescue and Poyer can hardly have failed to alarm M.P.s, and they ordered Fairfax to “take speedy and effectual care for disbanding the forces...at Pendennis.” Fortescue remained defiant, and on 13 April he sent a letter and a “representation” to Parliament.²⁰

For a week affairs in Cornwall hung in the balance. One gleeful royalist averred that “Pendennis hath declared against Parliament and Hardress Waller lyes at a distance, unwilling to provoke the Cornish who are well-affected.”²¹ Royalist excitement was understandable: had military mutiny and civilian discontent come together in Cornwall as they had already done in Wales, the central regime would have faced a formidable challenge. Fortunately for Parliament, Fortescue was prepared to come to terms; his letter agreed to hand over Pendennis, providing that certain conditions were met. The Colonel’s missive was read out to the House on 18 April, after which it was ordered that his arrears should be paid, that he should be awarded a gratuity, and that he should be especially recommended to Fairfax “for some employment.” The sense of relief was palpable, and Cromwell himself was given the task of finding Fortescue a suitable military post.²²

Whatever the mood may have been in London, the officer in charge of negotiations on the ground, Colonel Robert Bennett, was clearly taking nothing for granted until the Castle had been given up. Bennett, who had performed sterling service for Parliament during 1642–46, was the governor of St. Michael’s Mount and the fort known as “the Dennis,” near Helford. He was also

¹⁸Ibid., p. 181; and John Morrill, “Mutiny and Discontent in English Provincial Armies, 1645–47,” in idem, ed., *The Nature of the English Revolution* (1993), pp. 336, 343, 345, 350–51.

¹⁹British Library, London, Thomason Tracts [hereafter cited as E.]; 436 (10), *The Perfect Weekly Account*, 12–19 April 1648; CSPV, 1647–52, p. 55.

²⁰CJ, 5, pp. 525, 536; Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC [hereafter cited as FSL], XD.483, Bennett Mss, Nos 12, 15; and E.436 (10).

²¹Gardiner, *Hamilton Papers*, p. 183.

²²CJ, 5, pp. 533, 536; W. C. Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), 1: 597.

a fervent supporter of the Army and an assiduous record-keeper: his surviving papers throw much new light on the Second Civil War in the West.²³ By dint of frantic borrowing Bennett had managed to accumulate enough money to pay four months' arrears to the soldiers in Pendennis, and when Fortescue's men finally marched out of the Castle on 29 April everything passed off peaceably. Bennett clearly felt that the mutineers had taken advantage of him, however, for he complained in his private accounts that he had been forced to pay several former soldiers at officers' rates. Significantly, Bennett had dared not expostulate, owing to "the high mutiny of the souldiers" and "the ill being of the people."²⁴ Clearly, fears of a conjunction between the discontented Cornish populace and the mutineers persisted.

Nevertheless, with Fortescue's men disbanded and a reliable garrison installed in Pendennis, Sir Hardress had good reason to believe that he had averted the threat of trouble in Cornwall. The news from Wales also appeared to be good. Writing from Bodmin on 2 May, Waller informed Bennett that "it is thought Poyer is beaten, and his forces nothing to what was reported."²⁵ Encouraged by this (false) intelligence, Waller crossed back into Devon, and rejoined his infantry at Tavistock, already "resolving. . .to looke eastward." On 6 May Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Salmon left Tavistock for Exeter at the head of six companies of Waller's foot.²⁶ Before Sir Hardress could follow, storm-clouds began to gather across the Tamar. Later that day, Waller was forced to go to Saltash to discuss a message from the Sheriff of Cornwall, Edward Herle, concerning the activities of "divers malignant gentilmen." Herle had long been keeping a watchful eye on these men, and now—"by reason of the greate resorte that was made unto them & their late fixing of Armes"—he feared that they "speedely meant to disturbe the peace of the county." Waller promptly issued warrants for the plotters' arrest, and within a week several had been apprehended. So anxious did the parliamentary administrators of Cornwall remain, however, that they dared not lodge their prisoners locally but prepared to send them up to London instead, lest their presence "hazard the peace of the county heere."²⁷

²³For Bennett, see Coate, *Cornwall*, passim; Mary Coate, "An Original Diary of Colonel Robert Bennett of Hexworthy," *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* [hereafter cited as *DCNQ*] 18 (1934–35): 251–59; and Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, pp. 308–09. For his command of the western garrisons, see Bod., Mss J. Walker, C.10, f.9. Photocopies of Bennett's papers may be consulted at the Cornish Record Office in Truro (Bennett Mss, FS3/47). I am most grateful to Mr. Colin Edwards for this information.

²⁴FSL, Bennett Mss, no.15

²⁵*Ibid.*, no. 16.

²⁶Bod., Tanner Mss, 57, no. 69, f.127r.

²⁷R. N. Worth, ed., *The Buller Papers* (Plymouth, 1895) [hereafter cited as Buller], pp. 101–02.

As if Waller did not have enough to contend with in Cornwall, worrying intelligence now reached him from Exeter, where Salmon had been refused permission to quarter his troops. The town governors, still smarting from their last experience of free-quarter, not only gave Salmon “very ill words,” but told him that if Fairfax himself

had come as. . . [he] did they would have kept him out. And supposing it not too late, the Mayor did with all speade send to shutt the gates, according to which command three were immediately shutt, but the soldiers being neare, the shutting of the fourth gate was prevented, at which they marcht in.

The soldiers may have got into the city, but the inhabitants still refused to admit them to their houses, prompting Salmon to lament that “hee should not be able to quarter the souldiers without putting the Towne in Blood.”²⁸ Seriously alarmed, Waller now rode to Exeter himself, eventually arriving on 12 May, by which time the Chamber had begun to back down and to make arrangements for quartering Salmon’s men. The citizens remained deeply resentful, however, and again complained to Parliament.²⁹ Meanwhile, far to the west, the long-anticipated storm was about to break.

