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"Neutralism" in Worcestershire

Abstract

This article discusses the supposed "neutralism" of the county of Worcestershire in the 1640s and suggests that the reason it seemed to be neutral was because there were many different groups there that balanced each other, rather than a single, yet neutral force.

"NEUTRALISM" IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Margaret Bertram

Many local historians, such as Anthony Fletcher, Roger Howell and John Morrill, have labeled Worcestershire a "neutral" county in the conflict between Crown and Parliament during the 1640s. Fletcher cited the presence of the clubmen, a localist group, as representative of the lack of concern for national political sentiment. Howell and Morrill have further contended that conservative provincialism was of paramount concern, and thus both the King and Parliament found the local population "unreceptive" to their advances.⁵⁷⁷ One would therefore expect that the knights of the shire selected for the Long Parliament would be a reflection of this neutralist sentiment, yet the actual documents reflect a dramatic political fragmentation that had both local and national ties.

In 1640 there existed a substantial Catholic influence in the gentry leadership of Worcestershire, as exemplified by men such as Sir William Russell. One would expect this Catholic influence and conservative gentry sentiment to translate into the election of Royalist⁵⁷⁸ knights of the shire. However, the men elected in 1640 reflected neither the Royalist nor neutralist sentiment one may expect to find by reading other local histories. The election of MPs⁵⁷⁹ Humphrey Salway and John Wilde, two radical Puritan independents, to the Long Parliament in 1640 complicates the simplistic aforementioned hypotheses. Though Salway's victory was overwhelming, Wilde's election was far more contentious and raised numerous questions about the politics of the shire as well as the nation at large. Such questions, particularly those stemming from Wilde's case, contest the purported neutrality in Worcestershire and suggest that this perceived balance was simply the net outcome of many powerful and opposing forces. Therefore, this paper will give attention to the political factions of Worcester, their influence on the election of 1640, and the resultant implications for the characterization of Worcestershire's political climate, with a particular focus on Wilde's surprising radicalism.

Worcestershire lies at the center of England and was considered a "corridor county" for royalist and parliamentary forces alike.⁵⁸⁰ Yet Fletcher and Morrill have suggested that the county took a surprisingly inward focus that can be best illustrated by the existence of the "clubmen." Fletcher maintained that in 1642, the "predominant mood was localist: men were concerned above all for their lives, their property and the security of their immediate communities."⁵⁸¹ As such, the clubmen organization, which also existed in other western midland counties, sought to maintain the status quo to ensure stability and peace within their county.⁵⁸² Morrill characterized the clubmen as individuals who were "concerned to protect those traditional rights and generalized notions of liberty" and, thus, emerged as the true champions of a "fully developed provincialism and conservatism."⁵⁸³ Because the objective of

⁵⁷⁷ Roger Howell, "Neutralism, Conservatism and Political Alignment in the English Revolution: The Case of the Towns, 1642-9," in *Reactions*, ed. Morrill, 72.

⁵⁷⁸ The term Royalist refers to those who supported King Charles I and the idea of a British monarchy

⁵⁷⁹ The word MP is an abbreviation for Members of Parliament, or those who serve in the British Parliament

⁵⁸⁰ Ronald Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 98.

⁵⁸¹ Anthony Fletcher, "The Coming of War," in *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649*, ed. John Morrill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 31.

⁵⁸² John Morrill, *Revolt in the Provinces: The People of England and the Tragedies of War, 1630-1648* (London: Longman, 1999), 133.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

the clubmen was to neutralize conflict, they had to direct their efforts against Royalist occupiers in the early 1640s.

On the other hand, this in no way made the clubmen parliamentary supporters. Seeing the parliamentary cause as divisive and radical, their campaign “was intended to ‘tame’ the royalists, force them to respect the wishes of the inhabitants and restore local civilian control.”⁵⁸⁴ Thus, “Both parliamentarians and Royalists found Worcester initially unreceptive to their advances,” according to Howell, who drew largely on Royalist and Worcestershire resident Henry Townshend’s contemporary diaries.⁵⁸⁵ Philip Styles likewise contended that when thinking about Worcester at this time, one should think “in terms less of embattled and coherent sides than of response to swiftly changing circumstances.”⁵⁸⁶ However, these arguments seem incomplete when one considers the predominantly Catholic and Royalist gentry was controlled the county at this time.

