



HAMPDEN-SYDNEY  
COLLEGE

John Hampden  
&  
Algernon Sydney  
*Making Heroes  
in the Seventeenth  
Century*

L. Nicole Greenspan



John Hampden  
&  
Algernon Sydney

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Seventeenth Century*

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ON THE COVER

Algernon Sidney and John Hampden,  
in nineteenth-century engravings.

The marbled paper was produced by  
Theron Hoar '25  
in the class "English 360: Authorship  
and the History of the Book,"  
taught by Evan Davis.

John  
Hampden  
&  
Algernon  
Sydney



*King Charles I*

JOHN HAMPDEN AND ALGERNON SYDNEY  
would not have been expected to become major figures in seventeenth-century English history.<sup>1</sup> Born a generation apart into families of status and privilege, both men could have anticipated lives of comfort and local influence, following traditional paths to establish themselves as landowners, politicians, or administrators.

John Hampden (1595-1643) was born into a respectable gentry family with deep roots in Buckinghamshire and spent much of his life within a 60-mile radius of the family seat at Great Hampden. In contrast, Algernon Sydney\* (1623-1683), a younger son of the Earl of Leicester, spent much of his early life in Paris and, after a number of rather unexceptional terms in military and political office, subsequently faced seventeen years of exile in Europe.

Yet Hampden and Sydney emerged as central figures in the defining political, constitutional, and religious controversies of their era, and their names still resonate internationally more than three hundred years later. Hampden has been memorialized by historians for his defense of parliamentary rights against royal absolutism, and Sydney has been celebrated for his republican political thought. Both men inspired future revolutionaries in the American colonies with their staunch opposition to oppressive government.<sup>2</sup>

Such portrayals of Hampden and Sydney focus on how successive generations have shaped historical narratives to align with contemporary issues. In the process, they often omit or gloss over what prompted Hampden and Sydney to challenge royal prerogative in their own era. Both men were committed Calvinists, and religion was a fundamental component of their political philosophy. They represented two distinct yet interrelated approaches, deeply rooted in their religious convictions, to resisting the unchecked exercise of royal power.

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\* *Algernon Sidney himself spelled his name with both an "i" and a "y," most often with the "i."* The College's 1783 Charter uses the "y," but during the 1800s, "i" was commonly used. In 1928, President Eggleston affirmed the Charter spelling "Sydney."

Politics and religion were intimately linked in this period, particularly given that Charles I was both the king and head of the Church of England. Both Hampden and Sydney worried that Charles I was steering the nation towards tyranny and ‘popery,’ a derogatory term for practices loosely associated with Roman Catholicism, including lavish church decorations, ritualistic worship, the hierarchical structure of bishops, and arbitrary government.

Hampden’s resistance stemmed from opposition to the abuse of royal power and the drive to purge the religious and political spheres of elements that he and other puritans deemed popish. Sydney shared many of Hampden’s religious and political concerns. In his voluminous writings, Sydney placed his opposition to monarchical absolutism within the broader context of resistance to religious coercion. He emphasized the right of the godly to worship without government interference or punishment, a position which contrasts with modern views on religious toleration that advocate for legal protections for and the coexistence of different faiths. For Sydney, a non-tyrannical government could only be upheld by individuals who were moral and virtuous, and religion was an essential component of this morality.<sup>3</sup>

Hampden became a symbol of Parliamentary sovereignty and was mythologized as a political and military hero, one whose fame and reputation could eclipse his actual achievements. Sydney lionized the English republic and cast himself as a warrior against royal oppression. In their own time they were depicted as martyrs—Hampden’s blood shed in battle and Sydney’s spilled on the scaffold. Yet historians of the seventeenth century rarely consider Hampden and Sydney together.

To some extent this is a result of chronology. Hampden died in 1643, early in the civil wars and decades before Sydney developed his political thought. It also reflects differences in historical practice. Hampden left few of his own writings, while Sydney composed lengthy political treatises. While Hampden’s resistance focused on the immediate threats posed by a specific king, Charles I, Sydney expanded

this struggle by articulating a more radical theory of civil resistance, asserting the fundamental right of the people to oppose tyrannical rulers.

Examining Hampden and Sydney alongside each other shows not only how they helped shape foundational ideas about Parliamentary rights and the limits of royal power in the seventeenth century but also sheds light on the process of myth-making and the construction of historical reputation and legacy.



*John Hampden*

## *John Hampden: Early Life*

John Hampden, the son of William Hampden and Elizabeth Cromwell (a connection that made Oliver his cousin), came from a well-established though moderately affluent family in Buckinghamshire. Great Hampden was the family seat, with additional lands and estates, including Great Kimble, spread across several local parishes. Although not among the most powerful families, the Hampdens were influential in the county. William Hampden died young, when John and his younger brother Richard were infants, leaving behind unresolved debts and a contentious relationship between their mother Elizabeth and William's cousin, who served as executor of the estate.

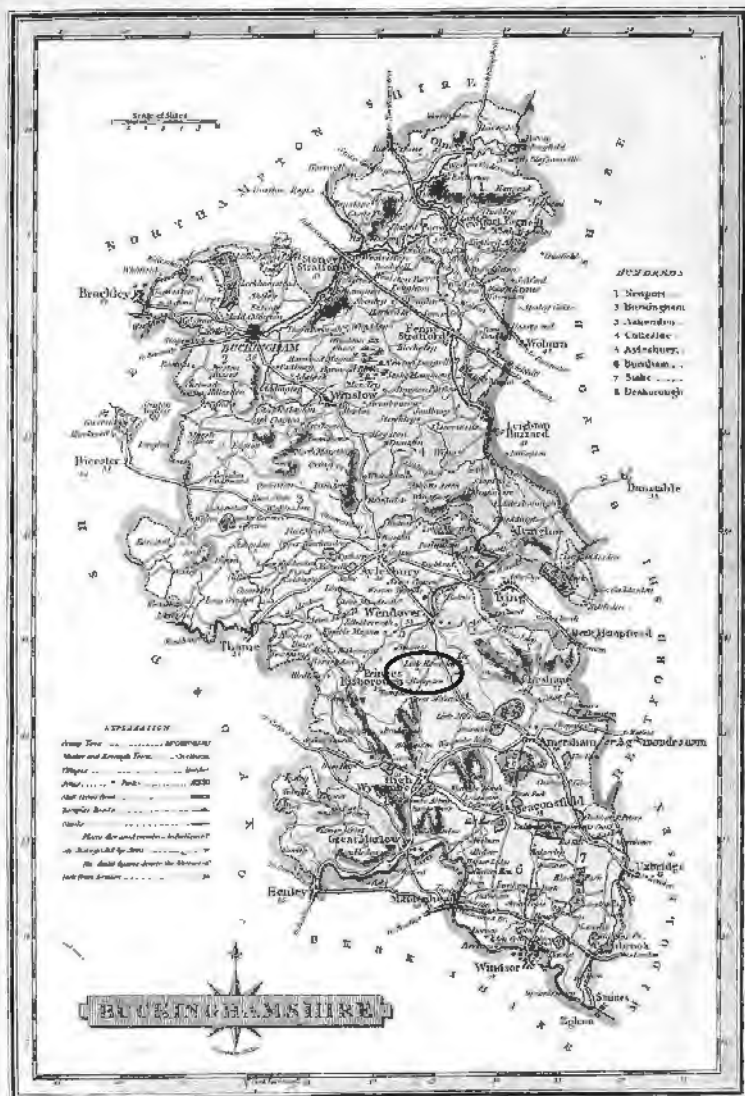
John Hampden's education followed a traditional path for those of his status and position. He first attended Thame grammar school and subsequently enrolled at Magdalene College, Oxford University, before studying law at the Inner Temple in London.<sup>4</sup> Like many of his peers, he did not complete his university or legal studies, as the principal goal of such education was not graduation but rather preparation for managing family estates and holding local administrative offices, and perhaps (as did Hampden) pursuing a career in politics.



