

Life under Siege: Nottingham during the English Civil War (1642-46)

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Nottingham was an important town during the British Civil Wars of the 1630s and 40s, which were fought between the King and Parliament. Though the King raising his standard in the town it rapidly became a stronghold for Parliament in a county which was fought over and invaded many times.

Nottingham's residents became embroiled in one of the fiercest areas of fighting in the country. How did a war, military garrison, and governor affect life for the people of Nottingham?

Key military events:

1642

- August: King raises his standard, the English Civil War begins
- December: first skirmishes between Newark and Nottingham's garrisons

1643

- February: first siege of Newark
- June: forces under Queen Henrietta Marie attack Nottingham but it holds after a skirmish
- August: Nottingham threatened by the Earl of Newcastle, who returned north the same month
- September: Royalists capture Nottingham in night raid, during the next ten days the garrison uses its guns against the town; they leave but establish a fort at the Trent bridge
- October: the fort is captured by the town's garrison
- December: Newcastle returns and takes the county; Nottingham is surrounded

1644

- January: Newcastle withdraws. Nottingham attacked, but Royalists driven off
- February: Royalist attempt to capture the Trent bridge fort by stealth is detected and defeated
- March: Second siege of Newark
- April: Prince Rupert threatens Nottingham

1645

- April: Trent bridge fort is captured; garrison withdraws into castle leaving town vulnerable
- July: Newark horse raid countryside
- August: King Charles passes through Nottinghamshire, heading north but is forced back to Newark; he is followed by 2-3,000 Parliamentary troops who wait in Nottingham
- October: Nottingham troops surround Newark, attacking satellite garrisons
- November: Scottish army arrives in Nottinghamshire; the third siege of Newark begins

1646

- May: King Charles surrenders to the Scots, third siege of Newark ends

Violence

The people of Nottingham suffered from:

- The threat of violence
- Injury, abuse, and death
- Surrounded by the sight, sound, and smell of battle
- Attack and capture
- Being under siege
- Their defenders shot cannon into the town: occupying, not protecting



Bridgeman Education, *Cruelties of the cavaliers, 1644*, LLM3629270

Reconstructing and understanding life in a garrison town during a civil war is difficult. By combining documentary evidence with material culture, images, and the sounds and smells of life it is possible to understand the continuity and discontinuity of Nottingham.

Three themes have emerged from the politics, religion, plotting, and personalities of the town: an underlying threat (and actuality) of violence; a heavy burden in money and resources; and an accompanying disruption of life.

Living in a garrisoned town in an area plagued by civil war attracted violence, plundering, threats, vast expense, and the attention of 'strangers'. Life was harder, it was unsafe, and in Nottingham the soldiers acted more as occupiers than protectors.

Expenses

Nottingham's people paid for the garrison and for the war. They supplied:

- Money: for the garrison and Parliament
- People: soldiers and labourers
- Free-quarter: Housing, food and drink for thousands of men
- Horses, wagons, ox, and
- New industries: cannons and gunpowder
- Fortifications, labour and materials

How did life in Nottingham change: from market town to military garrison?

Disruption of life

Life in Nottingham fundamentally changed in many ways for its people:

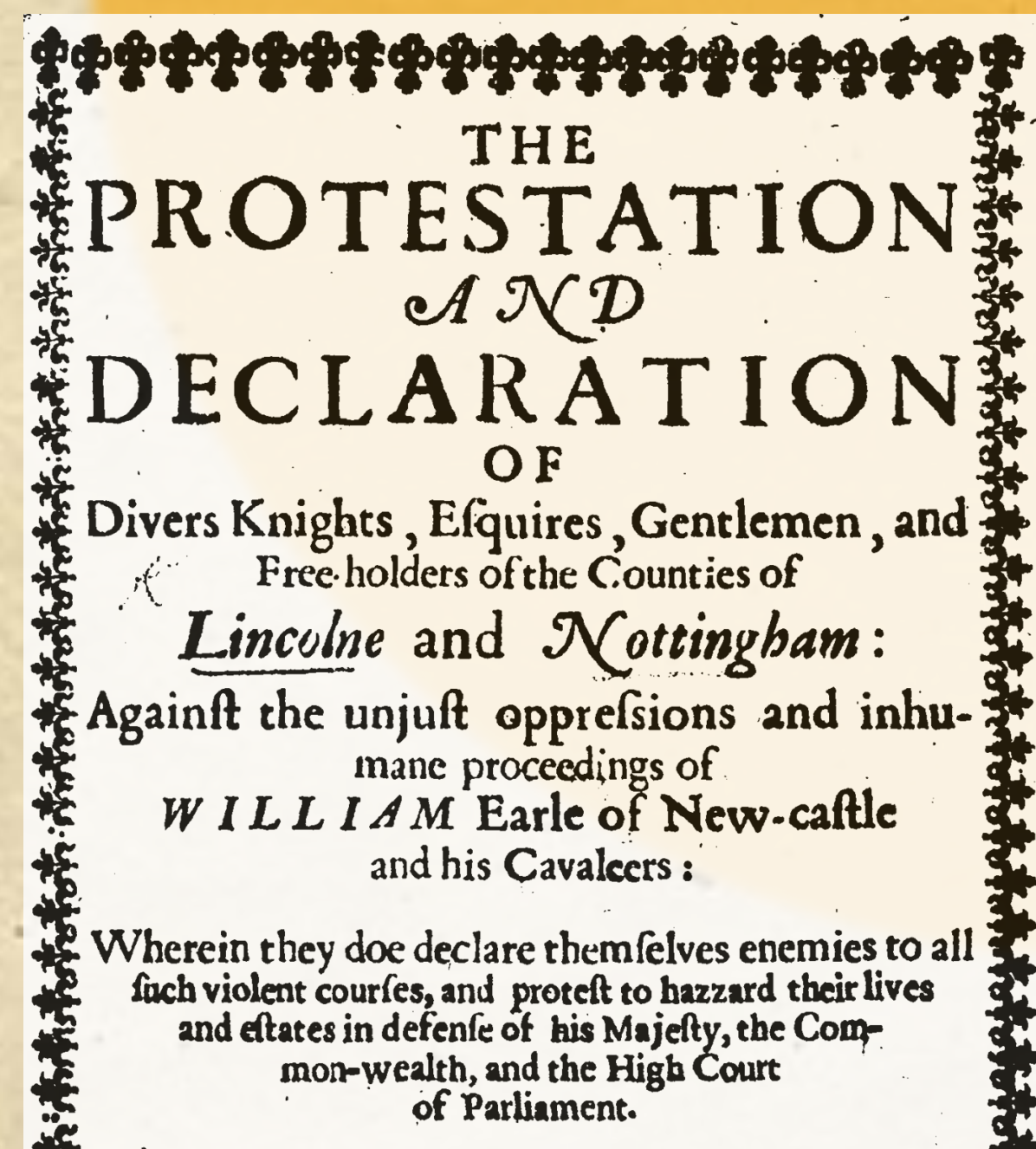
- Became a military, not market, town
- Disruption of local government: under civil and military authority
- Overcrowding: population of ≈4,000 but 5,000+ soldiers in 1643, more in 1645/6
- Change to sounds: 'foreign' (Scottish) voices, drum not church bells mark time



British Library, Thomason Tracts, *A true and exact relation of the manner of his Majesties setting up of his standard at Nottingham, E. 115 (4)*

Further reading and select bibliography:

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British Library, Thomason Tracts, *The protestation and declaration of divers knights*, 14 E 84 [17]