

# CAVALIERS AND ROUNDHEADS

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(A paper presented at the Historical Novel Society Conference 2017)

### INTRODUCTION

The Oxford dictionary defines passion as... 'An intense desire or enthusiasm for something'. The reason we are all here today in Portland, Oregon is because we share one thing in common – a passion for history. It is not enough to have a passion for history, if I were to ask any of you I am sure you would tell me that your passion is for a particular period of history, whether it is Tudor or Napoleonic or Edwardian.

My passion is the English Civil War and for that I have to thank my late father. He loved history, although, ironically, his passion was, in fact the American Civil War. Every Sunday afternoon he would read to my brother and I. Never children's books but books he loved. I must be the only child to have had the entire Longfellow's *Hiawatha* read to me in lieu of *Wind in the Willows*. When I was eight he chose *THE KING'S GENERAL* by Daphne du Maurier, which for those who may be familiar with this 1946 book is the fictional story of the very real and larger than life, Sir Richard Grenville. I was immediately transported to a time where real men had long hair and lace collars and very large swords but it was more than that. What du Maurier instilled in me was a fascination for the trauma, drama and life and death struggle of a country at war with itself. The English Civil War.

There have been many civil wars across the aeons. England itself was riven many times over as Matilda fought Stephen and the Plantagenets fought the Tudors, but the conflict of the mid seventeenth century, the battle between the King and his Parliament was to change forever the whole system of government on which England, America and my own, Australia is based. It was more than just a civil war, it was a revolution.

What distinguishes a revolution? It can be (to quote the OD again) 'A forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system' or 'A dramatic and wide-reaching change in conditions, attitudes, or operation'. You saw it here in America in the eighteenth century, in France, in Russia in China but before any of these revolutions there was the English revolution.

My intention today is to introduce you to this little known or understood period of history and because this is the Historical NOVEL Society conference, not an academic conference, to take a few minutes to look at where this period of history now sits in modern fiction writing.

I know I promised you light and entertaining and I apologise in advance for the first part of this talk. You cannot look at one event in isolation. To understand the English Civil War, you really do need to understand the two centuries of political and religious unrest that led to it.

### BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT

No conflict of this kind starts in isolation and to understand what brought England to war with itself we firstly need to look at the situation in Europe which begins with the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century which became a very real and present danger to the supremacy of the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. By the early 1600s this bubbled into war between Protestant powers and the Catholic powers, with the ever-present threat of the Ottoman Empire to the south and east. The 30 Years War covers the period from 1618 to the late 1640s.

To try and explain the ins and outs of the Thirty years war would take the rest of the day. England sat on the edge of this conflict but was not uninvolved. James I's daughter, Mary had married the Elector of Palatine who was to become the Winter King, the Protestant ruler of the Holy Roman Empire for one short winter. This brought the English into the war and while direct English involvement was limited, many, many of the men whose names became synonymous with the English Civil War learned their trade on the bloody battlefields of Europe.

While Europe tore itself apart (It is estimated that the population of Germany by 15-30% with some parts - such as Westphalia- losing 75% of its population to disease and famine), the protestant King James VI of Scotland took the throne of England.

James and his Danish queen, had two sons, the older, Henry died while young leaving the younger son, Charles, a shy young man with a pronounced stammer, to succeed him as King Charles I of England. Their daughter, Mary, as I have already stated married the Elector of Palatine.

The character of Charles I has been much debated and discussed. My own conclusion is that Charles was never raised to be King. He was a sensitive, insecure man and like a lot of insecure men he had a strong stubborn streak and placed a great reliance on advisors and also on what he saw as the 'divine right of Kings', a subject his father believed in and wrote about. This doctrine asserts that kingship is given by God and is therefore not subject to any earthly authority, such as a Parliament. It therefore follows that to rebel against your King is to sin against God and at the end of the day only God can judge a King. This was a doctrine common to monarchs across Europe, notably Louis XIV and would be the downfall of Louis's descendant Louis XVI.

