

Redlynch & District Local History Society

The Civil War in Hampshire, by Dr Alistair Dougall, 6 February 2018

The causes of the English Civil War are many, and hotly disputed by historians. Charles I's attempt to rule without Parliament, and his support of Archbishop Laud's controversial religious policies, were both contributing factors to a lengthy conflict that, with no common foreign enemy to unite the population, succeeded in dividing both communities and families. It may have been the most traumatic war in English history, with more people killed, as a proportion of the population, than in either of the world wars of the 20th century.

Dr Alistair Dougall, head of history at the Godolphin School, has made a study of how the war affected people in Hampshire, a people described by one contemporary writer as 'miserably oppressed' by the Civil War. Hampshire, though its only major battle was that of Cheriton in 1644, saw several sieges as well as numerous skirmishes between Parliamentary and Royalist troops, and associated social and economic disruption throughout the county. The Isle of Wight was held peacefully for Parliament throughout the war – Charles I was famously held prisoner at Carisbrooke Castle – but it was a different story on the mainland. Portsmouth and Winchester were both besieged for short periods, but there was a lengthy siege of Basing House causing the church to be damaged and nearby houses destroyed to give more space to the attacking Parliamentary forces.



Local men, sometimes up to the age of 60, were pressed into service with either side, regardless of their loyalties. Both armies taxed local people; some towns were taxed by both sides, and the concern that providing aid to one side would lead to repercussions by the other was very real. Troops passing through the county were billeted in private houses, not only consuming scarce food stocks, but carrying with them the risk of disease. Many soldiers died of disease, rather than in battle.

Civilians were also at risk of plunder by hungry troops; a satirical print of the period showed a soldier with a roast chicken on a spit instead of a pike, and a cooking pot instead of a helmet on his head. Trade was disrupted, as farmers and local merchants avoided travelling, if they had not already had their goods plundered.

The burden placed on a town by passing armies could be considerable; at one point in 1645 some 11,000 soldiers were quartered in and around Andover. Despite the impressment of local men many troops on both sides were from outside the county. Scots and Irish troops and Continental mercenaries would have been foreigners to most Hampshire people living away from the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth.

Our next talk will be by Henry Coles on 'The Beaulieu Birdmen: the New Forest Flying School' at 7.30pm on Tuesday 6 March at Morgan's Vale & Woodfalls Village Hall.