*Thame School, Great Hampden*

JOHN HAMPDEN SOCIETY

Hampden became a member of Parliament (MP) first for a borough in Cornwall and then, in 1625, for Wendover in Buckinghamshire.<sup>5</sup> This critical year also saw the death of James I and the succession of his son Charles I. The 1620s were a tumultuous decade, marked by growing tensions between Charles I and Parliament, which largely centered upon the nature and extent of royal authority over political, religious, and constitutional issues. One of the major sources of conflict was the king's use of royal prerogative to raise funds without Parliament's consent. Parliament had the exclusive right to levy those taxes, which were based



*Great and Little Hampden in Buckinghamshire are circled.*

on personal property and considered extraordinary sources of revenue for the crown, such as would be needed in a time of war. However, both king and parliament claimed the right to control indirect streams of revenue, such as taxes on goods.

Also contentious were Charles I's efforts to reform the Church of England, including emphasis on the authority of the church hierarchy, rituals such as kneeling during communion, and decorating churches with statues and other images. As a Puritan, Hampden was deeply suspicious that the reforms were propelling the church down the road to popery. Such fears were amplified by the king's marriage to the French Catholic princess Henrietta Maria, who brought Catholic courtiers and clergy with her to England. Hampden aligned himself with like-minded associates, including Richard Knightley, Lord Saye and Sele, and John Preston.<sup>6</sup> Though not a formal political party in the modern sense, this loose alliance shared the common goals of resisting royal encroachment on religious and political liberties. Hampden's early involvement in these conflicts ultimately would position him as a leading figure in the struggle against Charles I, a conflict that would culminate in civil war.

### *The Forced Loan*

John Hampden first came to national prominence in January 1627. He refused to pay Charles I's Forced Loan, which (as the name suggests) demanded money from subjects with no guarantee of repayment.<sup>7</sup> Effectively this was a tax implemented by the king to raise money without Parliamentary approval. Such extra-Parliamentary loans were used periodically, and controversially, by the crown, especially in times of financial stress. In 1625 Charles attempted to raise funds to finance war against Spain, though the returns fell short of his expectations. Hampden was assessed as owing more than £13, a sum that even contemporaries thought was too high, especially as his mother Elizabeth was asked to pay a further £10. Ultimately Hampden paid £10 or about 75% of his assessed amount.<sup>8</sup> When he received notice of his expected contribution

to the Forced Loan the following year, Hampden refused payment entirely. His defiance led to his imprisonment for nearly a year, along with dozens of other gentlemen, including his uncle Edmund. Together with four others, Edmund Hampden challenged the legality of the loan and their imprisonment without trial, in what became known as the Five Knights' Case. In February 1627, after nearly three weeks in prison, John and Edmund petitioned for their release, declaring they were suffering "both in their health and estates." Hampden would not be released until January 1628, by which time his uncle already had died in prison.<sup>9</sup> Hampden was not alone in rejecting his assessment. Many contemporaries avoided payment for a variety of reasons. Some complained that their portions were excessive, some were unable to comply due to economic distress, and some local officials tasked with collections were inefficient or uncompliant.<sup>10</sup> Hampden's own reasons for first underpaying and then refusing his assessments are not recorded, though it seems clear that he acted out of principle rather than a personal desire to avoid taxation. The Forced Loan thus ignited a larger political and constitutional battle. A key objection was the legality of royal financial measures, part of a broader concern that Charles sought to expand royal power at the expense of Parliamentary authority. Hampden's principled resistance laid the foundation for his later role as a central figure in the constitutional struggles that would lead to civil war.

### *Ship Money*

Hampden returned to the spotlight in the 1630s with his refusal to pay Ship Money, another extra-Parliamentary tax issued by Charles I. The king had stopped calling Parliament in 1629, which meant that he was cut off from Parliamentary taxation. During this period of "Personal Rule," which lasted until 1640, Charles relied upon his personal prerogative to raise funds. Ship money had a long history in England and was not inherently controversial. Traditionally, the crown could conscript

the use of merchant ships from coastal towns for war or to increase defenses, and there was an option to send money in lieu of vessels.

In the 1630s Charles sought to expand the Royal Navy to counter the growing maritime strength of European powers such as the Dutch and French. He also sought to combat pirates who were not only attacking English shipping but also conducting increasingly bold raids on English soil for captives, reaching as far inland as London itself.<sup>11</sup> In 1634 Charles imposed Ship Money on coastal towns, and the following year extended it to the rest of the country. Charles also replaced the traditional request for ships with demands for cash payments. These changes were designed to raise large sums for modernizing the royal navy and constructing its new flagship vessel, the *Sovereign of the Seas*, which could not be achieved by requesting the temporary use of much smaller and less powerful merchant vessels. These were worthwhile enterprises that might have found ready support in Parliament, had it met. In its absence Charles acted unilaterally, provoking widespread discontent.<sup>12</sup>

In 1637, John Hampden emerged as the leading figure in the resistance to Ship Money when he was prosecuted for his refusal to pay. Collection rates varied by location, with some areas, like Cheshire, largely complying while others resisted. Objections were not necessarily based on political principle but could be based on local disputes over assessments or practical problems related to collection. Reluctance, however, did not necessarily mean complete refusal, and in its early years, most Ship Money was successfully collected and brought in about £200,000 annually.<sup>13</sup> Even Hampden himself did not entirely reject payment. As a large landowner with estates in different parishes, in 1635 Hampden received multiple assessments. He paid £8, 4s for his estate in Great Hampden, but defaulted on £20 on another property, Stoke Mandeville.<sup>14</sup> Hampden's objection was not to the amount of his assessment, but to the king's changes in assessment and collection, and to what appeared to be the transformation of Ship Money into an annual tax—one levied without Parliamentary consent.

Hampden was prosecuted in the royal court of Exchequer, and the trial became central to the constitutional debates over royal prerogative and Parliamentary authority.<sup>15</sup> Twelve royally appointed judges presided over the proceedings. Sir John Bankes, the attorney general, and Sir Edward Littleton, the solicitor-general, represented the king and argued that Ship Money was not a tax (and therefore not subject to Parliamentary consent). Instead, Bankes argued, it was essential to national defense and therefore fell within the king's personal prerogative.<sup>16</sup> Hampden's case, presented by the lawyers Oliver St. John and Robert Holborne, rejected the argument of necessity and maintained that it was a tax—and thus could not be levied without Parliamentary approval. The judges were keenly aware of the trial's high stakes and historic significance. Sir George Croke, one of the judges, observed that it concerned no less than “the King in his Prerogative and his power Royall,” and “all the King's Subjects in their liberties, their persons, and their estates.”<sup>17</sup> The trial, which ran from November 6 to December 18, ended in a 7-5 decision for the king. Croke and other judges circulated their opinions, some of which were later published. The king's imposition of Ship Money, Croke contended, “is illegall, and contrary to the Common law, not being by authority of Parliament.”<sup>18</sup> Charles's victory in the Ship Money case came at the cost of intensified opposition to his use of prerogative power and governance, which only increased when circumstances forced the king to reconvene Parliament in 1640.

### *Parliament, Treason, and the Five Members*

After eleven years without Parliament, elections were held in 1640, by which point John Hampden had already earned a national reputation for resistance to royal authority. This call to Parliament followed a series of events, originating in Scotland, that challenged Charles I's rule. Charles had attempted to impose the Anglican prayer book on Presbyterian Scotland, and in response, his Scottish subjects engaged in a National Covenant to defend their church structure and worship. In the Bishops'

Wars that followed, the Scottish Covenanters occupied part of northern England.<sup>19</sup> Facing a financial crisis, Charles I needed money to send troops to Scotland and had no choice but to summon Parliament.

Once convened, however, its members, including Hampden, who was now MP for the county of Buckingham, exercised their traditional right to present grievances, which now had accumulated over the previous eleven years. Hampden aligned himself with MPs who were prepared to challenge perceived misuses of imprecisely defined royal powers. His allies included Lord Saye and Sele, the Earls of Bedford and Warwick, John Pym, Oliver St. John, Denzil Holles, and Arthur Haselrige. Collectively they sought to limit royal power while expanding Parliament's influence over political, religious, financial, and military matters. Parliament declared Ship Money illegal, "against the Laws of this Realm" and "the Subjects right of Property." Parliament also voided Hampden's conviction in early 1642.<sup>20</sup>

Hampden was particularly concerned with religious reform, which was rooted in the Puritan belief that the Reformation begun during Elizabeth's reign remained incomplete. Hampden and other Puritans sought to purge the Church of England of elements that they considered too popish, including bishops. Appointed by the crown and seated in the House of Lords, bishops were both religious leaders and political actors who represented royal authority. For Hampden and his allies, this reinforced the perception that the king was building a popish and tyrannical regime.

