

## **Where did King Charles 1<sup>st</sup> spend his last night of freedom?** by Victoria Arthurson July 2018

Did King Charles 1<sup>st</sup> spend his last night of freedom in Southwell? While some claim that he did, a visitor to the Minster pointed out that not only does Stamford make the same claim, but they have a blue plaque to prove it!

So where was King Charles Stuart the first Scottish King of England on the night of the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1646?

In 1646 the war was going very badly for Charles. Besieged in Oxford, unable to come to terms with the Parliamentarians, he sent the French envoy Montreuil to London to negotiate with the Scottish commissioners. (At this time England and Scotland were still separate states since the Act of Union was not until 1703.) Since the Scots wanted a religious settlement and were prepared to bargain with both the King and the Parliamentarians, Charles was hoping to use this to his advantage. On 3<sup>rd</sup> April Montreuil arrived in Southwell to continue the negotiations. He lodged in The King's Arms Inn (re-named The Saracen's Head) and the Scots Commissioners were quartered at the Archbishop's Palace.

The Scottish Army was encamped at Kelham and Newark was besieged by a Parliamentarian Army. Despite the talks not being encouraging Charles decided to come to Southwell. In a letter to the Marquis of Ormond he wrote that he (Charles) had written many gracious letters to Parliament without effect and having received very good security that he and his friends would be safe with the Scots, who would assist with their forces in procuring peace, he had resolved to put himself to the hazard of passing into the Scots army now in Newark.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> April, Charles left Oxford secretly disguised as a servant with his hair cropped and beard clipped to aid the deception. The king, his personal attendant and his chaplain Dr Hudson crept over Magdalene Bridge at 0300 hours. Dr Hudson rode to Southwell to check on the negotiations while Charles made for Downham in Norfolk. Changing his disguise to that of a clergyman, the king arrived in Stamford on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May. Late on the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> May the king and his small party rode out.

An extract from a letter sent by the Parliamentarians besieging Newark (see below for source) tells of his arrival in Southwell on the 5<sup>th</sup> May:

*“Sr, We were this morneing about ten of the Clock credibly informed that the King wth three others came in great speede this morneing about seaven of the clocke to Southwell and went to the House of Monsr. Montrell the French Agent”*

So, it appears that neither Stamford nor Southwell can claim that Charles spent his last night of freedom sleeping in their town since he was actually riding hell for leather throughout the night between the two, trying to avoid detection by his enemies. Believing that he was their guest,

Charles met the Scots Commissioners in Southwell on the morning of May 5<sup>th</sup>, but later that day a troop of soldiers escorted him to Kelham. Charles remained a prisoner of the Scots until the following January when they sold him to the English Parliamentarians.

So what about the blue plaque on the house in Stamford which states that Charles 1 spent his last night of freedom there? Between 1743 – 48 this house was owned by the 18<sup>th</sup> century antiquarian William Stukeley. Stukeley claimed that Charles 1 spent his last night of freedom in this house. However this is most unlikely as Stukeley himself built the bridge, known as King Charles' Gateway, which spans the road. However, there is another house in Grantham owned by one William Cave that is more likely to be where Charles 1 may have slept on May 3<sup>rd</sup> before he escaped to Southwell. But, as we now know, this was not on the night of May 4<sup>th</sup> 1646 which was his last night of freedom.

*My thanks to JFH Smith who kindly sent me his unpublished article, Stamford and the Civil War: The Last Days of Freedom of King Charles I to read. The Transactions of the Thoroton Society vol XXVI 'The Surrender of King Charles to the Scots' is a very informative read for those wishing to delve further.*

*This article is reproduced from The Steward, issue No 10 – July 2018*