Charles came to the throne in 1625 but the seeds of discontent between monarch and parliament had already been sown. In 1624 James had gone cap in hand to Parliament looking for money to fund war against Spain. Strongly influenced by his friend the Duke of Buckingham, Charles supported the impeachment of the Lord Treasurer, a move his father presciently warned him would lead to trouble.

In 1628 Charles married the French princess, Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII. Henrietta was Catholic and viewed with enormous distrust in an England that still remembered the persecutions of Mary Tudor. While Charles publicly declared that marriage to a Catholic would in no way lead to the relaxing of any restrictions on the practice of the Catholic faith in England, privately he had already agreed to do this in a secret treaty with his brother in law.

Now Charles was King the pernicious influence of Buckingham became more pronounced, provoking Parliament to formally call for his removal. Charles refused and in 1628 Buckingham was assassinated, leaving a void that was soon to be filled by a very different, but equally influential, personality Thomas Wentworth, the first Earl of Stafford.

In 1629, he found himself once more thwarted by his Parliament. He dissolved Parliament and ruled alone, imposing taxes on an increasingly unwilling and unhappy population by way of archaic taxes and customary rights and prerogatives such as the imposition of Ship Money.

While Charles was influenced on the secular side by Stafford, on the religious side, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, was introducing 'high church concepts' such as alter adornments, alter rails and other practices seen by the general population as 'popish' in origin. Opponents of the new religious practices were persecuted, pilloried and whipped. Adherents to strict concepts of the protestant faith began taking ship for America, particularly New England where the Mayflower had landed in 1620.

Trouble came when Charles sought to introduce the new religious practices into Calvinist Scotland. Charles interpreted the growing unrest as outright rebellion and in 1638 he raised an inadequate army and marched across the border. An uneasy truce was called without bloodshed, but Charles needed money not only to bolster his own forces but also to support his brother in law in his struggles against Spain in the ongoing 30 Years War.

In 1640 Charles had no choice but to call Parliament to vote him the funds he needed. While initially voting him some money, Parliament took advantage of its regained voice and began calling for reform. Less than a month after it was called, Charles once more dissolved parliament and found himself facing full scale war with Scotland. Resoundingly defeated by the better disciplined Scots Army, once more Charles was placed in, as he saw it, the invidious position of having to go cap in hand to Parliament.

The long parliament (as it came to be called) assembled in November 1640 and this time wasted no time in asserting its authority, beginning with passing an Act that mandated that Parliament had to be summoned every three years. As all good politicians do, this would annexed to a subsidy bill so Charles had no choice but to sign it.

Assured of its continuity, Parliament then took the step of impeaching the Earl of Stafford for high treason on the grounds that he had threatened to bring in Irish troops. The bill of attainder, of course, required royal assent and Charles refused. Ireland rebelled and London seethed with unrest, fuelled by pamphleteers outlining atrocities in Ireland, and fearing for the safety of his family, Charles sentenced his friend to death.

With Stafford dead and assured of its power, Parliament passed what it known as THE GRAND REMONSTRANCE, outlining all of its complaints against Charles. While the bill itself did not go anywhere, moves began to impeach the Queen for suspected complicity in the Irish Rebellion. Outraged, Charles demanded that Parliament give up five of its members – Pym, Hampden, Haselrigge, Hollis and Strode. When they refused he went personally to Parliament to arrest them. Without invitation he strode into the debating chamber, assumed the Speaker's chair and demanded the arrest of the 5 members. They had, of course, been tipped off and fled and the King was forced to retire empty handed. It is a consequence of this action that no monarch of England or their representative may enter Parliament without express invitation.

This single action is probably the one precipitating act for the war that followed. With his position in London now severely undermined and London in virtual anarchy, the King and his family fled, never to return until his trial 7 years later. He went north to Hull hoping to garner support in the loyal north. The governor shut the gates on him.

Supporters of the King and supporters of the Parliament could see that the only solution would be armed conflict and began to raise and arm the militia. On 22 August 1642 the King raised his standard at Nottingham. The wind promptly blew it down again but the act was symbolic. War had begun.