Hampden was sympathetic to the Scottish Covenanters, whom he saw as co-religionists resisting such encroachments. From the king's perspective, however, this support verged on treason, as it seemed to support an invasion of England. Hampden also opposed what he viewed as the influence of 'evil counselors' on the king, particularly William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is possible to interpret this rhetoric as a sort of polite fiction enabling opponents of the king to denounce him publicly while shielding him from direct criticism. Yet

complaints about evil councilors were echoed in private correspondence, suggesting there was more to it than a convenient political pretense.<sup>21</sup>

Particularly worrisome for Hampden was the presence and influence of Catholics at court, notably Queen Henrietta Maria and her Catholic secretary Sir John Winter, who were seen as working towards the reconciliation of England with Rome. This was not necessarily a farfetched belief at the time, given the conversion to Catholicism of King Henri IV of France. Along with others in Parliament, Hampden pushed for Parliamentary oversight of the queen's household and the eviction of Catholics from her entourage. Charles and Henrietta Maria, however, were equally determined to reject Parliamentary interference. According to Conrad Russell, one of his biographers, Hampden was willing to compromise on political matters, but was uncompromising on religious issues: he "simply put his hatred of popery above his desire for peace."<sup>22</sup> This interpretation, however, oversimplifies the relationship between religion and politics, which for Hampden and his allies were inseparable. In this view, popery and arbitrary government (or 'tyranny') were inextricably linked, and represented an existential threat to the stability of the realm.

Fear of Catholics escalated as reports reached London of the brutal massacre of Protestants in the Irish Rebellion in October 1641, intensifying efforts to limit Catholic power and influence.<sup>23</sup> In November, Hampden became one of the leaders in Parliament promoting the *Grand Remonstrance*, which contained a list of over 200 grievances dating back to the start of Charles's reign and called for a wide range of reforms, including removing bishops and 'evil councilors' from the Church of England, purging popish elements and practices, ending taxation without Parliamentary consent, and demanding Parliamentary oversight of royal advisors. These points were radical and controversial, generating impassioned debates. The *Remonstrance* generated heated discussion on November 22 and, as exhausted MPs continued into the early hours of November 23, narrowly passed by 11 votes (159-148).



JOHN HAMPDEN SOCIETY

*King Charles commandeered the Speaker's chair and tried to arrest the Five Members.*

After two weeks without a response from the king, Parliament decided to print the *Remonstrance* to increase its circulation and to provoke Charles to reply.<sup>24</sup> This was part of a wider 'explosion of print' that brought formerly privileged political matters into public view, marking a shift towards public politics.<sup>25</sup> News, pamphlets, and popular petitions and demonstrations amplified Parliament's demands. Petitions with thousands of signatures and armed demonstrations endorsed radical MPs and their calls for reform. Tensions spilled over into violent clashes in London in December 1641 between the king's supporters and those of Parliament.<sup>26</sup>

By January 1642, the situation had reached a critical impasse. To break the deadlock Charles made a fateful decision—one which

would backfire dramatically and propel the nation towards civil war. He accused John Hampden and four other members of the House of Commons (John Pym, Denzil Holles, Arthur Haselrige, and William Strode, along with one member of the Lords) of treason.<sup>27</sup> A series of events rapidly unfolded. On January 3, Charles dispatched his attorney general, Edward Herbert, to the House of Lords with articles of impeachment, declaring that the accused conspired to incite war against the king, sought a Scottish invasion of England, attempted to coerce Parliament, and subverted English law and government. The king then sent his serjeant-at-arms to the House of Commons to arrest the Five Members. Concerned for their safety in the absence of formal legal charges, the Commons refused to surrender the men. The next day, Charles took the unprecedented step of leading 400 armed guards to the Commons. The king entered the chamber and commandeered the Speaker's chair, only to find the Five Members had been warned of his approach and had escaped his reach. Charles's bold move had failed, and he had to retreat empty-handed, ultimately abandoning the attempted impeachment.<sup>28</sup>

The episode marked a dramatic escalation in the political conflict and cemented Hampden's position as prominent leader of Parliamentary opposition. Musicians in London sang songs about the Five, and some royal supporters pledged to hunt down the members on the king's behalf.<sup>29</sup> Charles's actions ignited a groundswell of popular support for the Five Members, who became symbols of resistance. So dramatic was the episode, and so elevated the attention, that it could overshadow their actual actions. Printers rushed to publish speeches supposedly given in Parliament by the Five Members defending themselves and the institution they represented. As powerful and timely as they might have seemed, the printed speeches are almost certainly forgeries.<sup>30</sup> Hampden's speech was allegedly delivered on January 4, after he and the other members already had evacuated the House. In early 1642 there was a thriving market for fabricated speeches, driven

by the intense public demand to engage with the political moment. Publishers sought to capitalize on interest in the failed arrest. For some audiences, the authenticity of the speeches may have mattered less than the messages they contained or the figures to whom they were attributed. Hampden's alleged speech, for example, argued that it was possible to be both a good subject and to lawfully resist the king's actions: "To deny obedience to a King, commanding any thing against Gods true Worship and Religion, against the Ancient and Fundamentall Lawes of the Land, in indeavouring to performe the same, is a good Subject."<sup>31</sup> Such rhetoric aimed to distinguish between opposing the king and treason, serving to both disseminate this view and bolster the cause of resistance.

Buckinghamshire, Hampden's home county, quickly mobilized in his defense. In a dramatic show of support, 5,000 inhabitants, with over 3,000 on horseback, descended on London to bring petitions to Parliament. To the House of Commons, the inhabitants of Buckinghamshire declared their loyalty, pledging that if needed, "we shall with all alacrity addresse our selves, ready to live by you, or to die at your feet, against whomsoever shall in any sort illegally attempt upon you." They reiterated this offer in their petition to the House of Lords, noting that after the "late attempt upon the Honourable *House of Commons*," they offer in its "just defence to live and dye."

The House of Commons, followed by the Lords, voted that Hampden and the four other members would not be imprisoned "until the Parliamentall Processe of Law had passed upon them." In return, the Buckinghamshire petitioners pledged "to defend and assist their Honours to the uttermost of their lives, and fortunes."<sup>32</sup> Buckinghamshire brought other petitions on Hampden's behalf as well. In a petition to the king, the inhabitants expressed their confidence in Hampden, praising the "loyaltie and wisdom" that "we his Countrymen, and Neighbours have ever had good cause to consider." They registered dismay at the manner of his impeachment, which they

declared violated Parliamentary privilege. The petitioners also noted that Hampden was their chosen representative, and the accusations against him also ‘wound the judgement and care of us your Petitioners.’ The king’s response assured the petitioners of his respect for Parliamentary independence and conceded that his actions against Hampden had been irregular. As a result, the king agreed “to waive his former proceedings against the said *Master Hampden*” and the other members. Charles indicated his intent to pursue formal legal charges against Hampden, though any such plan was dropped in the approach of war.<sup>33</sup>

The consequences of the king’s failed attempt were far-reaching. On January 10, 1642, Charles departed London, feeling unsafe amidst growing support for Parliament. The following day, the House of Commons, which had relocated after the king breached its chamber, including the Five Members, made a triumphant return to Westminster accompanied by armed citizens from London, Buckinghamshire, and other parts of the kingdom. The Lord Mayor and sheriffs supported Parliament, and the London militia (known as “trained bands”) had come under Parliament’s authority, effectively stripping the king of control of the city. This marked a clear shift in the balance of power between king and parliament, setting the stage for civil war.<sup>34</sup>

### *Civil War*

Tensions between Parliament and the king escalated following Charles’s departure from London. Hampden emerged as a leading figure in Parliament’s efforts to wrest authority from the king. Hampden, along with several other MPs, led an initiative to place the nation’s forts, castles, and garrisons, especially the strategically critical arsenals in the Tower of London and Hull, under Parliamentary control. This move not only directly challenged royal authority but also positioned Parliament to prepare for the increasingly likely outbreak of war. Hampden’s role expanded in July, when he was appointed to a committee tasked with ensuring “the Safety of the Kingdom,

the Defence of the Parliament, the Preservation of the Peace of the Kingdom, and of opposing any Force whatsoever which may be raised against them.” This assertion signaled Parliament’s growing confidence in assuming traditional elements of royal prerogative, particularly national defense.