II

On 16 May the deliberations of the Cornish county committee—the group of parliamentarian gentlemen who administered local affairs—were interrupted at Launceston by the arrival of a merchant named Anthony Gubbs, who had come to warn them of an imminent rising in his home town of Penzance. The Committee clearly took Gubbs’s words with a pinch of salt, for soon afterwards he set off disconsolately for home again. That very night, insurgent forces began to rise in the countryside around Penzance, while in the nearby town of Helston many of the inhabitants “vapoured most terribly” against friends of the Parliament.³⁰ By dawn a substantial rebel force was assembled in Penzance, and from here the insurgents moved off to confront the garrison at St. Michael’s Mount, a couple of miles to the east. The rebels’ initial intention was to surprise the Mount, but the garrison had been informed of their approach. By the time the insurgents arrived at the adjoining town of Market Jew, the Castle had been put in a state of defence. Shortly afterwards, John St. Aubyn of Clowance and

²⁸Bod., Tanner Mss, 57, no. 69, ff. 127r–128r.

²⁹Ibid., f.129; and LJ, 10, pp. 269–72. The dispute at Exeter has attracted far more attention than the Cornish rising, see R. W. Cotton and H. Woolcombe, eds., *Gleanings from the Municipal Records. . . of Exeter* (Exeter, 1877), pp. 134–37; Mary Coate, “Exeter in the Civil War and Interregnum,” *DCNQ*, 18 (1934–35): 350; Underdown, *Pride’s Purge*, p. 92; Roberts, *Recovery and Restoration*, p. 12; and Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, pp. 66–67.

³⁰Buller, p. 104; E.445 (28), *A Letter from the Isle of Wight*, (1 June 1648) [hereafter cited as *A Letter*], pp. 3–4; and Public Record Office, London [hereafter cited as PRO], SP 23, 149, ff.587–88.

two other parliamentary gentlemen rode into Market Jew to “parley” with the insurrectionists.

St. Aubyn had already sent a messenger hurrying to the east for reinforcements, and was clearly playing for time. He managed to get the meeting postponed until Saturday, whereupon the rebels returned to Penzance.³¹ Thus it was that when Anthony Gubbs finally arrived home he found his worst fears had been realised, and that the local malcontents were now “with manie hundred more grow[ne] to a head, & . . . lodged in our towne.” Wheeling about, Gubbs made his way to nearby St. Ives where his son, Joseph, lived and told him to ride to Waller for help. Gubbs then returned to Penzance, where he was siezed by the insurgents, and his goods confiscated “for the supplie of ther rebellion.” Soon afterwards the rebels demanded that Gubbs give them £300, and, when he refused to comply, pronounced sentence of death on the terrified merchant.³²

While Gubbs languished in prison, the insurgents established a gunpowder magazine in the market-place and triumphantly beat up their drums.³³ The rebels had high hopes of assistance from neighbouring towns at this point, and the people of St. Ives were thought to be particularly sympathetic. Significantly, one of the first reports of the rebellion to appear in London had claimed that “the disaffected to Parliament [are] risen in *two* places in Cornwell, viz, at Pensance, and St Ives.”³⁴ The claim that there had been a full-scale rising in St. Ives was incorrect, but it is clear that local parliamentarians regarded the town with extreme distrust, for on 19 May, St. Aubyn rode across rebel-held territory to St. Ives, in order “to quiet them [there] who were suspected to have a hand in the confederacy.” It is probable that the rebels were also expecting assistance from the market town of Helston, where serious unrest had already manifested itself, but here too they were to be disappointed. On Thursday evening a party of thirty parliamentary soldiers marched into Helston on their way to the Mount, and were prevailed upon by a local supporter to stay, thus pre-empting an insurrection that a group of disaffected townsmen had planned for that night.³⁵

The rebels’ failure to secure St. Ives and Helston was made all the more serious for them by the fact that their enemies had now begun to react. In Devon, Waller—clearly rattled—had issued a call on 17 May for “well-affected volunteers” to join him, and soon afterwards he crossed the Tamar with a sub-

³¹E.522 (31), *Perfect Occurrences of Parliament*, 19–26 May 1648; and *A Letter*, p. 3.

³²PRO, SP 23, 149, ff.587–88.

³³PRO, SP 19, 148, f.5; FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 20.

³⁴E.444 (9), *The Moderate Intelligencer*, 18–25 May 1648 (my italics). See also E.445 (4), *The Desires of the Countie of Surrey*, 27 May 1648; and PRO, SP 23, 149, f.588.

³⁵*A Letter*, p. 4.

stantial force.³⁶ Yet Waller's men would take time to arrive, and the one hope of crushing the rebellion swiftly lay with the scattered units that had already been stationed in Cornwall when the trouble began. Chief among these were two troops of Horse that Waller had sent into Cornwall earlier that year, and the County Troop (or "Sheriff's Troop") under Edward Herle.³⁷ Within days, all three units had made their way into the West, where they joined a small group of foot soldiers under Colonel Bennett and prepared to advance against the rebels. On 20 May Herle and Bennett arrived in Helston with some 400 Horse and 120 Foot. That same evening, they set off for Breage, a few miles to the north, where they quartered for the night. Herle was clearly anxious to engage the rebels as quickly as possible, and by 9 p.m. on the following day he had advanced with his cavalry as far as Mr. Harris's house at Kenegy, just a mile or two east of Penzance. From here he sent an anxious message to Bennett (whose men had got no further than the Mount) urging him to hurry and stressing the need to procure intelligence from the rebel camp. The best way of gaining such information, Herle suggested, would be to employ "a townsman [of Market Jew] or souldier of the Mount. . .who may pretend to run away to them, and to stay with them till he can learne their strength and resolucions."³⁸

If any parliamentary spy did make his way into Penzance that night, he would have found that the rebels' numbers were still swelling. The insurgent leaders had sent out "their warrants to the Westerne Parishes. . .to raise men" and fresh recruits had been coming into the town from the surrounding countryside all day, bringing arms and ammunition with them. Even after Herle arrived at Kenegy, reinforcements continued to come in to the rebels, including a group of nine men who arrived in Penzance from Towednack on the morning of 22 May.³⁹ By noon that day the rebel force had grown to between 300 and 500 men.⁴⁰ The insurgents were confident of still further accretions of strength, moreover, for, having learned of Herle's advance, they had despatched an emissary to the Lizard peninsula, twenty miles to the south, in order to bring the people of that district to their assistance. The individual charged with this mission, Captain Thomas Pike, had set off from Penzance by boat that morning, and he "landed upon the sand by the Looe [Bar]" near Porth Leven a few hours later. From here Pike made his way "unto the South to raise them"—and the speed with which local men rallied to him suggests that the insurgents of the

³⁶CJ, 5, p. 606.