## **THE WAR BEGINS**

Like all civil wars choices had to be made. Men wrestled with their consciences – to take up arms against the lawful King of England went against the very DNA of many Englishmen. Brothers would fight brothers, fathers their sons and women would be torn between them, forced to defend their own homes in many instances.

If you were to put them side by side it would be hard to tell one side from another. It is too simplistic to say on the one side there were the cavaliers (those who remember the Sellers and Yeatman book 1066 And All That will recall they are described as 'Wrong but Wromantic') and the roundheads (described by S and Y as 'Right but Repulsive'). There were peers and gentry, hardened soldiers and field hands on both sides. Men who only a few months ago had sat down together and called each other friend. Unlike the American Civil War, there was not a clear divide of north and south. It was neighbour and neighbour.

There was no overall commander of either Army. Nominally commanding the army for Parliament was the Earl of Essex <slide>, but individual commanders such as Waller in the South, the Earl of Manchester in the East and Lord Fairfax in the north, operated independently.

While the King, now based in headquarters in Oxford, commanded those forces loyal to him, he was heavily reliant on experienced soldiers such as his dashing nephew, son of the Elector of Palatine, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, the Earl of Newcastle in the North. The King was cursed by commanders who knew nothing of soldiery, such as George Lord Digby.

On 22 October 1642 two armies faced each other in the lee of a bluff known as Edgehill in Warwickshire and here I am going to change pace. Rather than bore you with a recitation of battles and manoeuvres I would like to tell the story of the Civil War through some of the individuals impacted by it. After all fiction is about people and relationships – the movements of armies and the machinations of negotiations and intrigues are the background to the rich tapestry which we historical novelists draw on for our inspiration.

At the battle of Edgehill, Sir Jacob Astley was one of the few on the field with a lifetime of military experience. At the age of 63 he had served two kings and had seen fighting in Germany. He would die in the King's service. Addressing his troops in the minutes before the commencement of the battle, he gathered his troops and prayed: "*O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not forget me.*" which he followed promptly with the order "*March on, boys!*"

On the Parliamentary side, a dour, puritan farmer from the fens of Cambridgeshire wrote to his cousin, John Hampden: "*Your troopers are most of them old decayed serving men and tapsters; and their [the Royalists] troopers are gentlemen's sons, younger sons and persons of quality....*" The name of that colonel was Oliver Cromwell.

Prince Rupert, the dashing commander of the King's cavalry, wiped one whole flank of the parliamentary forces off the field. As effective as Rupert's shock tactics were, once his cavalry had left the field, they were very hard to restore to battle. Later parliament's Cromwell noted this and developed a different form of cavalry charge... advancing at the trot, knee to knee.

On a hill above the battlefield, Sir William Harvey, the court physician sat with the young Prince Charles. It was the study of battlefield victims that assisted Harvey in his study of the circulation of blood.

At the end of the day, neither side had really prevailed. In one of those 'what if' moments, the King hesitated. If he had exploited his advantage and pushed on for London, the war might have been over, but he dithered and the moment passed.

And in the midst of this carnage and social disruption a baby was born on Christmas Day... No, not the obvious (!)... a difficult baby who was to become a difficult man...Sir Isaac Newton.

1643 saw a year of changing fortunes. In the greater part the King prevailed.

In January, Queen Henrietta Maria, who had fled to France with the crown jewels to purchase men and arms, landed under bombardment in Yorkshire. Forced to shelter in a ditch, the redoubtable little Queen went out under fire to rescue her pet dog.

In royalist Herefordshire, Brilliana Harley held her husband's castle, Brampton Bryan for 3 months against the besieging forces of Parliament. With her husband in London, she wrote to her son, serving with Parliament ... *Now they say, they will drive me out of my house. They have taken away all your fathers rents, and they say they will drive away the cattle, and then I shall have nothing to live upon; for all their aim is to force me to let those men I have go, that then they might seize upon my house and cut our throats by a few rouges, and then say, they knew not who did it; ... They have used all means to leave me no man in my house, and tell me, that then I shall be safe; but I have no cause to trust them*

After surviving the siege, Brilliana died of a respiratory infection in October that year.

