Chapter 2

A Storm in the West

The Cornish Dimension of the English Civil War

Thanks to the shrill warnings of the London pamphleteers, the inrush of thousands of armed Welshmen across Offa's Dyke in late 1642 was – as far as the majority of English people was concerned – an alarming, but not entirely unexpected, development. The sudden irruption of thousands of armed Cornishmen across the River Tamar, by contrast, came as a bolt from the blue. Throughout September 1642 Parliamentarian dominance of southern England had seemed assured: as S. R. Gardiner wrote, 'all the south of England acknowledged the authority of the Houses . . . in the East and in the South . . . there was no sign of reluctance'.[1] Yet, far to the west, a storm was about to break. During the first week of October some ten thousand Cornishmen rose up in arms and ejected the few local supporters of Parliament from their county. Within weeks they had raised an army, and within months that army, assisted by Royalist forces from elsewhere, had captured the entire south-west of England for the king. Thereafter Cornish troops remained the Parliamentarians' most implacable opponents. No English county was so highly praised by the king's propagandists, or so bitterly excoriated by Parliament's, and it seems fair to suggest that no English county did more to assist the Royalist cause.[2]

Cornwall's stout support for the Crown has been variously explained. At the time, Parliamentarian observers claimed that the Royalism of the Cornish could be chiefly attributed to their settled opposition to 'true religion', their slavish deference to their social 'betters' and their sheer brute 'ignorance'.[3] Royalist commentators turned this picture on its head, praising the Cornish for their zeal for the established church, their obedience to divinely ordained authority and their exalted sense of duty and honour.[4] These two conflicting views – partisan mirror-images of each other – long held the historiographical field. But, more recently, interpretations have undergone a considerable shift. On the one hand, scholars have come to see Cornwall as a deeply divided county whose eventual declaration for the king was largely fortuitous.[5] On the other, they have laid increasing emphasis on the importance of straightforward social, political and

religious conservatism in explaining Cornwall's wartime behaviour.[6] This chapter will refute the first view and will demonstrate that the second, while accurate as far as it goes, nevertheless masks the extent to which Cornish Royalism, like its Welsh counterpart, was rooted in ethnic difference.

I

For centuries before the Civil War, Cornwall had been regarded as 'a land apart'. A bleak, rocky peninsula, surrounded by the seas on all sides but one, and practically cut off from the neighbouring county of Devon by the River Tamar, it had, together with Wales, been one of the chief refuges of the indigenous Celtic people of Britain when they fled west to avoid the Saxon tide during the Dark Ages. Long an independent kingdom, Cornwall had finally been incorporated within the English state during the tenth century, but its distinctive ethnicity had survived intact. The Cornish, like their Welsh cousins, were fiercely proud of their British descent, and they continued to cling to their ancient customs, legends and language throughout the medieval period. According to early modern writers, they also retained 'a kinde of conceyled envye agaynste the Englishe, whom they yet affecte with a desire of revenge for their fathers sakes'.[7] Many English people, for their part, regarded the 'West Britons' with open contempt. During the twelfth century the Cornish were derided as exemplars of 'ignorance and boorishness', and little was to change over the next five hundred years.[8] In 1531 an Italian visitor to London wrote that the kingdom of England contained three different peoples: the English, who were 'affable and generous', the Welsh who were 'sturdy . . . and sociable' and the Cornish who were 'poor, rough and boorish'. He can only have been repeating the views of his English hosts, and a century later Cornishmen were still being pilloried on the London stage as archetypal rustic clowns.[9]

During the early Tudor period Cornish fears that – as a result of a concatenation of political, religious, social and linguistic changes – their separate identity was coming under increasing threat, had contributed to a number of major rebellions. In 1497, and again in 1549, Cornish rebel armies had marched across the Tamar, motivated, at least in part, by a desire to resist further cultural assimilation with England.[10] These revolts had been brutally crushed, and in their wake the Anglicisation of Cornish society had proceeded apace. By 1600 less than a quarter of Cornwall's *circa* ninety thousand inhabitants still spoke Cornish, and the geographical range of the language had become restricted to the far west of the county: in particular to the two hundreds of Kerrier and Penwith.[11] Yet it would be a mistake to presume that the Cornish perception of themselves as a separate 'people' perished as fast as the language did. Even in the wholly Anglophone east, ordinary Cornish people were still in the habit of terming 'any stranger whom they liked not *Sais*, i.e. Sax or Saxon' towards the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign.[12]

Historians have long suspected that Cornwall's unusual behaviour during the Civil War owed something to its distinctive cultural identity. Gardiner was perhaps the first to glimpse the significance of the fact that 'England beyond the Tamar . . . [was] considered to be almost a foreign country' by the Cornish, and he suggested that there might have been 'something of local patriotism' in Cornwall's refusal to embrace the Parliamentarian cause as Devon did.[13] Mary Coate, the author of the standard history of Cornwall in the Civil War, adopted a broadly similar view, but went further, stressing that Cornish 'local patriotism' had been 'rooted in racial difference'.[14] More recently, a number of other scholars have suggested that ethnic divisions may have contributed to the peculiar pattern of the Civil War in the far south-west.[15] But the thesis has never been explored in depth. What grounds are there for thinking that in Cornwall, as in Wales, the struggle between king and Parliament was, in some ways, a continuation of the much more ancient struggle between Saxon and Celt?

First one should note the striking similarity of the relationship that existed between England and Cornwall on the one hand and England and Wales on the other during the 150 years that preceded the Civil War. Throughout this period Cornwall, like Wales, formed an ethnically distinct region within what was otherwise a remarkably homogeneous English state. Also Cornwall, like Wales, possessed a submerged, and potentially very dangerous, tradition of popular hostility to English rule. Furthermore Cornwall, like Wales, was treated in the most conciliatory fashion possible by the English Crown, which not only bestowed exceptional marks of royal favour on its Celtic subjects, but also provided them with a measure of constitutional accommodation sufficient to cast at least 'an aura of semi-independence' around the regions in which they dwelt.[16] Cornwall's constitutional distinctiveness was partly derived from its somewhat blurred identification with the Duchy of Cornwall. The monarch's eldest son was not only Prince of Wales, he was also Duke of Cornwall, and the Cornish, like the Welsh, were encouraged to believe that the prince took a special interest in their welfare. Cornwall's unusual status was still further underlined by the fact that the entire county lay under the jurisdiction of the Stannaries – special institutions that had been set up by the Crown during the Middle Ages in order to govern the local tin-mining industry and which conferred extraordinary privileges on many thousands of ordinary Cornish people. Together, the Duchy and the Stannary organisations provided Cornwall with a remarkable network of distinctive laws, rights and customs.

