

THE MILITIA IN EARLY STUART CHESHIRE

by G. P. Higgins, M.A.

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In a letter sent to the Lords Lieutenant of all counties in 1626 the Privy Council described the militia as 'the sure and constant bulwark of defence'.² Whatever the truth of this description it underlined the fact that the militia remained, in the early seventeenth century, the bedrock of the country's land based defences against invasion. Based on the medieval concept that it was the obligation of every able bodied man to aid the defence of his country in time of national danger, the militia was a part time force organised on a county basis. In fact the geographical county of Cheshire possessed two militia forces. The city of Chester, as a county in its own right, vigorously upheld the privilege of organising and maintaining its own militia as a unit completely separate from Cheshire's force. The latter, which was a much larger and more significant military unit, is the subject of this paper.³

The creation and maintenance of an effective militia in each county was one of the most difficult and costly tasks facing local governors. It was essential, therefore, that consistently firm and vigilant direction be given by the Privy Council in London if anything worthwhile was to be achieved in the provinces. Inevitably perhaps, such direction was not forthcoming during the period of peace for England which opened soon after the accession of James I in 1603, when the long war against Spain was finally concluded. In fact slackness in militia organisation had already set in by the time James came to the throne, as the threat of invasion receded in the last years of the war. The Armada crisis of 1588 had forced the Council to make urgent efforts to spur the counties into effective action regarding their militia forces. Thereafter, the continuing war and the spectre of a Spanish invasion were enough to maintain at least a visible measure of military preparedness in the counties. In 1599, however, came the last of Spain's attempted invasions, and with it the peak of militia activity during the war.⁴ Following the failure of the invasion the level of militia readiness quickly fell as the Council's directives became far less demanding. Indeed, in 1601 the counties were ordered

¹ I am very grateful to Mr. J. T. Driver and Dr. B. E. Harris for encouraging me to write this article. Neither is, of course, responsible for its deficiencies.

² *Acts of the Privy Council* (hereafter *A.P.C.*), 1626, p. 75.

³ There is no published work which relates specifically to the organisation of the militia of the City of Chester. The main source material for that subject, the official records of the City, has not been used for this article. It is in the custody of the Chester City Record Office.

⁴ L. Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia 1558-1638*, 1971 edit., p. 165.

by the Council to train the militia only once each year and to limit the training to a maximum of two days because of the high cost involved.⁵ Clearly any previous sense of crisis and urgency had passed.

As far as Cheshire was concerned, this relaxation of close Council supervision of militia activity was of even longer standing. In the early 1590s the county had undergone two invasion scares resulting from intelligence from the Continent which suggested that the Spanish were about to invade the north west of England. Neither invasion materialised but both were sufficiently credible to make the Council take a closer than usual interest in the county's military affairs. The passing of these threats and the growing disorder in Ulster, which escalated into full scale open rebellion in the mid nineties, ended this temporary preoccupation with Cheshire's internal military situation. As Chester was the main port for embarkation to northern Ireland, the Council's interest in Cheshire now became centred on its role in contributing to the efficient movement of troops sent to quell the rebellion. Therefore, in the later 1590s and the early 1600s, Cheshire's Commissioners for Musters, a panel of leading gentlemen undertaking responsibility for the county's military government in the temporary absence of a Lord Lieutenant, received a constant stream of orders from the Council relating to the Irish campaign rather than to the county militia. They were directed to carry out such duties as aiding the provision of shipping and victuals for the troops, raising levies of fresh soldiers and ensuring the orderly and the efficient passage of men through the county to the point of embarkation.⁶ In these circumstances it was inevitable that the state of Cheshire's militia should be overlooked by both central and local governors, fully occupied as they were by more immediately pressing military commitments.

The Stuart period opened, then, with the Cheshire militia, like the forces of so many counties, already suffering from neglect and increasing decay. Through the first ten years of James I's reign this deterioration in standards continued as supervision of the militia became just another aspect of the Council's routine administration, given no special priority. The approach of the central government in these years is well illustrated by the Council's orders relating to the militia in 1608.⁷ In a sense this set of instructions was untypical in that they were far more direct and detailed than most others issued in the first decade of James' reign, requiring, for example, the mustering of the untrained sections of the county forces. However, even these orders were couched in deliberately conciliatory terms and were far less demanding than corresponding instructions issued in the 1590s. It was emphasised, for instance, that in the execution of the orders the King did not 'require more haste herein than may be convenient for the people'. There was no requirement to hold training. Also, musters could be held in the divisions of the counties, in Cheshire the seven hundreds, rather than one general muster of

⁵ *A.P.C.*, 1600-01, p. 406.