By the 1640s, Worcestershire had a long tradition of Catholicism among its gentry. As Jan Broadway pointed out, Catholic gentry were not allowed to hold many of the local offices, but they maintained close kinship ties with powerful protestant counterparts who allowed them to influence local politics.⁵⁸⁷ Leading Catholic gentry in Worcestershire were cited by C.D. Gilbert as “activists” who “not merely...fought in the King’s armies but...actively promoted the royalist war effort.” Though the Catholics had suffered from recusancy fines, loss of property, and suspicion, most were attracted to the Royalist cause because of Parliament’s contemporary reputation for Puritanism. Sir William Russell, a prominent Worcester Catholic, was one such man. The people of Worcestershire elected Russell as governor of the city and Sheriff of the county during the Royalist occupation from November 1642 to December 1643.⁵⁸⁸ That the occupying Royalist forces should choose a Catholic gentleman for such high offices in the shire was clearly antagonistic to anyone harboring Puritan sympathies, whether he supported Parliament or not, and probably mobilized parties resentful of the power of Catholic gentry such as Russell.

This resentment may have stalled Royalist support at first, but by August 1642 the gentry of the county “had been swung firmly behind the king’s cause” by executing the much-disputed Commission of Array.⁵⁸⁹ The Commission “empowered recipients to raise the armed men of their country for the King and imprison his opponents.”⁵⁹⁰ Members of the gentry, even its Catholic members, served as commissioners and raised troops and horses for the Royalist cause. By March 1643, “the Royalist commissioners of array there formalised their proceedings and met regularly, as a committee of safety.”⁵⁹¹ What is more, the gentry of the Grand Jury renewed a substantial contribution to the King every three months.⁵⁹² The city of Worcester also made symbolic overtures to the King in these early years. In fact, “the custom of ringing bells on 27 March, the King’s Accession day, was observed in obvious defiance of the Parliamentary

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁸⁵ Howell, “Neutralism,” 72.

⁵⁸⁶ Philip Styles, *Studies in Seventeenth Century West Midlands History*, (Kington: The Roundwood Press, 1978), 213.

⁵⁸⁷ Jan Broadway, “‘To Equall Their Virtues’: Thomas Habington, Recusancy and the Gentry of Early Stuart Worcestershire,” *Midland History* 29 (2004): 337.

⁵⁸⁸ C.D. Gilbert, “The Catholics in Worcestershire, 1642-1651,” *Recusant History* 20 (1991): 339.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 337.

⁵⁹⁰ Hutton, *Royalist War Effort*, 86.

⁵⁹¹ Fletcher, “The Coming of War”, 31.

⁵⁹² Morrill, *Revolt*, 113.

committee, as late as 1647."⁵⁹³ Many historians have viewed such overtures of Royalist support as balances to Puritan sentiment in the county, yet county support appears to have been *unbalanced* in favor of the King. How can such substantial backing for the King be viewed as innocuous or neutral? Is it fair to simply separate interests into Catholic Royalist gentry and radical Puritan supporters of Parliament?

Such questions may have led historians such as Alison Wall to examine the other side of the coin. Wall described Worcestershire as a "troubled county" that has been masked by a peaceful image.⁵⁹⁴ Relatively unique to her account, Wall cited religion as a "divisive issue" in Worcestershire, with prestige and geography exacerbating such conflict for a number of years preceding the civil war.⁵⁹⁵ Thus, Worcestershire's long history of factionalism dating to the Tudor monarchs cannot be dismissed. Rather, it suggests to the modern reader that factionalism was a prominent feature of county politics and affected the representation of the shire in the national arena. In turn, this factionalism, based on religion, social class, and personal vendettas, resulted in a perplexing political dynamic that raises myriad questions about Worcestershire's "neutralism."

If one assumes Worcester was under the influence of Royalist gentry in the 1640s, it seems logical that they would ensure the election of more conservative MPs. However, this is not found to be the case. MP Humphrey Salway was elected to Parliament for the first time in 1640 by an "overwhelming majority."⁵⁹⁶ During his tenure, Salway took the side of Parliament in the civil war and actively sought to prevent the execution of the Commission of Array in Worcestershire.⁵⁹⁷ Therefore, as one of the so-called "independents," Salway represented a surprising anomaly. In Worcestershire, where the powerful gentry had rallied around the Royalist cause, Salway was a sore thumb of radicalism. What made his election even more surprising was his particularly overwhelming victory. This fact indicates a great deal of anti-Royalist sentiment must have been mobilized at the time. Salway's stunning electoral victory questions the power of the Royalist gentry to control election outcomes, as does the equally shocking election of John Wilde.