In Cornwall, as in Wales, the summoning of the Long Parliament heralded a threat to these time-honoured arrangements. Within months, signs began to

appear that the institutional framework that had hitherto helped to underpin the Cornish sense of distinctiveness was in danger. Not only did the authority of the king, and by extension that of the prince, come under sustained assault in Parliament, but calls began to be made for the reform of the Stannaries.[17] These developments were unsettling enough in themselves, but far more alarming, to most Cornish people, were the attacks that MPs now began to launch upon the established church. Zealous Protestantism had made little headway in Cornwall before the Civil War, and in 1640 puritan activity was still largely confined to the east of the county. That ordinary Cornish people had remained so unusually resistant to radical Protestant doctrines was in part a result of simple religious conservatism, in part a result of the fact that some west Cornish folk had been unable to speak the language in which those doctrines were usually advanced. Yet it may also have reflected the fact that in Cornwall, as in many other parts of the British Isles, established religious practices served as a crucial badge of ethnic identity.

As has already been noted, the Welsh believed the reformed Church of England incorporated the pure stream of original Christian tradition, and they believed this tradition to have been preserved, unsullied, throughout the long centuries of 'Popish darkness' by the early Celtic Church. Cornwall had been as stout a bulwark of Celtic Christianity as had Wales, so the Cornish had as much reason as their Welsh cousins to take pride in the alleged British origins of the Church, and to regard it as, in a special sense, their own. Such views are certainly known to have been held in Cornish gentry circles, and it is hard to doubt that they circulated among the common people as well.[18] Wales is only a few hours' sail from Cornwall, and there was a great deal of interaction between the two peoples during the early modern period. In the far west of Cornwall, the inhabitants were able to converse with Welsh visitors in what was essentially a dialect version of their own tongue, and the alleged British origins of the church must surely have been a subject for mutual self-congratulation.

If Cornish people believed the Church of England to be the product of a glorious Celtic past, they may also have believed it to be a guarantor of a continued Celtic future. Although calls for the Book of Common Prayer to be translated into Cornish had gone unheeded during Elizabeth's reign, the established church had subsequently proved itself willing to accommodate Cornish language and culture.[19] During the 1590s, it was observed that 'the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments have been used in Cornish beyond all remembrance', and Cornish continued to be employed long afterwards in sermons in west Cornwall.[20] When rumours spread to this district in 1641 that English puritan MPs were planning to institute a series of radical religious reforms, the Cornish-speaking population may have feared not only for the future of the Church itself, but also for their accustomed ability to receive basic religious instruction in their own tongue. The Cornish had their own reasons for adhering to the Church of England, therefore, and from the moment that opposition to Parliament first became visible in Cornwall in 1642 it was inextricably linked with opposition to religious change.[21]

II

The pre-history of Cornish Royalism is a surprisingly neglected subject. As a result, the exceptional precocity and fervour of Cornish declarations of support for the king during the early months of 1642 has gone largely unrecognised. No previous historian appears to have noted that a petition from Cornwall in favour of episcopacy was sent up to London and printed as early as February 1642, for example.[22] Nor has it been remarked that on 5 March this document was reprinted as part of a collection of three pro-episcopal petitions. Significantly, the documents that appeared alongside it were the Cheshire petition of late 1641 – long recognised by scholars as one of the earliest manifestations of militant pro-Royalism – and the equally pro-Royalist petition from North Wales that was discussed in Chapter 1.[23] Already, then, the Cornish had been bracketed with Parliament's most vocal opponents, and the inclusion of the Welsh and Cornish petitions in the same collection suggests that the individual who compiled it had recognised that the politico-religious outlook of the two peoples was similar. The Venetian ambassador drew the same conclusion; on 21 March, after having told his master of the strength of Welsh support for Charles, he added that the Cornish were similarly disposed and had drawn up a petition, signed by great numbers, that requested king and Parliament 'not to allow innovations in the Anglican Church or any diminution of the royal prerogatives'.[24]

The ambassador clearly regarded this petition as representative of majority opinion in Cornwall, and the humiliating fate that befell the counter-petition organised by Parliament's supporters in the county suggests that he was right to do so. As Anthony Fletcher has observed, 'Cornwall was apparently the only county [in England] where the standard petition of thanks and loyalty to Parliament met with outright rejection at a public assembly of gentry'. At the March Assizes it was laid aside by the grand jury.[25] Despite this very public rebuff, the petition's local sponsors sent the document up to Parliament, where it was read, approved and ordered to be printed.[26] But its pretensions to speak for Cornwall as a whole were quickly challenged by yet another Cornish petition, the third to emerge from the county in as many months. This document not only mounted a new defence of the Church but claimed that the previous, pro-Parliamentarian petition had been 'indirectly intruded upon divers persons, without reading or

perusal, many of them since retracting their opinions, and wishing back their hands'.[27]

Further evidence of Cornish dislike of Parliament's proceedings emerged in April, when John Smith, Rector of the Cornish parish of St Ewe, was apprehended by a group of watchmen during a business trip to Plymouth in Devon. The arrest took place late at night and Smith may well have been drunk at the time – certainly, he was in truculent mood and roundly abused his captors, prompting one of them to reprove him for swearing. Goaded by this, Smith accused the man of being a 'Rownd-head'. The watch dragged the angry cleric off to prison and reported his words to the pro-Parliamentarian town magistrates, who next day launched a full-scale investigation into Smith's activities. What they discovered filled them with alarm. According to a group of men who had been drinking with Smith the night before, he had boasted that 'there was a peticion drawne [up] in Cornewall to bee exhibited to the Parliament' and that Lord Robartes – the newly appointed, and strongly Parliamentarian, Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall – was disliked in the county and 'should not be received there if thirtie thowsand could oppose him'.[28] Smith was also accused of saying that if either he or 'one Mr Courteney', both of whom had been engaged in gathering signatures to the new petition, should be sent for by Parliament, 'hee was confident the countie of Cornewall would not suffer them to goe'.