In the north, the Parliamentary forces faced terrible hardship. Sir Thomas Fairfax, son of Lord Fairfax (my personal pin up boy), was accompanied on campaign by his wife and daughter. Lady Anne Fairfax, the daughter of a veteran of the Continental wars was a tough cookie. Anne was captured by Lord Newcastle as the parliamentary forces broke out of the besieged town of Bradford. Despite being wounded and pursued by royalists, Fairfax conveyed his small daughter to Hull. Lord Newcastle returned Fairfax's wife in his own carriage, a noble gesture. It is said that Newcastle had been visited by a ghost – a white lady, who wrung her hands and called on him to 'Pity poor Bradford.' Whatever the reason, Newcastle did not wreak revenge on the stubborn little cloth town.

Another redoubtable woman of the north was the Countess of Derby, Charlotte de La Tremouille. Like Brilliana she held the family home, Lathom House against the Parliamentary forces. She endured two major sieges and earned herself the nickname 'Babylon'.

One tragic story is that of Lucius Carey, Viscount Falkland. He had been by the King's side as the country fell into war and despite fighting bravely for his monarch, he saw the war as a consequence of fatal flaws in the King's character. In September 1643 on the eve of the battle of Newbury he told his friends "he was weary of the times and foresaw much misery to his own Country and did believe he should be out of it ere night." The following day he rode straight at hedge lined with parliamentary musket and was killed outright.

The end of 1643 saw both armies wearied by war and pretty much at a stalemate but in early 1644 the fortunes of war began to turn against the King and by June of that year, York was under siege. The King despatched Rupert to raise the siege and the two forces met on Marston Moor just to the west of York.

All day both sides stood and watched each other and only as Rupert had decided to sit down for dinner did battle commence, the only thing distinguishing one side from the other were the white favours the parliamentary forces affixed to hats and helmets. It was a bitter fight through the dark and rain. Fairfax, finding himself wounded and isolated, tore the favour from his helmet and made his way through the fighting to enlist Cromwell's aid. Lord Newcastle's personal troops, known as Newcastle's lambs for the white coats they wore, made a last stand and to a man they died.

The parliamentary victory broke the hold on the north and Rupert returned to Oxford and his enraged uncle. Rupert himself mourned the loss of his dog, a poodle called Boy, whom he had trained to perform certain insulting acts when the name of one parliamentary leader was named. Boy has been named as the first official British Army dog.

The Parliamentary forces underwent a massive restructure. Parliament passed an Act removing all members of parliament from active command, with a small exception for one Colonel Cromwell. Sir Thomas Fairfax was named as the overall commander of what was called the New Model Army and the first professionally organised and united armed force in Britain came into being.

At the battle of Naseby in June 1645 the new force defeated the King's forces in a few short hours, breaking the King's cause irrevocably. The next few months were spent in cleaning up the last pockets of resistance in the west and by 1646 the war was effectively over. The King escaped north to Scotland and in 1647 the Scots handed him over to the English (for a good payment) where, apart from an abortive attempt at escape, he remained in captivity.

A tragic footnote to history is the fate of Charles' children. Henrietta Maria had escaped to France, throwing herself on the mercy of her nephew Louis XIV. She had with her, her eldest son Charles, daughter Mary and the baby Henrietta (Minette who was to marry Louis' brother and die in tragic and suspicious circumstances). Left behind in England were Princess Elizabeth and Prince Henry and Prince James (later James II). In 1648 James escaped with the aid of an interesting and somewhat disreputable man, Colonel Bampfield who was later to act as a double agent. Elizabeth died in captivity in 1650. Henry was eventually reunited with his family but died young just before the restoration.

A second uprising in 1648, prompted by Charles' secret negotiations with the Scots, prompted Parliament to act. While Charles might well declare 'While I live, I hope.', Parliament were of the opinion that while he lived, England would never know peace.