Wilde was also a radical independent elected to the Long Parliament from Worcestershire. Though it may be argued that the election of Salway was simply a fluke, by 1640 he had not revealed his true political sympathies, Wilde had long been an obvious opponent of the Crown. A respected lawyer and legal counsel to the city of Worcester, Wilde served consistently as an MP for Droitwich, Worcestershire, in every Parliament from 1621 through the Short Parliament of 1640.⁵⁹⁸ Though many historians today dispute whether MPs were very oppositional prior to 1640, Wilde was a radical from the start.

Back in 1621, one of the hot issues was the status of England's relations with Spain during the Thirty Years' War. Wilde was an adamant opponent of friendly relations between the two nations, and expressed this most vehemently on November 27th when he compared Spain to

⁵⁹³ Styles, *Studies*, 217.

⁵⁹⁴ Alison Wall, "Patterns of Politics in England, 1558-1625," *The Historical Journal* 31 (Dec 1988), 947.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 952-3.

⁵⁹⁶ Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller eds., *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 3., (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984).

⁵⁹⁷ H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48:789.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 908.

ancient Carthage, maintaining that the Spaniards could not be trusted under any circumstances.⁵⁹⁹ In John Pym's diary entry for this day, he noted that Wilde "began to speake too liberally of the Howse of Austria but was quickly stopt by the dislike of the Howse."⁶⁰⁰ This silencing came after he called James I "deluded" in his desire to enhance diplomatic relations between England and Spain.⁶⁰¹

Wilde's vehement outbursts hardly went unnoticed. They attracted a great deal of attention both within and outside of Parliament and were likely a testament to Wilde's Puritanism, as he characterized the Spaniards as those who would "breake their truth especially as in Cause of Religion."⁶⁰² As such, he also strongly supported the war against the Spanish although he was a "severe critic" of Buckingham's conduct of it.⁶⁰³ Overall, Wilde's willingness to challenge the King and his most favored advisor, question the practices of the exchequer, and speak almost too freely on other issues of the day indicate that he was a surprisingly extreme personality emerging from a county that was supposedly innocuous.

Neutrality certainly did not characterize Wilde's subsequent behavior in Parliament. Though not quite as vocal in the mid-1620s, Wilde was a staunch supporter of the Petition of Right in 1628. He believed in the "ancient liberties" of the commonwealth and sought their protection in the Petition. Of the varying measures included in the Petition, Wilde was particularly supportive of those relating to the *writ of habeas corpus* and the billeting of soldiers. He was also the first to reintroduce the Petition of Right into debate on April 26, 1628.⁶⁰⁴ In this speech, he reasserted the "ancient" and "fundamental" liberties of the King's subjects as established by the Magna Carta and six statutes. He likewise condemned a conciliatory passage insisted upon by the Lords that allowed the royal prerogative to infringe upon these rights in times of emergency. He noted that such a clause "may be abused by prerogative, and [at] a 'convenient time'."⁶⁰⁵ He referred to such a clause as dependent upon the "scanty" promise of the King and further elaborated saying, "if he break his promise, we [have] no relief."⁶⁰⁶ In Wilde's view, the King could not be trusted.

Wilde further spoke of the Petition as a responsibility of the MPs to all of posterity. It was evident that he desired to reassert the rights of the people when he said: "For ourselves, we have used that honest necromancy as to consult with the dead, and what we do now is but to plant trees for posterity."⁶⁰⁷ In this way, Wilde saw the rights addressed in the Petition as inherited, applicable to all, and beyond the whim of the King. This sense of ideological responsibility likely pleased Wilde's constituents. He fought on behalf of the population he represented and openly expressed his skepticism of the King's word.

Obviously, Wilde's activism in the parliaments of 1621 and 1628 implied his almost exclusive loyalty to Parliament and his community, which often led to conflict with the King. It is likely that when elected to the aforementioned parliaments, Wilde was considered a protector

⁵⁹⁹ Wallace Notestein, Frances Helen Relf and Hartley Simpson, eds., *Commons Debates, 1621*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 4:441.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ Matthew, *DNB*, 58:909.

