



# Civil War



Civil Wars rip entire countries apart and Britain has had many. The 12<sup>th</sup> Century civil war between Stephen and Matilda caused New-Castle to be built, and in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Wars of the Roses the famous Battle of Blore Heath was fought not too far from here in Market Drayton. However, the first civil war to have a direct impact on Talke was between Charles I and Cromwell's Parliamentary Model Army. There were two main reasons why the civil war started, and both of them had a direct impact on Talke.



## Why the civil war started?

### Money

A letter from the privy council to Staffordshire's Justice of the Peace show that the people of Talke and surrounding areas were refusing to pay a 'voluntary' contribution to fund Charles' war in the Palatine, now part of Germany. Charles wanted to defend the rights of his nephew who had been invited by the Protestants of the Palatine to become king but had been thrown out by Catholic invaders. The

initial clamour in Britain for Charles to join the 30 years war against this Catholic anti-Christ was stopped in its tracks by the war's heavy price tag. The people of Talke and the country in general had had enough- and refused to pay. Rather than admitting that this 'tryall (trial of the people's) good affections' for a far-off ruinous war was unpopular, the king and privy council attributed it to Staffordshire's 'backwardness' in comparison to other counties who had paid more, adamantly persisting that the king is 'loved in this county.' The Justices of the Peace are themselves blamed for setting a bad example by not donating enough themselves and were even accused of holding the money back. This stern reprimand showed that Charles's voluntary contribution was just another now not so hidden tax that was threatening the liberty of country and parliament.

This was by no means Charles' only disastrous military escapade, and having dismissed a disobedient Parliament, Charles was forced onto more devious methods to obtain his war money, selling monopolies which drove one local felt maker out of business and refusing to pay local workers that had transported some of the

king's goods. Charles' war against the Scottish covenanters over their Presbyterian church meant that ship money, (supposed to be only raised in coastal regions to prepare the navy in times of war), was now levied everywhere in 1640, costing Staffordshire the phenomenal sum of £63.

## Religion

Charles appointed Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury, whose mission was to bring order and beauty back to the church. He demanded rails be put around all church altars, priests to wear elaborate clothes and for worshippers to bow. Many people in Talke saw this as an attempt to bring back Catholicism and control of local churches, and the village became a 'hotbed' of religious dissent.

We have records of Laud's visit to nearby Wolstanton in 1635, and it is likely that Talke was paid a similar visit by church clerks. A Mr. Harding of Wolstanton was sent to Chester gaol for having the presumption to be a layman preacher and teacher without the church's consent. Others were accused of being recusants (Catholics) and of opposing bishops. The vicar himself was condemned for failing to read out of the government's new standard prayer book, the introduction of which had caused riots in Scotland, and was blamed for the poor repair of the church.

Even ordinary local churchgoers were not free from Laud's anger. One woman was excommunicated for refusing to kneel to receive communion, very serious as this meant expulsion from the entire village community as anyone found speaking to, helping or selling to an excommunicate would themselves be excommunicated, barred from church service, its rites of passage and eternal life.

It is interesting to wonder what happened to these declarations once the bishops had left, whether they were just ignored or seen as part of the growing tyranny of a king who had thrown out the country's elected representatives and enforced taxes that contravened the laws. In Wolverhampton there was such anger that a group broke into the church and smashed the altar rails, moving the table down into the main chapel where it could be accessed by all without kneeling.

It wasn't long before these grievances of too many taxes and too little religious freedom came together into an angry parliament, which finally led to the King storming out and raising his royal standard at Oxford, leaving London as the parliamentary base in 1642. He called on William Sneyd of Keele and 'other men of social rank' to recruit, train and most importantly pay for an army of 800 foot soldiers to defend against 'outrages, riots, routes and unlawful assemblies.' Charles



Charles I

was nearly bankrupt after parliamentarians had seized the royal treasury and began kidnapping known royalists and holding them for ransom to buy weapons.