## **TO KILL A KING**

On January 8 1649 A commission of 53 men was formed to try the King and his trial was conducted in the still extant Westminster Hall. One notable absentee from the men on the 'jury' was Sir Thomas Fairfax, the commander of the Army. His wife, the redoubtable Lady Anne is said to have called out 'He has more wit than to be here' when Fairfax's was called. John Bradshaw the president of the court, was so afraid for his life that he wore a steel hat.

Unsurprisingly the King refused to accept the jurisdiction of the court, maintaining that no earthly court could judge a God appointed King. None the less they did and sentenced him to die. The death warrant was signed by the commissioners, including two small twiglets on my family tree – Sir Michael Livesey and William Purefoy.

On the night before he was to die, Charles' two young children Henry aged 8 and Elizabeth 13 were brought to visit him. Conscious of the threat to his eldest son Charles' claim to the throne, the King warned his little son about being made a puppet king. The little boy replied "*I will be torn in pieces first.*" One can only imagine the poignancy of this farewell, particularly in the knowledge that Elizabeth would die within a couple of years, still a prisoner herself.

The public execution of a reigning monarch was unprecedented in English history and a large crowd gathered outside the Banqueting House in Whitehall to witness this shocking spectacle. On January 30, wearing extra shirts so as he would not shiver from cold and have people think he shivered from fear, this stubborn, proud man stepped out of the middle window on to a high scaffold where the executioner awaited him. With enormous dignity, he said "*I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown; where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in the world.*" With one blow from the axe, the King left the world.

Among the eye witnesses was a fifteen-year-old boy, playing truant from school – Samuel Pepys. He referred to the event many times in his later diaries. Philip Henry, a clergyman and diarist at the time, wrote a moan "as I never heard before and desire I may never hear again" rose from the assembled crowd. Men and women came forward to dip pieces of cloth into the King's blood. Charles had become a martyr. His body was hurriedly embalmed with the head reattached and on a dark, wintry night, his coffin was placed into the tomb of Henry VIII at Windsor. If you are a fan of the historical mysteries of C.S. Harris you will recognise that the later uncovering of his grave during the reign of the Prince Regent made for a gripping story.

In France, the young Prince Charles II had tried everything to save his father including presenting a blank sheet of paper with his signature, begging the generals to name their terms (although that might be a story!). News did not reach him until 5 February when his chaplain entered his room and began... 'Your Majesty...'. No other words were needed. His revenge on those who had signed his father's death warrant would be relentless and brutal.

### **THE INTERREGNUM**

Thus began the 'Interregnum' (literally 'between reigns'). Without a King, how was England to be governed?

A Council of State was established comprised of many of the men who had actively participated in the execution of the King, with a depleted Parliament, known as the Rump Parliament, acting as the legislature. In various forms this would be the main arm of government for the next eleven years.

The young King Charles II was not the man his father had been. He had a much better grasp on politics and the need to occasionally dissemble. By virtually agreeing to whatever terms the Scots threw at him, he enlisted their loyalty and in June 1650 landed in Scotland, determined to take back his throne by force.

Fairfax resigned his command of the army and it was Oliver Cromwell who led his hardened forces into Scotland. Against superior numbers he beat the Scots at the battle of Dunbar on 3 September 1650. Poor Charles, so fed up with his Scottish hosts, could do nothing except throw his hat in the air.

The following year, Charles made a play for England hoping that the English royalists would flock once again to his banner. But England was tired of war and his adherents lacked the resources or the energy to lend him the support he needed. With his Scottish Army he marched southwards, followed by Cromwell who caught up with him at Worcester. Exactly a year after Dunbar, the King's forces were resoundingly beaten, a victory Cromwell called his 'Crowning Mercy'.