Although he had no prior military experience, Hampden’s political leadership and popularity in Buckinghamshire made him a clear choice for military command. He was appointed a colonel in the Parliamentary army and in August raised a regiment of foot soldiers, known as the Green Coats, from Buckinghamshire.<sup>35</sup> Hampden’s evolution from politician to military commander exemplifies the rapid militarization of the conflict between king and Parliament. He and other politicians assumed military roles, blurring the lines between civil and martial leadership. Among them was Hampden’s (at the time) lesser-known cousin Oliver Cromwell, who would rise over the next decade to become the Lord General of the army and subsequently Lord Protector.

Although Hampden did not exercise independent command during his relatively short tenure as colonel, he showed signs of promise as a military leader. Under the Earl of Essex’s command, for example, Hampden participated in the siege of Reading, which surrendered to Parliament.<sup>36</sup> Hampden’s name evidently was associated with both credibility and marketability. One account of the siege, which was sent to the House of Commons and signed by Hampden, Sir Philip Stapleton, and Arthur Goodwin, placed their names prominently on the title page.<sup>37</sup> His growing symbolic importance left his relatively modest military contributions open to exaggeration or even fabrication, making his achievements difficult to assess accurately. One pamphlet dramatically inflated his involvement, falsely attributing the capture of Reading almost entirely to the “courage of noble Colonell *Hampden*” and “his valiant associate Colonell Hurry.” In this account, which was narrated in a tone of breathless excitement, Hampden heroically

lead Parliament to victory. Some historians, including his nineteenth-century biographer Lord Nugent, have mistakenly accepted this pamphlet as genuine and incorporated its material, complicating the picture of Hampden's career.<sup>39</sup> In the issue published on 16 April 1643, the royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* reported a false rumor that the Earl of Essex would turn over his position as Parliamentary general to Hampden, "one of the five Members so much talked about," who was "more active, and so by consequence more capable" of military leadership. Hampden, the newsbook lamented, was using his talents to fight for the wrong side. Because he was a "principall mover" of the civil war, he had suffered a string of personal tragedies including the death of a son, two daughters, and a granddaughter. The newsbook concluded that Hampden's misfortunes should be taken as a warning by the king's opponents, who could suffer similar punishments.<sup>40</sup>

There is still confusion over the nature and extent of Hampden's involvement in particular battles, such as that of Aylesbury in November 1642, in which he did not in fact participate. The Battlefields Trust wrongly places Hampden at the battle of Aylesbury, whereas the Aylesbury town council affirms he was not present.<sup>41</sup> Such accounts highlight the challenges historians face in separating fact from fiction, evaluating the reliability of wartime sources, and the impact of propaganda on historical memory. Exaggeration, fabrication, contradiction, and confusion cloud the historical record. At the same time, however, they attest to Hampden's significance and popularity, and provide insight into the construction of heroic figures and the process of myth-making during the English civil war.

## *Death and Reputation*

On 18 June 1643, Hampden was gravely wounded at the Battle of Chalgrove while pursuing a retreating royalist regiment near Oxford, where the king had his headquarters. He was shot in the shoulder, an injury that would prove fatal six days later. News of the battle spread rapidly, with accounts quickly appearing in print while Hampden was still alive. The day after the battle, in a letter to Parliament that was soon published, the Earl of Essex reported that Hampden “charged with much courage” before sustaining his injury.<sup>42</sup> Another pamphlet acquired by the London bookseller George Thomason on June 20 further emphasized Hampden’s heroic reputation, describing him as “noble and valiant” and “a Gentleman that hath never been wanting to adventure his life and fortune for the good and welfare of his King and Country.”<sup>43</sup> Such characterizations aimed to mythologize Hampden and locate his actions within a narrative of patriotic sacrifice.

Hampden succumbed to his wound and died on June 24 at Thame. The royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* announced Hampden’s passing in its issue for June 18–24, upgrading his status from merely “one of the five Members,” as stated in its issue of April 16 to “the Principall Member of the *Five*,” underscoring his symbolic importance. The newsbook reiterated its earlier claim that Hampden, as a chief instigator of rebellion, ignored the signs that he was fighting on the wrong side of the conflict: “We told the world what *faire warnings* Master Hampden had received since the beginning of this Rebellion (whereof he was a cheife Incendiary).”<sup>44</sup> On July 4, the Parliamentary newsbook *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer* published a lengthy obituary beginning on the front page. “The loss of Colonell Hampden,” was a deep blow to “the heart of every man that loves the good of his Kingdom and Country.” He was portrayed as a martyr for the Parliamentary cause, a warrior who had been “constant to defend our Religion and liberty” and whose memory would inspire future generations.<sup>45</sup> Elegies praised his piety, valor, integrity, and virtue in fighting popery and tyranny.<sup>46</sup> One such

elegy portrayed his heroism on the battlefield:

When Death about him, did in ambush lye,  
 And whizzing shot, like shewres [*showers*] of arrows flye,  
 Waving his conqu'ring steele, as if that he  
 From Mars, had got the sole Monopolie  
 Of never-fayling Courage; and so cheare  
 His fighting men, that they still chased feare  
 (Through his example) to the enemy,  
 And bring them off with joyfull victory.<sup>47</sup>

Another elegy on “the deplored Death of that Religious and valiant Gentleman” lamented, “Farewell then honour'd Hampden (heavenly Jem)/Adorning now the new JERUSALEM.”<sup>48</sup>

These elegies helped solidify Hampden's reputation as a symbol of religious and political integrity, his death at once tragic and heroic.

Even his royalist opponents respected Hampden's significance as a leader. Edward Hyde, later the Earl of Clarendon, acknowledged Hampden's prominence in his history of the civil war. In opposing ship money, Hampden became “the most generally known, and the most universally esteemed, throughout the whole nation, that any private man at that time could be.” Clarendon referred to Hampden as the “*patriae pater*” and declared he was “possessed with the most absolute spirit of popularity, and the most absolute faculties to govern the people, of any man I ever knew.” Clarendon's admiration was tempered with criticism, as he observed that Hampden “had a head to contrive, a tongue to persuade, and a hand to execute any mischief.”



*Statue of John Hampden  
 at Aylesbury Market*

Yet Clarendon also acknowledged that Hampden's "reputation of honesty was universal, and his affections seemed so publicly guided, that no corrupt or private ends could bias them." Even through the eyes of adversaries, Hampden emerges as a figure of remarkable leadership and integrity, guided by principle and virtue.<sup>49</sup> Hampden's death and the memorials of his life, ranging from portrayals as a courageous martyr for Parliament to a chief instigator of rebellion, attest to his significant influence on the political landscape during the civil war and shaped his legacy as a symbol of heroic opposition to tyranny for future generations.



JOHN HAMPDEN SOCIETY

*Locket with strands of John Hampden's hair.*



*Algernon Sidney*

### *Algernon Sydney: Early Life*

Algernon Sydney's political and military career diverged markedly from that of John Hampden. Unlike Hampden, known for his political skills, Sydney had a more contentious and difficult personality, quick-tempered and argumentative. The younger son of the Earl of Leicester (whose older brother Philip later inherited the title), Sydney came from a world of aristocratic privilege, though he himself was often short of money. Unlike Hampden, Sydney did not attend university. Instead, he was educated at home and while traveling with his father, who served as ambassador to Paris in the 1630s. These experiences exposed Sydney to diplomatic and cosmopolitan life abroad, which shaped his outlook and political thought. He remained on the continent until 1641, when his father was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland. Upon his return, Sydney participated in the effort to suppress the Irish Rebellion.