³⁷See Buller, pp. 102, 108; *A Letter*, p. 4; and Bod., J. Walker Mss, C.10, f.97.

³⁸*A Letter*, p. 4; FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 18.

³⁹*Ibid*, no. 20.

⁴⁰For the rebels' numbers, see *A Letter*, p. 4; E.522 (31); and Buller, p. 105.

Lizard were following a pre-laid plan. According to the parliamentarians, “their plot was to [march north and] come into the reare of our forces that evening.”⁴¹

As the rebellion caught fire in the south, events were rapidly moving to a climax in the north, where Bennett and Herle were preparing to advance on Penzance. The insurgents had already erected makeshift fortifications around the town, and now they hastened to man these defences; a witness later deposed that one Robert Pascow had “led on a p[ar]tye of souldiers to lyne the Hedges against the Parliament forces.” Bennett cannot have relished the prospect of carrying out an assault against prepared positions, and he summoned the insurgents to surrender. Those within the town—buoyed up by the hope that their allies would at any moment fall upon Bennett’s back—refused to listen to his overtures: they were “very desperate, [and] would accept noe termes.”⁴² Bennett was left with no alternative but to attack and, shortly after noon, his soldiers “fell resolutely on.” According to John Moyle, a member of the parliamentarian county committee, the fighting at the barricades raged for some time, until “after neere two houres dispute, with the losse of only two of ours [killed], & four or five wounded, the enemies were totally scattered, [losing] about 60 or 70 slaine, some drowned [&] sixty taken.”⁴³ Routed, the surviving rebels took to their heels, many of them managing to elude their pursuers among the maze of ancient field-boundaries that still today surround Penzance.⁴⁴

It was a dangerous time to be abroad in West Penwith, and when Alexander Daniel (a resident of nearby Larigan, who had earlier been put under house-arrest by the rebels) attempted to ride into Penzance to congratulate Bennett on his victory he was confronted by “a bloody soldier, who held up his musket to knock me on the head.” Daniel somehow managed to escape unhurt, but his ordeal hints at the tidal wave of violence and disorder that now engulfed Penzance.⁴⁵ The town had been taken by storm, and was thus a legitimate target for plunder. The victorious soldiers set about the work with a will and had soon stripped the entire town. Reminiscing many years later, a trooper recalled that he had had “5 gallons of English coin, silver & gold, and pieces of Eight. .

⁴¹*A Letter*, p. 5.

⁴²FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 20; Buller, p. 105.

⁴³*Ibid.* Other sources give similar figures for casualties, but suggest that the fight was rather shorter. See E.522 (23), *Perfect Occurrences of Parliament*, 26 May to 3 June 1648; *A Letter*, p. 4; John Keast, *The Travels of Peter Mundy* (Truro, 1984), p. 85 and Cornish Record Office, Truro [hereafter cited as CRO], DD.EN 2469 (Daniel Mss), f. 50.

⁴⁴Buller, p. 105; and David H. Cullum, “Society and Economy in West Cornwall, 1588–1750”, 2 vols. (Ph.D thesis, University of Exeter, 1994), 1: 5.

⁴⁵CRO, DD, EN 2469, ff. 41, 50.

.measur’d out to him as his share.” One awestruck contemporary claimed that “the souldiers never had such plunder since they were souldiers,” adding that “the town is utterly undone.” Moyle confirmed this picture: “the towne. . .[is] exquisitely plundered,” he laconically informed a correspondent. Only Anthony Gubbs, who had been reprieved from almost certain death as a result of the parliamentary victory, had his house and goods spared.⁴⁶

While the soldiers pillaged, news arrived that fresh rebel forces were gathering near Helston. Alarmed, Bennett and Herle set about reassembling their scattered troops, but it was obvious that this would take time. Impatient of delay, an unnamed Helston man (who had ridden with Bennett to Penzance, and who subsequently composed the most detailed account of the 1648 rising) set off to reassure the townsfolk that help was on its way. Once arrived in Helston, he ordered bonfires to be lit and bells rung out for the victory at Penzance. On the face of it these demonstrations of public joy were purely celebratory, but there can be little doubt that they were primarily intended to hearten Parliament’s supporters, and to cast down the hearts of Helston’s pro-rebel faction. Nor was the impact of the measure limited to the town itself, for as the bells pealed out and the “feux de joie”—their flames visible for miles around—blazed up into the night-sky, those who were on the point of stirring in the surrounding countryside may well have had second thoughts. Certainly the district around Helston remained in a quavering quiet that night. But further to the south the rebels were gathering strength, and news soon reached the town that 120 insurgents were assembled in Mullion churchyard.⁴⁷

This intelligence put Helston’s parliamentary faction “in a pittifull fright,” as the anonymous chronicler later confessed. “We procured a watch,” he recalled, “and all that we durst trust. . .[in the town] were not above 20, and all the muskets were but 15, [so] the mayor, my selfe, and the rest of our magistrates, watched in person all night.”⁴⁸ Luckily for Helston’s trembling defenders, no attack materialised. At 5 o’clock next morning one Renald Loggett sent a letter to Herle from Helston, informing him of the rebels’ overnight movements. Instead of striking directly north, they had marched eastwards from Mullion to the town of St. Keverne, gathering up recruits as they went. “The country there aboute fales in to them,” Loggett reported, while “all the honest men in them p[ar]tes are inforced to fly.” As a result, the rebel force had grown very considerably during the night. “They are in number, as [is] coniectured, 4 or 5

⁴⁶British Library, Egerton Mss, 2657 (Borlase’s Parochial History of Cornwall), f.14; *A Letter*, pp. 5–6; Buller, p. 105; PRO, SP 23, 149, f.588.

