

Lichfield and the Civil War

The Background – what was the city like before the Civil War

There were fields round the City, as the 1610 Speed map shows.

The population of Lichfield was under 3000. A cathedral city, it was also a market centre where goods from the farms of the countryside around could be sold, and where tradesmen and craft workers such as shoemakers, tailors and blacksmiths operated. It was close to main transport routes – the junction where the road from London to Carlisle (now the A5) crossed the road from Exeter to York (now the A38).

The Close was a fortified area surrounding the Cathedral. It had stone walls, corner towers and two gatehouses. Built on higher ground, the Cathedral with its three spires was a landmark for miles around along the flat Trent valley. A ditch outside the walls of the Close, the Dumble, added to the strength of the position on the north. On the south side, the water of the Minster Pool formed another defensive barrier.

The city to the south of the Cathedral had also originally had defences, provided by bishop Roger de Clinton in the early 1100s. A ditch, with an earth bank, provided protection to the west, south and east, while the pools gave protection on the north. Four gates to the city had existed in the medieval period, where the roads came into the city, but these had disappeared and what was left of the ditches was of little military use.

Parts of the street pattern are the same as today, especially inside the city. Some of the street names are the same or very similar. Some of the buildings are still here too – not just the Cathedral, but for example Dr Milley's Hospital and St John's Hospital marked on the Speed map, along with others not specifically mentioned.

The Cathedral, as **diocesan centre**, employed or supported many of Lichfield's inhabitants, directly or indirectly. The leading clergy were also natural supporters of the Crown – the established church of England represented one of the main targets of the **Puritans** on the Parliamentary side. The bishop, Robert Wright, had been one of the twelve bishops put in the Tower of London in 1641 after protesting against the actions of the House of Commons. Released later that year, he went to Eccleshall Castle near Stone, one of the bishop's residences which he defended with troops for the King. Wright died in 1643 and his successor as bishop, Accepted Frewen never actually came to live here in the diocese.

The City Council had supporters of both sides among its members. For the Parliamentarians, on the Council there were Robert Drafgate, Essex's steward in Lichfield and a former senior bailiff, the Town Clerk Michael Noble and Thomas Minors, a merchant who later became Lichfield's M.P. in the 1650s. For the Royalists, Sir Richard Dyott was current M.P. for Lichfield, also **Steward and Recorder**.

Civil War timeline

- August 1642, the King declares war on Parliament at Nottingham
- October 1642, battle of Edgehill (Warwickshire)
- January 1644, Scottish troops march south to aid the Parliamentary forces
- July 1644, battle of Marston Moor (near York)
- June 1645, battle of Naseby (Leicestershire)
- May 1646, the King surrenders to the Scots
- January 1649, the King beheaded

The First Siege, 1-4 March 1643

In the autumn of 1642, after the King raised his standard at Nottingham, effectively declaring war, Lichfield was garrisoned by Royalists, under the command of the Earl of Chesterfield, later assisted by Sir Richard Dyott.

Lord Brooke, owner of Warwick Castle, raised a regiment of foot soldiers in support of the Parliamentary cause at this time, securing Warwickshire and capturing Stratford on Avon in February 1643. He was then ordered by Parliament to assemble further troops to attack Lichfield and Stafford.

On 1 March, around 1200 troops reached Lichfield from the south and next day marched into the city. Royalist troops regrouped in the Cathedral Close behind the defences and the Parliamentarians took over the town. Lord Brooke's troops settled to attack the Close from the south. Artillery (a **demi-culverin**, "Black Bess") bombarded the South gate. At this point in the siege, Lord Brooke was shot and killed – the tradition is that this was by "Dumb" Dyott, stationed in the tower of the Cathedral.

Reinforcements for the attackers arrived with Sir John Gell from Derbyshire. Initially, on 3 March, attacks on both the South and west gates were pushed back. At one stage, the advance included a human shield of members of some of the defenders' families.

Further reinforcements arrived with Sir William Brereton (from Cheshire) and his second-in-command Simon Rudgeley, a local Staffordshire man. On Saturday 4 March, a mortar device arrived from Coventry and was positioned in the garden of Sir Richard Dyott's house in what is now Market Street, overlooking Minster Pool. Although some early shots fell short, some of the shells (or "granadoes") did explode and the bombardment had its effect.

The garrison negotiated terms of surrender – effectively "**free quarter**" to those within the Close (exemption from being put to death). The Earl of Chesterfield was sent to

London and imprisoned in the Tower. His troops were disarmed and allowed to go. Many headed for Stafford and the Royalist garrison there.

The Second Siege, 7-21 April 1643

The Parliamentary garrison which took over the Close in March 1643 was commanded by Colonel Russel. Expecting a counter-attack, they initially looked to strengthen and make good damage done to the gates and walls of the fortifications. At this time too, destruction of some of the Cathedral contents took place – windows, organ, statues, images and library.

Rupert, Prince Palatine of the Rhine (a nephew of King Charles, son of his sister Elizabeth) was given the task of dislodging the Parliamentary garrison. His force was initially of 400 foot soldiers and 1200 horse, reinforced by regiments from Colonel Hastings from Ashby and from Stafford and assembled by 7 April.

Again, no attempt was made to defend the town; troops withdrew into the safety of the Close. The Royalists assessed that the southern defences, including Minster Pool, were relatively strong. To the north of the Close, though, the land rose up to the level of the fortified battlements.