⁶ See, for example, *A.P.C.*, 1595-96, pp. 314, 331, 420; 1596-97, pp. 159, 182; 1597-98, p. 526; 1598-99, pp. 33, 185, 303.

⁷ J. Wake, ed., *The Montagu Musters Book 1602-1623*, Northamptonshire Record Society, vol. 7, 1935, pp. 24-7.

the whole county force. Previously, in the war years, the Council had discouraged divisional musters fearing the lack of co ordination in county forces that could result, and that such a system made the detection and remedying of abuses in the militia a more difficult and elaborate administrative task. By 1608 such fears had apparently been replaced by a desire for convenience and acceptance by the counties.

The year 1616, however, marked the end of this period of near total neglect of the militia. The central government was jolted out of its inattentiveness by renewed Spanish military activity on the Continent which once more brought the possibility of war and even invasion. In the following year, a letter from the Council ordering musters to be held in every county, disclosed that the danger had caused the King 'to cast a vigilant and provident eye to the safety of his dominions', a sure indication that militia affairs were again coming under closer scrutiny.⁸ Initially, the major result of the government's change of policy was to reveal the lamentable condition of the militia after ten years of neglect. In 1613, the Earl of Derby, Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire and Cheshire, the government's military officer for the two counties, reported to the Council that he found 'the defects . . . to be sundry and great' in the Cheshire militia after the annual muster had been held.⁹ Understandably, remedying the effects of the previous decade was a slow business, despite pressure from London. In 1619 Derby still had to report that 'many defects in general both in horse and foot' had been found at the Cheshire muster.¹⁰ The main faults he noted were that the men were badly trained, many of the firearms were obsolete and the horse company's heavy cavalry was in every respect below standard. Despite disappointing reports like this from several counties, the Council persisted in its attempts to improve the militia, having by this time been given further incentive to do so by the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in Europe. In 1623, for example, a new book of instructions for militia training was sent out to the counties describing the use of modern firearms and the latest methods of drilling and exercising troops.¹¹ The Council's efforts had borne at least some fruit in Cheshire by the end of James I's reign in 1625. The county muster for that year revealed some continuing deficiencies in the militia but at least it was now possible to report that 'the arms both of the horse and foot are much better and more aptly furnished than in former times'.¹²

The accession of Charles I in 1625 was the major turning point in the history of the militia in this period. The presence of an energetic young monarch and the resumption of a warlike policy in the later 1620s combined to cause a far greater interest in the condition of the militia than had been evident even in the latter years of the previous reign. Indeed, the King's aim was nothing less than a 'perfect

⁸ *A.P.C.*, 1613-14, p. 552.

⁹ Public Record Office: State Papers Domestic, James I, Ref. S.P. 14/72/94.

¹⁰ P.R.O., S.P. 14/108/20.

¹¹ *A.P.C.*, 1623-25, pp. 8, 205.

¹² P.R.O.: State Papers Domestic, Charles I, Ref. S.P. 16/10/43.

militia'.¹³ The result was the implementation of a determined policy by the central government to raise the standard of the local forces. This produced a burst of activity in the counties which even surpassed the efforts of the 1590s.

Three attempted improvements characterised this policy. First, the Council sought to have a magazine of arms and ammunition established in each county and to encourage the founding of artillery yards for gunnery practice. Artillery yards were not a new idea by this time, but those which had existed hitherto had been confined largely to the area of London. An attempt to establish one in Cheshire was made in 1625, but failed because of the difficulty of finding a suitable site and, more crucially, sufficient sources of funds to finance it. In 1628 a similar scheme was launched by Edward Holmwood, an experienced professional soldier. It gained the approval of the Council, but the total lack of evidence regarding either its foundation or its functioning suggests that the plan proved as abortive as the earlier one, probably for the same reasons. The establishment of a county magazine, however, was successfully carried out. In 1626 the Council ordered the Lord Lieutenant to ensure that a magazine was established at Chester and laid down the quantities of ammunition it should contain. At first the county's Deputy Lieutenants toyed with a more ambitious alternative plan, namely to set up several smaller magazines throughout the county, to be used in conjunction with divisional musters of the militia. The idea was only briefly entertained, however, because of the high cost of such a venture. Thus the original plan was adopted and a magazine was established in the castle at Chester and paid for by a county rate.

