Bull has demonstrated that artillery, contrary to most recent historians of the English Civil Wars, played a significant role in their military operations. As important as this thesis is, the book should not be considered the definitive work on the subject. Either the author should delve further into the subject or other historians should follow in his wake.

The book breaks into non-combat and combat sections of three chapters each. The most detailed portion of the former deals with English (Weald) manufacture of cannon. Bull’s analysis benefits from recent archaeological work at the Horsmonden site, which was owned by the Browne family, who built an industrial combine based on artillery production. The firm’s prosperity in both the pre- and wartime periods depended not only on orders, but also securing their payment. As the author observes, obtaining the latter posed such a challenge to English arms manufacturers that they could not capitalize either mercantile enterprises or proto-industrial ones. It appears from the book’s analysis that native manufacture provided sufficient artillery for the war. (Indeed, Peter Edwards’ Dealing in Death: The Arms Trade and the British Civil Wars, 1638-52, 2000, states that imports were more essential for munitions and small arms for the cavalry and infantry than for artillery pieces.) The advantage of Parliament’s possessing the chief production sites from the start of the First English Civil War posed a problem that Royalist activities failed to overcome. As a result the king’s forces had fewer, older and less standardized artillery pieces, which exacerbated the underfunded regime’s inherent supply problems.

In the second half of the book Bull’s examination of fortifications, sieges and battles proves his contention about the value of artillery. (Perhaps he could have said more about naval warfare, which absorbed a substantial quantity of Parliament’s cannon inventory, since command of the sea resulted in depriving supplies to the king and succoring besieged posts gave an advantage to the Parliamentarians.) The scramble, detailed in chapter four, for securing posts, whether
entire cities or single houses, consumed tremendous amounts of labor, money, artillery, and troops. Later in the war both sides considered reducing the number of fortified places to reduce costs and increase the number of mobile forces, but only the Parliamentarians (after the creation of the New Model Army) inaugurated that policy. (Indeed in Scotland, the marquis of Montrose’s refusal until the winter of 1645-46 to fight a war of position accounts for a large degree of his success, because garrisons did not deplete his numbers nor did artillery degrade his mobility.) Generally, sieges occupied considerable activities of both parties, whether as defenders or attackers. Here Parliament’s advantage in the quantity of artillery became apparent. And the king’s disadvantages, exemplified by his failure before Gloucester in 1643, stand in sharp contrast. Bull’s discussion of battles rests on discrete incidents in a number of battles, chiefly Edgehill and Marston Moor. Unlike sieges, where the absence or presence of large caliber guns, mortars or munitions often determined the result, battlefield use of artillery cannot be so objectively examined. For example, no one tallied the causes of death or wounds, and the expenditure of shot gives no idea of its effectiveness, since large amounts could be mitigated by muddy ground or poor gun crews. Nevertheless, Bull shows that artillery frequently played a role in battle. Or as he observes of Naseby, when the king advanced from an excellent position with his artillery well-sited to a poorer one that masked his guns, human decisions could overturn the “furie of the ordnance.”

In the conclusion Bull argues that the failure of both parties to surreptitiously amass an inventory of artillery before August 1642 indicates that neither had a covert plan for war. Since both thought a single cataclysmic battle (such as Newburn in 1640) would decide the war, one could argue that prodigious efforts and expenditures required to provide armament for artillery fortifications (plus the works themselves) and to arm warships would impose unnecessary burdens. He is more correct to observe that the state of king’s inventory of cannon (generally less than his opponents, and mismatched, which created logistic headaches), and munitions gave Parliament and their Scottish allies advantages in a war that lasted not just one, but five campaigning seasons. In 1648-51 Parliament’s already substantial edge developed further, helping overwhelm its opponents.
The volume is based on meticulous research in the primary and secondary sources. Its ten appendices offer transcriptions of primary sources. Given the author’s thirty years of research on the subject, he might have better sustained his hypothesis by providing analytical appendices. The reviewer realizes that the evidence prevents absolute comparisons, but relative ones would have done much in highlighting Bull’s conclusions. He might have compared, for example, Royalist and Parliamentarian expenditure and acquisition of artillery. Or he could have examined total artillery held by the two sides in December 1642, July 1644 and June 1645 in fortifications, warships and armies. Turning to combat Bull could examine the fate of sieges (with tables on the numbers of those abandoned due to insufficient artillery or munitions, those decided by escalade, those terminated by breaching the wall, etc.). The lavish illustrations fail to support the appropriate text due to the publisher’s decision to place them at the end of the book.

For anyone analyzing English state finances or studying local communities during the war, this book is essential, since it rightly places expensive artillery pieces and their associated fortifications at the forefront. It will also serve as required reading for early modern industrial and military historians.


This volume challenges the tendency to view early modern religious practice in terms of a neat dichotomy between state-promulgated orthodoxy and small pockets of fervent, ideologically coherent resistance. The editors draw on a wide range of contributions from various fields, and the eclectic range of topics aptly reflects the diversity of faiths which underpin the book. By exploring the “ecumenicity of everyday life” (33), the contributors demonstrate how confessional boundaries in this period were more fluid than previously thought, and that even the most deeply held beliefs and prejudices could be unseated by daily exigencies.