

Zitierhinweis

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As Matthew McCormack makes clear right from the first line of this work, the militia was one of Georgian Britain's most important institutions. The militia's reform in 1757, whereby it became the New Militia, and subsequent mobilisation in the French wars of 1756–1815 were an essential component of the defence of Britain. Moreover, the force was suffused with the rhetoric of citizen soldiers, even if the reality of those who served in it frequently did not match up to these ideals. This alone would justify the study of the institution, but the author's novel and refreshing approach to the topic fully justifies its publication. Indeed, it goes beyond a study of the militia to serve as a methodological exhortation and exemplar of how the study of the military can be expanded and nuanced, providing new insights and links to wider social and cultural history.

The author's approach is notably different to previous studies of the militia. The standard reference point for understanding the institution is J. R. Western's 1965 *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: the Story of a Political Issue* (1); as this title, and its publication date, make clear, Western's study focuses on the politics of the militia, particularly its creation, as well as exploring the implementation of the militia laws and regulations, such that it also delves into the social history of the force. *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* acknowledges the debt we owe this work – the level of detail in Western's work means it is unlikely to be superseded – but also recognises its limitations. Historical practice has moved on in the last 50 years, and a cultural and social approach to the force is overdue. This alternative methodology is the intellectual spine of the McCormack's work.

Matthew McCormack's approach sits within the burgeoning field of the cultural history of war, which has expanded beyond the study of culture about war, notably artworks and other representations that have been eschewed and dismissed by more traditional military and political historians, to explore masculinities, the body, and cultural memory. Initially focused on the First World War, such approaches have increasingly been adapted to the study of the Age of Revolutions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In utilising such techniques and intellectual frameworks, *Embodying the Militia* provides an important avenue into contemporary views of gender and citizenship. It is, more importantly, conscious to avoid excessive, even detached, focus on representations and seeks to connect (or reconnect) cultural history with the material world. As the author puts it, the book 'seeks to move beyond representations to think about the soldier's experience in material and embodied terms' (p. 6).

The book is structured into two parts: representation and practice, with the latter forming the bulk of the work. Within each section we find chapters-cum-case studies, covering a particularly wide range of themes and issues regarding this militia. So we find a chapter about the militia in satirical prints and one on the material life of the militiaman, and they all champion an interdisciplinary approach, with each chapter engaging with a specific approach: gender in chapter one; national identity in two; visual arts in three; medicine in four; the body in five; masculinity in six; material culture in seven; crime in eight; and literature in nine. These chapters are necessarily thematic, but they also have a chronological logic to them, starting with the question of gender and the militia that was particularly prominent in the discussions about reforming the force in the 1750s, and indeed was in a symbiotic relationship with wider contemporary concerns about the state of Britain's menfolk, whilst the later chapters deal with the force once it was mobilised. The book, then, is ambitious in its breadth.

To cover this range, Matthew McCormack has made extensive use of a wide range of material. As he notes, the primary sources on the militia are dispersed; units were organised on a county basis so much of the material has been deposited in local archives. For time-pressed academics, he notes, 'the militia is therefore a branch of the British military that cannot be studied very comprehensively from the reading room of The National Archives' (p. 3). *Embodying the Militia* successfully rises to this challenge, and the bibliography provides an impressive catalogue of material from local and county archives – Essex, Dorset, London

Metropolitan to name a few – alongside the wealth of printed material about the militia. Furthermore, in the chapter on material life we find a discussion of extant examples of an officer's uniform discussed alongside the physical arrangements of the great military camps that sprang up across Britain during war, and where the militiamen were often stationed. Perhaps a little more could have been said about the choice of these archives, in the way that Stephen Conway did in *The British Isles and the American War of Independence* (2), but then the case studies in *Embodying the Georgian Militia* are not regional. Nevertheless, it also highlights the value of local archives for the study of home defences in this period – an important thing in an era of cuts to local services where archives are feeling the pinch. The use of these sources are informed by theories familiar to social and cultural historians but, perhaps, less seen in studies of the military. This is to be expected given the interdisciplinary approach outlined above, but it is done in a notably accessible way. There is a lightness of touch and clarity to the expression not always associated with post-modernism / structuralism. References to and discussion of Foucault feature in the work, for example in the chapter on training the militia:

We have seen how drillbooks focused upon the minutiae of bodily training. For Foucault, this level of detail is characteristic of modern disciplinary power: 'the soldier has become something that can be made', as the intricacies of his posture and gesture are re-formed and constantly monitored. The deportment and marching style of the militiaman was of particular concern in contemporary literature: 'In order to have the more soldier-like appearance, it is expected that you should endeavour to keep back your shoulders, and to bring your breast forward, taking care, at the same time, not to thrust out your belly' (p. 99).

