

Hull and the English Civil War

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

Just to give a little background, there were three 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? In essence it was a battle between the King, Charles I (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 mainly Protestant, following the breakdown between the Roman Catholic Church and the breakaway English Anglican Church, after 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" and in November of that year when the so called "Long Parliament" met, 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 - a vast stockpile of weapons and ammunition. This was then the largest arsenal outside London, and Charles desperately wanted possession of it to prosecute his war. Later, in April of that year Sir John refused the King entry to Hull, an unprecedented action at that time.

This was a very clear refusal to concede to 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 by the King, but the Scots signed up in support and in 1648 the second Civil war started. This ended again in failure for the King and a third war started in 1650. By then Charles's son had fled to the continent, his father Charles I having been beheaded on 30th 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). Parliament abolished the monarchy on the 7th February 1649.

A short lived period of "democracy" followed but Charles II returned from the Continent as a restored monarch and sought revenge on all involved in his father's execution. Charles I was executed in 1649 but by 1660 Charles II had 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. They were not wars as generally seen, but a series of battles involving a few thousand men (there was no emancipation of women at this time) and a series of skirmishes, involving a few hundred. They were between those who supported Parliament and its disciplined trained bands (armies) and the Lords and Landowners who raised their own, largely unpaid forces but who

showed allegiance to their Lord and Master. It was not always clear who was for which and indeed at some battles it was necessary for the opposing forces to wear coloured bits of cloth in their hats to show which side they were fighting on. These were called favours.

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

What was Hull's 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 and 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 1st – 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 great historical importance.

There was even more to Hull's part in the Civil Wars than this. Hull had weapons a-plenty as already mentioned; the largest armoury in the country outside London. The armoury store was in Suffolk Palace, (on the site of the now Three John Scots pub in Lowgate). Charles knew this from visits by representatives and his own visit on the 4th 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 Beverley Gate with promises of support and a purse of 100 guineas (which is about £11,500 now).

On the 22nd April 1642 Charles arrived at this site, Beverley Gate with the idea of getting into 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 Royalists 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 and has a distinct and unique atmosphere. 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. This same room was used to hatch a plot to rid Hull of its Catholic Governor, imposed by Charles II.

Whatever, the building is a “must see visit”. It has all the atmosphere that you would expect of a building of this age – wood panelled walls, large inglenook fireplaces and a wonderful feeling of being in an ancient building, as indeed you are.

Also can be seen from where you are now are 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.