The watchmen provided similar evidence, deposing that Smith had told them 'that hee hoped the tymes would shortly alter . . . [and] that hee would bringe sixetie thowsand hands out of Cornewalle to make good what hee sayde'. By this Smith had probably meant to boast that he and his allies would gather sixty thousand signatures to their petition. Yet his listeners could equally well have taken him to mean that he hoped to physically 'bring up' the thirty thousand men whom he had referred to earlier. Smith's words re-awakened old English fears about the Cornish propensity for insurrection, and alerted the Parliamentarians to the sheer strength of support for the Crown which was now building in Cornwall. The justices at once informed Parliament of Smith's dark prognostications, and MPs ordered that he should be sent up to London.[29]

Smith's claim that a fresh petitioning campaign was under way in Cornwall was rapidly confirmed. In May a petition signed by seven thousand Cornishmen was sent to the king at York 'in the name of the whole county of Cornwall'. This was an unequivocally Royalist document. Addressed to Charles alone, rather than to king and Parliament as was customary, it begged the king 'never to suffer your subjects to be governed by an arbitrary government nor admit an alteration in religion', and commiserated with him in his present 'discontents'. The petitioners expressed the hope that the dispute between king and Parliament might yet be peacefully resolved. But if this proved impossible, they averred, they

were ready 'to maintain and defend with their lives and fortunes, your Majesties sacred person . . . and lawfull prerogatives against all persons whatsoever'.[30] As F. T. R. Edgar has observed, the militancy of these words was in sharp contrast to the still-prevailing moderation elsewhere,[31] and contemporaries recognised the petition for the partisan document it was. One hostile Cornishman accurately termed it a 'congratulacion to King Charles', while the Venetian ambassador clearly saw it in the same light. He later reported that 'Cornwall, which is prolific in the most warlike men of the kingdom . . . has sent its deputy . . . to petition his Majesty not to allow [the] further progress . . . of those who aim at the destruction of the Protestant religion', and added that the Cornish had offered 'to devote their lives' to the king's service.[32] Charles I himself was delighted by these loyal assurances of support. On 26 June he issued a formal answer to the petition, thanking the inhabitants of Cornwall for their 'duty and affection'; it was to prove the first in a long line of such royal encomiums on the Cornish.[33]

Three days later Warwick, Lord Mohun, a prominent western gentleman, was sent from the court to Cornwall, with orders to put the Royalist Commission of Array into effect there.[34] Parliament attempted to sabotage his mission by ordering the stay of horses passing from Cornwall to York and directing the Sheriff of Cornwall to oppose the commissioners, but to no avail.[35] Mohun was soon safely across the Tamar where he joined hands with the Crown's Cornish supporters. Seriously alarmed, Parliament realised that determined steps must now be taken to wrest back the political initiative in the far south-west. On 27 July the Commons resolved that six Cornish MPs, led by Sir Richard Buller, should travel from London to Cornwall to execute the Parliamentary militia ordinance there.[36] The MPs set off at once and within the week had arrived at Launceston, on the eastern border of Cornwall, where the Summer Assizes were about to be held. The MPs' reception did not bode well. Their presence was tolerated at the Assizes, but the general atmosphere was strongly pro-Royalist. They reported back to London that the king's partisans were very strong in 'this much abused county', and that the Commissioners of Array controlled all of the local strongpoints. 'It be difficult to take off first impressions', the MPs observed, but they would nevertheless do their best 'to undeceive the people' and to 'obtain such an obedience that this county will not move out of itself'.[37] Clearly fears of a Cornish incursion across the Tamar were by now beginning to spread.

As Buller and his associates knew all too well, they faced a daunting task in Cornwall. Yet they were brave, determined men, who possessed a great deal of influence in their native county, and could count on the support of a tight-knit local network of puritan gentry and clergymen. In addition the Cornish Parliamentarian leaders were more experienced local governors than their Royalist

counterparts, and they set out to exploit this advantage to the hilt.[38] During early August, Buller and his allies – the 'Grandees' as their opponents mockingly termed them[39] – did everything they could to turn local opinion against the Commissioners of Array, sending out a stream of warrants, letters and orders, and opposing Royalist activists at every turn. Their exertions, combined with the fact that it was harvest-time, checked their opponents' momentum, and, after a disappointing muster at Bodmin on 17 August, the Royalists agreed to a temporary local truce. The Cornish Parliamentarians were delighted by this unexpected turn of affairs. 'Sir', wrote one of them to a friend in London soon afterwards, 'what the generall suspition of the kingdome, and our own feares of Cornewall have beene, you are well informed of', but 'now . . . those feares are in . . . good part over.'[40] Other letters written by Buller and his allies at this time were infused with the same sense of new-found optimism, but the Parliamentarians' hopes were built on sand.[41] Within a few short weeks they were to be swept out of Cornwall by precisely the sort of violent popular torrent that they had struggled so hard to avert.

The sequence of events that led to this eviction is reasonably clear. On 25 September Sir Ralph Hopton and some 160 Royalist horsemen, who had recently been driven out of Somerset by Parliamentary forces there, arrived in north-east Cornwall. From here, they made their way to the west of the county, where they joined forces with the Commissioners of Array. Soon afterwards local people began to assemble at Lostwithiel for the Michaelmas Sessions. When the Grand Inquest met, it was presented with several bills of indictment: one, sponsored by the local Parliamentarians, against Hopton and his followers for 'coming armed into the county', the others, sponsored by the local Royalists, against Buller and his allies at Launceston for 'riot' and 'unlawful assembly'. The latter set of indictments were swiftly found to be true ones, and the Sessions court accordingly ordered the Sheriff 'to rayse the *posse comitatus* [that is, the armed county gathering] for the dispersing of the unlawfull assembly at Launceston'. The indictment against Hopton and his followers, on the other hand, was subsequently dismissed at the Truro meeting of the Sessions – indeed the jury went so far as to publicly thank Hopton (who had appeared in court to defend himself) for having come to the county's assistance.[42] Soon afterwards warrants were issued for the *posse* to meet at Moilesbarrow Down, near Lostwithiel, on 4 October. The popular response to these warrants was overwhelming. Some ten thousand men turned out to assist the Sheriff, and when this vast host, accompanied by Hopton's troopers, advanced on Launceston, Buller and his supporters abandoned the town and fled into Devon.[43] By 8 October the whole of Cornwall was in Royalist hands, and a new front had been opened in the developing Civil War.