⁴⁷*A Letter*, p. 5.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

hundred & well armed," Loggett went on, and "if you doe not make haste, it is doubtfull whe[ther] they do attempt the Dennis or not."⁴⁹

The possibility that the insurgents might try to capture this little fort (which had been built by the royalists in 1644, and subsequently provided with a small parliamentary garrison) had doubtless already occurred to Herle.⁵⁰ By the time Loggett penned his letter, the Sheriff's forces were already hurrying south. Meanwhile the insurrectionists themselves had begun to edge north. Towards noon on 23 May, word reached Helston "that there was a great body of rebels at Maugon Church Towne," two miles to the south. The rebel strength was now put at 300 foot and 40 horse, less than Loggett had feared, but still quite formidable enough to overwhelm the handful of pro-parliamentarians in Helston, who were "struck in amazement" by the news. Yet the town magistrates kept their nerve. By sending out horsemen to confuse the rebel scouts they managed to delay the advance of the main insurgent body until Herle could arrive. Towards six that evening Herle's Horse and Foot swept into Helston and almost at once moved out against the insurrectionists.⁵¹

The first skirmish took place at Mawgan Church, where the parliamentarians "charged on," killing several rebels. From here, they advanced to the insurgents' main position, which lay half a mile away "at Trevilian's Barn, on the top of the hill above Geare Bridge." Two accounts of the engagement that followed survive. The first was written by the anonymous Helston man, and is very brief: "our Horse and Foot fell on bravely," he wrote, "[and] routed them with the hurt only of one man."⁵² The second is that of the eighteenth-century historian Richard Polwhele and is based on an unknown source, almost certainly an oral tradition. Polwhele's account of the episode runs thus:

A number of men under the command of Mr Bogans of Treleage in St Keverne. . . had. . . posted themselves in a most advantageous position at Gear. . . with an apparent determination of defending that important pass. But the Parliament troops advancing, and showing themselves in much greater force than was expected, Major Bogans' men deserted him without coming to action. Some betook themselves to the Dinas, the greater part dispersed, and Major Bogans himself fled to Hilters Clift, in St Keverne, and concealed himself in a cave in the rocks.

The incident had never been forgotten in the vicinity, Polwhele added, and "is still remembered. . . by the name of the Gear Rout."⁵³

Obviously, Polwhele's account must be treated with caution. His claim that

⁴⁹FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 19.

⁵⁰For the previous history of "the Dennis," see Courtenay Vyvyan, "Defence of the Helford River, 1643-46" *Journal of the Royal Institute of Cornwall* 18, pt. 1 (1910): 62-102.

⁵¹*A Letter*, pp. 5-6.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵³R. Polwhele, *The History of Cornwall*, 6 vols. (1803-08, reprinted Dorking, 1978), 4: 101.

the rebels held the Dennis, and that the fort was later besieged by the parliamentarians, is not borne out by contemporary evidence. In this respect, at least, it seems likely that Polwhele’s informants had got the events of 1648 confused with those of 1646 (when the Dennis was indeed invested).⁵⁴ More generally, Polwhele’s account is convincing. His statement that the St. Kevern rebels were led by a local gentleman seems eminently plausible; his description of the engagement as a “rout” tallies with the account of the Helston chronicler, while his assertion that most of Bogans’ men fled without fighting is supported by Moyle’s comment that only “seaven or eight” rebels were killed at the Gear.⁵⁵ Polwhele’s description of how Bogans fled to St. Kevern also ties in neatly with other evidence. According to the Helston chronicler, the parliamentarians pursued the fleeing rebels throughout that night “unto St Keverne and all the south [parts],” killing and capturing many in the process. The troopers were unable to account for all the insurgents, however, for “some of the principall firebrands,” finding themselves trapped upon the sea-coast by the pursuing troopers, “were so desperate, that scorning mercy, they joyned hand in hand and violently ran themselves into the ocean, where they perished in the waters.”⁵⁶ Others again went to ground in the surrounding countryside, and were still said to be “lurking in ye cliffes and in Tinne pitts” a week later.⁵⁷ Polwhele’s statement that Bogans hid on the sea-coast near St. Keverne seems perfectly credible, therefore—especially as one of the other rebel leaders is known to have concealed himself in the same way.⁵⁸

The Gear Rout marked the end of the Cornish rising. Within hours, Hardress Waller rode into Truro and at once set about restoring order in the far West. On 24 May he wrote to Parliament, assuring MPs that the insurgents had been dispersed and some 200 prisoners taken. The task of interrogating the captured rebels had already begun, and five days later, the newly-appointed “Committee for Troubles” moved from Truro to Helston “for ye better inquiring. . .[into] the authours and causes of the Insurrection.”⁵⁹ As the few remaining rebel fugitives were either captured or made their escape, any residual threat to the parliamentary authorities disappeared, and the committee-men were able to pro-

⁵⁴Ibid; and Vyvyan, “Helford River,” pp. 67–68. See also Joshua Sprigge, *Anglia Rediviva: England’s Recovery* (1647), p. 231.

⁵⁵Polwhele, *History of Cornwall*, 4: 101; Buller, p. 105.

⁵⁶*A Letter*, p. 6; Bond, *Eschol*, p. 31.

⁵⁷Buller, p. 107.

⁵⁸John Walker, *An Attempt Towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy* (1714), p. 240.

⁵⁹Buller, pp. 103–06; CJ, 5, p. 576; John Rushworth, ed., *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State* (1721), 8: 1131; FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 20.

ceed with their investigations unhindered. The final part of this article will attempt to follow in the parliamentarians' footsteps, by identifying as many as possible of the insurgents and exploring the complex web of hopes, fears, and resentments that had prompted them to risk their lives upon so desperate a cast.

