

## *Hull and the English Civil War*

Welcome to this short explanation of the very important, indeed key, role which Hull played in the English Civil Wars.

Just to give a little background, there were 3 English Civil Wars...the first from 1642 to 1647, a second from 1648 to 1649 and a third from 1650 to 1651.

Why was this so? It was in essence a battle between the King, Charles the First (who married Henrietta Marie, a Roman Catholic French Princess) and his entrenched belief in the divine right of Kings to rule under the authority of God, versus Parliament, which claimed to rule with the authority of the People.

Queen Henrietta constantly urged the King towards Catholicism but the Country was in the main Protestant following the breakdown between the Roman Catholic Church and the breakaway English Anglican Church following the refusal to grant Henry VIII's many wishes for divorce. And so religion was a secondary source of friction.

In 1640 the King dissolved the short parliament but in November of that year the so called Long Parliament met and Charles unsuccessfully tried to arrest five key members. In January 1642 Sir John Hotham, then Governor of Hull strengthened his grip on the arsenal at Hull being a vast stockpile of weapons and ammunition. This was then the largest arsenal outside London, and one which Charles knew about and wanted possession of, to prosecute his war. Later, in April of that year Sir John refused the King entry to Hull, a then unprecedented action at that time.

This was a very clear refusal to concede the divine right of the King and by August 1642 the war itself had started in Nottingham. By 1647 the first Civil War was lost to the King, but the Scots signed up in support and in 1648 the second war started. This ended again in failure for the King and a third war started in 1650. By then Charles son had fled to the continent Charles 1<sup>st</sup> having been beheaded on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1649.

England then became ruled by a sort of democracy, a Commonwealth under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, (who was offered the Kingship and declined), and the Parliament abolished the monarchy on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1649.

A short lived period of "democracy" followed but Charles 2 returned from the Continent as a restored monarch and sought revenge on all involved in his father's execution. Charles 1<sup>st</sup> was executed in 1649 but by 1660 Charles 2 resumed as monarch and was in hot pursuit of his father's executioners.

The actual civil wars in England were a frightening time for most, but not a war as generally seen, but a series of Battles involving a few thousand men (there was no emancipation of women at this time) or a series of skirmishes, involving a few hundred, between those who supported Parliament and its disciplined trained bandes (armies) and the Lords and Landowners who raised their own forces, largely unpaid but who showed allegiance to their Lord and Master. And it was not always clear who was for which, indeed at some battles it was necessary for the opposing forces to wear coloured bits of cloth in their hats to show who was for one side or another. These were called favours.

This then is a very brief explanation of a complex but significant period of English history.

What was Hulls significance in all this?

You have just finished stage 1, safely crossed the road from the Maritime Museum and arrived at Monument Bridge. As the tour tells you, there is no monument and no bridge but look to your left you will see the site of Beverley Gate, the main entrance to the City of Hull when it was a walled City. This is the place where Sir John Hotham, Governor of Hull refused entry to King Charles 1<sup>st</sup> –

an act without precedent in an age of the divine right of Kings – previously there had been unquestioning obedience. It is, in effect, the starting point of the First English Civil War. This site is therefore of historic importance



A portrait in the National Gallery of Sir John Hotham

There was more to Hull's part in the Civil Wars even than this. Hull had weapons a plenty as already mentioned, the largest armoury outside London in the country. The armoury store was in Suffolk Palace, (on the site of the now 3 John Scots pub in Lowgate). And Charles knew this, from visits by representatives and his own visit on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1639, when he stayed over at the house of Sir John Lister in the High Street (on the site now occupied by Wilberforce House). He pronounced himself "well satisfied" with the armoury and departed Hull from Beverleygate with promises of support and a purse of 100 guineas (which is about £11,500 now).

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1642 Charles arrived at this site, Beverleygate with the idea of getting in to Hull and its armoury but Sir John and the Governors refused him entry. Never before had the King been denied and the King, like his predecessors and successors, thought he ruled on behalf of God – the divine right of Kings.

Sieges of Hull by Royalist followed, without success.

And so this act of defiance reinforced the start of Civil War and deprived Charles of a mass of arms which probably influenced the eventual outcome.

What can be seen of this period, so many years ago, in the great and modern City of Hull?

First of all there is the White Hart Pub in Silver Street. This building lies between Silver Street and Bowlalley lane and is accessed via alleyways from each street. There is more information in the Want to Know More section of the website.

This remarkable building was thought to have been built as a Governors House in the 1620's it is largely untouched with a distinct and unique atmosphere of wood panels and inglenook fireplaces. It has been a pub since the 1700's.

Upstairs on the right is the "plotting parlour" where it is said that Sir John and the Governors met to decide tactics to refuse the King entry. Whilst this may well be a correct interpretation of events so many years ago, some historians say that this was not a plot but a plan and the same room was used to hatch a plot to rid Hull of its Catholic Governor imposed by Charles 2.

Whatever, the building is a "must see visit" and it has all the atmosphere that you would expect of a building of this age – wooden panelled walls, large, inglenook fire places and a wonderful feeling of being in an ancient building, as indeed you are.

Also can be seen where you are now the foundations of Beverley Gate at the corner of Whitefriargate and Princess Dock Street, close to the Maritime Museum. You have to remember that the boundaries of Hull were much smaller then and closing the gates of the City Walls in effect, sealed in the City from the outside world.

Well that's a brief look at the Civil War period and Hull.