

Siege of Gloucester – from Gloucester and the Civil War 10th August – 5th September

John Dorney – Town Clerk 1641 – 1662

John Corbet – son of local shoemaker. Vicar of St Mary de Crypt; chaplain to Massey

Accounts survive that show the Corporation paying costs of Masseys accommodation at the Crown Inn.

Piped supply of water from Robinswood Hill into Scriven's conduit in Southgate street (1637). Other water supply from wells dug in back yards or public wells – Trinity Well. Such wells easily contaminated.

Industry in City: trade, clothing manufacture, Brewers and maltsters; metal working; tanning; pin making. Reliance on agricultural products.

Strategic Importance of Gloucester.

Controlled south to north route to Worcester and Shrewsbury as well as east to west route routes from London and Oxford to Wales. Economic – agricultural and manufacturing products – timber and iron from FOD.

By start of Civil War, Gloucester was already mainly pro-parliamentarian. The county was not united and even in Gloucester a list drawn up in 1643 had 104 Royalist supporters.

For most ordinary folk, what was important for them was to be left alone so that they could carry on with their lives. Often took sides against whichever side occupied their region.

Opposition to ship money for wars with Spain and France. Tendency of local gentry was to support King. The Crown was financially weak and driven to rely on forced loans and taxes. Levy on imports and exports. Objected to ship money tax which was to pay for the refurbishment of the fleet.

Gloucester only collected 2% of the £5,500 due. The imposition of taxes without the consent of Parliament which occurred during the years of personal rule by the King (1629 – 1640) was a source of much resentment.

Locally there were concerns on the restrictions on the clothing industry and attacks on tobacco growing. The clothing industry was in decline and increasingly controlled from London. Tobacco was grown in the Cheltenham and Winchcombe area.

Charles I sought to abolish this local industry to protect the higher price of tobacco imported from Virginian tobacco plantations.

The Forest of Dean was strategically important for its supply of timber and iron. The sale of the FoD to Catholic Royalist Sir John Wyntar caused local bitterness because of his policy of enclosure and felling.

Even up to start of siege, citizens professed loyalty to King, but only as he acted through parliament. For most, opposition to the King was not a rebellious stance – they saw themselves as protecting the existing parliamentary status quo.

Puritanism had a strong local tradition.

Chapter 3

Measures for improving the defences of the city started before the declaration of war on 22nd August 1642. The local committee for defence was set up. Cirencester was captured 2 Feb 1643.

Rupert called on Gloucester to surrender and their response was that they would not surrender at the demand of a foreign Prince. Rupert withdrew to Cirencester.

“ That they were resolved with their lives and fortunes to defend the city for the use of the King and Parliament and in no wise would surrender at the demand of a foreign Prince.”

This reply encouraged Charles to think that the city would surrender to him in person.

Royalist noose tightened around Gloucester in coming months.

March 23rd/24th. Massey and Sir William Waller executed a daring plan. Royalist troops were camped at Highnam. While Massey attacked from Gloucester, Waller crossed the river at Frampton Passage and attacked from behind. The parliamentary forces killed 500 men and took prison 1442 common soldiers and 150 gentlemen. They seized 1600 weapons, 4 cannons and provisions. The prisoners were held in Mary de Lode and Holy Trinity churches and fed on turnip tops and cabbage leaves. They were released after 10 days, after promising not to fight.

Massey and Waller retook Tewkesbury on April 12th and seized Hereford on April 30th.

At the start of the civil war in 1642, the existing medieval walls were so dilapidated that sections adjacent to the North gate had fallen down.

Feb 1642, the Corporation ordered the purchase of 40 muskets and bandoliers from London, 20 from Bristol. Gloucester Volunteers founded in July 1642. Committee for Defence founded 5th August 1642 and the deputy lieutenant instructed to raise fortifications as fit for the preservation of the city.

More than 200 pikes were bought before the siege. Also pickaxes, spades, shovels, wheelbarrows and 3-4 cannons. Much of the framework for defences was established before the arrival of Massey.

Women and children were involved in repairing the fortifications. The Corporation was forced to take out loans to cover the costs of keeping the troops that it expected Parliament to cover. £1000 held in London from 1642 but not received until 1644. Citizens were expected to provide quarters for the garrison at 3s/man. Increasingly the burden was on the poorer section of the community.

More than £4000 was spent by inhabitants in housing the garrison in the 5-month period before the siege. The citizens were also expected to contribute towards the soldiers pay. The city was close to bankruptcy.

In anticipation of Royalist victory at the siege, the gentry appealed to King Charles to spare property in the town if it can be shown to belong to Royalist sympathisers.

A list of 104 citizens deemed loyal to the King was drawn up. It included Thomas Price who later became sherriff in 1661 and mayor in 1666

There was a fear of being besieted and a reluctance to be fighting against their king in person, but loyalty to parliament proved stronger.

Women in the city had active roles – bear arms, kept watch, repaired breaches.

Chapter 4.

The Royalists set up first camp on Tredworth Filed (Park Rd / Midland Rd area) to the east of the city on august 6th. The Royalists plundered Tuffley on August 7th and set up base in Brookethorpe.

By Thursday 10th August, there was a camp of 6000 foot and horse at Tredworth field plus Royalist armies camped all around the city:

South – Llanthony Priory; North - Walham 2000 cavalry; East @ Barton; Sir William Vavasour's Welsh army – 4000, camped on west side of Severn @ Over. (Note: other sources indicate Vavasour was to the North); Cavalry were quartered at Newent.

King Charles was quartered at Painswick and then at Matson House. Prince Rupert was at Prinknash park.