⁶⁰² Notestein, *Commons Debates, 1621*, 6:321.

⁶⁰³ Greaves and Zaller, *BDBR*, 322.

⁶⁰⁴ Robert C. Johnson, et al. eds. *Commons Debates, 1628*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983) 3:99.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

of his constituency and was accepted as a true representative of the people. Perhaps this reputation simply carried his election in 1640. Yet this is an insufficient explanation when one should expect that the changing and increasingly Royalist sentiment during the October 1640 elections would result in his defeat. It could not have been forgotten that Wilde had taken a consistently anti-Court position up to that point. In fact, the editor of Townshend's diaries noted that "Wylde was a most uncompromising opponent of the King, and did as much as anyone to create and foster an opposition in the county."⁶⁰⁸ Evidence suggests that Royalist gentry were already a powerful bloc in county politics at this time, so why would they have permitted the election of a man who had so conspicuously threatened the King and his power?

In the Long Parliament, Wilde took a leading role in measures against the Royalist gentry of England, particularly Catholics. As a presiding officer, Wilde actively fought the Commission of Array, raised funds and horses for the parliamentary forces, and drew up bills to confine and disarm Catholics. Wilde was appointed chairman of the impeachment committee against the thirteen bishops in 1640 as well.⁶⁰⁹ Thus, one may be surprised to learn that Wilde's election was endorsed by the Catholic Russell. In fact, Russell went so far as to slander Wilde's opponent, Sir Thomas Littleton, a fellow Royalist and long-time MP for Worcestershire, during the election in October 1640. At face value, this abnormality raises a number of questions. Why was a Catholic Royalist supporting a staunchly Puritan radical independent? Why did Russell shun fellow Royalist Littleton, who would have undoubtedly supported his interests? What happened at the October election itself and what were the effects of Wilde's victory?

Long Parliament diaries from December 14, 1640, as well as March 4 and March 9, 1641 indicate a heated debate over the Worcestershire election of October 1640. The cause of Sir Thomas Littleton was taken up by Sir Henry Herbert, a Royalist MP from Bewdley, Worcestershire, who had direct connections to Charles's court.⁶¹⁰ It is unclear exactly what kind of relationship Herbert and Littleton had, but they were both devoted Royalists, and it is likely they were friends who harbored many of the same sentiments concerning politics. As such, Herbert openly disputed the validity of Worcestershire's election of Wilde, and the Commons subsequently instructed a committee under Sir Lewis Dyve to examine the case. In December 1640, Herbert first introduced allegations against Sir William Russell, who he claimed had taken bribes as a deputy lieutenant and oppressed "whom he pleased."⁶¹¹ Wilde spoke against these accusations, but to little effect.

In March 1641, the issue of Russell, Wilde, and the election resurfaced. Dyve's committee gave an account at this time of the events of the election. Apparently, William Russell "did by several speeches at trainings of soldiers disparage Sir Thomas Littleton...that Sir Thomas Littleton had in former parliaments done no service for the country and that none but a fool or a knave would give his voice for him."⁶¹² Despite Mark Kishlansky's contention that parliamentary elections were simply a reflection of gentry interest and sentiment, it appears that the 1640 elections in Worcestershire gained the attention of many people of the county,

⁶⁰⁸ J.W. Willis Bund, ed., *Diary of Henry Townshend of Elmley Lovett, 1640-1660*, (London: Mitchell Hughes and Clarke, 1920), 2:21.

⁶⁰⁹ Greaves and Zaller, *BDBR*, 322.

⁶¹⁰ Matthew, *DNB*, 26:691.

⁶¹¹ Maija Jansson, ed., *Proceedings in the Opening Session of the Long Parliament*, (New Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 589.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 626.

regardless of whether they were freeholders.⁶¹³ The committee proceeded to recount that those present in the courtyard at Worcester called for the election of Littleton and “the vote seemed so full and clear for Sir Thomas Littleton as it was generally conceived that he had the first voice.”⁶¹⁴ Salway testified at this time that “he never saw a man so clearly elected as Sir Thomas Littleton.”⁶¹⁵ However, after this vocal show of support, a process of written balloting was used to determine the true winners. At this time, Salway and Wilde emerged victorious. Nevertheless, Herbert and others contended that many of the voters had not been asked whether they were freeholders or even residents of the county before casting their votes. In light of this, Herbert and others charged that Russell had “procured men to write their names in paper” and throw the vote.⁶¹⁶ Such was the nature of Herbert and Littleton’s case.