In 1643 he joined the Parliamentary cause and took up arms against the king, serving as captain in a regiment of horse under his cousin the Earl of Manchester. He fought in the battle of Marston Moor in 1644, where he was wounded. After a year of recovery, he left the army but retained his title of colonel. He shifted into politics, in 1647 becoming Governor of Dublin. He then served as a member of Parliament for Cardiff and was appointed to the Parliamentary Committee for the Affairs of Ireland. In 1648 he was appointed Governor of Dover, a position he held until his dismissal three years later.<sup>50</sup>

### *Civil War*

December 1648 marked a critical turning point in the English civil wars. Parliament was negotiating with the king to reach a settlement, though members were divided over the proceedings. Some wanted Charles to remain on the throne with reduced royal powers. Others, including Oliver Cromwell and many in the army, doubted the king's sincerity and believed that the only reliable path forward lay in Charles's utter defeat. The prospect of putting the king on trial for treason against his people

gained increasing traction. To prevent any obstruction, on December 6, Colonel Thomas Pride and his troops barred the doors of Parliament, refusing entry to those who opposed the trial or wanted to continue negotiations with the king. This event, known as Pride's Purge, excluded about 180 members and saw the arrests of dozens of others, clearing the way for the king's trial in a High Court of Justice.<sup>51</sup>

Sydney's stance during the trial reflects the deep political divisions of the period. In January 1649, Sydney was appointed as a commissioner for the trial, though he strongly opposed the proceedings. While he had fought against Charles, Sydney believed that Parliament lacked the authority to try the king. As he later recounted, he only learned of his appointment as commissioner during a reading of the Act authorizing the trial. He challenged its legality, advising Cromwell and John Bradshaw, the Lord President of the court, that the trial was illegitimate. Sydney described a heated exchange with Cromwell, who reportedly



*Oliver Cromwell*

declared, "I tell you, we will cut off his head with the crowne upon it," to which Sydney responded, "I cannot stop you, but I will keep myself clean from haveing any hand in this business." This confrontation highlights the ideological conflicts among Parliamentarians over the unprecedented nature of the trial. It also, Sydney related, made him a personal and lasting enemy to Cromwell, Bradshaw, and other key figures, who "did from that time continuously oppose me."<sup>52</sup> The clash between those pushing for a more radical shift in power and governance, and those, like Sydney, who were cautious about overstepping legal and moral boundaries, reflects the deep ideological polarization surrounding Charles I and the future of the monarchy.

## *Commonwealth and Protectorate*

Sidney ultimately came to accept the regicide and became an active participant in the Parliamentary republic or Commonwealth (derisively called the Rump by its opponents), which followed the abolition of monarchy and lasted from 1649 to 1653. He joined various committees, including the influential committee on Ireland, and his appointment to the Council of State in November 1652 further solidified his role in government. In addition to his involvement in Irish affairs, Sydney became known for his involvement in international relations and diplomacy.<sup>53</sup> His political actions were not without controversy, however, especially while he served as governor of Dover. Sydney clashed with army command, particularly with the newly appointed deputy governor and officials in Kent over the quartering of troops. This conflict resulted in a court martial which sought to try Sydney in his military capacity. He appealed to have his case transferred to Parliament, which had jurisdiction over its members. This dispute highlighted the porous boundary between civil and military authority, and the exploitation of this overlap to move cases to more favorable venues. While Sydney successfully transferred his case to Parliament, where it appears to have reached no formal resolution, he was removed as Governor of Dover in 1651.<sup>54</sup>

This experience appears not to have soured Sydney, who remained committed to the Commonwealth. Over the next decade he came to view the Parliamentary republic as the ideal form of government. Moving away from his initial opposition to the regicide, by 1659 he would call the execution of Charles I “the justest and bravest action that ever was done in England, or any where else.”<sup>55</sup> This shift reflects his deepening belief in the republican cause and marks a significant transformation of his political philosophy. His participation in the Commonwealth was instrumental in shaping his views, and he later proclaimed that the accomplishments of the republic surpassed those of the ancient world:

...neither the Romans nor Grecians in the time of their liberty ever performed any actions more glorious than freeing the country from a civil war that had raged in every part, the conquest of two such kingdoms as Scotland and Ireland, and crushing the formidable power of the Hollanders by sea; nor ever produced more examples of valor, industry, integrity, and in all respects compleat, disinterested, unmoveable and incorruptible virtue, than were at that time seen in our nation.<sup>56</sup>

Such mythologizing of the republic contrasted sharply against portrayals of the weakness of the Stuart kings and the institution of monarchy. This narrative portrayed a powerful, triumphant commonwealth rising from the ashes of civil war to claim its place on the international stage. American colonists would adopt this idealized vision of the republic during their own revolution a century later, demonstrating the lingering influence of the Commonwealth across generations and continents.<sup>57</sup>

Sydney's sense of pride and purpose in the republic came to an abrupt end in April 1653, when Cromwell disbanded Parliament by force of arms. When Cromwell and his men ordered the chamber to be evacuated, according to a widely-repeated account, Sydney was sitting to the right of the House Speaker. At first Sydney refused, declaring "he would not go out, and sate still" until threatened with physical removal.<sup>58</sup> His disillusionment increased later that year when Cromwell accepted the title of Lord Protector, which Sydney viewed as dangerously close to kingship and a clear betrayal of republican principles. For Sydney, Cromwell had moved from a defender of liberty to a tyrant.

In the absence of political duties, Sydney turned to other pursuits, including writing the unpublished essay "On Love." The essay tries to reconcile human desire with divine goodness. "If desires were absolutely sinful," Sydney reflected, "they had never been given us." Love, for Sydney, was divinely created to encompass both spiritual and sensual

dimensions: “There is no forbidden fruit out of paradise; we have a free liberty of enjoying what is good.”<sup>59</sup> Writing the essay may have been a way for Sydney to process his own personal experiences, allowing him to work through and articulate his thoughts and emotions around love and desire. His political writings, which also remained unpublished during his lifetime, served a similar purpose, to navigate and refine his theories and trace their origins and development.<sup>60</sup> Though often omitted from discussions of Sydney’s life, his essay on love reminds us that he was engaged in deep reflection on more than political philosophy. Liberty, goodness, and virtue applied not just to the realms of politics and government but also to the domains of love and desire, revealing commonality across his intellectual pursuits and broadening his contributions to moral and ethical reflection and action.

After Cromwell died in 1658, Sydney returned to politics. The army restored the Rump, and Sydney returned to the House, where he was elected to the Council of State in May 1659. Shortly thereafter he was dispatched as a commissioner to negotiate a treaty between the warring kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark, with an eye to protect English shipping.<sup>61</sup> Sydney’s reputation preceded him. One of the prospective commissioners, Bulstrode Whitelocke, turned down the job partly because of Sydney’s reputation for being hot headed and arrogant: “I knew well the overruling temper and height of Colonel Sydney.”<sup>62</sup>

Sydney took his task seriously but was frustrated by the slow pace of negotiations and his lack of resources. While in the Baltic, he defended the regicide so loudly that he was believed to have participated in the proceedings. Word got back to his father in England, who inquired about Sydney’s conduct, which was especially controversial since Parliament was undertaking the restoration of monarchy. Sydney informed his father that he was bound to justify the republican government that commissioned him. Yet he also could be pragmatic and privately disowned the execution of the king while in talks with Sweden and Denmark, as they likely would have been less comfortable engaging

diplomatically with someone who endorsed the execution of a fellow monarch.<sup>63</sup> It is possible that had the republic continued, Sydney might have gone on to pursue a diplomatic career, building on this experience as well as his early years abroad with his father. As it stood, Sydney was still on the continent when Parliament invited Charles II to reclaim his thrones in 1660.

### *Restoration and Exile*

Sydney initially supported the Restoration, since it was enacted under Parliamentary authority: “Since the Parliament hath acknowledged a king, I knowe, and acknowledge, I owe him the duty and the service that belongs unto a subject.”<sup>64</sup> He may have hoped that he could secure some position under the new king, perhaps retaining his diplomatic position abroad. He also continued to take interest in the Restoration government, recommending Samuel Missenden of the English Merchant Adventurers Company in Hamburg to serve as an intelligence agent abroad for the new government, noting that he had excellent credentials although he was “too Monarchicall for me.”<sup>65</sup>

Returning to England, however, was too dangerous. Though he had not been involved in the trial and execution of Charles I, Sydney was concerned for his safety, not least because he had so publicly endorsed the regicide while in the Baltic. He was aware of his reputation as “fierce, violent, seditious, mutinous, turbulent, and many others of the like nature.” He also knew that his name was on the list of commissioners for the king’s trial. Amidst rumors that Sydney would be exempted from the Act of Oblivion giving indemnity to Charles I’s opponents, his father warned him that there was “as ill an opinion of you” as the regicides, and it was “unwise, and perhaps as yet unsafe” to return to England. Also fueling animosity towards Sydney was his writing “*Manus haec inimica tyrannis*,” or ‘this hand is hostile to tyrants,’ in the register of the University of Copenhagen, which Sydney acknowledged to be true. He was conscious of this precarious position, or what he called

