

Roundheads and Cavaliers in Prestbury

by Tony Noel

In 1643 the King had captured Bristol but only after a bloody struggle. Gloucester was the next target for the Kings army. It was the lowest bridge over the Severn and as a trading centre was heavily taxed by the crown and therefore supported the Parliament.

This time the King opted for a siege, after the city refused to yield to his army. The city was well defended by Edward Massie, who much later changed sides and was imprisoned.

Concerned about the siege the Council of London agreed to the complaints of the Earl of Essex about his weak forces and authorised London Trained Bands and auxiliary regiments to march to relieve Gloucester with Essex's regular army.

After a hard time living off the poor villages in the Cotswolds, Essex reached Prestbury Hill on September 5th. There were few tracks down off of the hill to Prestbury and the other villages in the valley and attempts to travel down Aggs hill resulted in a serious confrontation with the Cavaliers from Cheltenham. Cannons and the wagons could not be easily brought down from the hill using the sunken lanes in safety. Canons were fired on the hill to encourage Gloucester but it is unlikely that they were heard. Although much of the army found billets in villages like Prestbury some were in fields around Darkes Farm, many were left on the hill in bad weather.

Sergeant Henry Foster reported that his men, not used to the countryside, had a difficult time on Prestbury hill with little shelter. On one occasion they even fired on their fellows when they thought that they were under attack.

Essex rested his men and eventually the siege of Gloucester was lifted on the 8th September because the Kings army had withdrawn in the face of the large Parliament army. Prestbury now had a garrison of 120 foot in a strong house in the village.

Lord Chandos of Sudeley had supported the king from the start of the war. Sudeley castle itself changed hands and was eventually damaged to prevent it being used in support of the King. In 1643 Lord Chandos rode into Cheltenham to prevent Puritan troops from collecting rents from supporters of the King. When his men were returning to Sudeley, they were attacked by the Parliamentarian troops in Prestbury.

There is no doubt that local people had a very hard time often unpaid for billeted troops and local farms were raided to provide horses and food for both armies.

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