THE SIEGE OF LEICESTER — 1645

A 325th Anniversary History by

JONATHAN WILSHERE and SUSAN GREEN

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June 1972 (Second edition)

Forty pence

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Portraits of Charles I (Myters) Prince Rupert (attributed to Honthorst) and Sir Thomas Fairfax (Faithorne) are reproduced by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The letters of Charles I and Prince Rupert and Prince Rupert's receipt (originals in Leicester Museum Archives Department), and the line drawings of the Magazine and Turret Gateway, are reproduced from W. Kelly — *Royal Progresses and Visits to Leicester* (1884).

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INTRODUCTION TO FIRST EDITION

This short account of the Siege of Leicester, produced to coincide with the 325th anniversary of the event, is a reminder that siege and disastrous sack was the price the town had to pay for three years of indecisive "sitting on the fence" which persisted, despite sound military advice, until Prince Rupert had actually opened fire. There was then no alternative, but to attempt, against hopeless odds, to defend an inadequately and poorly fortified town, boasting only three miles of ill-repaired walls and hastily constructed banks and ditches.

Had Leicester given Parliament unequivocal support early on, more positive steps would then have been taken to fortify the town, and Rupert, a perceptive if impetuous commander, might well have thought twice about the wisdom of attack. Conversely, the simple expedient of voicing support for the king would have prevented a wasteful and avertable sack; even after Naseby, Fairfax, a fair-minded man, would surely have offered Leicester generous surrender terms. The feeble-mindedness of the Corporation can also be contrasted with Northampton's early positive decision, which resulted in that town becoming a powerful Parliamentarian garrison.

Although the inhabitants witnessed the bloody scenes and looting rampages inseparable from the aftermath of any siege, they were at any rate spared the discomfort and inconvenience of a long blockade — Ashby and Belvoir had that to come. Nearly five centuries previously, in 1173, Leicester itself had borne a three-week siege, which both prefaced devastation in the north-east of the town, and precipitated the loss of St. Michael's as a habitable parish.

In retrospect, at a distance of three and a quarter centuries, it may be best to forget that the 1645 Siege of Leicester, not the most creditable chapter in the town's history, was quite avoidable, a non-event from the start, and admire instead the bravery of the ordinary townsfolk in adversity, the women of Leicester never having a finer hour.

The Magazine, now revitalised as a Regimental Museum on an island site in the midst of the ceaseless roar of traffic using the Southgate Underpass, remains as the most obvious reminder of Leicester's Civil War days. So too do such buildings as Skeffington House and the Chantry House, now combined as Newarke Houses Museum, which survived both German bombing in the Second World War and a near second siege in 1967 - 68, when the Underpass road scheme was under construction. The Turret Gateway, at the Newarke entrance to Castle View, though damaged in the Civil War and further truncated last century, provides another visible link with the troubled events of 325 years ago.

May 1970 JONATHAN WILSHERE

INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION

It is gratifying that there is a need for a second edition so soon; the opportunity has been taken of making a few minor amendments to the text, which otherwise has been left unaltered.

June 1972 JONATHAN WILSHERE
SUSAN GREEN

Fig. 2 Turret (or Rupert's) Gateway (1422-3) with St. Mary-de-Castro Church spire in background

THE SIEGE OF LEICESTER – 1645

THE BACKGROUND

The Siege of Leicester in 1645, though possibly not of great national significance in the history of the Civil War, nonetheless provided Charles I with his last success, for his downfall at Naseby was but a few days distant. The events leading to the fall of Leicester can only be fully appreciated when prefaced by a brief outline of some of the historical details of the preceding twenty years.

Charles I, from the time of his accession in 1625, had a continuous struggle against Parliament, endeavouring for eleven years (1629 - 1640) to rule without one; inevitably his financial difficulties increased in consequence. The king, acting unconstitutionally, levied the harsh and much-hated "Ship money" in a desperate attempt to raise funds; this tax, at first payable only by the inhabitants of sea-ports, was extended by 1635 to inland places also.

The writ sent to the high sheriff of Leicestershire and the mayor of Leicester demanded payment of £200 towards the provision of a ship of 450 tons burden, provided with ammunition and manned by 180 mariners. This requirement, equivalent to a quarter of the town's normal annual expenditure, was regarded as unreasonable and though quickly raised, met with an understandably hostile reception. Similar writs were issued for the same sums in 1637 and 1639, but the amount required in 1638 was only £72; a king making such demands was unlikely to enhance his reputation with his Leicester Subjects. It was the sort of action that would be remembered.

Dissatisfaction remained largely just beneath the surface until May 1641 when the king attempted to arrest five members of the House of Commons, including Leicestershire's Sir Arthur Heselrige, on a charge of having held a treasonable correspondence with the Scots. Bitter and open conflict between the opposing interests of king and Parliament ensued with some counties taking active defence measures.

Leicestershire, from its central situation, was subject to the ebb and flow of warfare throughout the period of the Civil War, as is reflected in frequent forays. In 1642 the county aimed at maintaining neutrality, but there was "a notable animosity" between the two powerful and well-balanced local families of Grey and Hastings, representing Parliamentarian and Royalist sympathies respectively. Their deep-rooted and two-centuries-old jealousy made Leicestershire, "like a cockpit, one spurring against another". Supporters of the rival factions divided geographically: Royalist support was strongest north and west of the Fosse Way and in the spur towards Belvoir, whereas south and east Leicestershire was predominantly Parliamentarian in sympathy.

The principal families backing Lord Grey of Groby included Ashby of Quenby, Babington of Rothley, Cave of Stanford, Dixie of Bosworth, Faunt of Foston, Hartopp of Buckminster, Heselrige of Noseley, Herrick

of Beaumanor, Packe of Prestwold, Palmer of Wanlip, Pochin of Barkby, Smith of Edmundthorpe, and Villiers of Brooksby. Few of these families were long-established in Leicestershire, most having amassed wealth as merchants or as purchasers of dissolved monastic lands.

Adherents of the Royalist cause, headed by Henry Hastings (later Lord Loughborough), youngest son but the most powerful member of the Hastings family of Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Castle Donington, included such families as Beaumont of Gracedieu, Farnham of Quorndon, Nevill of Holt, Poulteney of Lubenham, Shirley of Staunton Harold, Skeffington of Skeffington, Skipwith of Cotes, Turpin of Knaptoft, Turville of Aston Flamville, Wright of Barlestone, and other less important gentry. The majority of these Cavalier sympathisers were old Leicestershire families, less influential than their Roundhead counterparts, whom they outnumbered.