Such carefully constructed relationships between theory and the primary sources are to be applauded, and in a way provide a starting point (perhaps for the undergraduate reader) into how the works of Foucault, for example, can be incorporated and add a critical edge in a more focused historical study.

Any assessment of a book that utilises case studies ought to ascertain how far and how well they are integrated with each other. Parts of *Embodying the Militia* will be familiar to readers of Matthew McCormack's work over the previous five years, so how far is the book greater than the sum of its (already published) parts? Certainly, all the case studies support his conclusion that the militia ought to be taken more seriously by historians of the period. The militia reverberated to broader concerns of the time about masculinity, national identity, and citizenship, and through the various case studies Matthew McCormack demonstrates just how important the militia was to Georgians. As he puts it 'The Militia was a key component of a neoclassical worldview, which pitted the virtuous against the forces of "corruption"' (p. 192). Although this ideological basis for the force was compromised by the realities of implementation – with widespread substitution of service and the burden falling far heavier on the poor – nevertheless, through the later chapters of the book, his research repeatedly demonstrates that the ideal of a citizen soldier was never quite extinguished. Certainly, for the landed county gentleman, service as a militia officer featured as prominently as parliamentary service, acting as a Justice of the Peace, or the county administration, in their lives.

Regarding this particular line of argument, *Embodying the Militia* argues that the New Militia was far more complex response than Western's argument that the militia was a party matter or equally Eliga Gould's contention that it was 'idealistic rhetoric that bore no relation to reality' (p. 192).(3) In many ways, this book takes descriptions of the New Militia much more at face value, and sets them carefully within their contemporary context as well as the medium and genre through which they were communicated.

Embodying the Militia also grapples with the identity of these soldiers, challenging the (very generalised) view that 18th-century soldiers were robotic automatons where repeated drills had extinguished any individualism or initiative. It posits the idea that the training of these men reveals a conception of them as a body, and aggregate of thinking and feeling bodies. As

such, Matthew McCormack's line of thinking distances itself from both Foucauldian concepts of power and discipline and Harari's conception of military service as a highly individual experience. Such a compromise between military discipline and citizens echoed the militia's idealism about citizen soldiers. It is a convincing argument based solidly in the careful reading of training literature and practice from the period (although as a very minor point, it would have been interesting to see how the training of the militia was reported to higher ranking officers when it was in service; in effect examining the 'output' alongside the 'input'). The concept of a military body deserves to be experimented with in relation to other forces from the period, and indeed more broadly.

There is not much to criticize in this book, and generally what comments there are to make relate to the gaps and avenues that the book draws attention to that could be furthered by more research. In a superficial examination of its contents, it is not immediately obvious what the relationships are between the broader themes of the book and the chapters on the 'Affair of the Hanoverian soldier' and the exploration of 'Supporting the civil power'. However, these particular aspects are shown to be intriguing ways of illuminating the ideals and practice, respectively, of the militia. Although the book states right at the start that the militia was important in Britain, as it makes clear by its title, the book is focused on the English Militia (which included Wales), as it was this force that was reformed in 1757. We'll have to wait for other scholars to take a similar approach to the Scottish militia that were reformed in the 1790s (and indeed extend it to the Irish Militia) particularly around their political context and their contentious passage through parliament and sometimes troubled implementation.

The long life span of the militia invites some thoughts about how the force changed over time, and *Embodying the Militia* concludes that by the 1810s the force had changed considerably through long service and the institution of transfers to the line regiments of the British Army, signalling its transformation from a citizen army to more of a military reserve. This change is highlighted in the conclusion and would be worth returning to it in further research as this transformation was not without comment or debate. The chapters on representation highlight the scope for further work on the militia in contemporary culture, for example in the press, how county / local identities may have built upon or diverged from militia ideas through the development of regimental cultures, and, given that personal service in the militia was rare, recruitment appeals that were made, particularly in the long mobilisation of the 1793–1815 wars.

This work champions an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the military in this period, and for the engagement of scholars working in this field with the practices of social and culture historians. As Matthew McCormack suggests: 'approaches to war from the direction of military history and cultural history need not be as opposed as they often are: military history has always prioritized practical realities, and cultural history can as well' (p. 194). *Embodying the Georgian Militia* serves as a confirmation that crossovers between these two sub-disciplines can be productive and insightful, and one hopes that more work will follow Matthew McCormack's lead.

Notes

1. John Randle Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: the Story of a Political Issue, 1660–1802* (London, 1965).
2. Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford, 2000).
3. Eliga H. Gould, 'To strengthen the king's hands: dynastic legitimacy, militia reform and ideas of national unity in England 1745–1760', *The Historical Journal*, 34, 2 (1991).