This Civil War came late to all of Staffordshire and Cheshire, with both sides initially calling an informal truce in an attempt to keep the war from their doorstep. They even signed an informal treaty at Banbury on 23 December 1642 and formed a neutral army 'for the lawful defence of the county.' This delicate balance could never last, as different towns supported different sides; Tamworth came out for Parliament while Stafford and Tutbury Castle stayed loyal to the king. However, differences of opinion went so personal and deep that the war leaves many tragic tales of families torn apart, fighting on both sides of the conflict. It was not long before the battle of Hopton Heath was fought a few miles north of Stafford in 1643, a surprise victory for parliament that helped shift the fortunes away from the initially successful royalists.

It might have been in preparation for this battle that King Charles I made his visit to Talke. He stayed at Royalist Lawton Hall in 1642, on a journey from Uttoxeter to Stafford, and reportedly said he would go for a 'talk of the hill,' a walk around the hill, to get a better view of the opposing parliamentary troops. I still think it is unlikely that Charles came this far north, as above Stafford this was a strongly parliamentary area, with garrisons at Trentham, Leek and Keele. However it may have been possible that these were only taken for parliamentary after the battle, meaning that Charles could have travelled safely in this area before his fortunes change at Hopton Heath. Moreover, Talke had been described as 'talk o' th' hill' before this, even though this would technically be translated as hill of the hill. Perhaps this story was created to give grandeur to a name already well used.

It has also been rumoured that there was a battle between with the parliamentary and royalist troops far closer to Talke, and that blood ran down a hill which was then later called Hell fire Bank. I haven't found any other evidence for



Oliver Cromwell

this- have you ever heard of Hell Fire Bank? It is probably more likely that this refers to one of Talke's many mining explosions.

On the other hand, the civil war was primarily a localised affair, with national pitched battle a rare occurrence and scuffles continually fought. The closest battle that I have found to Talke was at Lawton.

After his victory, Cromwell purged parliament, throwing out his enemies and appointing himself an all-powerful protector, in an attempt to set up a 'Godly Commonwealth,' a puritan state that tried to make people more moral. He appointed Commissioner-Generals to oversee large regions and route out Catholicism and moral

laxity. Christmas was banned as it was not directly mentioned in the Bible and might even have heathen origins. Shops had to stay open on December 25th, although shops that did were often attacked by the locals- maybe this happened at Talke. All religious holidays were banned as an excuse for boozing and a distraction from the Sabbath, with only November 5<sup>th</sup> excluded to remind people of the threat posed by Catholic plotters to the state's safety. (A common tradition, likely to be held in Talke, was to make an effigy of the pope and fill it with the stray cats of the village so that when it was burnt it would scream.) Adultery was punishable by death. Swearing, not attending church or playing games on a Sunday by a fine, the stocks or whipping. However, this may not be as tyrannical as it first seemed. James I had already written a book of sports, deeming most activities as inappropriate for the Sabbath, and the major generals were reliant on local forces to enforce this who would often wink at offenders, hitting them only with feathers or bringing them food or music while they were in the stocks..



The Major General governing Talke and most of North Staffordshire was Major General Thomas Harrison. He had been born and baptised in Newcastle-Under-Lyme in 1616, the only son of Newcastle's mayor family, the second of four children. After spending time as a clerk/attorney, he joined the army at age 26, and soon rose in its ranks. This had been unthinkable a decade earlier, where offices (high ranking army positions) were bought for a man by his family and only open to the high born. The secret of Oliver Cromwell's new model army was not only its discipline but that it made officers on the basis of talent and experience, not on how much money their parents had. Thomas moved to London and married his cousin, and became an MP in 1646.

Thomas Harrison became one of Oliver's right hand men, and was one of the strongest advocates of beheading the king. In fact Thomas accompanied the king to his show-trial and his was even one of the signatures on the king's death warrant. However, many who were shocked by the king's beheading saw a grave omen in the fact that Thomas's first born son died on the same day as the king was executed. Unperturbed, Harrison became more radical still. When parliament tried to disband most of the army without pay and send the remainder of it on a campaign to Ireland in an effort to re-establish its own power over the country, Harrison helped lead the army rebellion. When Oliver Cromwell purged the parliament, it was Harrison who was sent for to bring in the troops and he even 'helped' the speaker down from his chair, for which he was rewarded by a seat on the council of state in 1649.