The House of Commons nominated the earl of Stamford Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire on 5 March 1642. He was empowered to call together all His Majesty's Subjects in Leicestershire "that are meet and fit for the wars, and them to train, exercise and put in readiness, and them from time to time to cause to be arranged and weaponed and to take muster of them". The king, realizing his prerogative had been abused, forbade the raising of troops under Stamford. Two knights of the shire, Sir Arthur Heselrige and Lord Grey of Ruthin, were then sent by Parliament to Leicester to see the ordinance was in force.

A further set-back for the king occurred on 23 April 1642 when Sir John Hotham denied him entrance to Hull. On 5 May, the earl of Stamford came to Leicester to make arrangements for ordering the militia and was confronted by a lord and his servants sent by the king with a commission on the same subject. The earl, accused of seducing the people from their allegiance to the king, when told to go, became so incensed that he drew his sword, telling the king's agent he was the one to go or he would make the place "too hot for him". An ugly situation developed when the king's men drew swords. The earl's servants did likewise: a fight had started. It was market day, the town crowded, and the noise of the melée attracted bystanders to the scene, who were quick to take Stamford's side. The king's representatives, outnumbered and fearing for their lives, were obliged to withdraw. The mayor and aldermen subsequently regretted the unfortunate scene and submitted themselves to parliament.

Roundhead recruiting meetings produced more than 200 volunteers at Broughton Astley, Kibworth, Copt Oak, Melton Mowbray and Queniborough, but Stamford, having removed the majority of arms from the County Magazine to his seat at Bradgate, was evidently uneasy, for the armoury was returned before the king's visit the following month.

Leicestershire was the first county to receive a Commission of Array when Henry Hastings arrived in Leicester on 12 June and persuaded the mayor, Thomas Rudyard, to ignore Stamford's Commission. The High Sheriff was accordingly ordered to assemble the train-bands of foot and freeholders at the Rawdykes on Wednesday 22 June. Hastings duly rode into Leicester on that day, his motley followers comprising tenants and

PLATE I

Charles I (1600-1649) painted in 1630 by Daniel Mysters (1590-1642)

PLATE II

Sir Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671) by William Fairthorne (1616-91)

100 Derbyshire colliers gathered on his journey south from York. They were provided with pikes, muskets and calivers; three miles outside Leicester, they were issued with powder, match and bullets. The meagre muster gave him few grounds for encouragement and he proceeded to the Horsefair Leys, where he spoke for the king's Cause and read aloud the Commission. The High Sheriff's reaction was to defiantly proclaim the votes of the two Houses of Parliament against the Commission; a sharp scuffle between the rival leaders was fortunately ended by a short shower, which dampened both gunpowder and spirits. Counterwarrants to seize the persons of the earl of Stamford and Henry Hastings were however issued. Hastings, instructed to use the magazine "as there shall be occasion", replaced the Parliamentarian Archdale Palmer as High Sheriff on 25 June.

Meanwhile, Charles, anxious to obtain first-hand knowledge of feelings in the town, arrived from Beverley on 22 July, accompanied by Prince Charles and nephew Rupert. The royal party received a cool but polite welcome from the Mayor and Corporation at Frog Island, outside the North Gate of the town. They proceeded to Lord's Place in High Street, the route lined by a crowd estimated at 10,000. The Assizes were in progress and the king personally addressed a large assembly at the Castle, desiring that all should assist the royal cause "with vigour" and furnish support for his army. If occasion was to arise, "I know you will bring horses, men, money and hearts, worthy of such a cause". He was offered 120 horses and men, indicative perhaps that "if the king were loved there as he ought to be Parliament were more feared than he". The king came "rather to prevent crimes than publish them" but he received a petition regretting his long estrangement from the "highest and safest council of Parliament". The grand jury for the assize complained that while the king protected such delinquents as Hastings there could never be peace and they prayed that the Commission of Array be left in Stamford's hands (already declared a traitor). Three later demands for distribution of the magazine among the hundreds of the county were finally met, after the king's departure, by the mayor and Corporation adopting a middle-line approach.

As on his previous visit in 1634, the king attended St. Martin's church on the Sunday accompanied by the robed mayor and Corporation in walking procession from Lord's Place up High Street to the High Cross and then left and left again into St. Martin's (now Guildhall) lane, probably entering the church by the west door. A throne had been erected at the instigation of Christiana, widowed Countess of Devonshire, the Corporation footing the bill for flowers, herbs and six bundles of rushes (with which the church was strewn). The king's party could derive little comfort from their visit; they departed quietly early on Monday morning, without taking leave of the mayor and Corporation.

The king, with Prince Charles and cavalry escort, passed through Leicester in August *en route* to Coventry, only to return humiliated after that town had denied them entrance. After an overnight stay at the Abbey Mansion, they started early next morning for Nottingham, where the king, mid wind and lightning, hoisted his standard on what is now called Standard

Hill. The date was 25 August 1642; Civil War had officially begun. An advanced guard of royalist cavalry was stationed in Leicester and, within the next few days, Prince Rupert attacked Bradgate, breaking up the furniture, making merry with Stamford's chaplain, turning loose horses and cattle and carrying off arms and ammunition.