And this is where the seeds of great fiction are sown. The royalists became hunted men, desperately trying to flee England to the safety of the continent. Those taken prisoner were doomed to slavery in the plantations of the West Indies or Virginia. And the biggest prize of all was the person of the King himself described in his 'Wanted' posters as a dark man almost 2 yards tall, his height and swarthy looks making him immediately distinctive. In a boy's own adventure involving disguises, near misses, hiding in oak trees, and priest holes, it took Charles (with the help of some very loyal supporters) six weeks to escape England. Of course, like his great nephew Bonnie Prince Charlie, there was a lovely young woman on hand to help him on his way. Disguised as Jane Lane's servant, William Jackson, they traversed England at one point accompanied by the king's loyal friend, Wilmot, whose idea of a disguise was to ride with a hawk on his wrist. It is unsurprising that this adventure has been the subject of many works of fiction.

In a small footnote (no pun intended), his experience in being forced into footwear made for a smaller man, gave Charles a shoe fetish for the rest of his life.

With the King back in France and England ruled by the Council of State, what was life in England like during this time. It is absolutely true that the Council of State ruled with a rod of iron. The observance of religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter were banned as was dancing, theatre and public performance of music. Although it is little known that it was also a period of surprising religious tolerance.

*"I will tell you the truth", Cromwell told Parliament in 1656, "that that which hath been our practice ... hath been to let this nation see that whatever pretensions be to religion, if quiet, peaceable, [they may enjoy] conscience and liberty to themselves, [so long as they do] not make religion a pretence for arms and blood. Truly we have suffered them, and that cheerfully ... to enjoy their own liberties ... be they those under Baptism, be they those of the Independent judgement simply, and of the Presbyterian judgement, in the name of God, encourage them".*

The tolerance even extended to a certain extent to Catholics and Episcopalians but political rather than religious reasons limited the activities. Quakers were not tolerated. In 1656 Jews were readmitted to England for the first time since the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In Bedford, a young preacher called John Bunyan, had complete freedom to preach his non-conformist views. These same views would see him imprisoned for twelve years after the return of the monarchy.

With no actual enemy to fight, the men of parliament began to feud among themselves and Oliver Cromwell, losing patience with the lot of them, forcibly dissolved parliament, reportedly snatching up the Mace with orders to 'take this bauble away'.

The constitutional void was filled with the appointment of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector for life. In effect the English had returned a King to the throne, albeit it one with a different name (although some years later Cromwell was offered, and refused, the Crown).

For the supporters of the losing side, life was grim. Royalist estates were sequestered or suffered such heavy fines the owners were forced to sell. With many heads of families in exile, wives and children were forced to keep estates going as best they could.

Of course, we know that this period of history was to end in 1660 but if you had been a royalist in 1653, the future looked very bleak and it is hardly surprising that little knots of disaffected royalists began plotting for the return of the King. Some, like the romantically named, Sealed Knot carried the King's permission, others did not and 1653 is marked by a number of ludicrous and inane plots to return to the King, all of which were foiled with ease by Cromwell's spy master John Thurloe, a former lawyer of whom, even Richard Cromwell remarked... 'He has the key to open wicked men's hearts.' Double agents abounded and included in their number the infamous Colonel Bampfield who only a few years earlier rescued Prince James.

The French sent Baron de Baas to England as an envoy from Cardinal Mazarin. De Baas was the brother of a certain D'Artagnan of Musketeers fame. He did not go down well at the Protector's court, complaining that the English soldiers were so feeble, they wore nightcaps under their helmets. He refused to remove his hat in Cromwell's presence, a gross insult to a head of state.

It is small wonder I had such fun with these characters in my own book [THE KING'S MAN](#).



While some royalists hung around alehouses plotting Cromwell's death, others took to the high toby as Highwayman. James Hind famously robbed the regicide John Bradshaw, while refusing to take money from royalists – a sort of latter day Robin Hood. Unfortunately, he was eventually caught and in 1652 was hanged, drawn and quartered.

In Yorkshire, the retired general, Sir Thomas Fairfax tended to his roses, while the young poet Andrew Marvell tutored his daughter Mary. Fairfax, too, turned his hand to poetry. He should have stuck with pruning roses. It is a mystery to me why Fairfax agreed to the marriage of his only and greatly beloved daughter to the Duke of Buckingham, the son of Charles I's great favourite who had been assassinated in 1628. One can only assume it was love, but Buckingham would never make her either a good husband or a happy marriage. Buckingham would become one of Charles II's inner circle and an archetypal Restoration rake.