It was a staggering success for the king's supporters, but how had they achieved it? Hopton himself had few doubts. In his retrospective narrative – a document that has heavily influenced all subsequent accounts of events in Cornwall during 1642 – Sir Ralph gave the impression that the Royalist triumph had been attributable to three main factors: his own arrival in the county with his cavalry, the assistance that he had received from the 'well-affected Cornish gentlemen', and the care that he and his followers had taken to convince local people of their respect for the law.[44] Obviously, all of these factors were extremely important, especially the contribution of the Royalist gentry, whom their enemies later accused of having been the instigators of 'the rebellion' in Cornwall.[45] Yet it is worth pointing out that in Somerset, just a few weeks before, a broadly similar combination of an armed Royalist presence, local gentry activism and vigorous propagandising by Hopton and other Cavalier leaders had failed to raise even a modicum of popular support for the king, let alone a full-scale county rising of the sort that occurred in Cornwall. The contrast partly reflects the fact that, in Cornwall, the Cavaliers had behaved with 'scrupulous legality' whereas in Somerset they had been rather more high-handed,[46] but it also reflects the fact that, in Cornwall, there already existed a powerful current of opposition to the Parliamentary cause, which was not the case in Somerset. It is misleading to suggest that Hopton and his local gentry supporters built up a Cornish Royalist party from scratch in autumn 1642. Rather, their achievement was to channel a pre-existent set of popular attitudes – political, religious and social – into support for the royal cause. Lurking behind all of these attitudes, moreover, and helping to bind them together, was a common sense of Cornish cultural defensiveness.

The war of words waged between the local partisans of king and Parliament during summer 1642 was not just a dispute over abstract religious and constitutional issues, it was also a struggle over what it meant to be Cornish, a contest for Cornwall's very soul. From the moment that divisions first became visible on the ground, it was apparent that the geographical pattern of political allegiance in Cornwall reflected a much more ancient cultural pattern. Thus throughout June to October 1642 the territorial base of the Parliamentarian party lay in the far east of the county, around the three pro-Parliamentarian towns of Launceston, Stratton and Saltash.[47] This was precisely the region of Cornwall in which the old Celtic culture had been most thoroughly eradicated, and in which local people appeared, on the surface at least, to be most like their English neighbours. The heartland of Cornish Royalism, by contrast, lay in the Celtic far west. It is highly significant that, as early as 9 August, Royalist activists were confident of popular support in this region, one local gentleman averring that he would 'be better able to keepe [the inhabitants of] Pen[with] and Kir[rier] in obedience

then others to perswade them from it'.[48] Penwith and Kerrier were the only hundreds of Cornwall in which Cornish remained the majority language, and they had, for centuries, been the strongholds of Cornish ethnic difference and resistance to cultural assimilation with England. Intriguing, too, is the fact that the king's Cornish gentry supporters are reported to have 'inrolled themselves in the livery of white and greene' at this time.[49] White and green were the Tudor colours, and therefore symbolic of support for the royal cause, but they were also colours that were especially associated with Wales, and therefore potent emblems of 'Brittish' pride.[50]

The choice facing the uncommitted mass of Cornwall's inhabitants in 1642 was thus, in a sense, a choice between two different varieties of Cornishness. Should they follow the lead of the Anglicised easterners and embrace the Parliamentary cause, thus signalling their willingness to go along with the rest of southern England? Or should they follow the lead of the Celtic westerners and stand out for the king, thus signalling their determination to steer an independent course of the sort that Cornwall had so often steered in the past? All the surviving evidence suggests that majority opinion in Cornwall had been inclining towards the latter course of action throughout 1642. Yet what irrevocably tipped the balance in the Royalists' favour in September was the sudden fear that swept the county that it was about to be invaded by a Parliamentarian army. And, ironically, it was the actions of the Cornish Parliamentarians themselves that caused this panic to begin.

Alarmed by the arrival of Hopton's horsemen, the Committee had not only called out the Cornish trained bands to oppose him, but – afraid that this call might go unheeded – had summoned in assistance from outside as well. Within days, several thousand Devon militiamen, some troops of Roundhead cavalry from Somerset and a force of Scottish mercenary soldiers (who had recently landed in Plymouth and agreed to assist the Parliamentary garrison there) were all preparing to march to the Committee's assistance.[51] The Royalists at once got word of their opponents' intentions and set out to rally Cornish opposition to this looming 'foreign' threat. Their task was made immeasurably easier by the diverse nature of the Parliamentary force, and by the fact that, thanks to the inhabitants' residual mistrust of the English and the bloody legacy of the Tudor past, fears of outside attack lay peculiarly close to the surface in Cornwall. The last time that a hostile army had forced its way across the Tamar had been in 1549, during the last stages of the so-called Prayer-Book Rebellion. The memories of that terrible time, when hundreds of Cornish people had been slain and the whole county thrown over to the mercy of rapacious soldiers, many of them continental mercenaries, had never faded.[52] And in October 1642, with foreign forces once again massing on the county's eastern border, many Cornish people

clearly convinced themselves, or were convinced by others, that history was about to repeat itself. The depth of popular apprehension that existed in Cornwall at this time is well revealed by the Sessions jury's public declaration of thanks to Hopton for having come to save 'them who were already marked out to distruction'; by the rumours circulating in Truro that the lives of Cornish women and children were in danger, and by the statement made by the *posse* men at Moilesbarrow Down that they were resolved to oppose the 'forraigne forces' that 'have bine endeavoured to bee raysed & brought into Cornewall'. All of the available evidence suggests that it was fear of outside invasion that eventually did more than anything else to unite the people of Cornwall behind the representatives of the Crown.[53]

III

The October rising prefigured one of the most remarkable periods in Cornish history, a period in which thousands of Cornish soldiers would march deep into the heart of England itself in support of the Royalist cause. Following the expulsion of the Committee, the Cornish Royalists quickly set about raising troops for the king. By November 1642 five volunteer regiments of Cornish infantrymen had been raised and with this small army Hopton marched across the Tamar in an attempt to conquer Devon. His first attack was repulsed but by the end of the year, with his strength increased to some three thousand men, he was ready to try again.[54] Fighting raged back and forth throughout early 1643 until, in May, the Cornishmen destroyed a much larger Parliamentarian army at the battle of Stratton. With their enemies routed, the Cornish seized control of much of Devon. In June the force that had now become known as the 'Cornish Army' linked up with a force of Royalist cavalry and advanced into Somerset. Meanwhile fresh Cornish forces were pouring into Devon to assist in the siege of Exeter, while other units were holding the Tamar against attack from the Parliamentary strongholds of Plymouth and Barnstaple.