THE SIEGE

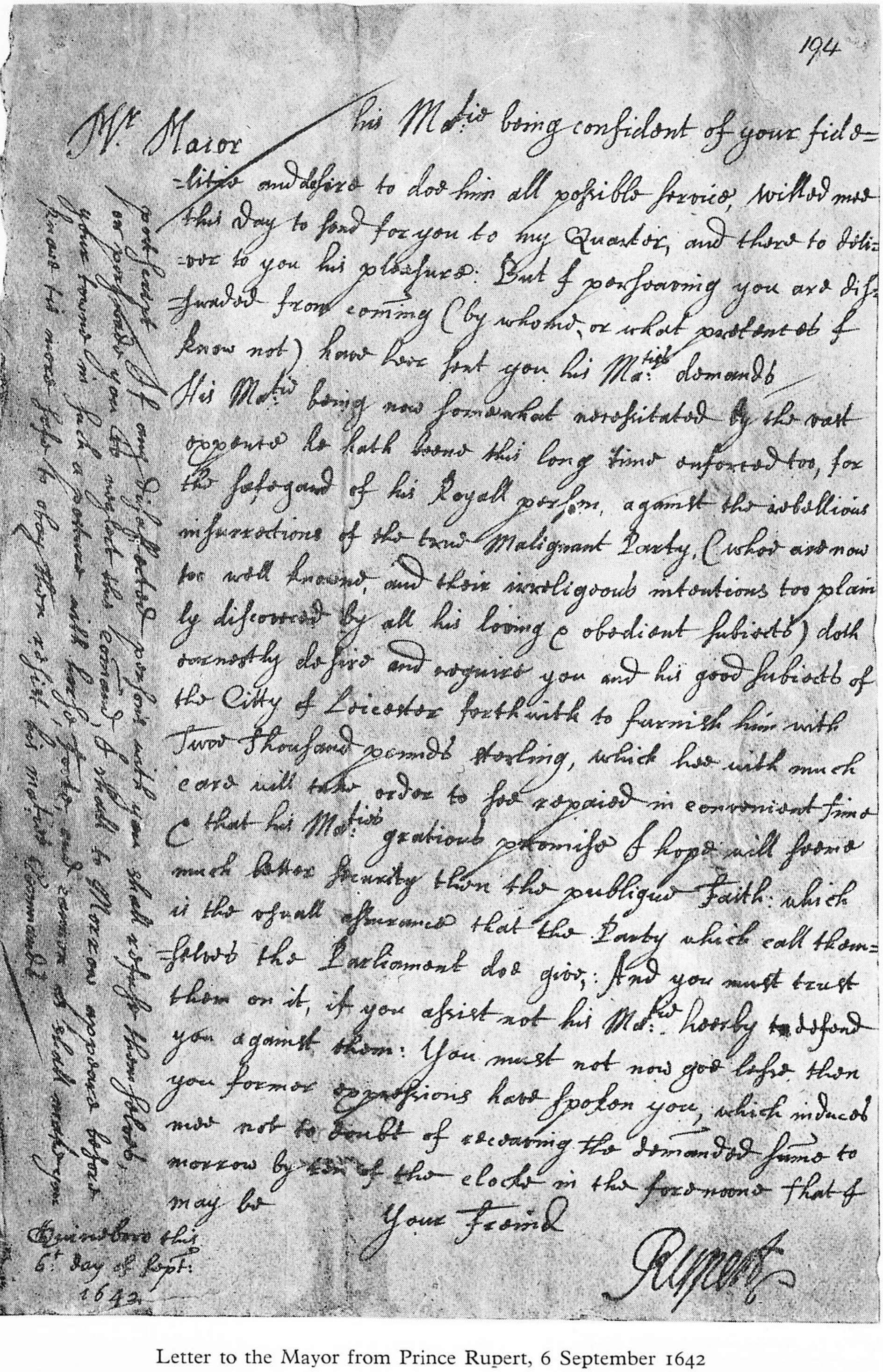
Rupert set up his headquarters at Queniborough, from where on 6 September he sent the well-known letter to the mayor of Leicester, Thomas Rudyard, demanding £2,000 sterling "by ten of the clock in the forenoon" of the next day, adding that if the mayor refused, he would "appear before your town in such a posture with horse, foot and cannon, as shall make you know 'tis more safe to obey than 'tis resist his Majesty's command". The town appealed to the king, whose reply expressing surprise at Rupert's conduct, discharged the Corporation from its fulfilment. However, six Dragoons had already been sent with £500 to Rupert — in theory a loan, but one never to be repaid!

During the following winter of 1642 - 3, Lord Grey of Groby, puritan heir of the old earl of Stamford, secured Leicester, although Belvoir Castle was taken for the king by the High Sheriff of Lincolnshire in January 1643. Near-anarchy prevailed while the garrisons of Belvoir and Ashby plundered mercilessly "as debased wicked wretches as if they had been raked out of hell". Grey, somewhat harshly described by Clarendon as "a young man of no eminent parts", by sitting tight, allowed the royalists to remain on top.

Parliament reformed the Leicestershire County Committee, its local governing body, in July, 1644. A new Committee for the Militia to "raise forces, suppress the enemy to assess taxes, to pay the troops, to appoint officers and suppress revolt" was set up, but internal friction was caused because several 'best men' were omitted from what was consequently regarded as merely an "A" XI. Grey was further not given adequote forces and attempts on the Ashby and Belvoir royalist strongholds produced bare success. March 1645 saw Sir Marmaduke Langdale's victory over Colonel Rossiter at Melton Mowbray — the way was now paved for a royalist assault on Leicester itself. Colonel George Booth, a Cheshire landowner, later to become Lord Delamere, changed sides and in Spring 1645 expressed considerable concern at the state of Leicester's defences, in the following letter to Lord Grey. Steps were taken to strengthen the fortifications, but time was too short for proper arrangements to be made.

"Leicester on the 12 April 1645,

"My Lord, — Being arrived at this place, which by reason of your public and private interest in it, lays claim to your utmost endeavours for the preservation of it, I shall make bold to acquaint your lordship with the weak condition it is in — most obvious to the observing eye. By all men's



194

Mr Maior his Matie being confident of your fide-
-litie and desire to doe him all possible service, willed mee
this day to send for you to my Quarter, and there to deli-
-ver to you his pleasure. But I perceaving you are dis-
swaded from comming (by whome, or what pretence I
know not) have here sent you his Maties demands
His Matie being now somewhat necessitated by the vast
expence he hath beene this long time enforced too, for
the safegard of his Royall person, against the rebellious
insurrections of the true Malignant Party, (whoe are now
too well knowne, and their irreligeous intentions too plain
ly discovered by all his loving & obedient subiects) doth
earnestly desire and require you and his good subiects of
the Citty of Leicester forthwith to furnish him with
Two Thousand pounds sterling, which hee with much
care will take order to see repaied in convenient time
(that his Maties gratious promise I hope will seeme
much better security then the publique Faith: which
is the usuall assurance that the Party which call them-
selves the Parliament doe give; And you must trust
them on it, if you assist not his Matie heerly to defend
you against them: You must not now goe lesse then
you former expressions have spoken you, which induceth
mee not to doubt of receaving the demanded summe to
morrow by ten of the clocke in the forenoone that I
may be

Your Friend

Rupert

Quenboro this
6t day of Sept:
1642

postscript If any disaffected persons with you shall attempt to perswade you to neglect this Command, I shall to morrow appeare before your towne in such a posture with horse, foote and canon as shall make you know tis more safe to obey than resist his Maties Command.