“the uneasiness of this posture,” and thought it best for his safety to remain abroad. His concern was not unreasonable. Others, like his friend Sir Henry Vane, who had not served as regicides had nevertheless been exempted from the Act of Oblivion. Vane continued to oppose monarchy after the Restoration and was executed in 1662. Thus, Sydney declared, “I choose this voluntary exile, as the least evill condition that is within my reach.”<sup>66</sup>

Sydney grew profoundly disillusioned by Vane’s execution. While he was prepared to submit to the crown, he refused to renounce and seek pardon for his support of the republic. His commitment to his principles was clear even in the face of personal danger, as he survived attempts on his life in Rome and Augsburg.<sup>67</sup> Sydney’s discontent continued to grow, particularly in response to Charles II’s regime and its renewed demands for conformity to the Anglican church, which he viewed as the revival of religious persecution. Although religious penalties were imposed by Parliament and were personally opposed by Charles II, for Sydney it was enough that the king was complicit in accepting these measures. As his disaffection increased, Sydney’s opposition to the king escalated to plans for armed revolt. When England went to war against the Dutch in 1665, Sydney approached contacts in the Netherlands, including the republican leader Johann de Witt, to galvanize Dutch support for an invasion of England aimed at overthrowing Charles II. Sydney also sought financial backing from Louis XIV to raise rebellion in England. These plans did not come to fruition, largely due to mutual distrust, financial cost, and the slim chances of success, though Louis XIV granted Sydney asylum in the French countryside, giving him a measure of stability in exile.<sup>68</sup>

During this period, Sydney composed the *Court Maxims*, which advocated for the overthrow of Charles II.<sup>69</sup> The *Court Maxims* was undiscovered until the 1970s and was first published in 1996. Sydney drew on classical and modern philosophers including Aristotle, Plato, Machiavelli, and Grotius to shape his thinking on the origins of government, religious and political liberty, and virtue. He also

was influenced by the religious republicanism that emerged in the English revolutionary period. Sydney's was a Calvinist republicanism, which he viewed as the ideal form of government with the godly as its exemplary citizens.<sup>70</sup> In *Court Maxims*, Sydney called for the reversal of the restoration, arguing that Parliament erred and the people "should repent of their choice and endeavour to unmake what they have made." Monarchy, he declared, "is the worst evil that can befall a nation." He accused Charles I and Charles II of abusing their power and operating outside the bounds of justice. Such a ruler "renders himself an enemy to mankind, and obliges all that are friends to reason and justice to destroy such a monster."<sup>71</sup> The responsibility would fall to the saints, or elect, who in Sydney's view were uniquely positioned to exercise political virtue. Central to Sydney's political philosophy was the belief that just laws, virtue, and consent of the people were essential characteristics of an ideal government.

While he did not rule out monarchy entirely, Sydney expected that monarchical power inevitably would be exercised for the benefit of its holder, leading to tyranny and corruption. In contrast, he believed that the godly or elect would act with political virtue, creating and enforcing just laws and punishing vice. Sydney envisioned an ideal polity where "there is a perpetual advance in all that is good, until such nation attains unto the political perfection of liberty, security, and happiness, which were the ends for which government was constituted."<sup>72</sup>

Sydney was not a rigid advocate of revolution, however, and he remained pragmatic in his effort to protect the godly in England, particularly by seeking the repeal of laws enforcing religious conformity. In 1670 he reached out to Charles II through the French military leader Maréchal de Turenne, suggesting that granting liberty of conscience to his subjects would be Charles II's best path to stability. While the king did not take this advice, it aligned with his own inclinations towards religious tolerance (and would be implemented by his successor James II in 1687). Two years later Charles II pursued a similar course in his

1672 Declaration of Indulgence which waived penalties for religious nonconformity, though it was short-lived due to Parliamentary opposition. Yet it is noteworthy that both Sydney and Charles II agreed on the issue of religious tolerance.<sup>73</sup> Sydney's pragmatic approach to the king even as he advocated rebellion in his political writings highlights the priority he placed on opposing religious persecution and protecting the godly or elect.

### *Return to England and the* Discourses Concerning Government

In 1677 Sydney learned that his father was ill and negotiated his return to England, likely expecting a short stay. His father died two months later, however, leaving him an inheritance that sparked a protracted legal battle with his elder brother Philip, now the Earl of Leicester. Although he eventually won the case, it took years to settle. While it was ongoing, Sydney lived in Leicester House in London, where he renewed his political involvement. In 1678 the French ambassador, Barillon, in London was concerned that opposition to France was rising in England, particularly with the marriage of Charles II's niece Mary to the Dutch William of Orange. Barillon valued Sydney's political insights and connections, offering him a French pension. Sydney likely saw little reason to decline payment from Louis XIV, whose payroll also included Charles II. Sydney tried to turn the situation to his advantage, attempting to persuade Barillon that a return of the English republic would pose no threat to France.<sup>74</sup>

That same year saw the eruption of the Popish Plot, an alleged attempt to overthrow Charles II, replace him on the throne with his brother James, duke of York, and reconcile England to the Catholic Church. Though largely fabricated, the Plot seemed credible to contemporaries, as the memory of the 1641 Irish Rebellion and its attacks upon Protestants still loomed large. The Plot seemed even more

DISCOURSES  
CONCERNING  
GOVERNMENT,  
BY  
Algernon Sidney,

Son to *Robert* Earl of *Leicester*, and Ambassador  
from the Commonwealth of *England* to *Charles*  
*Gustavus* King of *Sweden*.

*Published from an Original Manuscript of the Author.*

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*London* and *Westminster*. MDCXCVIII.

plausible as the Duke of York, who was the successor to Charles II, had converted to Catholicism in 1673, raising the spectre of popish and arbitrary government once again. This raised a crucial political question: could Parliament intervene in the royal line of succession? Early political parties, the Whigs and Tories, coalesced around the answer. The Whigs, with whom Sydney aligned, argued that Parliament could exclude the Duke of York, while the Tories maintained that the succession was divinely ordained and beyond Parliamentary jurisdiction. In three Parliaments between 1678 and 1681, members in the Commons and Lords sought to exclude James from the succession. One alternative candidate was Charles II's nephew, William of Orange, who in the end took the throne as William III. Sydney stood for three Parliamentary elections, losing twice and facing a contested result in the third, so he was unable to participate in events in the House directly. Charles's response to the exclusion attempts was to manipulate the election process and prevent Whigs from taking seats, to dissolve Parliament repeatedly, and ultimately to rule without it for four years until his death in 1685.<sup>75</sup> To many, the prospect of another civil war was on the horizon.

In the aftermath of Charles II's disbanding of Parliament, Sydney co-authored *A Just and Modest Vindication of the Proceedings of the Last Two Parliaments* (1681). His support for exclusion was in line with his support for Parliamentary authority; Parliament had disposed of the succession with the Restoration in 1660 and could do so again. Sydney expanded upon these ideas in his *Discourses Concerning Government*, which he composed between 1681 and 1683. Like John Locke, Sydney not only sought to justify excluding James from the throne, but also to define and limit monarchical power. Sydney wrote the *Discourses* to rebut Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, written half a century earlier and published in 1680, which defended royal absolutism. Filmer contended that political authority was divinely created and descended through monarchical successors. Royal authority was subject to no limitation, and Parliamentary liberty was given by the king's grace.<sup>76</sup>

Sydney believed that Filmer's strong justification for monarchical absolutism demanded a sustained rebuttal. Sydney argued that sovereignty resided in the people, who conferred it upon the monarch but did not give it up entirely. Parliament was not dependent on royal summons but had the right to meet in its absence. The people retained the right to rescind the power they originally had possessed, and they retained the right to oversee its exercise: "Governments, and the magistrates that execute them, are created by man. They who give being to them, cannot but have a right of regulating, limiting and directing them as best pleaseth themselves." Most significantly, subjects had the right to rebel against tyranny and oppression. If the only way to check the monarch's abuse of power was "by seditions, tumults, and war, those seditions, tumults, and wars, are justified by the laws of God and man."<sup>77</sup> These were not mere abstract theories but were directly related to political tensions in the 1680s. Charles II's abuse of monarchical power in dismissing Parliaments and interfering in elections, combined with the prospect of James's succession, stirred fears of a return to popery and arbitrary government. Sydney's *Discourses* justified resistance by legislation and by violence.

