

CHARLES I: June 1645 - May 1646, Defeat to Captivity  
By Margaret Henson

I THE MAN

Charles was the second son of an unhappy marriage. He had a sickly and solitary childhood, no warm, human attachments and over-shadowed by his older brother, Henry, who was popular and brilliant. Charles was constantly and unsuccessfully striving to emulate him and to conceal his own diffidence. It was a cruel fate that Henry died, leaving Charles as heir to the throne at about 12 years of age. He had no sense of humour, no "common touch" (cf Elizabeth I), and no understanding of what made people "tick". Deeply religious, he was the first English monarch born into the Anglican Church of the Elizabethan Settlement. In an age of increasing Puritanism, he supported episcopal authority as the ecclesiastical equivalence of the unassailable authority of the monarchy. He was not interested in theology as such. His Father had had an intellectual interest in the Divine Right of Kings. Charles believed unswervingly that the monarch was God's anointed to rule over his people in His Name. To rebel was a sin against God. God would not allow rebels ultimately to succeed. Yet Charles was aware that monarchical power in England was to an extent limited compared with monarchs in other countries in Europe. Charles had no natural political instinct. Therefore he relied on advice but found advice contrary to his own ideas very difficult to take. Innately unsure, he was secretive and devious, which led to increasing distrust. He was totally dedicated to his job; he never pursued pleasure until his work was done. But in those days a monarch was expected to be able to exercise power decisively, tempered by a natural flare for the task in hand.

II THE CONSEQUENCIES OF NASEBY.

June 1645: Battle of Naseby: A decisive Royalist defeat; very heavy losses. Prince Rupert, Charles' nephew and i/c of the Royalist cavalry, advised peace: "more prudent to retain something than to lose all". Charles replied; "Speaking as a mere soldier and statesman, there is no probability but my ruin. Yet as a Christian, I must tell you that God will not suffer rebels or traitors to prosper".

July 1645 : Charles to Charles , Prince of Wales: that if ever he, Charles , was taken prisoner, Prince Charles was not to agree to any conditions which would be dishonourable or "degrading to royal authority", even to save his father's life. (First evidence that Charles even contemplated defeat). Royalists were now gradually driven out of the south and south-west. Charles twice tried to join Montrose and the Royalists in Scotland, but failed because of Royalist defeats in the north-east and the north-west. In both cases, Charles travelled through Newark on his way back, and in Nov. 1645 was back in Oxford. Montrose was defeated in Scotland. By February 1646 the only Royalist garrisons were Exeter, Bristol, Oxford and Newark. Exeter and Bristol fell, and the Parliamentary Army advanced against Oxford. The Scottish (Presbyterian) Army and Parliamentary forces were besieging Newark. Charles had to flee.

MEANWHILE, August - November 1645: Charles, without the knowledge of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, was secretly negotiating with the Irish Catholic Confederates with a view to their sending an army into England, and the Queen, Henrietta Maria, was secretly negotiating with the pope to influence this - all in exchange for Catholic privileges in Ireland. Charles also received a French envoy, Montreuil, who came to England to persuade the Scottish Army to join with English Presbyterian forces and French military assistance to reinstate the King. Montreuil stayed at the King's Head in Southwell (later renamed as the Saracen's Head for obvious reasons).

III THE JOURNEY, MON 27 APR- TUES 5 MAY 1646.

This route can be traced on any large scale motoring map or on the appropriate Ordnance Survey maps. Charles' options: He could go abroad, but this would probably be interpreted as abdication (cf James II). As he was also King of Scotland, he could perhaps, through Montreuil, receive Scottish help. Some believe that he was in touch with sympathisers in London (see later). We do not know