Major General Harrison was one of the main advocates of a theocracy ruled by the saints, those few 'elect' who had been chosen by God for a place in heaven,

rather than a democracy or republic. However he was an infamously poor administrator and impatient with committees, so both locally and in London his vision of a godly commonwealth was never turned into an effective law.

With the exception of Catholics, believed to be servants of the anti-Christ, the rule of Oliver Cromwell was a time of religious liberty, and Thomas was one of the many who took advantage of this and whipped up religious fervour and radicalism in the army. He soon founded and lead the fifth monarchist movement, a group that believed that the time of the last judgement was nigh, as four great empires or monarchies had already fallen and that a godly commonwealth was needed to hasten Christ's return which would bring in the fifth monarchy of God.

However, there was a rival group in the levellers, who believed in social justice, democracy and even the unheard of concept of equality for women. During the second civil war between army and parliament, Harrison did a deal with the levellers, but when he got into power he turned traitor and persecuted the levellers. This group provided one of the inspirations for the Quaker movement, one of the first organisations outside the Church of England to affect Talke (please see the section on religion for more info about Quakers at Talke)

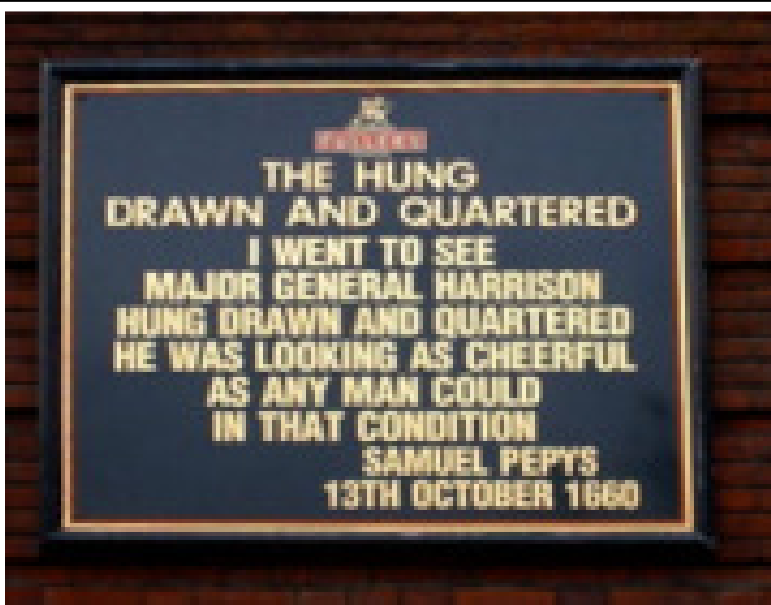
Thomas Harrison was soon back in Talke as a major general and fighting Charles II's insurrection in 1651. Having landed in Scotland to raise an army loyal to the Stuart family, Charles was lured into the south, the plan being that he and his followers could be annihilated for good. Harrison tried to cut Charles off at



Charles II

the battle of nearby Knutsford in August 1651 and finally defeated him at Worcester in September, forcing the young Charles to flee in disguise to an exile in France.

Thomas Harrison's end was not a happy one. The dandy clothes he wore in the picture were in stark contrast to the life of simplicity he somewhat hypocritically had advocated. Harrison was thrown out of government and into prison four times for plotting against Cromwell



Sign outside the *Hung, Drawn and Quartered* pub in Tower Hill, London- from Wikipedia

(when Cromwell seemed to be becoming not just an all-powerful protector but an anointed king.) When Oliver died and his son Richard refused to become the new protector, Charles II was invited back to be king in the restoration, on the condition that he forgave those who had rebelled against him. However, despite this promise and Harrison's retirement from politics, he was put to death by Charles II for his role in executing his father. His speech made on the block should be available in the local history section of Talke library.

This was not the end of Talke's civil war troubles. Charles II died without a legitimate heir and his catholic brother James II took the throne and tried to bring back Catholicism. James was controlling three kingdoms with three separate churches, Anglican England, Presbyterian Scotland and Catholic Ireland. James succession was welcomed by the Irish but he was thrown out by the English in the 1688 Glorious Revolution. This greatly upset the Irish, who continued to support James' heirs, the old and the young pretender, and this period is the origin of Ireland's Republicanism and Orange Order and many of their other troubles.