During June and July 1643 the Cornish Army captured Taunton, defeated Parliament's main western army at Lansdown, near Bath, and then helped to destroy that force entirely at the battle of Roundway Down. Days later, the Cornishmen crowned their successes by participating in the storm of Bristol, the second city of the kingdom. From here the Cornish Army – by now under the command of Prince Maurice – set out to eliminate the final pockets of resistance in the west. In August, the Cornishmen took most of the remaining Parliamentary garrisons in Dorset; in September, most of the remaining garrisons in Devon; and by mid-October the only town in the far south-west that still held out for Parliament was Plymouth. Throughout the closing weeks of 1643 the Cornishmen hurled themselves against this last enemy stronghold, but Plymouth

proved to be the first town to defeat them. On Christmas day 1643 Maurice, unable to penetrate the port's formidable defensive perimeter, ordered his troops to withdraw.[55] Exhausted by a year-long campaign, the Cornish soldiers returned home. Yet next spring they returned to the fray, setting off to besiege Lyme in Dorset while other units maintained the blockade of Plymouth. In March 1644 it was estimated that there were some five thousand Cornishmen in the king's armies, and that a thousand more had already been killed or hurt in his service.[56] Further heavy casualties were incurred over the following months. Even so, when the earl of Essex advanced into Devon with a Parliamentary army that summer, he found himself confronted by 2,500 Cornish veterans, backed up by many more Cornish militia-men along the line of the Tamar.[57] The contribution that the Cornish had made to the Royalist war effort during 1642–44 was quite simply immense and, as has already been observed, that contribution was not restricted to defending Cornwall alone.

Individual Cornishmen saw service in many parts of England, including the far north. Captain Lanyon, 'a Cornish man, of an undaunted spirit', was reported to be one of the most active members of the Royalist garrison at Carlisle in 1645.[58] Other Cornishmen travelled still further afield, most notably the three hundred Royalist prisoners who, in summer 1644, were shipped over to Ireland by the Parliamentarians to fight against the Confederate forces there. These men were 'without arms, clothes or money', and – as the Royalist earl of Ormond subsequently reported from Dublin – 'so little affected to that service, that they daily run hither, and are sent hence for England, with the best encouragement I can give them'.[59] Yet, as one would expect, it was the south-west of England that bore the brunt of the Cornish influx. Few parts of this region escaped the passage of Cornish soldiers – indeed formations of Cornish troops are known to have marched as far north as Oxford and as far east as Berkshire in the king's service.[60] Throughout this entire district, Cornish soldiers – tough, proud and distinctive, some of them, at least, still speaking their own language[61] – ranged freely.

The Royalist view of these 'outlandish' visitors is the easiest to summarise, and was evident from the moment that the king responded to the Cornish petition of May 1642. Simply put, it was that the Cornish were supremely loyal subjects. Such was the central premise of the formal '[con]gratulacion to Cornishmen' that was distributed throughout the county by Royalist activists following the triumph of October 1642; the proclamation praising 'the singular courage of our county of Cornewall and . . . their notable zeale and affection to us' that was issued by the king from Oxford in March 1643; and, most strikingly of all, the declaration extolling 'the extraordinary merit of our county of Cornwall' that was issued by him from Sudeley Castle six months later (copies of which were

ordered to be displayed in Cornish churches 'forever').[62] A precisely similar attitude towards the Cornish emerges from the work of Cavalier propagandists, and from the writings of English Royalist gentlemen.[63]

The high estimation in which the Cornish were held by the Royalists was reflected not only in such laudatory public pronouncements, but in the favourable treatment that was accorded them throughout the war. 'Foreign' Royalist troops were usually kept out of Cornwall, for example, and, on the rare occasions when they did cross the Tamar, care was taken to ensure that they treated the civilian population with respect.[64] Cornishmen were specially selected to recruit the king's lifeguard of foot, just as Welshmen were, while Cornish soldiers were permitted to serve in exclusively Cornish regiments.[65] Just how anxious the king was to demonstrate his gratitude to his Cornish subjects is shown by the fact that, in September 1643, he sent Sir William Killigrew into Cornwall to act as his personal representative there. Killigrew, himself a Cornishman, was ordered to present the Cornish gentry with a copy of the king's recent declaration, together with a congratulatory letter, and to ask them if there was anything more that Charles could do to reward them for their extraordinary services; no other county is known to have received such a signal mark of royal favour during the Civil War.[66]

At first sight the Royalist attitude to the Cornish seems perfectly straightforward. Cornwall had supplied the king with magnificent assistance; he and his supporters had responded by lavishing praise and favour on the county's inhabitants. Yet matters were more complicated than they at first appear, for it is evident that in Cornwall, as in Wales, many of the concessions that the Royalists made to local people were designed not only to reward them, but to flatter and exploit their sense of ethnic difference. By permitting the recruitment of wholly Cornish regiments and the creation of an entire 'Cornish Army'; by ensuring that foreign troops were kept out of Cornwall and entrusting control of the Tamar bridges to Cornish frontier guards; by sending down a personal 'Ambassador to the Cornish' and issuing declarations that emphasised the special relationship that existed between Cornwall and the Crown, Charles was reinforcing the Cornish perception of themselves as a distinctive people, while at the same time stressing the point that, by fighting for him, they were helping to preserve their own unique status within the English state. These were subtle tactics, which had almost certainly been recommended to the king by the Cornish gentry governors themselves, and there can be no doubt that they did a great deal to confirm and reinforce Cornish support for the Crown.