The second improvement in the militia sought by the Council was to raise the woefully low standards of the counties' horse companies. Constantly under-strength and poorly equipped, this section of the militia had always provided the most problems for both the local governors and the Council, and Cheshire's horse company was no exception in this respect. In the early years of Charles I's reign the Council had constantly exhorted all the counties to improve their horse companies, but little progress was made in Cheshire or elsewhere. As a result, in 1628, the Council tried a dramatic new move to force the local governors into taking effective action at last. Regional, rather than county, musters of the horse companies would take place and would be inspected personally by the King. Cheshire's company was to assemble at Leicester with those of the midland counties.

Initially in Cheshire the Council's move had the desired effect, producing a flurry of preparations for the event. This is evident from the pages of the letter book of Thomas Legh, one of the Deputy Lieutenants.¹⁴ This manuscript volume covering the period from May 1625 to September 1642 is the major source for the Caroline militia in Cheshire. Legh recorded transcripts and summaries of the correspondence concerning the militia between the Council, Lord Lieutenant and the Deputies, and details of the decisions taken by the Deputies and their activity to implement them.

¹³ *A.P.C.*, 1625-26, p. 496.

¹⁴ Chester City Record Office: Earwaker Manuscripts, Ref. CR 63/2/6 ff. 38-40.

The letter book concentrates on the eastern hundreds of the county where Legh was more involved.

The hurried preparations described in Legh's book, including a preliminary view of the horse company to discover any existing defects before the muster at Leicester, turned out to be unnecessary. In March 1628, two months after the original Council order, the muster at Leicester was postponed because it was claimed 'the troops of horse in most counties are found to be defective and in so ill equipage that they cannot well be reformed and made complete in so short a time'.¹⁵ The Council's plan had in fact already met with so many complaints and so much evasion from all areas of the country, that it was obviously doomed to fail. Rather than have this happen, the Council abandoned the idea altogether in May. The reason given for this change of mind, that the Council wished to save the counties the great expenditure that regional musters would cause, could not hide the fact that an important aspect of the Government's reinvigorated militia policy had been a failure.

By contrast, the third innovatory feature of this policy, and probably the most important, was a marked success and especially so in Cheshire. This was the Council's decision to use experienced professional soldiers to instruct the trained bands. Eighty four of these 'Low Countries Sergeants', as they were called, were to be deployed throughout the country and they were sent out to their allotted counties early in 1626. Cheshire received two, Philip Cotton and Arthur Humberstone. They were given an enthusiastic and positive welcome in the county. Special divisional training was arranged by the Deputy Lieutenants so that the veterans could begin to instruct the raw infantrymen of the militia. In a short time highly favourable reports of their work were being sent to the Council. Originally, the soldiers were to work in the counties for three months. However, as the laudatory reports of their work in Cheshire were paralleled by so many other counties, including neighbouring Lancashire, the King and Council extended their stay. The Cheshire Deputies welcomed this arrangement and gave the soldiers further commendations when they had completed their lengthened term of service. A sure sign of the county's favour was the ease and speed with which a county rate was arranged and collected to pay the soldiers' salaries and expenses.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the veterans in the county had coincided with the beginning of a concerted attempt by the Cheshire Deputies to raise the standard of the county's militia to unprecedented heights, in line with the Government's national policy. One feature of their activity was to intensify the efforts, which had begun in later years of the previous reign, to re equip the local forces entirely with modern firearms. In 1613 most infantrymen in the Cheshire trained bands who carried a firearm were still armed with the caliver, which was a lighter, less penetrating forerunner of the musket. This weapon had been deemed unacceptable by the Council in 1618 and the process of ousting it was now completed. By 1629

¹⁵ *A.P.C.*, 1627-28, pp. 3, 47.

there were no calivers on show at the Cheshire muster, and the militia could boast seven hundred muskets compared to two hundred and eighty in 1613.¹⁶ Besides the caliver, another casualty of modernisation was the bow. Most counties had discarded this weapon by the end of the sixteenth century but in Cheshire its passing came only gradually. This was understandable in a county whose archers had acquired during the Middle Ages a near legendary reputation for their prowess with the long bow. The muster certificate for 1613 reveals that although Cheshire's trained bands were by then armed with calivers and muskets there were still several bows in evidence amongst the untrained sections of the militia. Even as late as 1627 Cheshire provided a contingent of archers for the Duke of Buckingham's ill fated expedition to the isle of Rhé. By the end of the decade the bow had been discarded even by the untrained sections in favour of firearms.