Letter to the Mayor from Prince Rupert, 6 September 1642

Charles R,

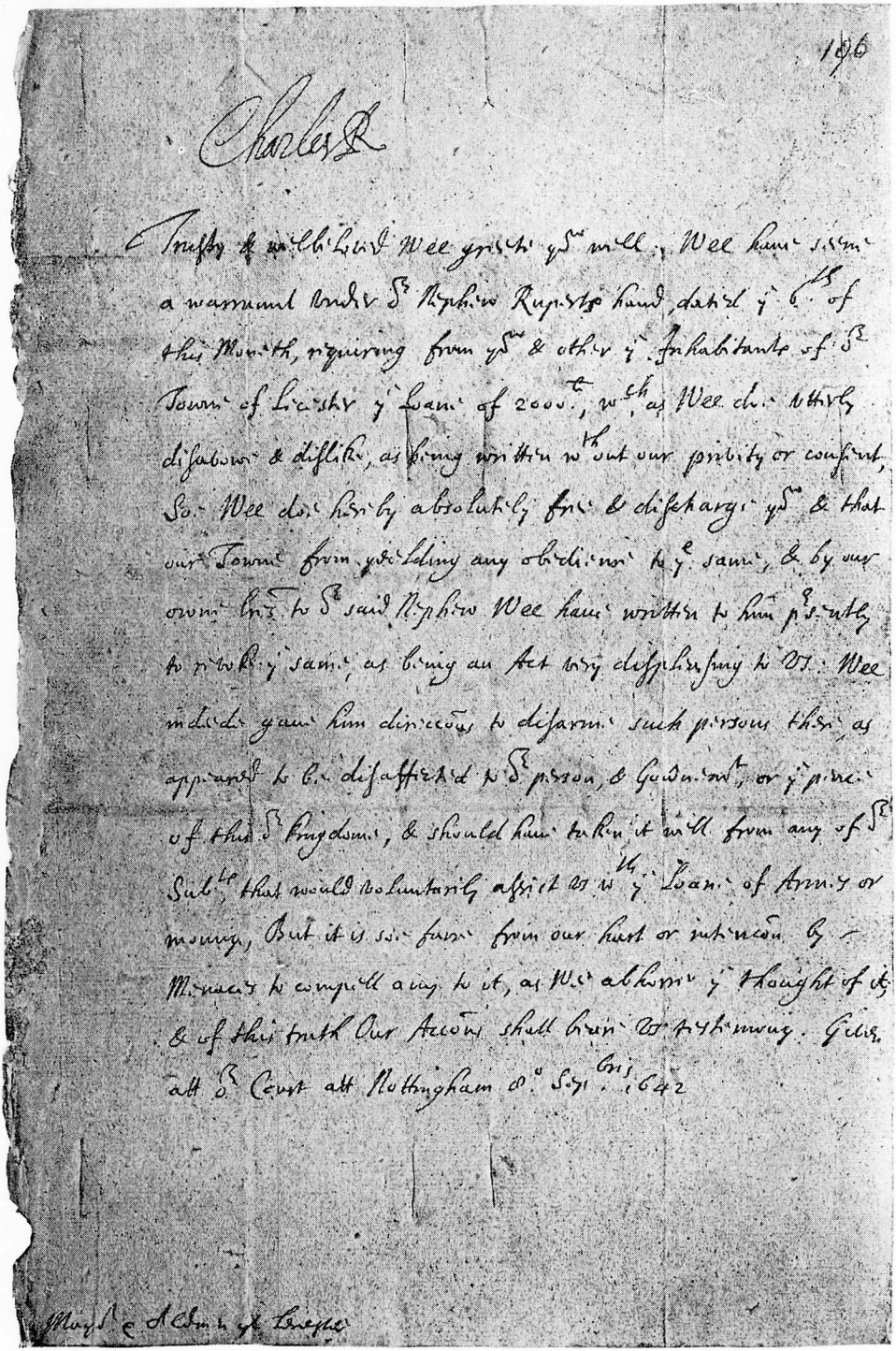
"Trusty & welbeloved Wee greete you well; Wee have seene a warrant under our Nephew Ruperts hand, dated ye 6th of this moneth, requiring from you & other ye Inhabitants of our Towne of Leicester ye loane of 2000li., which as wee doe utterly disavowe & dislike, as being written without our privity or consent, soe wee doe hereby absolutely free & discharge you & that our Towne from yeelding any obedience to ye same, & by our owne letters to our said Nephew wee have written to him presently to revoke ye same, as being an Act very displeasing to us.

"Wee indeede gave him direccons to disarme such persons there as appeared to be disaffected to our person & Government, or ye peace of this our Kingdome, & should have taken it well from any of our subjects, that would voluntarily assist us with ye loane of Armes or money, But it is soe farre from our hart or intencon by menaces to compell any to it, as Wee abhore ye thought of it, & of this truth Our Accons shall beare us testemony. Given att our court att Nottingham, 8 Sep'bris, 1642."

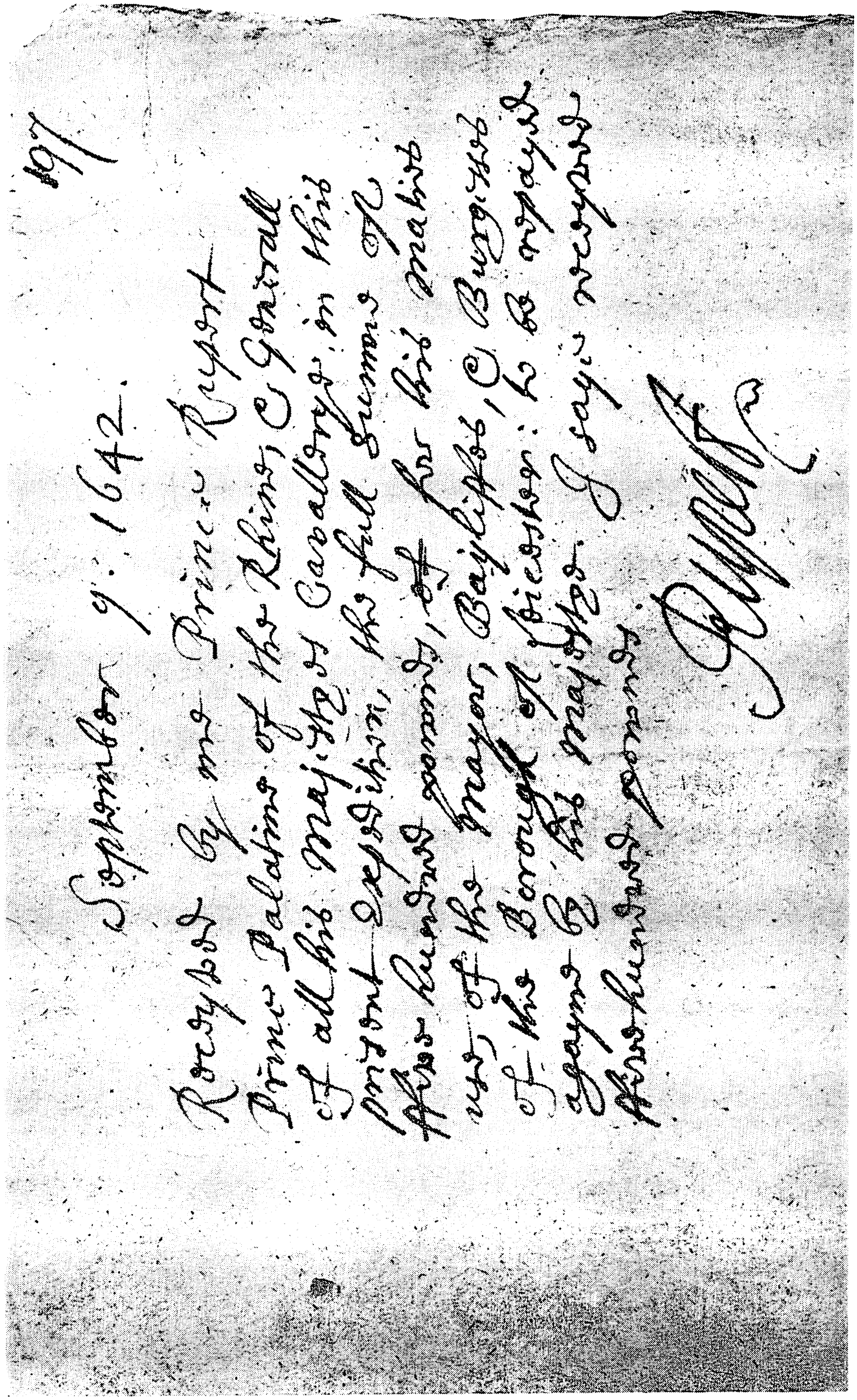
"To Our Trusty & Welbeloved ye *
Mayor & Aldermen of our
Towne of Leicester."