By 8 April, the Close was surrounded. The artillery was set up on the highest ground to the north – still known as Prince Rupert's Mount. The walls of Bishop Langton's fortified close were strong and well-built. For a week, the cannonballs (each weighing ten to fourteen pounds) made little effect – they were designed for battlefield rather than siege use.

An alternative approach was needed. Attempting to undermine the walls was a classic technique, tunnelling under the walls or towers and setting explosive charges off. Defenders counter-mined, digging to find the tunnels and prevent them being used. On 20 April, the foundations under the north-west tower near modern Beacon Street, were successfully undermined; the explosion, accompanied by simultaneous attacks at other parts of the defences, allowed the Royalists to storm through the breach in the walls.

Fighting in the Close was fierce and Royalist losses were high in hand-to hand fighting. However, the defenders had little food or ammunition left. Articles of agreement for surrender were signed and on 21 April, Colonel Russel and his surviving men were allowed to march out of the Close, drums beating and colours flying, down Bird Street and St John Street and along the road towards Coventry.

A replacement Royalist garrison under Colonel Richard Bagot from nearby Blithfield was formed. For the rest of the Civil War, this garrison maintained a presence for the Royalists in Staffordshire. Importantly, this enabled the strategic communications link between Royalists in the North of England and those in Wales and the West of England to remain open.

The Third Siege, March – July 1646

In practical terms, this was part of a mopping-up operation. Royalist armies had been beaten and no large coherent forces of troops remained in the field. Individual strongholds fended for themselves, in the absence of any specific instructions from the King as to what to do.

The Parliamentarian forces were led by Sir William Brereton again. They captured the town on 9 March as the defenders again moved back inside the Close. The Royalists were now led by Sir Thomas Tyldesley – Colonel Richard Bagot had been severely injured at the battle of Naseby in 1645 and died of his wounds shortly afterwards.

Inside the Close, preparations had long been made for a potential siege. Stocks of food and ammunition were high and defences had been strengthened. Brereton resolved not to attempt to storm the Close immediately, but surrounded it and cut it off from re-supply. Timber-framed houses on Beacon Street were burned by the defenders to prevent them providing cover for attack. Brereton's summons to surrender on 13 April was rejected by Tyldesley. A series of occasional attacks and defensive raids followed.

Heavy guns were brought up to assist the attack. On 7 May, a bombardment began, aimed principally at the Cathedral itself. The central spire fell on 12 May, into the choir and nave areas of the church. Still the garrison did not surrender.

In June, a letter was received from the King, inviting loyal garrison governors to seek the best terms they could to lay down their arms honourably. On 10 July, terms were agreed. On 16 July, Tyldesley's men marched out, drums beating and colours flying, before laying down their weapons. In all, 700 soldiers and 80 officers of various ranks were counted.

The Civil War in Lichfield was at an end.

Reconstruction

After the end of the third siege, the Parliamentarian forces moved to slight the defences, to prevent their having any future military value or use. The standing walls of the Close were demolished.

Some royal supporters suffered for their loyalty; estates were confiscated, though some former owners paid a lump sum to Parliament to recover their estates.

During the **Interregnum**, Lichfield suffered economically. The Anglican church and the cathedral specifically had played a significant part in local life – many workmen earned their living from work in the Close. A survey and valuation was made in 1649 of property belonging to the former Dean and Chapter and Vicars Choral. Some of this was sold, with the proceeds going to Parliament.

Physical damage was also significant. Beacon Street and Dam Street, along with the area near Minster Pool had suffered badly. The buildings inside the Close were badly damaged, as the 1649 survey shows. Obviously, the cathedral too was badly damaged. Other parish churches in the town were also damaged. The steeple of St Marys church was damaged, and the Market Cross in front of it destroyed. St Chads

church was occupied by Parliamentarian troops during the first and third sieges. Statues, painted windows, communion rails and fonts were all frequently damaged or destroyed, being contrary to Puritan traditions of worship.

At the Restoration in 1660, the diocese of Lichfield, abolished under the Commonwealth, was revived. The former bishop, Accepted Frewen (appointed in 1643 after the death of Thomas Wright) became archbishop of York and a new bishop, John Hacket was appointed. He worked actively to rebuild and restore the Cathedral, which was **reconsecrated** on 24 December 1669.

Glossary of terms

Diocesan centre

The diocese of Lichfield in the seventeenth century included all of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, as well as the northern half of Shropshire and the north and east of Warwickshire (including Birmingham and Coventry). The Church of England there was under the control of the bishop of Lichfield, based here, but with other homes too, such as Eccleshall Castle in Staffordshire.

Puritans

This was a reforming church movement, starting in the sixteenth century. They wanted changes more radical than those begun by the Church of England under Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603).

They were strongly opposed to images in churches (wall paintings, statues etc) and other aspects of church services. They came to see bishops and the whole structure of organization, wealth and control of the church as bad and they aimed to replace this.

Steward and Recorder

These offices involved presiding over the courts of the manor and the city, running both administration and justice in the area.

Demi-culverin

This was a type of cannon, with a barrel with a diameter of about four and a half inches (about 11 centimetres).

Free quarter

By surrendering and being granted free quarter, troops were sure that they would not be put to death. They were shown mercy and allowed free passage through enemy lines to freedom.

Interregnum

This is the period between the death of Charles I in 1649 and the restoration of Charles II in 1660.

Reconsecrated

Consecration meant that a newly built church was officially dedicated to the service of God by its bishop. In this case, because the Cathedral had been out of use since the Civil War, the process was gone through again after the rebuilding.