In striving to modernise the militia, the Deputies also turned their attention to the problems of the horse company. Like the task of rearming the foot soldiers, the process of re equipping the horse troops in accordance with the latest military thinking had begun in the previous reign. Originally the horse company was divided into two sections, the lances and light horse. The former, who took their name from their main weapon, were the heavy cavalry. They wore three quarter length armour and carried a sword and dagger, and sometimes a pistol, in addition to their lance. The light horse wore only light armour, and were armed with a staff and pistol, their role being to skirmish and harass the enemy. Advances in weaponry required a change in these roles. The lances were replaced by cuirassiers armed with a brace of pistols and more lightly armoured for greater mobility. Harquebusiers, taking their name from the portable gun they carried, succeeded the light horse. By 1628 these changes had been effected by the Cheshire Deputies in the county's horse company. The Deputies had not been able, however, to raise substantially the numbers of the horse company as the Council had wished. The height of their achievement was to raise the number of horse soldiers to seventy six in 1629, a figure only barely equalling that for 1613. The Council was concerned because, in Elizabeth's reign in the years leading up to the Armada, the Cheshire horse company had numbered one hundred and twenty. Given the heavy cost of providing cavalry armed in the modern fashion, it was perhaps inevitable, despite pressure from London, that the Deputies' efforts further to increase the numbers proved futile throughout the 1630s.

The most notable feature of the Deputies' energetic response to the Council's policy of the later 1620s, was a grand muster and training session for the whole county force. The operation, arrangements for which were launched in the summer of 1626, was planned on a scale never before attempted. The details were drawn up at a meeting of the Deputies in Chester after an initial muster which was held to discover any shortcomings. The venue selected for the gathering was Northwich, its central position in the county being the deciding factor. The training session, which was to last three days, required a complex plan of organisation devised by

¹⁶ P.R.O., S.P. 14/72/94; Chester City R.O., CR 63/2/6 f. 46.

the Deputies, including a set of strict rules governing individual conduct.¹⁷ Despite difficulties in financing the operation, the Deputies' efforts met with great success. An enrolment of the whole county force, numbering eleven hundred, was accomplished, followed by three days of manoeuvres for the trained bands. The Deputies also carried out the Council's order to administer oaths of allegiance and supremacy to all the forces mustered: orthodox religious views were considered an essential qualification for a loyal militiaman. The Deputies' only failure had been their inability to persuade the Council to contribute to the cost of the exercise from central funds. As a result, the whole sum had had to be borne by the county. Estimated originally to be around £4,000, the levy caused some unrest.

The combination of Council pressure and conscientious activity within the county brought Cheshire's militia to the zenith of its achievement by 1629, as far as can be judged in peace time conditions. The ranks of the infantry were complete and the horse company had been increased, albeit modestly. The trained bands were armed with modern weapons and had been instructed in the latest techniques. A magazine had been established and stocked, and the county's beacons repaired. All seemed well but, once more, the militia had reached another important turning point. In the years after 1629 England remained at peace. As the militia was less likely to be needed for national defence, there was less motive for keeping the force efficient and ready. Moreover, the Council was increasingly distracted by the pressing demands of other policies, notably the need to provide adequate revenue in the absence of parliamentary supply during the King's personal rule from 1629 to 1640. Orders to the counties concerning the militia and musters became noticeably less detailed and exacting. Inevitably, a decline in militia standards followed, although in Cheshire this process occurred more slowly than in many other counties, for example, Somerset.¹⁸ Musters and training continued to be held annually throughout the early 1630s. Even then, however, the brief reports of the Deputies suggest that they, like the Council, had relaxed their previous efforts. In the later years of the decade the militia's decline visibly gathered momentum. The Council's orders became even slacker. In 1637 the counties were released from the duty of watching the beacons. The following year musters were to be held 'at such convenient times as may be least incommodious' and cancelled altogether if the plague was in the vicinity. It is hardly surprising that the counties took the opportunity to neglect one of their most difficult tasks. Cheshire was no exception; training sessions ceased and no more modernisation or replacement of equipment was attempted. By the end of 1638 the 'perfect militia' was further from accomplishment than ever.

The central government now began to regret its neglect of the militia during the 1630s. The attempt of King Charles and Archbishop Laud to impose orthodox Anglicanism on Scotland, by the introduction of a new prayer book in 1637, had

¹⁷ Chester City R.O., CR 63/2/6 ff. 27-33.