III

Mary Coate, the only previous historian to have examined the rising in any depth, was able to identify twelve men who had been involved in the insurrection: seven who had helped to plan it and five who had acted as rebel "captains." By drawing on a wide range of sources that Coate missed (most notably the Bennett papers, which include a set of interrogatories administered to rebel prisoners) it is possible to expand this list to fifty-eight, and to correct several mis-identifications. Names can now be ascribed to perhaps one in twenty of those who took part in the rising: a far higher proportion than usual for early modern rebellions. Included among these fifty-eight men were a servant, a butcher, two ministers, three soldiers, and no fewer than nineteen gentlemen. (The occupations of the others are unknown.) The prominence of gentlemen in the sample is interesting and proves that the rising was by no means a purely popular revolt, but should not be taken as evidence that the insurgent host was a mere rabble of gentility. In the wake of the rising the parliamentarians were obviously more anxious to identify the rebel leaders than anyone else, and as a result it is the gentry participants who emerge from the historical record with the greatest clarity.

What is intriguing about these gentlemen is not so much their social status as their political allegiance. Coate noted, accurately, that the chief plotters had been royalist sympathisers and that the insurgents at Penzance had been led by "some inferior royalist officers."⁶⁰ If anything, this underplayed the importance of militant Cavalierism in the rising. A thorough re-examination of the evidence reveals that almost all of the rebel leaders were ex-royalist officers. Thus, of the seven gentlemen-plotters identified by Herle before the rebellion began—John and Richard Arundell, Sir Arthur Basset, Robert Harris, Sir John Trelawney, Jonathan Trelawney, and Charles Trevanion—at least six had previously served as regimental commanders in Charles I's army.⁶¹ Those who commanded the rebel forces on the ground were also ex-royalist officers, though of a slightly lower rank. Hannibal Bogans, the leader of the insurgents at the

⁶⁰Coate, *Cornwall*, pp. 238–39.

⁶¹Buller, p. 102. For the previous military careers of the two Arundells, Basset, Harris, Jonathan Trelawney and Trevanion, see P. R. Newman, *Royalist Officers in England and Wales, 1642–60* (1981), pp. 6–7, 18, 177, 376, 377.

Gear, was a former royalist major.⁶² So was Christopher Grosse of St. Buryan, later acknowledged to have been “chief. . .in the insurrection at Penzance.”⁶³ Grosse’s six main confederates—Robert Coleman, “Mr Jones,” William Kiegwin, Martin Maddern, Thomas Pike, and “Mr Tresillian”—had all served as royalist majors or captains.⁶⁴ So had another of those implicated in the rising, Neville Blight of Carnedon, while the “Captaine Pendarvys” who was arrested near Penryn on suspicion of having been with the rebels in Penzance was probably William Pendarves of Roscrow, yet another ex-royalist officer.⁶⁵

Robert Ashton’s conclusion that “the leadership of the English risings of the Second Civil War was overwhelmingly Cavalier” is thus strongly borne out by the evidence from Cornwall: indeed, the Cornish rebel leaders would appear to have been even more overwhelmingly Cavalier than were their counterparts elsewhere!⁶⁶ Of all the rebel “captains,” only two are not known to have served in the army of Charles I: an obscure individual named “Glover” who helped to command the Lizard insurgents⁶⁷, and Thomas Flavell, Vicar of Mullion, who—following in the footsteps of an earlier generation of West Cornish rebel clerics—put himself at the head of his parishioners and led them into battle. Flavell (whose participation in the rising has gone unnoted by past scholars) was clearly a remarkable man. A renowned exorcist and layer of ghosts, his own shade is said to have troubled the parish of Mullion long after his death. As late as the nineteenth-century, the spot where his spectre had finally been laid to rest was still pointed out to the curious: some measure, perhaps, of the local reputation that Flavell had enjoyed during his life-time.⁶⁸

⁶²For Bogans, see Polwhele, *Cornwall*, p. 101; M. A. E. Green, ed., *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents, 1643–60*, 5 vols. (1882–92), [hereafter cited as CCC], 4: 2549; and Vyvyan, “Helford River,” p. 80.

⁶³For Christopher Grosse, see Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, 8: 1306; Coate, *Cornwall*, p. 239 (this account confuses Christopher with his father, Thomas); FSL, Bennett Mss, numbers 20, 28 and 45; Buller, pp. 104–07; British Library, Harleian Mss, 6804, ff.197–98; and CCC, 1, p. 487 and 4, p. 2980.

⁶⁴For these individuals, see *A Letter*, p. 3; FSL, Bennett Mss, numbers 20–21; Buller, pp. 104, 107; Whetter, “Gubbs,” pp. 162–63; and CCC, 2: 1935 and 4: 2866.

⁶⁵For Blight, see Buller, p. 104; CCC, 4, p. 2731; and Stuart Reid, *Officers and Regiments of the Royalist Army* (Leigh on Sea, n.d.), p. 47. For Pendarves, see FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 21; CCC, 2, p. 1327; and Reid, *Officers*, p. 3.

⁶⁶Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 477. See also Lyndon, “Essex,” pp. 26–28.

⁶⁷For Glover, see FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 19; and Keast, *Peter Mundy*, p. 85.

⁶⁸For Flavell, see FSL, Bennett Mss, no.19; Walker, *Sufferings of the Clergy*, pp. 240–41; M. A. Courtney, *Folklore and Legends of Cornwall* (Exeter, 1989), pp. 95–96; and E. G. Harvey, *Mullyon: Its History, Scenery and Antiquities* (Truro, 1875), p. 6.