Political tensions only escalated after Parliament was disbanded in 1681. Government crackdowns on Protestant dissenters in London in 1682 intensified, and Charles II recalled town charters as part of an effort to control local government. Rumors of conspiracies to topple the regime began to spread. Among them was the 1683 Rye House Plot, which was directed against both Charles II and his brother James.<sup>78</sup> Though its nature and extent have been debated, and it may have overlapped with a second plot against the regime, a number of prominent Whigs were implicated, including Lord Russel, Lord Howard, and James, Duke of Monmouth, who was the illegitimate son of Charles II. Also implicated was Algernon Sydney, who had been in talks with Russell, Howard, Monmouth, and John Hampden the younger to raise rebellion in England and Scotland.

Sydney was arrested on June 25, 1683, and imprisoned for months in the Tower.<sup>79</sup> He was accused of seeking to wage war against the crown, soliciting Scottish participation in revolt, and treasonously declaring that the monarch was subject to Parliament and could be legally deposed. A search of his house turned up a manuscript of the *Discourses*. Sydney's talks with Johan de Witt to raise rebellion in England resurfaced as well. Sydney refused to answer questions, informing his interrogators that he "conceives that He ought not to answer to them until He knows His charge and His accusers." Lord Howard gave a confession implicating Sydney and attesting to his involvement, which fulfilled the legal requirement for one of two witnesses needed to prove treason. Over the next few months, however, no other witness could be unearthed, and Sydney refused to implicate himself.<sup>80</sup> Chief Justice George Jeffreys ruled that the *Discourses* itself could be used as the second witness, a decision which called into question the relationship between thought and action. According to Jeffreys, writing was in fact action, and the *Discourses*, which advocated rebellion against the crown, was evidence of treason.

### *Trial and Execution*

Sydney was tried on November 21 and quickly found guilty.<sup>81</sup> The case became a landmark for its controversies surrounding political prosecution, freedom of expression, and abuse of judicial power. In a petition to the king on 25 November, Sydney raised numerous legal objections to the conduct of his trial, including his initial imprisonment without charge and subsequent denial of a copy of his indictment; the irregular and improper selection of the jury; the reliance on hearsay and unreliable testimony; the judge's repeated and aggressive interruption of his defense; and the pressure on the jury to return a quick verdict. Sydney rejected the ideas that writing was equivalent to acting, and that an unpublished manuscript could constitute evidence of conspiracy to commit treason, particularly as his alleged co-conspirator Lord Howard had never even seen it. He defended the *Discourses* as a private reflection



ATKINSON MUSEUM OF HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE

*The Trial of Algernon Sidney depicts the moment when Sidney says, "Prick my arm! Do I not bleed like any other man?"*

on a decades-old book containing only the "Crude and private Thoughts of a man, for the exercise of his own understanding, in his Study, never shewed to any, nor applied to any particular case." Nevertheless, Sydney stopped short of claiming the *Discourses* as his own, noting that authorship was attributed to him based on handwriting analysis, which he argued was inadmissible as legal evidence. Sydney objected to other elements of the trial as well. As the son and brother of an Earl, he contended that it was beneath his aristocratic standing to be tried by a lower-ranking magistrate and jurors who were unpropertied and "utterly unable to judge of such a matter."<sup>82</sup>

Sydney's petition to the king proved unsuccessful, and on 26 November he was sentenced to death. His request for his sentence to be commuted to exile was denied, and he was informed that his execution would take place on December 7.<sup>83</sup> In the days that followed he showed little concern over his personal fate, yet he remained keenly aware of

the historical significance of the trial and the *Discourses*, and sought to shape their legacies. Sydney wrote his *Apology* to inform “the world” that for his whole life he had “endeavoured to uphold the common rights of mankind, the lawes of this land, and the true Protestant religion against corrupt principles, arbitrary power, and Popery.”

Following his conviction, he affirmed, “I doe now willingly lay downe my life for the same.”<sup>84</sup> In the speech given to the sheriffs, which was published in multiple editions and addressed to “Men, Brethren, Fathers, Countreymen, and Strangers,” Sydney reiterated many of the arguments he advanced in his petition to the king. He warned, “We live in an age, that makes *Truth* pass for *Treason*,” and reaffirmed his commitment to the “*Old Cause*,” resisting persecution and oppression. He concluded the speech with a prayer that God “Stirre up such as are faint,” “Direct those that are willing,” “Confirm those that waver,” and “Give Wisdom and Integrity unto All.”<sup>85</sup> Sydney’s *Apology* similarly closed with his dedication to godly liberty, his encouragement to fight popery and tyranny, and his faith that God will “spirit his people to stand up for his cause, and deliver them.”<sup>86</sup>

On December 7, 1683, Sydney was beheaded. The announcement of his execution in the official government newspaper, the *London Gazette*, simply remarked that “he was Beheaded on a Scaffold erected for that purpose.”<sup>87</sup> More detail is given in the sheriffs’ account, which describes a somber occasion laden with significance. Sydney remained silent as he was escorted to the block and declined to make a verbal address, though he gave his speech to the sheriffs to ensure its publication. He then took off his hat, doublet, and coat, and declared, “I am ready to die.” He was beheaded in one blow, after which the scaffold was draped in black for mourning.<sup>88</sup> The execution both marked the end of Sydney’s life and solidified his legacy as a martyr for republican ideals and a symbol of resistance against tyranny.



## Conclusion

John Hampden and Algernon Sydney embodied the struggle for political and religious liberty and the establishment of constitutional limits on royal political power. As both politicians and soldiers, they were dedicated to establishing constitutional limits on royal authority in church and state. Hampden was mythologized as a Parliamentary hero—the patriot—though his early death left unresolved questions about how he might have navigated the evolving conflict. Would he have sided with more radical figures like his cousin Oliver Cromwell, advocating for the trial and execution of the king, or would he have taken a more conservative Presbyterian stance, like Sir Thomas Fairfax, Lord General of the Army? Would he have been purged from Parliament in 1648, or would he have absented himself from the king's trial, as did Algernon Sydney? Such open questions highlight the challenges of determining Hampden's trajectory as Parliamentary opposition fractured over the course of the 1640s. Sydney, in contrast, left an extensive record of his political thoughts and actions. His *Discourses Concerning Government* articulated a defense of rebellion against oppressive rulers, making an essential contribution to republican thought. His final writings, composed as his execution approached, established him as a symbol for republican ideals.

Both men played vital roles in shaping the evolving political and religious discourse of their time, and their opposition to tyranny was deeply intertwined with their religious convictions. Their resistance to royal absolutism was not merely a political stance but a moral imperative grounded in their religious beliefs. The legacies of Hampden and Sydney reflect the tensions between authority and liberty, religion and politics, that not only would define seventeenth-century England but also shape the political landscape of the Atlantic world. Later generations, particularly in the American colonies and during the Enlightenment, drew inspiration from their ideas about the limits of government and the rights of the governed, adapting their ideas to new contexts.

Their views and actions resonated with American revolutionaries, especially Presbyterians, leading to the naming of Hampden-Sydney College by Samuel Stanhope Smith. They remain, in the twenty-first century, symbols of the struggle for liberty, constitutional governance, and the moral boundaries of political authority.



*Continental Navy privateer "Hampden," 1779.  
Oil on panel by Francis Holman.*

## Notes

1. See John Adair, *A Life of John Hampden the Patriot* (Leeds, 1976); Jonathan Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic, 1623-1677* (Cambridge, 1988); Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677-1683* (Cambridge, 1991); John Carswell, *The Porcupine: The Life of Algernon Sidney* (London, 1989).
2. See Maia Jansson, "Shared Memory: John Hampden, New World and Old," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2009), pp. 157-171; John Houston, *Algernon Sidney and the Republican Heritage in England and America* (Princeton, 1991).
3. Michael P. Winship, "Algernon Sidney's Calvinist Republicanism," *Journal of British Studies* 49 (2010), pp. 753-773.
4. Conrad Russell, "Hampden, John (1595-1643)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
5. See Hampden, John (1595-1643) in *The History of Parliament, the House of Commons 1604-1629*, eds. Andrew Thrush and John P. Ferris (Cambridge, 2010). Also available online at <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/hampden-john-1595-1643>.
6. Russell, "Hampden, John," DNB.
7. Richard Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics 1626-1628* (Oxford, 1987).
8. John Bruce, ed., *Letters and Papers of the Verney Family down to the End of the Year 1639* (London: Camden Society, 1853), pp. 120, 284.
9. The National Archives [TNA], Kew, UK, SP 16/85/40-43, 85-103; SP 16/526/24; SP 16/90/60.
10. Simon Healey, "O What a Lovely War? War, Taxation, and Public Opinion in England, 1624-1629," *Canadian Journal of History* 38 (2003), pp. 444-457.
11. Nabil Matar, "The Barbary Corsairs, King Charles I, and the Civil War," *The Seventeenth Century* 16 (2001), pp. 239-258.
12. Henrik Langelüddecke, "I finde all men & my officers all soe

unwilling': The Collection of Ship Money, 1635-1640," *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007), pp. 509-542; John Morrill, *Revolt in the Provinces*, 2nd ed. (London, 1999), pp. 238-248.