Yet there was a downside to this strategy as well, for the coded messages that Charles transmitted to his Cornish subjects were intercepted and at least partially deciphered by the Parliamentary camp, where they had the effect of confirming

the ancient view of the Cornish as 'foreigners' and of exacerbating English hostility towards them. This hostility had been growing, in any case, from the moment that Cornwall rose for the king in October 1642, thus setting out on a political course diametrically opposed to that which had been adopted by its eastern neighbours. Now, Royalist propaganda helped to convince English Parliamentarians that all Cornishmen and women supported the king. As has previously been observed, this belief was demonstrably false, for in Cornwall, as in Wales, there were a number of individuals who were brave enough, or foolish enough, to strike out against the prevailing tide of 'national' feeling. Buller's success in raising seven hundred men at Launceston has already been alluded to and during the following year it was claimed that three hundred exiled Cornishmen were assisting the Parliamentary forces in Devon.[67] Nevertheless, it is easy to see why the limited support that existed for Parliament in Cornwall should have been overlooked. Parliament's Cornish supporters were gentlemen rather than commoners: chiefs without braves.[68] They themselves admitted to this after the Committee's flight into Devon, when one despondent Cornish Roundhead reported from Plymouth that 'most part of our gentlemen are here . . . but no foot nor troope[r]s'.[69] The lack of popular support for the Cornish Parliamentarians, the astonishing speed with which they had been bundled out of the county and the almost invisible public profile that they maintained thereafter all combined to erase them from the English public consciousness, thus permitting the idea that the Cornish were a race of Royalists to become an established orthodoxy. It was only a matter of time before disgruntled Parliamentarians began to mutter that so wilfully obstinate a people could scarcely be regarded as English at all.

Parliament itself did not openly endorse such comments. What may be termed the 'official' Parliamentarian view of the Cornish – by which I mean the view generally expressed in formal pronouncements of the two Houses – was that they, like the inhabitants of other pro-Royalist districts, were not so much wicked as misguided: that they had been led astray by evil men, and that once the scales had been lifted from their eyes, and the 'oppressive' Cavalier forces removed, they would be eager to rejoin the rest of the kingdom. Obviously, this was the only sensible line that Parliament could adopt if it were ever to win back popular support in these regions, and obviously this was the line that was favoured by pro-Parliamentary exiles. Maintaining this benign façade was by no means easy, however, especially when it came to the Cornish, whose enthusiastic support for the king had infuriated English Parliamentarians. Some measure of just how angry MPs were is provided by the fact that, during the first eight months of the Civil War, official Parliamentarian references to the Cornish, while never explicitly condemnatory, were

nevertheless couched in such a way as to resurrect long-standing English prejudices against them.

From the moment that the pro-Royalist rising in Cornwall took place, Parliament termed it an 'insurrection'.[70] This at once had the effect of reminding English people of the past Cornish propensity for rebellion – a link that was made explicit by several Roundhead pamphleteers[71] – and of the violent incursions that the Cornish had made into England in the past. Once these dark memories had been summoned up, it became all too easy to see Cornwall less as an integral part of England than as a semi-detached threat to it. And by labelling those who had aided Hopton in Cornwall as 'rebels', Parliament encouraged its English supporters to see them as 'traitors', too: perfidious betrayers, not only of the Parliamentary cause but of the entire English nation. The pamphleteer who claimed that 'the Cornishmen are . . . disaffected to the Parliament, and the good of this kingdom' was clearly thinking along precisely these lines.[72] Parliament's insistence on continuing to refer to what was going on in Cornwall as an 'insurrection' throughout early 1643 is especially striking.[73] By ignoring the fact that a Royalist army had been raised in the county, and by constantly repeating the charge that Hopton and his allies were rebels, official Parliamentary pronouncements suggested that the Cornish were operating independently of the Royalist forces elsewhere, and pursuing their own agenda (which, of course, in many ways they were). This in turn had the effect of underscoring the distinctiveness of Cornish behaviour, and of subliminally reinforcing the message that the Cornish were 'not as other (English)men'. That Charles I himself felt it necessary in March 1643 to issue a proclamation specifically denying that his supporters in Cornwall were rebels shows how potentially damaging he believed the Parliament's tactics to be.[74]

If Parliament was prepared to hint at Cornish 'foreignness', pro-Parliamentary pamphleteers were prepared to go very much further. As I have shown elsewhere, a flood of anti-Cornish bile poured off the London presses between 1642 and 1644, and many of the accusations levelled against the Cornish during this period were clearly designed to suggest that they were 'alien' and 'un-English'. At first, these suggestions were made in a relatively subtle way. The frequency with which Parliamentary propagandists depicted the king's Cornish soldiers as violent plunderers, for example – when we know, from a variety of other sources, that they were in fact quite unusually blameless in this respect[75] – may have been an attempt to appeal to the contemporary English conviction that plundering was a peculiarly 'foreign' vice.[76] Similarly, propagandist descriptions of the Cornish as 'slavish' and 'Popish' encouraged English readers to perceive them as downtrodden, quasi-Catholic 'foreigners', the very antithesis of the free-born, Protestant Englishman.[77]

Such tactics must have had their effect. But far more subversive of the notion that Cornwall formed an integral part of England was the growing tendency to equate the behaviour of the Cornish with that of the Welsh. As noted already, the Venetian ambassador had been drawing parallels between events in Cornwall and Wales since as early as March 1642, and English observers can hardly have failed to do the same. Certainly, from the moment that Cornwall declared for the king, statements began to appear in the Parliamentary press implying a degree of collusion between the Cornish and the Welsh. On 12 October one pamphleteer reported that the Royalist Lords Hertford and Mohun were advancing on London 'with great forces of Welsh and Cornish' and many similar reports followed.[78] Thereafter, Cornwall and Wales became inextricably conjoined in the English Parliamentarian imagination as two equally 'ignorant' and 'barbarous' regions in which support for the king was wellnigh universal.[79] One Parliamentarian writer even asserted that Cornwall formed part of Wales, thus resurrecting the ancient view of the Cornish as 'West Welsh'.[80]