City had 1400 - 1500 men and 15 cannons

August 10th. Heralds were sent to the city with proclamation to surrender. Response was that the city remained loyal to the King and would obey orders but only as presented through Parliament.

Defences included:

- refurbishment of walls and ditches
- internal defences
- scorched earth policy in suburbs

Ditches were dug to a depth of 4 m. at the South gate. Bastions were added to the walls. Bastions at South, North and Alvin gates as well as St Oswald's Priory and Little Meadow.

The Siege mainly directed at bombarding the area from the east to South gates where land was highest and driest, concentrating on the S.E corner. A breach on 14th August was quickly repaired. A furious bombardment on 18th August took place at the corner of the wall next Rignall Stile. An internal breastwork was dug between East and South gates. The east gate was seen as the weakest point of defence on 3rd and 4th September. Royalists renewed their mining operations. Additional defences were constructed across Eastgate St – a large trench.

Welsh forces under Vavasour advance to Vineyard at Over.

The scorched earth policy in the suburbs – on the east side of Southgate Street, Green Dragon Land was destroyed in the digging of the ditch. Fete Lane and Brook Street were destroyed – adjacent to Whitefriars. The tower at Llanthony Priory was demolished. In Kingsholm, housing to the east of Greyfriars was demolished. St Owen, on the west side of Southgate street was demolished.

The whole community – men, women and children – were involved in repairing fortifications and cutting ditches by hand to a depth of 4m. turf was still collected from Little Meadow on the NW side of the city. This was used to effect repairs to the fortifications and to dry out for use as fuel. The main magazine was in St Mary de Crypt. A stock of 40 barrels of powder at the start of the siege but two powder mills (at the quay and in cathedral outbuildings) were able to replenish supplies. Only 3 barrels were left at the end of the siege.

Chapter 5. Tactics.

Royalists had been expecting a quick surrender. The King was opposed to storm assault as had been used in Bristol because of bloodshed.

Army of 30,000 men vs Garrison of 14,000. They did not believe that the City could withstand a long siege and thought 10 days would suffice, the water supply from Robinswood Hill was cut off. The City put watchmen on Wainlodes Hill to signal any

approaching relief army. Bizarre example of laxity – cattle were still taken out to graze.

Royalist plan was first to target the S.E corner as it was higher ground. Easier to dig approach trenches and mines than in boggy ground to the west. Built battery at Gaudy Green.

On 16th August expended operations to north side of East gate towards Friars Barn. Installed cannon at Kingsholm – this attempt was thwarted by a sally which spiked the cannon.

From 28th August, there was a new emphasis at mining the East gate.

26th August – intensified work to fill ditch by Rignall stile and prepare miners under East gate.

Three elements of Royalist assault:

- Artillery bombardment
- Digging of assault trenches – saps
- Mining

Artillery: Most terrifying of weapons were mortars that fired “grenadoes”. High trajectory but low velocity – to drop explosive shells on target. Grenado – hollow iron sphere filled with powder and slow-burning fuse. Potentially devastating but appeared to have caused surprisingly little damage. Effectiveness of mortars depended on shell exploding at right time. Gunners used fuses that were too long. The shells buried themselves in the earth or were put out.

Digging assault trenches – Sapping. This was to safely bring the troops to the walls once breached.

Mines: Purpose to dig under the defences, fill the shaft with gunpowder and then explode the charge. FoD miners were pressed into service at the East gate.

Kingsholm battery believed to have been located in former gravel quarries at Walham.

Rignall stile battery – Cromwell st / Park End Road junction.

Main camps of Royalist army: Llanthony, Barton Hill and Tredworth. Kingsholm battery at Walham. Forces from Worcester quartered in Kingsholm – Deans Way, St Mark’s Street, Edwy Parade, St Margaret’s hospital, Matson.

City ditches proved to be a major obstacle to the besiegers. Dr Chillingworth – siege engine.

Massey was offensive in his defence of the City. He took the initiative during the siege by mounting raiding parties – sallies – distraction the Royalists from developing their plan of attack.

Sallies and night-time raiding parties. The size of the raiding parties varies from a few men to hundreds. Largest – 400 musketeers – on Friday 18th August, sallied out of North Gate to seize the 4 cannons recently installed at Kingsholm.

Friday September 1st, a raiding party slipped out of sally port in East gate tower and threw grenades in to the mine entrance. Fleeing miners were shot down.

Digging countermines – aim to flood Royalists mines.

Inside the besieged city.

Siege did cause hardship. Water supply cut off from Robinswood Hill. Royalists diverted the water that drove the city corn mills. City had to rely on wells and water from the Severn and had to grind corn with horse mills. Supplies of fuel were cut off

and citizens collected turf as substitute. Were able to graze cattle and had prepared by seizing crops beforehand.

19th august – 150 cannon balls fired into the city. Batteries were so close that if shot missed the wall, it often flew right over the town. At 30 Westgate street, Mr Commeline – apothecary - house hit. St Katherine's church - near St Oswald's – destroyed. Greyfriars badly damaged by battery. South gate badly damaged. Top of steeple of St Nicholas church was destroyed. Tolsey at the Cross was damaged. Crown Inn – Massey's lodgings – 20lb bullet came through window and landed on pillow.

Relief of city.

Fire lit on Wainlodes Hill on 24th August that alerted City that relief was on its way. Essex mustered an army on 24th august and set off on 26th August. Marched down Prestbury Hill on 5th September, reaching Gloucester on 8th September. Royalist army had already withdrawn from 4th, with Cavalry withdrawing on 5th.