*(Address on envelope)

PLATE IV



Letter to the Mayor and Aldermen from King Charles I, 8 September 1642



September 9. 1642.
Receyved by me Prince Rupert
Prince Palatine of the Rhine, Generall
of all his majesties Cavallerye in this
present expedition, the full summe of
three hundred pounds, for his majesties
use, of the mayor, Bayliffes, & Burgesses
of the Borough of Leicester: to be repayed
agayne by his majestye. I saye received
three hundred pounds.
Rupert

Prince Rupert's Receipt (9 September 1642)—an I.O.U. never repaid

account, there are not above 200 soldiers in the town; and these as peremptory against discipline, as their governors are ignorant of it. I am most confident — nay, would almost hazard my life and fortunes upon it, that 500 resolute soldiers would at any time make themselves masters of this town, which if lost, will take away all commerce with the North-east of England. And I can assure you, 'tis God's providence alone in keeping it from the enemy's knowledge, and suppressing their courage, that is this town's defence; but when we neglect to serve God in his providence by secondary means, 'tis just with God to leave us with our own strength, which is but weakness. The grand masters, most sensible of their danger, and careful of their own security, have all of them houses in a place of this town called the Newarke, where they are fortifying themselves as strong as may be, which will prove, as I fear, of most dangerous consequences; for I perceive the townsmen much discontented, conceiving themselves deserted by the Committee to the enemy's mercy. I assure you, my Lord, I espy discontent despersing itself fast abroad in this town; and if your Lordship's care prevent not, I expect very shortly to hear ill news from this place. Pardon my boldness, excuse my haste, and accept of my profession of being, my Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient servant,
"GEO. BOOTH".

Lord Grey subsequently wrote to the Committee of Leicester, who replied on 1 May 1645 —

"Right Honourable, — We received your Lordship's letter of the 25th of April last, about our fortifications, wherein we shall submit ourselves to our Lordship's discretion. We never had the least thought to desert the town or any part of it, but have fortified and still proceed to fortify all our outworks, and have much amended them; and never had further thoughts in fortifying the Newarke than for a resource in time of absolute necessity, and as more safety for our magazine, it being a place very easily made a strong place. Our greatest want is of ordnance and arms, and therefore we humbly desire your Lordship's warrants to charge carts, waggons, and horses, for bringing the same hither, giving reasonable payment for it We take leave and are my Lords,

"Your lordships' most humble servants,

"Thomas Haselrigge — Edmund Cradock
John Browne — Valentine Goodman
Fran Smalley — John Swinfen"
Will Stanley

The king had left Oxford to relieve blockaded Chester, but hearing that the siege was raised there, decided to draw General Fairfax and the New Model Army from designs on Oxford by attacking Leicester. Previously on 15 May, the Committee had heard the rumour that Lord Hawley, Governor of Bristol, might take Leicester. A Common Hall

(council meeting) was called at which all members took a solemn oath that they had neither correspondence with the enemy, nor assisted with the supply of arms. Shops were to be closed and an active service list of 900 was prepared. The Newarke fortifications were further strengthened with fresh works at Grey Friars and Horsefair Leys to protect the quarters of the main guard. Wadland, clerk to the Corporation, refused to allow a weak spot in that part of the Newarke wall, abutting on to some of his land, to be strengthened.

The king was at Ashby for the night of 27 May, going on next day to the Skipwiths at Cotes, before sleeping the night of 29th at Aylestone.

The town garrison was pitifully small, though it was swelled by 100 cavalry from Kirby Bellars and an intercepted Nottingham-bound detachment of 200 dragoons under Major Innes, who was bribed by £20 in gold. Despite strenuous efforts to further increase the defending force, including fruitless letters to Parliament requesting 1,000 recruits, the estimated garrison strength was assessed at—

Regular Cavalry	240
Infantry	480
Inhabitants capable of bearing arms	900
Recruits from the County	150
Dragoons under Major Innes	200
Cavalry from Kirby Bellars	100
Total	2,070

Sir Arthur Heselrige had been asked for 200 muskets, but could only provide less than 80 carbines. The result was a shortage of arms as well as of men, some of whom were described as "being very malignant and many coming in who did not intend to fight". Colonel Sir Theophilus Grey, brother to the earl of Kent, head of the senior branch of the Grey family and holder of the disputed baronacy of Hastings, as Governor of Leicester had the experienced Lieutenant-Colonel Whitbrook in charge of 700, but Major Innes and Sir Robert Pye were chosen to defend the important Newarke, surrounded as it was on three sides with a wall of 600 yard perimeter—the river providing the fourth side.

Meanwhile, on 27 May the Royalist army totalling about 6,000 had approached Leicester in three divisions. The prince's black colliers, assisted by Lord Loughborough's Blue Coats, mounted a battery before the Magazine. The firelocks were commanded by Colonel John Russell. Colonel Leslie's party, called his *Tertia,* with ladders and ropes, were stationed before the drawbridge and Sir Bernard Astley drew up his men near the Abbey mansion, while the earl of Northampton's dragoons waited an opening to enter the town.