As the remarkable string of Cornish military successes continued during 1643, so Parliamentarian attitudes towards the king's Cornish soldiers grew increasingly hostile. One effect of this was that attempts by Roundhead propagandists to present the Cornish as uncivilised, and therefore as un-English, became much more blatant. Particular alarm was caused by the Royalist victory at Stratton (a victory that, it is interesting to note, was won in the classic 'Celtic' manner by a wild charge of Cornishmen, armed only with pikes and swords, who overwhelmed their technically superior foes). In its wake, references began to be made to 'the inhumane Cornish'.[81] Meanwhile, a tendency to regard Cornwall itself as a distinct territorial entity had begun to emerge. In early 1644 one Parliamentarian writer claimed that the Royalists had hoped to counterbalance the invasion of the Scots by forming a 'rebellious league' of Devon and Cornwall, but that the king's 'Cornish hopes' would fail him.[82] Such references to Cornwall as if it enjoyed a status approaching that of an independent polity were to become increasingly common as the war went on.

IV

Eighteen months of war had had a dramatic impact on English perceptions of the Cornish, but the events of this period also affected the way in which the Cornish viewed the English, and, just as importantly, themselves. In Cornwall, as in Wales, evidence on these points is tantalisingly slight. Few Cornish quarter sessions records survive for the 1640s, so the 'official' voice of Cornwall is muted; no news-books were produced in Cornwall during the war, so we lack the unofficial voices that reveal so much about contemporary perceptions in London and Oxford; those contemporary Cornish documents that do exist, moreover, were chiefly penned by the gentry and the clergy, so the views of ordinary people – and especially of the Cornish-speaking westerners – remain obscure. Nevertheless it is possible to discern a little through the gloom.

There can be little doubt that the 'official' Cornish view of Cornwall's role in the conflict, the view that was publicly propounded by the county's gentry governors, corresponded very closely with the 'official' view of the Royalist high command: namely, that Cornwall was a supremely loyal English county whose inhabitants were labouring to bring their misguided neighbours back to the path of righteousness.[83] This view of Cornwall was made easier to sustain by the hurried departure of almost all of Parliament's local supporters at the beginning of the war. As early as October 1642 it was reported that 'all good ministers and Christians almost have left Cornwall', and small groups of Cornish Parliamentarians continued to slip into Plymouth thereafter, thus eroding their party's narrow Cornish base still further.[84] We have already noted the dramatic effect that this exodus had on English perceptions of the Cornish, but perhaps more dramatic still was the effect it had on opinion within Cornwall itself. With the ejection of the 'Grandees', the nascent political identity that they had tried to strengthen – one that was both Parliamentarian and Cornish – dissolved entirely. Thereafter, most local people came to equate the defence of the Royalist cause with the defence of Cornwall itself, thus embracing a popular ideology that, by analogy with the situation in Wales, might be termed Cornu-Royalism. And many pieces of evidence suggest that, from October 1642 onwards, the Civil War in Cornwall, as opposed to the Civil War in which Cornwall was involved, effectively came to an end, as Cornish people came to regard themselves as engaged, not so much in a fratricidal conflict, as a quasi-national struggle for their own defence.

It is intriguing that Bevil Grenville and several other Cornishmen with reputations as 'puritans' eventually came out for the king, instead of declaring for Parliament as the godly almost invariably did elsewhere.[85] Had they put allegiance to their 'country' above allegiance to religious ideology? It is hard to tell, but perceptions of the war as a fight between Cornwall and the rest were clearly well entrenched by January 1643, when a Cornishman described the engagement fought at Braddock Down as 'the battell . . . between our county and the enemyes of Devon and elsewhere'.[86] More significant still is the fact that, as the war intensified, even former supporters of the Parliament began to abandon their old allegiance and to identify with the 'national' cause instead. A case in point is that of Alexander Daniel of Laregan, a man who had signed the anti-episcopal petition of 1642, but who nevertheless referred in his diary in May 1643 to 'the battle at Stratton between the Devonians . . . and our Cornish . . . where God gave a wonderful victory to our Cornish, who stood for the king'. As Daniel went on

to record, 'for this victory . . . [there] was a public thanksgiving in Cornwall'.[87] Stratton was clearly regarded in Cornwall as a 'national' triumph.

This was certainly the view of the Cornish Royalist officer William Scawen, who later referred with pride to '*our* battle at Stratton . . . where the rebels . . . were . . . defeated *by the Cornish only*'. Elsewhere in his post-war writings, Scawen boasted at length 'of *our* services . . . in the late Civil Wars on behalf of . . . Charles I, when . . . *wee in this county* sustained for four years time, the whole power . . . of the rebellious part of . . . [the] kingdom, invading us with severall great and well-formed armies'. Looking back on the conflict from the vantage point of the 1670s, Scawen consistently depicted the army that had been raised for the king in Cornwall during the Civil War as a quasi-national formation.[88] And that many ordinary Cornish soldiers had felt precisely the same way at the time is demonstrated by their fierce insistence that the army in which they served should be officially termed 'the Cornish Army'.[89] Clearly, the successive experiences of mass-mobilisation in a common cause, of collective resistance to foreign invasion and of shared triumph on the field of battle had forged a greatly heightened sense of ethnic solidarity in Cornwall by late 1643.

The events of the following year were to reinforce this sense of cohesion still further and to turn the already fierce antagonism between the Cornish Royalists and their Parliamentarian opponents into outright hatred. In July 1644 Cornwall was invaded by Parliament's main south-eastern field army, under the command of the earl of Essex. Essex's men had made no secret of their intention to punish the Cornish for their 'ill-affection' to the Parliamentary cause, and once the Roundheads had crossed over the Tamar the entire adult male population took to its heels. Passing through the silent villages, many of them inhabited only by sullen groups of women and children, Essex was beset by a powerful sense of unease, but did nothing to prevent his exultant troops from 'vaunting' over the populace. The Parliamentarians' misdeeds roused the Cornish to savage anger and Essex's men soon found themselves being harried by vengeful guerrilla bands. As powerful Royalist armies closed in on the Parliamentarians from both east and west, Essex concluded that his position was hopeless and set sail in a fishing boat for Plymouth, abandoning his entire army to its fate. On 2 September 1644 some six thousand Roundhead infantrymen laid down their arms at Castle Dore, near Fowey. It was the most abject Parliamentary defeat of the Civil War – and worse was still to come for the hapless Roundhead soldiers.[90]