whether or not he had decided where he was going when he set out. He apparently told his Council in Oxford that he was bound for London. He had acquired a pass (how?) for a Captain to travel to London to negotiate for the return of his sequestered land. Only 3 people set-out together at 3 am on Monday 27 April: Charles, disguised as a servant with his hair cut short and his beard trimmed; Ashburnam, a Groom of the Bedchamber; and Hudson, a chaplain to Charles, who had risen from humble beginnings to become a priest and an academic at Oxford. They left Oxford via Magdalen Bridge, Much Balden, Dorchester-on-Thames to Benson, where they were challenged by a company of Parliamentary horse. They continued to Nettlebed and Henley-on-Thames, accompanied for part of the way by a soldier. At Henley they had to show their pass and pay over a sum of money (? a bribe). They rode on to Maidenhead and Slough in company with a soldier from General Ireton's troops. At Uxbridge they again apparently had to bribe or tip a guard. We do not know where they spent the night. The next morning they rode the three miles to Hillingdon, within sight of London. There they stayed for 3 hours, ostensibly to refresh themselves. After 3 miles (?), it is suggested that Charles expected to meet someone there or at least to receive a message; but, as neither materialised, judged it safer to move on. He turned northwards towards Norfolk, either to take ship from Lynn (later named King's Lynn), or in the hope of hearing from Montreuil. He went through Harrow to St. Albans, where he was asked whence he came, and gave the man a 6d. He spent the night (29<sup>th</sup>) at Wheathampstead. There they decided that Charles and Ashburnam should continue the next day towards Newmarket, and Hudson should leave them at Gravely to ride to Southwell to discover whether Montreuil had reached a satisfactory agreement with the Scots; then to return to meet Charles at Downham Market. After spending the night at an inn just outside Newmarket, Charles and Ashburnam reached the White Swan at Downham Market. There they contacted a Royalist squire from Fordham, Ralph Skipwith. The next morning Charles determined to have his hair trimmed (presumably inexpertly done before his escape from Oxford). Fearing that he and Ashburnam had aroused suspicion, he left a message for Hudson with Skipwith, and retired to Mundford for the night.

MEANWHILE, Hudson had reached Southwell on Thursday night. It seems strange that Charles had received no news from Montreuil before this, since Montreuil had been in negotiation with the Scots since late summer, and was able to give Hudson immediately the news that the Scots had agreed to all the King's terms. Hudson very sensibly wanted this in writing, which the Scots refused. However, they declared that if Parliament refused to restore him to his rights and privileges, they would declare for him. Montreuil assured Hudson that the Scots were to be trusted. Hudson rejoined Charles at Mundford. Ashburnam was in favour of taking ship from Lynn to Newcastle, but Hudson had found that the news of the King's flight had reached Norfolk and that all the ports were watched. The decision was made to go to the Scots at Southwell.

At some point Charles seems to have changed his servant's attire for that of a clergyman. Hudson now procured a grey coat for him from Skipwith. Was this to change his appearance yet again? After a stay at Crimlesham, the party travelled up the Ouse valley, crossing the river at Southery Ferry, and proceeding via Littleport and Ely to Huntingdon. It was there that Charles decided to visit the religious community at Little Gidding, where he had twice stayed in happier times (1633 and 1642). The community had been set up by Nicholas Ferrar in 1625 at the local manor house and its adjacent church. After this, Charles' last visit, it was demolished by the government. Charles dared not stay the night at a place where he might have been expected to visit. The party left for Coppingford nearby (See T.S.Eliot's last of the Four Quartets: "If you come this way / Taking the route you would be likely to take / From the place you would be likely to come from,.....").

Here we have a connection with the Minster, Hamish Moyle, a member of the restored community, made the triptych in the Airmen's Chapel.

Charles stayed at Coppingford till the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> May, when they rode away under cover of darkness. Note how it was apparently necessary to take greater precautions as time went on. At Stamford they stayed with a Mr Cave, but the location of the house has not been identified. They remained there during the hours of daylight, leaving at about 11.00 p.m. for Southwell. They entered the King's Head at 7 am. We do not know where they crossed the Trent. It definitely was not at Newark which was under siege. Hazelford has been suggested and even further upstream, but surely they would have crossed as far downstream from Nottingham as possible. There was a ferry at

Fiskerton. Later on the 5<sup>th</sup> May Charles rode to the Archbishop's Palace, where the commanders of the Scottish Army had their HQ. He agreed to order Newark to surrender, but refused to concede to the further demands. He was taken to Kelham, a prisoner, and on 7<sup>th</sup> May to Newcastle. From Oxford to Southwell he had ridden about 234 miles over a period of 8 days.

#### IV        May 1646 - Jan 1649

The person of the King was a useful bargaining counter for the Scots, who sold him to Parliament - for rather less than they at first bargained for. Parliament had by now discovered Charles' overtures to the Irish Catholics and the French, as well as the Scots. At first he was imprisoned at Holmby House in Northants. He then came under the control of the Army, who moved him to Newmarket and Hampton Court. In Nov 1647, he escaped to the Isle of Wight, but was imprisoned in Carisbrook Castle. In 1648 the Scots invaded England, but were badly mauled at Preston. The Army were now set on bringing the King to trial and moved him to Hurst Castle and then to Windsor, and finally to St. James's on his 49<sup>th</sup> birthday in Jan 1649. He was executed at the end of the month.

It is arguable that Charles' surrender at Southwell is the watershed between the possibilities of war and the irreversible capture, defeat and death.