For the purposes of the present discussion, Flavell's most important attribute was not so much his aptitude with bell, book and candle as his stout royalism. Described by Walker as "a man of singular Courage and Boldness," he was a thorn in the side of Interregnum governments, and is said to have "vowed never to shave off his beard until the return of his Majesty to his Kingdoms."⁶⁹ There can be little doubt that this hirsute warrior-priest was at least as much of a Cavalier as were the other rebel leaders. As one would expect, far less evidence survives about the rank and file, but there are clear hints that, in Cornwall (as in many other places) ex-royalist soldiers formed the core of the rebel forces in 1648.⁷⁰ John Pierce, leader of the Helston malcontents, had been a sergeant to the royalist Colonel Collins.⁷¹ A rebel scout named Calenso killed at St. Mawgan may well be identifiable with one of the two men of the same name listed in the royalist garrison at the Dennis in 1644. Thomas Chirwin, Roger Ellys, and Thomas Nighton—all middle-ranking rebels in Penzance—are known to have been "chiefe actors" for the king in 1642–46. And many of those who rallied to Hannibal Bogans in 1648 must surely have served under him four years before, when he had commanded the royalist militia of St. Keverne.⁷²

The picture that begins to emerge, therefore, is of a rising of ex-royalist officers and soldiers, run along military lines and orchestrated from the top. Moyle spoke of a pre-arranged "designe," or plot, "universall in our County, [and] long transacted at Trerise [the home of the ultra-loyal Arundell family] and elsewhere," while Gubbs blamed the rebellion on months of pre-planning by former royalists.⁷³ But the insurrection could never have attained the proportions it did without the support of the West Cornish countryfolk. Contemporary testimony makes it clear that the inhabitants of West Penwith and the Lizard peninsula rallied to the insurgents en masse. The 300–500 men who gathered at Penzance and the 300–400 who came in from around St. Keverne represented a large proportion of the adult male population of those two districts—and the insurgents had many well-wishers in Helston and St. Ives as well. It is clear that the rebellion attracted support from across the spectrum of West Cornish society,

⁶⁹Walker, *Sufferings of the Clergy*, pp. 240–41.

⁷⁰For the importance of royalist soldiers in the disturbances elsewhere, see Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, pp. 348, 456, 464.

⁷¹For Pierce, see *A Letter*, p. 4; for Collins, see Newman, *Royalist Officers*, p. 78; and Mark Stoyle, "Sir Richard Grenville's Creatures: The New Cornish Tertia, 1644–46," *Cornish Studies* 4 (1996): 39.

⁷²Vyvyan, "Helford River," pp. 80, 74; *A Letter*, p. 6; PRO, SP 23, 149, f.587.

⁷³Buller, p. 104; PRO, SP 23, 149, ff.587–88.

and that in Cornwall, as in most other parts of the realm in 1648, the insurgent forces were made up of Cavaliers and countryfolk combined.⁷⁴

What were the rebels’ motives? The short-term causes of the insurrection are clear enough. First, the initial success of Poyer’s rebellion had fostered an atmosphere of growing anticipation among the local royalists and had encouraged them to hasten preparations for a revolt of their own. Second, Herle’s discovery of the royalist plot, and his subsequent drive to apprehend the conspirators, had made it plain to the Cornish Cavaliers that if they did not act quickly they would be prevented from acting at all. Third, rumours of trouble in Exeter—confirmed by Waller’s hasty departure for that city on 12 May—had aroused extravagant hopes that the “Key of the West” was about to come out in open rebellion against the Parliament.⁷⁵ Finally, the erection of a maypole—that most potent of royalist symbols⁷⁶—in Penzance on 15 May had provided an opportunity for discontented elements to gather, and was later said to have been “the occasion” of all the trouble which followed.⁷⁷ (In this respect, Penzance’s experience mirrored that of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, where the erection of a maypole had led to “a great combustion” a few days before.⁷⁸)

Far harder to pin down are the underlying causes of the insurrection. Unlike most other insurgent groups in 1648 the Cornish rebels did not issue a manifesto, and this helps to explain why previous scholars have been content to state that the rising was a “royalist” one, and to leave matters there.⁷⁹ That the over-riding aim of the Cavalier officers who led the rebellion was to restore the king to power need hardly be doubted. Yet, even among this group, other, less purely ideological motives can be discerned. The revolt of Major Grosse, for example, was explicable not only in terms of his zeal for the royal cause, but also of his resentment at Parliament’s failure to grant him and his men a gratuity, which they had been promised when they agreed to surrender the Isles of Scilly in 1646.⁸⁰ And matters are made more complicated by the fact that the Cornish rebel leaders (like many of their counterparts elsewhere) evidently strove to

⁷⁴See, for example, Everitt, *Kent*, p. 229; Lyndon, “Essex,” p. 29; and idem, “Second Civil War,” p. 400.

⁷⁵Bod., Tanner Mss. 57, f.127r.

⁷⁶See T. T. Lewis, ed., *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley* (Camden Society, Old Series, 58, 1854), p. 167; Keith Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (1997), p. 211; David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–60* (Oxford, 1985), p. 177.

⁷⁷*A Letter*, p. 5.

⁷⁸Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 376.

⁷⁹See, for example, Coate, *Cornwall*, p. 241; and Ian Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645–53* (Oxford, 1994), p. 246.

⁸⁰See Bod., Tanner Mss. 57, f.556.

conceal the true extent of their own “Cavalierism.”

Despite the lack of a written manifesto, some intriguing hints survive as to the sort of political program that the rebel leaders publically espoused. Shortly before the rising began Sheriff Herle reported that attempts were being made by royalist activists “to get hands to Poyer’s declaration” in Cornwall. This can only have been a reference to the manifesto that Poyer had issued in March, and the conspirators’ decision to adopt this document is revealing.⁸¹ As Ashton has observed, Poyer’s Declaration was “emphatically mainstream”; it displayed “an equal concern for the rights of the king and the privileges of Parliament.”⁸² By choosing to adopt this document, the Cornish rebel leaders sought to present themselves not so much as Cavalier intransigents as royalist moderates. Bearing this in mind, the fact that Grosse and Pike told a local man “thatt the service that they weare in was for King and Parliament” is intriguing.⁸³ The rebel leaders’ appropriation of this slogan—first used by supporters of Parliament in 1642—confirms that they wished to appeal to as wide a constituency as possible.