The king had promised the Roundheads that, once they had given up their arms, they would be escorted back to Southampton in safety, but he had reckoned without the anger of the local people. As the files of weary men trudged eastwards, they were set upon by the Cornish country-folk who robbed them of all they possessed. Particularly violent scenes were enacted in the little town of

Lostwithiel on 3 September, when crowds of Cornish men and women mobbed the Parliamentarians as they were crossing the River Fowey, beating them, pillaging them and stripping them to their very skins. The female camp-followers who accompanied the Parliamentary soldiers suffered along with the rest and a number of luckless men and women were thrown off the bridge into the river below, where several of them drowned.[91] It was by no means the worst atrocity committed during the course of the Civil War, but, to the ordinary Roundhead soldiers, the 'barbarismes' that had been inflicted upon them at Lostwithiel Bridge, coming on top of the humiliating defeat that had been inflicted on their army just days before, represented an almost unbearable affront.[92]

Several factors combined to ensure that the events of 3 September would live on in infamy among supporters of the Parliament. First, there was the fact that the Royalists had reneged on their promise to protect their defenceless opponents. Second, there was the fact that the Cornish mob had not just attacked the Roundhead soldiers, but had beaten, and even killed, their female camp-followers as well. This suggested that the Cornish did not adhere to the normal codes of war – by which women, children, clergymen, the old, the sick and the dead were supposed to be afforded protection – and thus confirmed the view of them as a barbarous and uncivilised people.[93] It also reinforced the growing Parliamentarian conviction that the Cornish were hostile to the English as a nation. The prominence of Cornish women in the violence sent out precisely the same message, as well as being intensely humiliating for the Roundhead soldiers. Finally, there was the fact that the events that had taken place at Lostwithiel Bridge in 1644 were chillingly reminiscent of those that had taken place at Portadown Bridge in Ulster in 1641 during the opening stages of the Irish Rebellion. On that occasion, a band of Irish Catholic rebels had stripped and beaten a group of a hundred English men, women and children before driving their victims on to the bridge and then drowning and shooting them in the waters below.[94] The incident had been widely reported and had sunk deep into the English popular consciousness.[95] Portadown was remembered with horror in England as an incident that had epitomised the murderous determination of a 'barbarous', 'popish' people to extirpate the English Protestants from their land. It is easy to see how the atrocities committed at Lostwithiel, despite their far smaller scale, could have been viewed in a similar light, reinforcing the perception of the Civil War in the far south-west as an ethnic conflict between two different peoples.

Within days, a bitter clamour for revenge against the Cornish was being made in the London press, just as it had previously been made against the Irish. Roundhead pamphleteers, boiling with rage, were soon predicting that the time would come when 'we shall be even with . . . [that] wicked [Cornish] crue', while

Roundhead soldiers matched bloody words with bloody actions.[96] At the battle of Newbury, fought on 27 October, no quarter was given to those Cornish Royalist soldiers who were unfortunate enough to fall into their enemies' hands, and these killings reflected a wider shift in Parliamentarian attitudes.[97] The 'Cornwall business', as the debacle of July to September 1644 was subsequently termed by Roundhead commentators,[98] had finally ensured that the view of the Cornish as an intrinsically Royalist people would become established orthodoxy in the Parliamentarian camp. In November 1644 one news-writer reported 'that there is scarce any . . . gentleman in Cornwall, but he is now in present service in his Majesty's army, or . . . has lost his life by his disobedience to the Parliament'.[99] And even this picture of Cornish unanimity in the king's cause was topped later that same month by a pamphleteer reporting the trial of Alexander Carew, a Cornish gentleman who had initially embraced the cause of Parliament but who had later made overtures to the king. Carew, the pamphlet's author observed in acid tones, had been 'thought formerly to be one of great resolution for the Parliament, *but this it is for a man to be naturalised in Cornwall*'.[100] The image of the Cornish as 'natural-born' Royalists, as a people pre-ordained from birth to be irredeemably hostile to the Parliamentary cause, had now reached its apogee. Between Parliament and ultimate military victory, many ordinary Parliamentarians had now come to believe, there stood a wholly 'irreconcilable' people.[101] It was a situation pregnant with the most terrible possibilities.

Chapter 3

Irish Invaders

Irish and 'English-Irish' Troops in England, 1642–1644

If English attitudes towards the Welsh and Cornish have been almost entirely neglected by previous historians of the Civil War, the same cannot be said of English attitudes towards the Irish. On the contrary, scholars have devoted an enormous amount of attention to this subject over the past 350 years, and have shown how a deep-seated fear of Irish invasion influenced the course of English politics at almost every turn between 1638 and 1646.[1] Some of the invasion scares that took place before the Civil War have already been touched upon. We have seen, for example, how the news that forces were being prepared in Ireland by the earl of Strafford and the earl of Antrim to assist Charles I in his projected wars against the Scots had caused widespread alarm in England during 1638–40.[2] We have seen how the charge that Strafford had plotted 'to bring over the Irish army into England' to crush the king's domestic opponents had transfixed the political nation throughout early 1641.[3] Most important of all, we have seen how the Irish rising of October 1641, and the bloody massacres that followed it, had sparked near-hysteria in England during late 1641 and early 1642.[4] Thousands of Englishmen and women had been convinced that the rebellion in Ireland was merely the prelude to a full-scale Catholic descent upon England.[5] So had many English settlers in Ireland itself. One Protestant woman from Armagh, who was briefly captured by the insurgents, later deposed that she had 'often heard the common sort of rebels say that, when they had destroyed all the English in Ireland, they would go with an army into England and destroy the English there'.[6] This was the stuff of English nightmares – and when troops from Ireland did indeed begin to arrive in England during the Civil War, many ordinary people believed that the 'Irish invaders' were bent on nothing less than the utter extirpation of the English race.

If Irish intervention in the English Civil War stirred up intensely powerful emotions at the time, it remains a hotly contested subject today. While there can be no doubt that Charles I was able to bring over substantial forces from Ireland to bolster his armies in England, historians continue to differ about exactly how