Bonnie Prince Charlie

James II's grandson was Bonnie Prince Charlie and he led the Jacobin rebellion, marching south in the hope of meeting up with a French fleet and then taking the crown in London. He passed through Talke on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1745, along with a 2,000 strong army, half of the total Highland force, on his way from Knutsford to 'Congelton' (this was its spelling at the time.) He stayed the night at nearby Little Moreton Hall. Meanwhile his troops 'entered every town with sword in hand and the bells were obliged to ring to welcome' them. Many rode on horseback and wore blue clothing with red details, but some wore red coats that they had taken from English soldiers slain at the battle of Preston Pans near Edinburgh.

Their army stopped at the Red Lyon Inn (see turnpikes and pubs) and 'drank much liqueur.' In high spirits the troops attacked many of the stabled horses, but the drama really started when they discovered the famous spy Captain Vere who had been feasting there with seven dragoons. Although born a Scotsman he worked for the Prime Minister Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and reported back to the King on the movements of the rebels.

We have this account from another spy, Captain Dudley Bradstreet, who was travelling with the rebels.

"He thought to conceal himself under the bed but was dragged from under it, and plundered of his Gold Watch, purse of gold, and several other things (which included most of his clothes)"

Many of Prince Charles's men, including the Duke of Perth, were all for hanging Vere at once. Dudley Bradstreet, fearful that 'my case, when discovered, would not be a comfortable one' denied all knowledge of Captain Vere and spoke up with others that the Duke of Perth was 'quite right to make such an example, spies were the pests of the army.' However, both Captain Vere and Dudley Bradstreet reminded Prince Charles's advisors that King William had so many of his rebel Scotsmen in prison that this 'one example' of killing a spy may result in hundreds of imprisoned Scotsmen being killed in retaliation. However, other sources say that Captain Vere was spared only by the Prince's mercy.

Instead, Captain Vere was 'rammed into a little closet' 'tied with ropes after being kept starving night and day.' The next day, after being questioned by the members of the Prince's council at Talke, he was tied to a horse's tail, and wearing very few clothes was marched to nearby St Peter Devenport's at nearby 'Maxwell' (Macesfield) where he was interrogated by higher officers and by Prince Charles himself. Long marches, sometimes strapped to a pinion, cold and lack of food meant he caught fever.

However, we know that Captain Vere was to get his revenge from the accounts he wrote in later letters. By skilful lying, he convinced the officers that their planned attack on Newcastle would be a disaster as 'the Duke of Cumberland was come to Newcastle with a Detachment of Dragoons which altered their schemes and saved y<sup>e</sup> troops y<sup>t</sup> were at Newcastle.'

Vere was put into jail in Carlisle, safely near the secure Scottish border. He was 'confeind in the Guard Roome in the castel and lay upon a bench' under the watchful eyes of John Hamilton, previously the Duke of Gordon. However, Vere escaped when the city surrendered to the Duke of Cumberland's 'battery of 6 eight pounders (canons.)' The governor of the city asked him to negotiate with the besieging army and understanding that he would suffer the same fate as the town's garrison if he did not agree, ran secret messages to the Duke's army- hoping for his former master's mercy in finally betraying the government he worked for.

Meanwhile at Talke, which was mostly loyal to the King, an alarm was sent four miles away to the Duke of Cumberland's advanced guard, under the command of General Bland, at Newcastle-under-Lyme. The Duke was William Augustus, the son of George II and was soon given the name 'the butcher' and 'stinking Billy' for his brutal treatment of highlanders, but even his force retreated in the face of this rowdy band of Highlanders. The Scottish army soon left Talke and marched to Ashbourne, making many local dignitaries temporarily their prisoner, including Justice Meverill. The highlanders stay was not long, as they were already returning to the north before they were defeated at the battle of Culloden on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1746 by the Duke of Cumberland. William Augustus got such praise in England for his defeat of the Scots that, rather than being remembered as the butcher, the flower 'Sweet William' was named after him.