

THE 'BATTLE OF THE STEEPLE'

DECEMBER 18th 1642

Newcastle's army was over a thousand strong, bolstered by horse troops, dragoons, foot soldiers, pioneers and artillery, and when hostilities began they soon captured houses close to the church. As cannon bombarded the church tower, it became obvious the enemy could not be repelled. The solution was extreme: Bradford's "rabble" army of just three hundred would leave their positions to strike at the very heart of the enemy. Swarming from the church and shouting: 'Conquer or die!' they rammed their way into the Royalists, causing total disarray.

So wrote the chronicler:

'Thus with us falling on them, away the enemy went, and after them went about fifty of our musketeers. The courage of our men astonished the enemy, believing that no fifty men in the world would dare take on a thousand unless they were either drunk or mad.'

The Royalist dead and injured included Sir John Harper, Captains Wray and Binns, Sir John Gotherick and two hundred soldiers; captured were Major Carew, 26 soldiers, 100 horses, 180 weight of powder, and 40 muskets. Bradford suffered only two deaths and twelve casualties. No man was captured, nor even a single bullet lost to the enemy.

It had been Bradford's finest hour.

THE BATTLE FOR BRADFORD

JUNE 30th 1643

Newcastle raged once more. The situation between Fairfax (now returned) and he could no longer be left unaddressed and a personal confrontation between the two could not be avoided. On June 30th, Newcastle arrived on the outskirts of Bradford with some 12,000 men. There to meet him was Fairfax, with a Bradford/Leeds army of 4000 men.

The battle lasted the entire day and yet – even against such overwhelming forces – at times the Bradford men appeared to have the upper hand. Eventually, however, Newcastle's men broke through and the battle was lost. As Fairfax retreated, Newcastle began his march on Bradford.

THE FINAL DAY

JULY 1st 1643

The Royalist commander lost no time making his way to Bolling Hall, from where he intended to lead the attack on Bradford. Fairfax awaited but there was little he could do.

3 Newcastle's offence began with an all-day and into the night bombardment of the town, soon prompting Lister to write: *'Off went their guns, the first shot killing three men sitting on a bench. Oh, that dreadful night in which Bradford was taken. What weeping and wringing of hands!'*

5 At dawn the next day, Fairfax began a breakout attempt. He led his horsemen against three hundred Cavaliers. He got through, but his men were captured, including Lady Fairfax, though she was released by Newcastle and given an escort to her husband.

THE LEGEND OF 'PITY POOR BRADFORD'

JULY 2nd 1643

7 In the night, the earl claimed he was visited by an apparition; a woman in white pulling the blankets from his bed, and wailing 'Pity poor Bradford'. Before dawn, when wholesale slaughter was to begin, he issued fresh orders: *'Take the town, but spare the people'*. The Royalist army duly marched into Bradford, ransacking and pillaging as they went, but they allowed the population to live. The town was spared.

On March 3rd, 1644, Parliamentary forces returned and drove the Royalists out of Bradford, for good. The people rejoiced.

To read the full story of the Bradford Civil War Siege visit:

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THE BRADFORD CIVIL WAR SIEGE

• TRAIL •



"BRADFORD'S FINEST HOUR!"

Researched, written and produced by local historian



~ Malcolm Hanson ~



THE SIEGE OF BRADFORD

BACKGROUND

Sentiment in Bradford was for Parliament. Charles I had sold the manor to the citizens of London to pay off his father's debts, and many feared for their lives. By opposing the king the result would be Royalist soldiers billeted in the town, attacking the townspeople and smashing up taverns and lodging houses. *Local chronicler, Joseph Lister wrote: 'Not any of us ate a morsel of bread for twenty-four hours together, and mother and child expected daily to be dashed to pieces, one against the other'.*

2 This was the background against which the inhabitants of Bradford lived. It was one of constant threat, and it was not helped by Sir Thomas Fairfax – Parliamentarian commander – who entered the town, supposedly to defend it, but soon left, taking most of the town's able-bodied men with him.



THE 'MIRACLE OF BRADFORD'

OCTOBER 23rd 1642

Bradford had only three months to wait before a Royalist army arrived nearby. Joseph Lister narrated: *'They were making every preparation to attack, and soon they advanced towards us, exhibiting their ensigns of war. They were about seven or eight hundred men, we about three hundred; they had several cannon, we had none. They had the advantage, though they got no ground of us'.* Yet, a heavy snow shower – coupled with the bursting of a gun – seemed to intimidate the Royalists and surprisingly they turned and fled. On hearing the news, Royalist commander, the Earl of Newcastle raged, promising the people of Bradford his army would return – and two months later they did.



- 1 CITY HALL – POI.** Begin under the imposing figures of Charles 1st and Oliver Cromwell.
- 2 IVEGATE.** Here at the bottom of Ivegate were the headquarters of Sir Thomas Fairfax.
- 3 KIRKGATE** being the main thoroughfare was heavily bombed.
- 4 BRADFORD CATHEDRAL.** Here took place the Battle of the Steeple commemorated with a plaque in the cathedral.
- 5 PAPER HALL.** Lady Fairfax was captured nearby but returned unharmed to her husband.
- 6 VICAR LANE.** Christened at the time Dead Lane due to the many Royalist soldiers slain here.
- 7 THE INTERCHANGE.** End of the walk. Take bus 635 from the Interchange to Bolling Hall to complete your day.