¹⁸ Ibid. f. 51; P.R.O., S.P. 16/224/37, 248/32, 302/136; Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia*, pp. 267-9; T. G. Barnes, *Somerset 1625-1640*, 1961, p. 259.

provoked widespread resistance. This developed in 1638 into a revolt of national proportions north of the border. As both sides prepared for war, the Government's interest in the militia was reawakened. In November the counties were ordered to hold a muster of their forces immediately. Recent assurances from Cheshire's Deputies that they had found 'all things complete, and in readiness' were ignored as were similarly bland reports from other counties.¹⁹ In December the Council sent a military officer, Captain Thelwell, to oversee and report on preparations in Lancashire and Cheshire. Early in 1639 Thelwell reported in generally favourable terms on the situation he found in the two counties. His report was, however, grossly misleading as regards Cheshire for, while his observations on the armament and personnel of the militia were substantially correct, he had miscalculated the mood of the county community, which by 1639 had become increasingly unco-operative and defiant.

This mood existed in the county largely because of the Government's collection of ship money. Initially this had met with negligible opposition in Cheshire. The regularity with which it was collected after 1635, however, and the size of the amounts demanded, caused growing protest and, by 1639, open defiance.²⁰ Two factors exacerbated the situation. First, opposition to the Government was fuelled by growing resentment of Laudian religious policies, even amongst those gentlemen who were loyal to Anglican ideals. Second, there may have been discontent in the county because of the cancellation of the general horse muster at Leicester, for which so many preparations had been made, and the Council's refusal to help to finance the special training session arranged by the Deputies in 1626. Five of the nine Deputies serving in 1639 had been amongst those in office in the later 1620s, and two others had taken office soon after.

Therefore, in 1638 and 1639 when the Council strove to resurrect an efficient militia in the shortest possible time, a storm of complaints greeted their attempts in Cheshire. Protests over the difficulty and expense of providing supplies of powder for the militia were followed by more familiar complaints about the cost of providing mounts for the horse company. The argument used to support these protests was long established and not peculiar to Cheshire. The Deputies argued, just as their Elizabethan counterparts had done fifty years previously, that the charges laid on Cheshire were higher than those of neighbouring counties and were unfairly disproportionate to the county's wealth and population.²¹ There was some justification for the Deputies' claims as Cheshire was at this time rated as one of the poorer counties. In the assessment for ship money, for instance, only six other counties were charged less than Cheshire. Their argument was a common excuse offered by counties for delaying the payment of taxation. Such arguments were totally unsuccessful in changing the Council's mind. Salt was rubbed into the

¹⁹ Chester City R.O., CR 63/2/6 f. 56.

²⁰ For more details see G. P. Higgins, 'The Government of Early Stuart Cheshire', *Northern History*, vol. 12, 1976, pp. 48-9.

²¹ Chester City R.O., CR 63/2/6 ff. 60, 61, 66; P.R.O., S.P. 16/417/14.

county's alleged wounds when a levy of one hundred and fifty soldiers was demanded by the Government for its army in the north. This necessitated a further exaction for military purposes, namely the payment of coat and conduct money, which was to cover the costs of providing each soldier with the required coat and pay the wages of those responsible for conducting the troops.

The Council chose to ignore the increasingly ugly mood of the county community, and accepted instead the comforting but utterly misleading reports of Captain Thelwell. This was merely one example of the short sightedness which characterised its national policy. Despite widespread protests, the Council pressed ahead with its plan of raising an army of some thirty thousand men drawn from the trained bands of the county militia forces. For Cheshire, which was to supply over two hundred men for this army, this scheme brought dissatisfaction with the Council's military policy to a head. A petition of protest was drawn up and signed by most of the leading gentry. It contained two major complaints; that the county would be left defenceless without its trained bands, and that it would be impossible to undertake the cost of rearming the militia again. The second of these was clearly the crucial argument, a point emphasised by a final request that if the trained bandsmen had to go, then at least their weapons should remain in the county. Significantly, the petition was sponsored and signed by the Deputies. In several counties the tension and disharmony provoked by the Government's military policy produced serious rifts in the local community. Somerset provides the best example. There opposition focused on the Deputies, who were seen as agents of the unpopular policy, and became alienated from the county community at large.²² In Cheshire, however, the Deputies not only identified with the local opposition, but actually led it, and the county community was substantially united behind them. It is true that the petition of protest was most vigorously sponsored by the puritan Deputies, Sir George Booth and Sir Richard Wilbraham, but all the other Deputies willingly signed it with the sole exception of Lord Rivers who was out of the county at the time, probably more by judgement than by chance. Five out of eight of the Deputies who signed the petition eventually sided with the Crown in the Civil War. Nevertheless in 1640 they shared the county's resentment of royal policies, and were then prepared to mobilise it. The key to the Deputies' attitude in 1640 probably lies in the continuity of personnel mentioned earlier.