The Cavaliers’ use of the language of moderation may well have helped them to win over a handful of ex-parliamentarian soldiers. Among the rebels taken at Penzance were two men who had been “formerly employed in the Parliament service under. . . Captain Keates.” Keates’s company had been disbanded and paid off in 1647, so resentment over arrears seems unlikely to have been an issue in this case: possibly the two men had been genuinely convinced by the rebels’ arguments. But the only serving parliamentary soldier who is known to have deserted to the rebels did so primarily because he believed that the insurgents would pay his arrears; John Perne of Market Jew later confessed that “he went to the enemy att Penzance by the perswation” of others who told him “that he should have. . . [his] 2 moneths pay.”⁸⁴ Such illusory promises were made to soldiers all over the realm during 1648.⁸⁵

As well as appealing to the soldiers, the insurgents also capitalised on the resentment that existed against them. The Helston chronicler noted that, when the rebels first rose, “they pretended that they were threatned and wronged by the Mount soldiers, and took up armes to defend themselves, but this,” he added sceptically, “was a meer pretence.”⁸⁶ His cynicism may have been partially jus-

⁸¹See Buller, p. 102; Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 417; E.436 (14), *Colonel Powell and Colonel Poyers Letter*, 20 April 1648; and E.435 (9), *The Declaration of Colonel Poyer and Colonel Powell*, 10 April 1648.

⁸²Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 450.

⁸³FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 20.

⁸⁴Ibid.; and Bod., J. Walker Mss, C.10, f.9.

⁸⁵See Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 399; and Everitt, *Kent*, p. 260.

⁸⁶*A Letter*, p. 3.

tified, but there can be little doubt that in West Cornwall, as elsewhere, anti-military feeling was running high. In February a local man had made bitter complaint against his treatment by troopers, who had “threatned to cutt [his] throte except [he] should doe accordinge to there will.” A visitor to Penwith later claimed that it was the presence of the Mount soldiers that had first “made the country people to grumble,” while the fact that a Goldsithney man “violently strooke a souldier of the Mount” during the rebellion tends to confirm that there was genuine popular hostility towards the garrison.⁸⁷

Resentment against taxation was another major grievance that helped to propel many into the rebel camp; it was later reported that the insurgents had supposed “yt all the Land would have followed their example, and have risen against the Parliament. . .by reason of the greate burdens & taxes that were imposed on the people for the maintenance of the Army.”⁸⁸ Once the rebellion was underway, fear of punishment also proved an important incentive; Grosse warned his anxious listeners that “the party that did appose the Towne [of Penzance]. . .did intend to plunder & burne [it].”⁸⁹ In their desire to protect their homes and families, then, their hatred of taxation and their antipathy towards the soldiery, the Cornish rebels—like those who rose in many other parts of the kingdom during 1648—clearly shared a great deal in common with the Clubmen of 1645–46.⁹⁰ Yet, were there any peculiarly local factors at work?

Little evidence has emerged to suggest that there was anything distinctively “Cornish” about the rebellion of 1648; that the rebel bands that gathered at Penzance and St. Keverne were in any way different from the “ill-assorted bod[ies] of royalists. . .ex-supernumeraries. . .and local clubmen” that rose in other parts of the kingdom during the Second Civil War.⁹¹ The rebels possessed a similar agenda to insurgent groups elsewhere, they expressed the hope that sympathisers from other parts of the realm would join them, and they are said to have “imagined that what they there att Pensance did was ye sence of ye whole kingdome.”⁹² Nor were the rebels themselves exclusively Cornish: Flavell was originally from Somerset, while several of the other participants were Devonians. There was even a “Blackmoore” among the rebel host: Captain Pike’s

⁸⁷CRO, Arundell Mss, AM/15/153; John Taylor, *Wanderings to See the Wonders of the West* (1649), p. 17; and FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 21.

⁸⁸Buller, p. 103.

⁸⁹FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 20.

⁹⁰Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, pp. 225–26, 230; and Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex, 1600–1660* (1975), p. 273.

⁹¹Morrill, *Revolt of the Provinces*, p. 130.

⁹²Buller, p. 103.

man-servant, Martin, who was unfortunate enough to be captured in arms near Penzance.⁹³

It would not do to present the rebellion of May 1648 as an exclusively Cornish affair, therefore. But it should not be forgotten that the central government's relationship with Cornwall was quite exceptionally strained, even by the standards of 1648. Cornwall had been perhaps the most strongly royalist district in the entire kingdom during the First Civil War and thousands of Cornishmen had flocked to the king's banner, creating bitter resentment in the hearts of many English parliamentarians. Such feelings had lingered long after the war was over, and in 1647 it was seriously proposed that the Cornish should be forbidden to elect M.P.s to Westminster "until such time as it shall appear that their former Enmity and Rancour be laid aside."⁹⁴ This suggestion was not adopted, but there can be little doubt that the "foreign" parliamentary soldiers stationed in Cornwall after the war behaved with particular insensitivity towards their reluctant hosts.⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly, then, the Cornish remained notoriously hostile to parliamentary rule after 1646—and it seems probable that this hostility was most virulent of all in the far west of the county, where the ancient Cornish language and culture continued to cling on by its fingertips and local people nursed "a secret envy" against the English. I have argued elsewhere that the notorious rebelliousness of this region during the Tudor period was partially explicable in terms of its inhabitants' desire to defend the religious and cultural practices that served as the symbols of Cornish nationhood.⁹⁶ Did a concealed resentment against English cultural hegemony—accentuated in 1648 by the protestantising, centralising policies of the parliamentary regime—similarly contribute to the Cornish rising of the Second Civil War?