## **THE RESTORATION**

A combination of recurring malaria and the 'stone' may have accounted for Cromwell's declining health and he died on 3 September 1658, the anniversary of his great victories at Dunbar and Worcester. He was succeeded by his son, Richard, but "Tumbledown Dick" was not the man his father had been and in 1660 at the behest of the Army (and particularly one General Monck), Charles II returned to the throne of England and England's brief experiment with republicanism was over.

If any of you have a military background you will be familiar with the parade inspection where a senior officer walks the lines of soldiers. This goes back to Charles II... he landed in England to be met by General Monck. Charles ordered an inspection of Monck's men, walking the line of soldiers and looking into their eyes to test their loyalty. One of the legacies of the English Civil War was the establishment of a regular standing army of which Monck's regiment would go on to become the Coldstream Guards.

I mentioned earlier that Charles exacted terrible revenge on the men who had murdered his father. Cromwell's body, along with his son in law Henry Ireton and that of Bradshaw were exhumed and symbolically hanged, drawn and quartered. Cromwell's severed head was displayed on a pike above Westminster Hall until it was blown down in a storm some twenty years later. The head bounced around from owner to owner for another two centuries before allegedly being interred in a secret location in Sussex College in Cambridge in 1960.

## **THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR IN MODERN FICTION**

Where does this period of history sit in the annals of modern historical fiction?

It's my opinion that until recently this has been a largely neglected period of history for fiction writers. In the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott had a crack at it and most people would have read *Children of the New Forest* by Marryat. In the early part of the twentieth century Georgette Heyer wrote *The Royal Escape* (her account of the escape of Charles II from Worcester) and of course du Maurier's iconic *The King's General*. As a teenager I scoured the library shelves for books by Nigel Tranter, Robert Neill and Rosemary Sutcliff. Barbara Softly was another popular author of YA novels set in this period. In the 1980s and 1990s Pamela Belle wrote her wonderful *Heron* and *Wintercombe* series (which I highly recommend and are currently being republished). A fortuitous skiing accident in 1993 set me on the path to writing my first book. I wrote the sort of book I liked to read – English Civil War, plenty of action, strong characters and a hopeful ever after.

But as a young writer clutching her first manuscript for the book that was to become *By the Sword*, the publishing world had no interest in anything outside the more popular periods such as the Tudors, the Regency or Scottish Highlands. As one publisher put it, 'if I can't put tartan on it, I'm not interested'. This was despite the fact that this manuscript had been long listed for the prestigious Catherine Cookson Fiction Award. Despite high praise for the story, the characters and the depth of historical research, it seemed no one was prepared to take on a story set in the English Civil War. Editors may have loved it but as we all know it is the marketing department that makes the decisions.

And it is at this point I thank God for the internet. Not only did I start to connect with other writers as passionate about the period as I was (a group of us formed a blog dedicated to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), but digital publishing opened up publishing opportunities that went beyond the bricks and mortar and offered the chance for stories with a difference to finally find a voice.

In the last 10 years in particular there has been an explosion of fiction set in this period and not just romantic fiction. If your taste is for action and adventure such as Cornwell's *Sharpe*, you can't go past Michael Arnold's *Stryker* series. Historical mystery series abound... Young Adult novels and historical romance in all its guises.

In compiling the list I have given you, I came across books and authors I had never heard of, and I assumed I knew most writers in this field. Well known names such as Bernard Cornwell (*A Crowning Mercy*) and Lindsey Davis have dipped toes into this period. Even Phillipa Gregory has announced a new series beginning in the English Civil War.

## CONCLUSION

So, there we are, a potted history of twenty of the most turbulent years of English History. What I have tried to show you is that behind the dry facts, real people lived their lives, each one providing a small snap shot that a good author can take and blend with fiction to make a thoroughly satisfying tale of adventure, mystery, battles and love. Whatever takes your fancy. '

Alison Stuart

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