

# Puritanism and Revolution

Christopher Hill was educated at St Peter's School, York, and at Balliol College, Oxford, where he received a 'first' in modern history in 1934. That year he was also made a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. In 1936 he was lecturer in modern history at University College, Cardiff, and two years later tutor in modern history at Balliol. During his war service he had a variety of posts: Field Security Police, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, Intelligence Corps and the Foreign Office. He returned to Oxford in 1945 and from 1958 until 1965 was university lecturer in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history. He was Ford Lecturer in English History in 1962. From 1965 to 1978 he was Master of Balliol College. After leaving Balliol he became a Professor at the Open University for a time but has now retired. In 1965 he was made D.Litt., Oxon. Dr Hill, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and of the British Academy, was a member of the editorial board of *Past and Present* (1952-68), and since 1961 of the Yale University Press edition of the Complete Prose of John Milton. He was made Hon.D.Litt., Hull, in 1966; of Sheffield in 1967; East Anglia in 1968; Glasgow in 1976; Exeter and Wales, 1979; Hon.LLD. Bristol in 1976; D. Univ., York in 1978 and of the Open University in 1982; and Hon. Dr Sorbonne Nouvelle in 1979. He is at present honorary visiting professor at the University of Warwick.

His publications include *The English Revolution* (1940), *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* (1947), *Economic Problems of the Church* (1956), *The Century of Revolution* (1961), *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964), *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1965), *Reformation to Industrial Revolution* (1967), *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (1970), *Antichrist in 17th Century England* (1971), *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), *Change and Continuity in 17th Century England* (1974), *Milton and the English Revolution* (1978), which won the Royal Society of Literature Award, *Some Intellectual Consequences of the English Revolution* (1980), *The World of the Muggletonians* (1983), *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (1984), *Writing and Revolution in 17th Century England* (1985), *Religion and Politics in 17th Century England* (1986), *People and Ideas in 17th Century England* (1986), *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People - John Bunyan and his Church* (1988), which won the W. H. Smith Literary Award, *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in 17th Century England* (1990) and *The English Bible and the 17th Century Revolution* (1993). He also contributed to *Rebels and their Causes*, a collection of essays to celebrate the seventy-fifth birthday of A. L. Morton. Dr Hill has travelled in Europe generally, in Japan and India and in the USA. He is married, with two children.

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CHRISTOPHER HILL

PURITANISM  
AND REVOLUTION

*Studies in Interpretation of the  
English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*



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PURITANISM AND REVOLUTION

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*For my former pupils,  
who taught me most*

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## Preface

These essays were originally written, independently, on various occasions between 1940 and 1958. Such unity as they have derives from their concern with the interpretation of what used to be called 'The Puritan Revolution'. The title of the book is intended to emphasize a double disability from which I believe English historians suffer in their approach to this revolution. First, few of us have any experience of revolutions. The British tradition since the seventeenth century has been almost entirely gradualist: revolutions are things we learn about from books. Secondly, most of us think that we do know all about Puritanism. But too often we are thinking – whether with conscious hostility or unconscious sympathy – not of Puritanism at all but of later nonconformity. They differ as much as vinegar does from wine. How many nineteenth-century nonconformists, for instance, would have agreed with Milton that a man may be a heretic in the truth? So we have to make a deliberate intellectual effort to open our minds to revolutionaries, and to clear them of erroneous prepossessions about Puritans. When we are dealing with men who were simultaneously Puritans and revolutionaries the task is doubly exacting. 'By God I have leapt over a wall, by God I have run through a troop, and by God I will go through this death, and He will make it easy to me.' The last words of Major-General Harrison are outside the experience of most of us in this country, though they might seem less strange to members of resistance movements during the late war.

The essays here collected have all, I believe, a bearing on the interpretation of the seventeenth-century revolution, of the ideas which helped to produce it and resulted from it, and of the relation between these ideas and economic and political events. Each essay tackles the problem from a different angle, though I believe they are united by a coherent approach. Their diversity may help to emphasize my conviction that the revolution was a complex event, understanding of which is hindered rather than helped by dwelling exclusively on one aspect of it, whether religious

or constitutional or economic or biographical. Men make movements and movements make men.

Most of the essays were substantially rewritten and expanded for this volume. Where I quote from seventeenth-century editions I have retained the original spelling and capitalization, but I have occasionally modernized punctuation and use of italics.

### *Postscript*

It comes as rather a shock to reread nearly forty years later what one wrote in the brash exuberance of early middle age. I think I agree with most of what I published in 1958, but I have gone on thinking and writing about Puritanism and Revolution ever since. The chapter headed 'Recent Interpretations of the Civil War' should now more properly read 'Interpretations which were current thirty-six years ago'. An article on 'Parliament and People in 17th Century England', republished in my *People and Ideas in 17th Century England* (1986), did something to update it thirteen years ago, but that is now dated too. Rather than attempt to rewrite these essays, I have given references on p. xi to later writings of mine bearing on the same subject.

But the last thing I would claim for any of these pieces is that they are definitive: they represent starting points from which later ideas developed. One conviction which I have not abandoned is that to look only at debates in Parliament or only at 'the county community' of the gentry is not the way to understand the seventeenth-century revolution. There were quite a lot of other people about who had to do the fighting and pay the taxes.

In quotations from seventeenth-century sources spelling, capitalization and punctuation have been modernized except in titles of books.

November 1994

Some of the questions discussed in this book are further considered in the following of my works:

**Chapter One: Recent Interpretations of the Civil War**

*The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (1961), Chapter 8.

*Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1965), Chapters II–V and Appendix.

*God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (1970), Chapters 8–10.

*The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1972), Chapter 8.

*The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (1984), Chapter Six, 3, and Chapter Ten, 3.

*Writing and Revolution in 17th Century England* (1985), Chapter 6.

*Religion and Politics in 17th Century England* (1986), Parts II and III, *passim*, Chapter 15.

*People and Ideas in 17th Century England* (1986), Chapters 1–3, 5.

*A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church* (1988), Chapters 11–13.

*A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in 17th Century England* (1990), Chapters 2–6, 10–11.

See also, *passim*, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964) and *The English Bible and the 17th Century Revolution* (1993).

**Chapter Five: The Agrarian Legislation of the Revolution**

*The Century of Revolution* (1961), Chapters 3, 9, 13, 17.

*Reformation to Industrial Revolution* (1967), Part II, Chapter 8, Part IV, Chapters 3 and 5.

Chapter Nine: Thomas Hobbes and the Revolution in Political Thought

*The World Turned Upside Down*, Chapter 17, and Appendix.

Chapter Ten: James Harrington and the People

*The Experience of Defeat*, Chapters 6 (4), 8 (2), 10 (5).

Chapter Thirteen: Society and Andrew Marvell

*The Experience of Defeat*, Chapter 8 (2).

*Writing and Revolution in 17th Century England*, Chapter 7.

*Religion and Politics in 17th Century England*, Chapter 13.

See also *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* and *The English Bible*, *passim*.

# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the notes:

<i>C.C.C.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents.</i>
<i>C.J.</i>	<i>Commons' Journals.</i>
<i>C.S.P. Col.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Colonial.</i>
<i>C.S.P. Dom.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic.</i>
<i>C.S.P. Venetian.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Venetian.</i>
<i>D.N.B.</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography.</i>
<i>Econ. H.R.</i>	<i>Economic History Review.</i>
<i>E.H.R.</i>	<i>English Historical Review.</i>
<i>L.J.</i>	<i>Lords' Journals.</i>
<i>H.M.C.</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission.</i>
<i>Trans. R.H.S.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society.</i>