Wilde, Salway, and their supporters contended that the voices heard in the castle yard may have been for Littleton, but Wilde “had many voices in the town that could not get into the hill or castle yard.”⁶¹⁷ As such, circumstances of location and space prevented Wilde’s supporters from being heard and, thus, the written ballots were the clearest indication of popular sentiment. The outcome of this case was not documented because more pressing issues, such as the war and trial of the Earl of Strafford, took precedence. However, it was obviously important enough to Herbert, as he physically struck Wilde in an argument over the election. Such impassioned actions suggest that the political situation in Worcestershire at the time of the Long Parliament cannot be seen as neutral, but instead quite heated in terms of personal, local, and national interests.

The dispute recounted in the parliamentary diaries provides a wealth of questions with few answers. It is unclear at this time why Russell supported Wilde’s bid for election when the two were such ideological opposites. Perhaps the answer lies in personal and local interests. Were Russell and Littleton rivals? Were Russell and Wilde friends? The documents suggest a personal grudge between Russell and Littleton, which led to Russell’s slanderous comments preceding the election. However, personal dislike did not invariably necessitate an endorsement of Wilde. Herbert suggested that Russell had used his powerful ties to throw the election in Wilde’s favor. Nevertheless, Wilde had been increasingly outspoken against the King and Catholics, and he had supported and drawn up extensive legislation against vices such as gambling and drinking, making him an effectual Puritan poster boy. Russell, on the other hand, had suffered from recusancy fines and essentially owed his political power to his inheritance and the King. Such conditions should have made Russell and Wilde natural adversaries. The mystery only deepens when we examine Russell’s tenuous relationship with his fellow gentry in the years immediately following.

Henry Townshend, a Royalist citizen of Worcestershire, noted that Russell fell out of favor with Royalist Colonel Samuel Sandys after Russell’s replacement of Sandys as Governor of Worcester in 1642.⁶¹⁸ Such animosity toward Russell was further illustrated in the charges brought against him by the County Commissioners on October 20, 1643. These charges included the “unfaithful” management of accounts and unlawful distribution of arms as well as more

⁶¹³ Mark A. Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection: Social and Political Choice in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁶¹⁴ Jansson, ed., *Proceedings in the Long Parliament*, 626.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 627.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 681.

⁶¹⁸ Bund, ed., *Diary of Henry Townshend*, 1:135-136.

general accusations of lying, plundering, and oppressing the citizenry of the shire.⁶¹⁹ Townshend noted that these charges ultimately divided the leading gentry into those who supported Russell in his defense (and were largely from the South) and those who opposed him (and were largely from the North).⁶²⁰ Thus, Russell maintained a rather feeble relationship with his fellow gentry, and the same can be said of his relationship with supporters of Parliament. For example, when Parliamentary forces laid siege to Worcestershire in 1646, an article was adopted that protected the inhabitants from being plundered by soldiers. However, Russell was specifically exempted from this article, proving that he likewise had few friends in Parliament.⁶²¹ Such evidence makes Wilde's 1640 election and Russell's support of it all the more enigmatic.

Though the election dispute likely reflected personal and local rivalries, the outcome had national political implications. First, the very fact that Herbert had made the election a parliamentary issue is notable. As a staunch Royalist, he likely felt some allegiance to Sir Thomas Littleton and resented the election of the anti-Court Wilde. Giving this dispute a national stage indicated that the Royalist versus Parliamentarian struggle was very much alive. Furthermore, regardless of whether Wilde's election had been legitimate, he was given the opportunity to represent Worcestershire with a Puritan and pro-parliamentary outlook in a national forum. Wilde's support for the parliamentary struggle and encouragement of the rule of law is most succinctly stated in Gawdy's diary of May 26, 1642, when he quoted Wilde as saying, "all men know that to make war upon the parliament is treason, that the king is not to command anything that is unlawful."⁶²² This statement illustrated Wilde's viewpoint that Parliament and the common law of England were superior to the King and the royal prerogative.