13. Richard Cust and Peter Lake, *Gentry Culture and the Politics of Religion: Cheshire on the Eve of the Civil War* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 163-185; Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, CT, 1995), pp. 545-595.

14. Carol G. Bonsey and J. G. Jenkins, eds., *Ship Money Papers and Richard Grenville's Note-Book* (Buckinghamshire Record Society, 1965), pp. 65, 109.

15. For the trial records see Cobbett's *Complete Collection of State Trials*, vol. 3, 1627-1640 (London, 1809), pp. 825-1315; John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*, vol. 2 (London, 1721), pp. 480-605.

16. Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, vol. 4, pp. 68-69.

17. "The Argument of Sir George Crooke, Knight," in *The Arguments of Sir Richard Hutton, Knight, one of the judges of the Common Pleas, and Sir George Croke, Knight, one of the judges of the Kings Bench* (London, 1641), p. 7.

18. "Argument of Sir George Crooke," p. 15.

19. Mark Charles Fissel, *The Bishops Wars: Charles I's Campaigns against Scotland* (Cambridge, 1994).

20. "Act Declaring the Illegality of Ship-Money," in *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 3rd edition, ed. S. R. Gardiner (Oxford, 1906), pp. 89-191; *Anno Regni Caroli, Regis Angliae, Scotiae, Franciae, & Hiberniae, Decimo Septimo* (London, 1641), sigs. A4v-B2; *An Act for the Declaring Unlawful and Void the Late Proceedings Touching Ship-Money, and for the Vacating of all Records and Process Concerning the Same* (London, 1641); "Judgement was given against Mr Hampden by the greater Part of the Judges," in *Arguments of Sir Richard Hutton*, pp. 2, 4, 13-16.

21. David Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War*

(Oxford, 2018), p. 131.

22. Conrad Russell, "Hampden, John," *DNB*.

23. See Eamon Darcy, *The Irish Rebellion and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms* (London, 2015); Joseph Cope, *England and the 1641 Irish Rebellion* (Woodbridge, 2009).

24. *A Remonstrance of the State of the Kingdome* (London, 1641); *A Remonstrance of the State of the Kingdom* (London, 1641), printed for Joseph Hunscurr, which was quickly reprinted to add Parliament's petition to the king; *A Remonstrance of the State of the Kingdome* (London, 1641), printed for John Greensmith.

25. Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013).

26. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, pp. 90-93, 110-112.

27. *By the Kings Majesty Were Accused with Seven Articles of High Treason* (London, 1642).

28. *Journal of the House of Lords*, vol. 4 (London, 1830), pp. 500-503; *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 2 (1802), pp. 366-368, 373, 389; Rushworth, *Historical Collections* vol. 4, pp. 473-494; TNA SP 16/488/61-62v. This episode is commemorated during the State Opening of Parliament today, when the doors of the Commons are ceremoniously slammed shut to assert its independence from the crown.

29. Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, p. 140.

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31. *A Discreet and Learned Speech Spoken in the Parliament, on Wednesday the 4. of January, 1641, by Mr. Hampden* (London, 1642), p. 4.

32. *The Parliaments Answer to the Two Petitions of the Countie of Buckingham* (London, 1642), sigs. A2, A3v, A4 r-v; *The Two Petitions of the County of Buckingham* (London, 1642), unpaginated.

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40. *Mercurius Aulicus* 9-16 April 1643, pp. 185, 192.

41. <https://www.battlefieldstrust.com/memorial/memorial.asp?MemorialID=143>; <https://www.aylesburytowncouncil.gov.uk/uncategorised/the-battle-of-aylesbury/>. Correct as of December 2024. *Good and Ioyfull Newes out of Buckinghamshire* (London, 1642), places his men at the battle (p. 5). The author raised the possibility that the account was unreliable, if not entirely fabricated, observing that the insatiable thirst for information afforded writers license “according to his fancie and wishes” to compose texts “confidently committing many illegitimate conceptions of their own to the publike view.” (p. 3).

42. *A Letter Written from His Excellency Robert Earle of Essex* (London, 19 June 1643), p. 6.

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## 250TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUMES

### I.

*Neither All the Questions nor All the Answers:  
A Brief History of Hampden-Sydney College*  
Thomas H. Shomo

Drawing primarily from the two official histories of the College—Brinkley and Bradshaw—this volume summarizes the College's history from the founding through the late 20th Century.

The style is accessible and answers many frequently asked questions about Hampden-Sydney while encouraging readers to expand their knowledge through the other 250th Anniversary pamphlets and, for the more seriously interested, the many other publications and resources housed in the Bortz Library.

### II.

*John Hampden and Algernon Sydney:  
Making Heroes in the Seventeenth-Century*  
L. Nicole Greenspan

The lives, careers, and contributions of Hampden and Sydney shaped the fabric of seventeenth-century society, religion, and politics.

Their struggle for liberty and opposition to tyranny, coupled with their reputations as heroes and martyrs of their time, later inspired American revolutionaries.

Understanding the lives of Hampden and Sydney sheds light on why Hampden-Sydney College is named in their honor.

### III.

*Between Athens and Jerusalem:  
Enlightenment Faith, Religious Revival,  
and the Shaping of Hampden-Sydney College, 1774-1812*  
J. Michael Utzinger

In 1774 the Presbytery of Hanover met at Cub Creek Presbyterian Meeting House in Charlotte County, Virginia, to discuss hiring Samuel Stanhope Smith as the head of its proposed academy in Prince Edward County. Smith maintained a confidence in both human reason and revealed faith as complementary means to shape individuals and the wider society.

The creative tension between reason and faith continued to mark Hampden-Sydney College and its founding Presbyterian dissenters. Further, those associated with the College made important contributions toward conversations surrounding religious liberty and disestablishment, revivalism, and the ethics of enslavement.

## IV.

*From Academy to College: Hampden-Sydney in the Revolution*

John C. Coombs

This volume examines the early development of Hampden-Sydney within the broader context of Virginia's transformation from British dominion to independent Commonwealth over the course of the revolutionary era. The tumultuous events roiling America in the last years of the imperial crisis with Great Britain—which president Samuel Stanhope Smith referred to as “the Distractions of the Times”—would exert a profound influence over the formative years of the new “public Academy” that extended far beyond the decision to name it after two great champions of English liberty. Virginia's struggle for independence and adoption of a republican constitution not only created the political conditions that allowed the College's leaders to successfully secure a charter of incorporation from the General Assembly in 1783, but would also give new import to the stated mission “to form good men, and good Citizens, on the common and universal principles of Morality” and through constant attention to “the whole Circle of Education.”

## V.

*Climbing the Hill: African American History at Hampden-Sydney College*

Caroline S. Emmons

In the early period of the college, enslaved individuals' labor and presence on campus helped shape the College's founding. While often unnamed in the College records, there is nevertheless abundant evidence of their contributions, which were critical in enabling the construction and operation of the campus. The institution of slavery itself was regularly debated in a variety of settings. After emancipation, African Americans continued to contribute in critical ways to the success of the college, as members of the staff and eventually, in the late 20th century, as students and even as President.

## VI.

*The First Buildings at Hampden-Sydney College:  
Their History, Architecture, and Archaeology*

Charles E. Pearson and Richard C. McClintock

Construction at Hampden-Sydney College began in the summer of 1775 and, by 1820, a dozen or so buildings existed at the school. By 1850, the original campus of the school was abandoned and the locations of the first buildings were forgotten. A 2017 geophysical survey revealed the buried traces of several original buildings. This volume presents what is known about the earliest buildings at the school and what we can learn from their archaeological remains.