It is impossible to be sure, but the evidence is suggestive. We should note, first of all, the links that existed between the Cornish and the Welsh rebels in 1648. One contemporary claimed that the Cornish first rose "by example of the Welch," and it is fascinating to speculate as to exactly what ordinary Cornish (and, indeed, ordinary Welsh) rebels may have perceived the underlying aims of Poyer's rebellion to be.⁹⁷ Poyer's Declaration—which, as we have seen, the

⁹³E.445 (4), *The Desires of the County of Surrey*, 27 May 1648; Harvey, *Mullyon*, p. 29, and FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 21.

⁹⁴See M. J. Stoyle, "Pagans or Paragons? Images of the Cornish during the English Civil War," *English Historical Review* 111, 441 (April 1996); and Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 221.

⁹⁵BL, Add. Mss 33,420, (William Scawen's "Antiquities Cornu-brittanica"), f.123r.

⁹⁶Stoyle, "Pagans or Paragons," pp. 322–23; Mark Stoyle, "Cornish Rebellions, 1497–1648," *History Today* (May 1997); and Mark Stoyle, "The Dissidence of Despair: Rebellion and Identity in early modern Cornwall," *Journal of British Studies* 38, 4 (October 1999): 423–44.

⁹⁷E.522 (32), *A Perfect Diurnall*, 22–29 May 1648.

Cornish rebels adopted—was a royalist document, but it also spoke of the need to defend the Book of Common Prayer in Welsh, one of the most visible symbols of an English willingness to accept Welsh difference, while many, perhaps most, of his followers were Welsh-speakers.⁹⁸ Poyer’s multi-hued rebellion had a definite Celtic tinge to it, therefore, and it might not be going too far to suggest that in 1648 (as in 1642?) the West Cornish decision to rise for the king was partially prompted by a desire to join with their brethren across the Bristol Channel in defiance of the meddling English Parliament.

There are other hints that ethnic tensions helped to fuel the rebellion. First, the insurrection was entirely confined to that small area of Cornwall in which the old language was still spoken—“those western heathen partes” as John Moyle contemptuously referred to the districts around St. Keverne and Penzance.⁹⁹ Second, a number of the rebel leaders were former officers of Sir Richard Grenville: the royalist commander who had emerged as the champion of Cornish particularism during 1644–46.¹⁰⁰ Third, the parliamentary soldiers who defeated the rebels subsequently staged a victory parade through the streets of Penryn in which they carried, impaled upon the points of their swords, “three silver balls used in hurling.”¹⁰¹ Hurling, a wild type of handball, was looked upon as “a sport peculiar to Cornwall” during this period, so the significance of the soldiers’ action is obvious.¹⁰² The public violation of the hurling balls was a symbolic declaration of their triumph, not only over the insurrectionists, but over traditional Cornishness itself. Finally, it is worth noting that according to the testimony of one ex-rebel, the insurgents had been joined at Penzance by a butcher named “Curnowe.” Kernow is the Cornish-language name for Cornwall, and it is tempting to suggest that—like the John Somerset who led a Somerset Club rising in 1645 and the man named Christmas hurt in a riot in favour of yuletide festivities at Ipswich in 1647—Curnowe may have been particularly remarked upon because his name helped to symbolise the rebel cause.¹⁰³

The insurrection that shook the far west of Cornwall in May 1648 was a complex phenomenon. At first sight, it appears to have been a purely royalist rising: led by ex-royalist officers, supported by ex-royalist soldiers, and espous-

⁹⁸E.436 (14), *Colonel Powell and Colonel Poyers Letters*.

⁹⁹Buller, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰M. J. Stoye, “The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel: Sir Richard Grenville and Cornish Particularism 1644–46,” *Historical Research* 71, 174 (February 1998): 31–51.

¹⁰¹Keast, *Peter Mundy*, p. 85.

¹⁰²Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England*, 2 vols. (London, 1811), 1: 209.

¹⁰³FSL, Bennett Mss, no. 20; Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 241; and David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 91.

ing broadly royalist ideals. There are clear parallels here with the situation in Essex, where as the late Brian Lyndon has shown, the Second Civil War was above all a resumption of the conflict of 1642–46.¹⁰⁴ Yet within the main stream of recrudescing Cavalierism there were other important currents. It is probably no coincidence that, of all the risings that occurred in 1648, the one that the Cornish revolt most closely resembles is that which occurred in North Wales, for in both regions there lurked a visceral resentment against English overlordship, a resentment that could, from time to time, break forth into sudden violence.¹⁰⁵ The opposition to centralisation that existed in Cornwall and Wales was of a quite different order to that which existed in the shires of England, and the rebels' evident concern for "Cornishness" should not be taken as an uncomplicated manifestation of "county communitarianism." Popular hostility to soldiers, free-quarter, heavy taxation, and so forth certainly helped to fuel the West Cornish rebellion, but it was a combination of aggressive royalism and defensive "Celticity" that lay at its core—and, ironically, helped to seal its fate.

The defeat of the rebels can be attributed to many things; to Herle's watchfulness, to Gubbs's warnings, and to the speed with which local parliamentary commanders reacted. Yet, most serious of all was the insurrectionists' failure to reach out to potential allies. None of the Cornish garrisons came over to them, despite the manifest discontent among the soldiery, and this meant that the insurgents were denied a secure "place of retreat" of the kind that proved so vital to Poyer in Wales. Nor was any support forthcoming from Devon, even though resentment against taxation and free-quarter in that county was intense, and Plymouth and Exeter continued to defy Waller's orders. Not a single prominent ex-parliamentarian is known to have joined the rebels, in fact, in striking contrast to the situation elsewhere. It is tempting to conclude that, despite the best efforts of the rebel leaders, the public face of the May 1648 rising remained just too ultra-royalist and too ultra-Cornish to attract any widespread support beyond the Cornish-speaking heartlands of the far West—and that therein lay the chief reason for its failure.

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¹⁰⁴Lyndon, "Essex," pp. 18, 26–29.

¹⁰⁵Norman Tucker, *North Wales in the Civil War* (Wrexham, 1992), pp. 131–46; and Stoyle, *Loyalty and Locality*, pp. 238–40.