Sir Marmaduke Langdale arrived with the royalist cavalry next day, and halted on the east side. Reconnoitering parties were sent out to report on the defences with a special eye on weak points. In the afternoon Major Innes and Captain Babington headed the defending cavalry in

charging a troop of royalist horse, pursuing them as far as the bridge at Belgrave. Prisoners were taken on both sides, but such excitement detracted from the more necessary work of strengthening the defences. Guns were few and had to be moved as emergency required and with a scarcity of horses for such removal work, the ability to provide a mobile battery was lacking. There were few spades and mattocks for the repair of breaches and a shortage of musket baskets to protect the guns. Naked lines were left dangerously exposed to the enemy's fire. The day of 28 May was one of skirmishes with some wild firing at night.

The main body of the royalist army with the king himself and Prince Rupert arrived on 29th, the king most probably turning the manor house at Aylestone, owned by the earl of Rutland, into his headquarters.

Rupert lost little time in announcing his arrival by attacking the town from the Rawdykes, where the earthworks, then stretching nearer the town than do the present remains, were tailor-made for his canon. The royalist army was stationed facing the town from various positions, particularly at St. Sunday's Bridge and the South Bridges. The south wall of the Newarke was not unnaturally decided upon as the projected chief point of attack. Throughout the evening and the whole of the night, Rupert supervised construction of a battery facing that wall.

Some of the houses near the North Bridge, sheltering the enemy, were stormed by a party of volunteer townsmen, and the occupants were forced to retreat. Several houses and the already semi-derelict church of St. Leonard were burnt to prevent their further use by the royalists. The Grange houses outside the South Gate, had also been demolished.

The enemy were stationed for attack at the following points:

1. The far bank of the river, near the North Mill and St. Sunday's Bridge. (Sir Bernard Astley)
2. The Abbey Meadow facing St. Margaret's Church.
3. The Belgrave Road near the site of St. Mark's Church.
4. Across the Humberstone Road, near the old station.
5. On the Harborough (i.e. London) Road near the end of the present Belvoir Street, facing the horn-work protecting Gallowtree Gate at the south-east angle of the walls.
6. South of the present Welford Place, near where the main guard occupied the advanced work outside the Horsefair Leys, and whose attack was also directed towards the South Gate, and wall of the town occupied by Prince Rupert's Infantry.
7. Troops stationed between the Rawdykes and the town, the main battery of the enemy being placed there and directed towards the South Gate and South Wall of the Newarke.

Colonel Sir Robert Pye and Major Innes had command at this last and all-important point, and were afforded the greatest number of defendants. Captains Babington and Hacker commanded at the West Bridge—probably a misquote for North Bridge, since the attacking forces were stationed

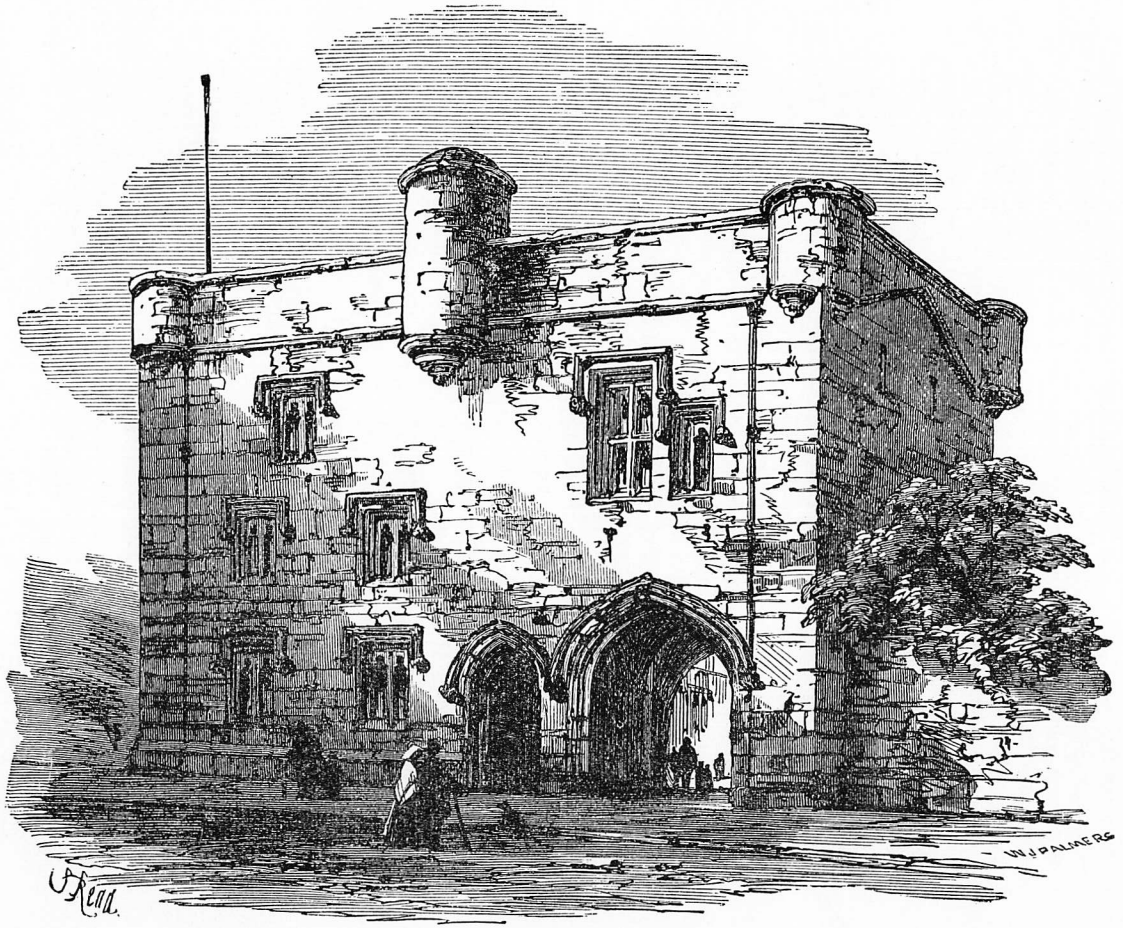


Fig. 3 The Magazine (East Front)

opposite. The other defences, in the charge of Colonel Grey and Lieutenant-Colonel Whitbrooke, were set up in St. Margaret's churchyard and in Belgrave and Gallowtree Gates.

During the night the defenders kept up a constant fire on the enemy but this was insufficient to prevent the building of a battery to hold the royalists' heavy guns. By daybreak it was finished and armed.