Wilde approached the question of whether Parliament could raise an army to send to Ireland with similar biases and convictions. On May 28, 1642, Wilde argued that if the houses were given power to send troops to Ireland, it logically followed that they should be able to raise them, though existing laws did not specifically grant such powers. He based his argument in statutes "that are [were] for the public good and benefit of the kingdom," which he contended had "a large construction or interpretation."⁶²³ This belief in the loose construction and flexible interpretation of statute is significant because it created a double standard wherein Parliament could interpret the law as needed, while the King's power to interpret and execute the law remained explicitly limited. Only a man with a deep understanding of the law, great rhetorical skill, and a radical bias could justify these conflicting claims, and this is what made Sergeant John Wilde a leader in Parliament.

Wilde used these strengths to pursue a number of his interests, including his opposition to the Commission of Array. Wilde's outspokenness on the Commission is well-documented. In fact, Wilde and Salway's opposition to the Commission is cited in D'Ewes's diary as delaying its effectiveness.⁶²⁴ Apparently, the Commission was to be executed at the county Quarter Sessions on July 13, 1642. This required the attendance of all freeholders with arms to appear before the commissioners. These plans were aborted when Salway and Wilde personally returned to Worcester and enforced the Militia Ordinance, which supported the Parliamentary forces:

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 2:131-132.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 185.

⁶²² Vernon F. Snow and Anne Steele Young, eds., *The Private Journals of the Long Parliament: 7 March to 1 June, 1642.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 2:373.

⁶²³ Ibid., 2:383.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 3:100; Ibid., 223.

However, by August 3, the ordinance was repudiated by fifty-nine signatories, all gentry or men of high office in Worcester. The pledge by these men, though cognizant of the rights of Parliament and the evils of popery, was a testament to their full trust in and support for the King.⁶²⁵ Thus, Salway and Wilde found themselves at odds with the very men whose interests they were supposed to represent.

This struggle over the Commission illustrates the tug-of-war between Royalist gentry and Parliament-supporting freeholders and MPs. Lacking necessary material and ideological support, the MPs "found they could not sustain their cause in the gentry community," and their influence in the localities declined.⁶²⁶ This did not stop Wilde from pushing forward, however. On September 13, 1642, Wilde introduced an order which would authorize the inhabitants of Worcester "to train and arm themselves and to make their defense against all such as should offer violence unto them, which order, though it had some dangerous clauses in it, yet easily passed the house...."⁶²⁷ This order was obviously a direct affront to the Commissioners and occupying Royalist forces in Worcester.

So, had Russell just not gotten what he had bargained for in Wilde? By supporting his election over that of Sir Thomas Littleton, had he sacrificed the interests of the Royalist gentry? If this was the case, why was there not more of a backlash against Russell himself? Russell obviously had some ulterior motive for choosing to support Wilde to the point of putting his reputation on the line and being subjected to rumors of dirty dealings. Regardless of personal motivations, Russell must have known about Wilde's radical past. If one were to assume the correctness of previous historiography on Worcestershire, one would consider Wilde's election inconsistent with the nonaligned politics of the county. Moreover, the labeling of Worcestershire as neutral implies an ambivalence on the part of its citizenry that is simply unsupported by the great deal of participation in the county election, the controversy surrounding the said election, and the divided support amongst the gentry, Catholics, Puritans, and other personal factions. Personal and local rivalries eventually had national implications that cannot be ignored.

Being two of the so-called "radical independents," Salway and Wilde could not be deemed true representatives of "neutral" Worcestershire, as they neither represented all of the different factions existing within the county nor represents an overriding dispassionate sentiment. Further, these two Puritan parliamentary supporters did not represent the Catholic or Royalist sympathizers of the county, nor did they represent the clubmen's pacific and conservative interests. Perhaps if Worcestershire had not been divided along the lines of religion, personal rivalry, dedication to the King, and loyalty to the shire, and if it had maintained a consensus of neutrality, anyone could have served in Parliament. However, as illustrated by the overwhelming participation in the county election and then its dispute in Parliament, the people of Worcestershire had varying interests at stake, and each faction was jockeying for an MP who would fight for those interests in the tumultuous time. Such struggles disprove the earlier claims by Hutton and Morrill that Worcestershire was simply a neutral or pliable area that changed sentiment depending on which group occupied the city. On the contrary, Worcestershire was an intense battleground between Catholic and Puritan, Royalist and parliamentarian, and gentleman and freeholder.

⁶²⁵ Styles, *Studies*, 219.

⁶²⁶ Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 359.

⁶²⁷ Snow and Young, *Private Journals 2 June to 17 September 1642*, 3:352-353.

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