

SOUTHWELL AND THE CIVIL WAR

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"Mid-seventeenth century Southwell was a town mainly of timber-framed buildings with a population probably of about 1000. Life would normally have been dominated by the Minster and agriculture. Most men were small farmers or farmed on a part-time basis. Southwell was probably not then a market town.

Very few contemporary documents survive about the town's role in the Civil War. People of Southwell would, however, have had particular reason to be conscious of the outbreak of the Civil War. The war formally began with Charles raising his standard at Nottingham on August 22nd 1642. Charles had also been in the County shortly before that. He visited Southwell on his way from Doncaster to Leicester in July, and was in Southwell again on August 18th in the Archbishop of York's Palace. On August 12th he had issued a proclamation requiring every man living within a 20-mile radius of Nottingham, who could bear arms, to join him there.

During the war there was no major battle in the County and probably no fighting in Southwell, but even local people who did not join one of the armies could not have felt the war to be a distant thing. In September 1643, and in 1644, Royalists attempted to take Nottingham and its castle from John Hutchinson of Owthorpe and his Parliamentarians. Newark, held by the Royalists, was under siege in 1643 - 5. Various minor skirmishes also occurred in the County - some around the homes of the upper class. In the winter of 1644 - 45 the Parliamentarian Col. Thornhagh raided Thurgaton Priory and took 40 prisoners, while the Royalist Col. Eyre subsequently destroyed two troops of Parliamentarians at Upton.

Civilians would also have been subject to demand for billets, supplies and money from both armies. Local parish records were not properly kept after 1643, so there is no clear picture of civilian deaths in Southwell due to the war, though the burial of a "souldier" named "Edmond" was recorded in March of that year.

Southwell people, like the County as a whole, seem to have been divided in their allegiances. Many were probably reluctant to take sides. Several pamphlets were published in the summer of 1642 commenting on the political situation, many hoping that King and Parliament could be reconciled. Some of the more prominent men in Southwell may have supported the "letter from diverse knights and gentlemen of Nottinghamshire to the knights serving for that County in Parliament, July 1642" which stressed, "We are distracted with contrary demands: the Houses of Parliament command one thing, the King forbids that demand.... and we are at a stand.... ever ready to yield obedience to all the known Laws of the Land. We heartily pray a right understanding betwixt the King and his people and.... a firm peace amongst us".

At least one prominent local family was divided. Matthew Palmer who lived in Norwell Pallishall Prebend in Church Street was a Parliamentarian, whilst his father, Sir William, from Easthorpe, was a Royalist. Thoroton's "Antiquities of Nottinghamshire" (first published in 1677) claims Charles briefly visited Southwell during the war and received a mixed reception. He supposedly attempted to buy shoes from a shoemaker called Lee. Lee, however, refused to serve him as "he had been warned in a dream.... He (the King) was doomed to destruction and those who worked for him would never thrive".

Near the end of the war, Parliamentarian and Scottish Covenanter troops were in the town. It is said that the wife of a Royalist officer came to Southwell thinking to meet him there. Finding enemy forces present, she sought shelter in the Minster and gave birth to a child in the little room above the north porch, while the nave was full of Parliamentarian soldiers.

By the spring of 1646, the Scots were based at Kelham Hall. With no viable army since the Battle of Naseby, Charles had decided to surrender. He chose to approach the Scots, hoping he could strike a relatively favourable deal with them. Whilst he was at odds with them over religion, they had no interest in his political disputes with his English opponents. In late April he left his headquarters at Oxford. On May 5th Charles arrived at the Saracen's Head (known then as the King's Arms Hotel) before 7 a.m. disguised as a clergyman with "his beard.... shaved, and his lock cut). Some negotiations with the Scots may have taken place through a young French diplomat, Jean de Montreuil. Charles was probably escorted to meet commissioners from the Scottish army at the Archbishop's Palace. In the afternoon, a troop of horse took Charles to Kelham as a prisoner. Once at Kelham Charles had to write instructing his supporters to surrender Newark. On May 7th the Scots army moved north to Newcastle, taking the King with them.

In 1646 it is probable that Scottish soldiers pillaged the Minster "Treasury" destroying most of its records. Lead was stripped from the roof of the Archbishop's Palace and local people then removed some of the stone so that the palace became a ruin. Even Mr Clay, Steward of the Archbishop, admitted that he had removed stone and timber, but claimed he had paid four shillings and sixpence for them.

Reputedly, Cromwell at one stage stabled horses in the Minster. Certainly by 1660 the Minster had suffered damage to its windows and furnishings and some lead and timber had been removed. £1,354 was spent mainly on repairs between the Restoration in 1660 and 1663.

Norwood Park which had belonged to the Archbishop of York, passed to Edward Cludd "citizen and mercer of Lombard Street London" in 1647 for £945 and he built a "pretty brick house" there. At the Restoration, the Archbishop regained control of the estate but Cludd was allowed to remain as a tenant, paying initially £80 per year in rent.

Parliamentarian religious views meant not only attacks on property but also the governing Chapter of Minster Clergy was abolished in 1649 and a preacher was appointed to perform religious duties. Some of the Minster clergy survived to take appointments again in the Church after the Restoration but the intervening period must have been difficult. John Neile, for example, had to sell his library of books and live in poverty in Farnsfield. Some Prebendal houses in Southwell appear to have fallen into disrepair, or been badly damaged, during the war. As late as 1690, a report of the Archbishop of York noted, "The house of Muskham is most of it demolished, suffering damage during the late rebellion".

The Minster School survived. Cludd, who may have limited the damage to the Minster, helped draft a memorandum which warned, "there hath been paid yearly by the Chapter of Southwell to the schoolmaster there twelve pounds.... and the Schoolmaster will be unprovided for... In April 1652, the Trustees of the "Plundered Ministers and Schoolmasters" responded: "It is ordered that.... a yearly stipend of £14 be continued and paid to Mr Henry Moore, Scholemaster.... together with the arrears payable since the 16th October 1650".