However, the protests from Cheshire and elsewhere continued to be ignored. The Government persisted in its attempts to raise a large army and to ensure that the militia was at a peak of readiness. The response of the Deputies was a policy of non co operation. In April when the Deputies found that the appointed official was not at the muster point to receive the men they had levied from the county, they immediately sent the soldiers home, so that further delay was caused by the time consuming exercise of reassembling the force. In the following month, in reply to

²² Barnes, *Somerset*, pp. 262-71; Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia*, p. 293.

Council orders to levy a further force, this time of five hundred men, the Deputies protested that the directions were too vague, 'the letters only commanding us to levy but not directing us in what manner'.²³ When the Cheshire contingent was ready to march north, almost two months later, the King's position was so desperate as to be hopeless. Faced with national procrastination, Charles had been unable to assemble a sufficient army to impose his will on the Scots. Moreover, the troops he had been able to raise from the counties were of an exceedingly low calibre. In a skirmish at Newburn the King's motley forces were easily defeated and, in October 1640, Charles was forced to agree to the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Ripon. This allowed the Scots to occupy the counties of Northumberland and Durham, in addition to receiving a heavy subsidy, pending a final settlement agreed by Parliament, which Charles was forced to recall.

In considering the rather wayward history of the militia in the period from 1625 to 1640, it would be easy to make the mistake of underestimating the importance of the county forces. Before the Civil War England had no standing army and therefore the militia, whatever its deficiencies, was the only means of national defence. The importance attached to it by contemporaries is demonstrated by the struggle over the control of the militia between King and Parliament in 1641 and 1642, a struggle which played a crucial part in the eventual outbreak of war between the two. Indeed, this topic was a central issue in the discussions held in the years between 1642 and 1649 which aimed to achieve a negotiated settlement with the King. The storm of opposition to the royal government which had been generated before the Long Parliament met in November 1640, arose largely from the handling of militia affairs by the King and his ministers. The Grand Remonstrance of 1641 made clear that the burden of military exactions had become a national grievance. In several counties, as in Cheshire, further resentment was caused by the King's attempts to tamper with the county forces for his own purpose in 1639 and 1640. The outcome of this discontent was the collapse of the militia. This in turn was part of a general breakdown in royal administration which set in train the sensational events of the 1640s, that culminated in the execution of the King and the establishment of a republican commonwealth.

The importance of the militia is not confined merely to its relevance to the affairs and fortunes of the general government. The progress of the respective county forces reveals much about the workings of local government, and about the local governors themselves and the community they governed. What then can be said of Cheshire in these respects? The defiance and opposition which characterised the last years of the period give a misleading impression of the previous decades. Generally the Deputies had undertaken their militia duties diligently and conscientiously. This was especially true of the later 1620s when the Government's efforts to improve the militia were keenest. Few counties could match the level of activity achieved by the Cheshire Deputies in these years, or the progress that

²³ Chester City R.O., CR 63/2/6 f. 96; P.R.O., S.P. 16/454/85.

had been made in the county by 1629. Also notable was the degree of support given to the Deputies not only by their fellow local governors, like the Justices, but by the community as a whole. Throughout the early seventeenth century there was a minimum of bickering and complaint over the Deputies' handling of arms assessments and other potentially contentious issues associated with the militia.²⁴ This evidence of the unity of Cheshire society was more fully emphasised in the difficult years from 1638 to 1640 when the county community remained united, this time in its opposition to the Government. The collapse of the militia in 1640 had two causes. First it was impossible to keep a part time force at peak efficiency in peacetime. Secondly inconsistent and often impracticable government policies had had a detrimental effect. As Dr. Boynton has said, 'the history of the militia under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts reflects, in its own limited sphere, the history of England itself during those reigns.'²⁵

²⁴ Events in Wiltshire and Somerset provide an obvious contrast to Cheshire. See W. P. D. Murphy, ed., *The Earl of Hertford's Lieutenancy Papers 1603-1612*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 23, 1969.

²⁵ Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia*, p. 297.