At noon of Friday (30 May) Prince Rupert sent a trumpeter into the town offering a free pardon to the mayor, William Billiers, and free leave for Major Innes and his troops if they surrendered forthwith. A council of war, held in the Mayor's Parlour of the Guildhall, detained the trumpet for about an hour. Rupert meanwhile was raising a battery for "six great pieces on the hill where some time of old had been such another". (Rawdykes). No decision was reached by the Corporation despite advice from Pye and Innes, who recommended surrender; at two o'clock the committee sent a messenger to Rupert requesting deferment until the following morning, they also asked that he should not raise any works before then. The Corporation were playing for time hoping in the interim to further strengthen the Newarke defences. Rupert's reaction to this message can be summarised by a contemporary report: "His Highness told the trumpeter if he came again with such another errand, he would lay him by the heels". Rupert then sent the Corporation trumpeter back with the message that they had a quarter of an hour to reach a decision. The Mayor and Committee still hesitated and with more stupidity than sense, they again sent a message pleading for more time. Rupert held the messenger, and sent a final ultimatum, through one of his own men for a decision again within a quarter of an hour. The Corporation considered the request, but still procrastinated. They were given no further time for reply. Rupert, his patience exhausted, gave orders to open fire on the Newarke. The committee, still in session, hastily broke up when unmistakable sounds of attack were heard. Some members even then were not unduly alarmed.

The assault started around three o'clock and after three hours the walls of the Newarke were in ruin. A wide breach had been made in the South wall (this was on the north side of Mill Lane, towards Swan's Mills), but the worn and hard-pressed defendants were able to throw up a breast work five or six yards inside the breach, lining it with woolpacks dragged from the woolstaplers' yards in the area. The women and children of the town are recorded as "giving the most active and fearless help". For the next six hours, with shots flying about them and in the face of continued assault, they repaired the breach. Orders were now carried to the commanding royalist officers for a general assault, Sir Bernard Astley being directed to storm the town from the north side. Sir Henry Bard, from the neighbourhood of St. Margaret's was to carry the horn-work * along the eastern line, Belgrave Gate and East Gate. Colonel John Russell, at the head of

* *hornwork* — an arrangement of earth and bundles of wood, in lines, as forms a ditch, with sloping approach and ramparts, disposed in such a manner that besiegers are open from them to various cross-fires; when the line of defence is crossed by the enemy, the hornworks still enabling the besieged to hold their ground. (J. Thompson — *History of Leicester, p.* 386.)

Prince Rupert's infantry, was to engage the main town battery outside the Horsefair Leys. A further twenty bodies of one or two hundred men were to advance simultaneously from different directions in an effort to over-run the town.

With impending nightfall, the defenders were fearing the worse: the enemy were cutting down bushes to fill up the fosse and one of the defendants' largest mounted guns was brought up to the breach in the Newarke Wall in a last desperate attempt to repel the invaders. The garrison, subjected to a midnight storming from all sides, had to contend with twenty simultaneous attacks. The fighting at the Newarke was fierce; five times the royalists were forced back; on the second attack, the enemy was furiously repulsed by the horse stationed before the inner breastwork, under the command of Captain Hacker, augmented by the dismounted dragoons of Major Innes. The king's final answer was to send up his own guards to swell the numbers. The fighting was often hand to hand and many royalist weapons were taken, as were two stands of colours. The conflict at the Newarke throughout was hard and many brave individual deeds were recorded. Most of the garrison had had little sleep for three days since they had watched for two nights, and had fought and built or repaired the defences by day. Some contemporary observers considered their performance at the Newarke one of the most striking examples of courage during the entire Civil War.

Elsewhere in the town, other smaller attacks were more successful. Colonel Grey, hurrying to relieve St. Margaret's Church with his cavalry, was severely wounded and taken prisoner. At the hornwork towards Belgrave, Colonel Bard and his infantry division were compelled to retire on the first attack, but then he succeeded in scattering the soldiery in the defence lines by pouring in hand grenades, which caused many casualties. The royalists gained free pass and on reaching the post, the drawbridge was let down for the earl of Northampton's horse. Gallowtree Gate, gained by a body of cavalry, also fell about the same time. The enemy fought their way along the North and East defence-lines. Sir Bernard Astley stormed the North Mills, a place of some importance, and planting three ladders against the earthworks between St. Margaret's and Belgrave Gate, the cavaliers began to enter the town from this direction also. By 1.30 a.m. only the Newarke was holding out against the invading forces; the Prince's black ensign was hoisted upon the main town battery at the Horsefair Leys.

Even at this stage, the royalists encountered no walk-over. They had to fight, step by step, for their ground in almost every street. The defenders of Leicester, many of them ordinary citizens, refused to give in, despite the sight of bodies (including those of naked women) and blood that lay everywhere. Shouting, clashing of swords, pistol shots and the roar of musketry could be heard all over the town. The clamour reached a climax as the defenders were driven back along South Gate street to the High Cross, where soldiers retreating up High Street from the East Gate swelled the fighting. One of the fiercest encounters of the siege then followed; it was concentrated, for some hours, on the streets around the High Cross and the market place. Again the women of Leicester were in

evidence. One of the king's officers wrote that "the very women, to the honour of the Leicester ladies if they like it, officiously did their parts, and after the town was taken, and when if they had possessed of any discretion with their zeal, they would have kept their houses and been quiet, they fired upon our men out of their windows and from the tops of their houses, and threw tiles upon their heads". The cavalry rode out under either Major Innes or Captain Babington and charged the king's horse, who were driven back from the South Gate to the Market place; on being rallied there under the protection of their infantry and cannons, the royalists in their turn forced a parliamentarian retreat to the Newarke, where about six hundred still defending the Newarke, found themselves attacked from all sides. They laid down their arms and surrendered themselves as prisoners of war, on the perhaps empty conditions of personal safety and exemption from plunder. The enemy poured in through the South Gate and the Newarke wall.

A small resolute party still offered resistance after the king's troops had entered the town and gained the Newarke.

There is an oral tradition in Leicester that several people lost their lives in St. Martin's church-yard, where part of the garrison had been driven by the Royalists. Fighting persisted for an hour and some are said to have gained admittance into the church, annoying the king's forces from the battlements and leads. It appears from the following item in the parish book of that time, that the king's forces broke into the church to drive them out — "*Paid Francis Motley for mendinge the locks of the church-doors broke by the king's army 3s.*"

It is doubtful whether King Charles' troops caused as much bloodshed as some reports suggest. The king is said to have ridden to the High Cross from his vantage point at the Rawdykes, and actively encouraged the slaughtering of the inhabitants. Humphrey Brown, giving evidence at Charles I's trial, said he heard the king, witnessing the cruel maiming of a prisoner, say "I do not care if they cut him more, for they are mine enemies". Conversely, the king's behaviour has been described as beyond reproach; he rode through the streets calling upon the people to abandon their arms and beg for quarter.

The statesman/historian Clarendon wrote "the conquerors pursued their advantage with the utmost license, and miserably sacked the whole town without distinction of people or places, to the exceeding regret of the King".

It seems clear that many defenceless persons were killed in the streets, with ruthless murders in many houses. Some Scotch soldiers fired upon and killed several King's Dragoons from a house, (all occupants of which are said to have been murdered), probably the *Horse and Trumpet* near the High Cross, where several members of the Committee were sitting.

Leicester was certainly thoroughly sacked and 140 waggons of plunder were removed to Newark-on-Trent. The Mace, Town Seals and archives were "taken away by unruly souldiers" (*Hall Book, 31 May 1645*). The archives were later recovered, but the search for the Mace and Seals was fruitless. A meeting of the Common Hall decided on 22 August "that a

Newe Mace shalbe bought about the size of the old mace as neare to the price as conveniently" together with new "silver and guilte bosses" engraved with the Town Arms. A Corporation Seal, a Seal of Office and a Mayor's Seal were also to be procured. The cost of the new mace proved to be £24 6*s*. 6*d*. The town's artillery, consisting of fifty barrels of gunpowder, over a thousand muskets and nine cannon, were also carried off. It is also known that some of the defenders escaped by using the passwords "God and the Prince".

The number of royalists killed is recorded as 200 at the places of assault, but those who later died from their wounds were not included in this figure. From the return of actual burials taken immediately after the siege the total loss of both sides was given as 709. The royalists lost between 28 and 30 officers. The Roundheads suffered the deaths of five principal officers including Colonel Whitbrooke, though other officers were taken prisoner, some later being exchanged for leading royalist prisoners. Two colonels, four majors, and three other chief officers were buried in St. Martin's Church and many soldiers in the church-yard. Ten officers were buried at St. Margaret's.

Charles wrote of his Leicester success in the following letter (originally in cipher) to his Queen, Henrietta Maria:

"My dear heart,

"I had written to thee from Tutbury Monday last, by the ordinary of Oxford. They stopped my letter, nor am I confident how soon, or if this will come to thee, but I must not stay longer from giving thee thanks for thine of the 19th of May, which assures me of thy health, as likewise to tell thee of the good success which it hath pleased God to give me this day, of taking this town, which was well defended, for the few men that were in it. It was assaulted at a breach and two other places; at the first we were thrice repulsed, because of a strong intrenchment made before the breach, but the other two being weakly manned, our men entered without much opposition, which soon made amends for the strong resistance in the other place, where our men showed as much courage as was possible which got that success their fellows procured than by their successful entrance.

"The number of prisoners, quantities of arms, and ammunition, are not yet certain, but that assuredly they are very considerable. I am now hastening to the relief of Oxford, where, if it shall please God to bless me, according to these beginnings, it may make us see London next winter.

"I am momently, and by good hand, assured that Montrose's late good success is the cause of the Scot's sudden retreat.

"God bless thee, sweet heart."

Leicester Abbey, Saturday 31st May.

Although the king on 1 June levied the sum of £2,000 on the already despoiled and impoverished inhabitants, the royalists were not allowed to enjoy their victory for long. Lord Loughborough had been appointed Governor of Leicester with Sir Matthew Appleyard as his Lieutenant; a garrison of 1,200 was left to repair the fortifications. No sooner had the king left for Oxford than the soldiers burned Leicester Abbey, which had been his residence for two days after the siege.

LEICESTER RE-TAKEN

When the news of the fall of Leicester reached London, Parliament was addressed (4 June 1645) and it was earnestly recommended "that the army of the parliament should be ordered forthwith to march against the enemy, as well for the regaining of Leicester, if it were possible, before it should be made impregnable by fortifications, as also for prevention of the enemy's further surprising of other places of strength, and destroying the rest who had appeared in defence of the parliament". Fairfax was ordered to move out from Oxford and stop the king's troops, engaging them in battle if necessary.

Meanwhile, Prince Rupert is rumoured as being quartered in Great Glen when he received the summons of recall; he was directed to join the king immediately, with all the horse at his disposal. The ill-fated and decisive battle of Naseby, resulting in a magnificient organisational victory for Parliament, took place on 14 June 1645. The Royalist cause had been brought to an ignoble end; the king with Prince Rupert immediately fled towards Ashby, hurriedly exchanging the conspicuous royal saddles for plain ones at Wistow Hall. They passed through Leicester without drawing rein, with Cromwell in hot pursuit. Fairfax, advancing via Great Glen and Oadby, reached Leicester on 16 June, only to find Lord Loughborough disinclined to surrender. Cromwell had surrounded the town on all sides with his cavalry the previous night. Cannon fire, including the siege guns used at Naseby, was directed once more at the battle-scarred Newarke; only when, after two or three hours, a breach was opened in the wall, and after a night of negotiation, did the Governor admit the weakness of his position by surrender (18 June), thus saving Leicester from the horror of another siege. The garrison was allowed to withdraw, on fair and honourable terms without arms and with only staves in their hands, to Lichfield. Cavalry officers were allowed to take their arms. All prisoners taken by the royalists were set free. 2,000 stand of arms, 500 horses, 14 pieces of cannon, 30 colours and a surfeit of ammunition and stores were the Parliamentary spoils. The 19 June was a day of public thanksgiving. There were church collections in London, for the relief of Leicester. Leicester's two sieges were short affairs compared with the long sieges at Belvoir (October 1645 to January 1646) and at Ashby, where the garrison did not surrended for six months until 4 March 1646, but disruption of Leicester's affairs continued for some years, and the financial state of the town was far from healthy, despite a substantial grant from Parliament to

make good the losses, to provide corn for the poor and to finance traders in putting the poor on work. The Corporation received £1,500 from the estates of the royalist delinquents and the Town Clerk and no less than 40 of the 72 members of the Common Hall were removed for supposed royalist sympathies.

The Parliamentary garrison left the town in 1646, and the fortifications were "slighted" the next year.

The ordinary Leicester tradesmen suffered considerably as a result of the siege and the subsequent disruption of an ordered living, as the following instances illustrate. William Harley, cordwainer, with a wife and three children to maintain, having had all his goods plundered, requested admission as a freeman so that he could be elected a member of the cordwainers' company. Robert Warburton was apprenticed to his father (a blacksmith) who was slain in the siege. Consequently, Warburton sought not only a new master, but required credit for that part of the seven year apprenticeship he had already served. William Sumner, tailor, lost not only his house and fruit-trees, but his possessions were plundered, his son slain and his wife driven to distraction. In order to maintain himself, Sumner sought work as a butcher. John Stocker, joiner, who served in the town's defence, had his house near the South Gate demolished, and sought admission as a freeman in compensation.

It was with a real sense of relief that the bulk of the town's inhabitants held their three-day celebrations upon the restoration of King Charles II in May 1660. For the first time for nearly twenty years, they could once again live their lives in peace and reasonable security.

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