PORTFOLIO

The Sinews of War: Royalist Finances in the North Midlands 1642-1646

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Described as 'wicked and debased wretches', the garrison of Ashby de la Zouch, at the centre of the North Midlands region, epitomised plundering cavaliers. Their commander, Henry Hastings, Lord Loughborough, was labelled 'rob carrier', as was one of his colonels, Thomas Leveson, the governor of Dudley. An officer in another of Hastings' regiments, Thomas Mason, was described as 'the commander of the fen robbers'. The crimes committed by this collection of men included the interruption of the carrier trade and levying unwarrantable taxes upon the region. More sensational activities were reported in the Parliamentarian press and newsbooks, such as the imposition of a crude protection racket which mirrored the *brandtschatzung* (burning money), common in the continental wars, in which houses or whole villages were put to the torch if they failed to pay the 'un-warrantable taxes'. These lurid stories and the image of the Royalist War Effort that propagandists created transcended the Restoration. The term 'cavalier' now not only suggests flamboyance but also laxness or even ruthlessness; hence the expression — a cavalier attitude.

Certainly, there was a basis in truth to some of these stories. The accounts of the constables of Upton in Nottinghamshire, and indeed many other towns and villages, contain numerous entries such as

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Often such payments were made just to get them out of the village. After the siege of Leicester in 1645 the mayor's attendance upon the King was much delayed by the theft of the mace by victorious Royalist soldiers. The soldiers paid off at Upton were not part of the war effort; they were exacting payments for their own use and without order, being stragglers or deserters. The mace stolen from Leicester would have been considered a piece of legitimate plunder from a stormed town. In short, these latter incidents were not related to the financing of the Royalist War Effort. They make for good propaganda, but they do not create a true picture.

10: The pillaging soldier (The English Civil War, M. Ashley, 1974, permission: Thames and Hudson).

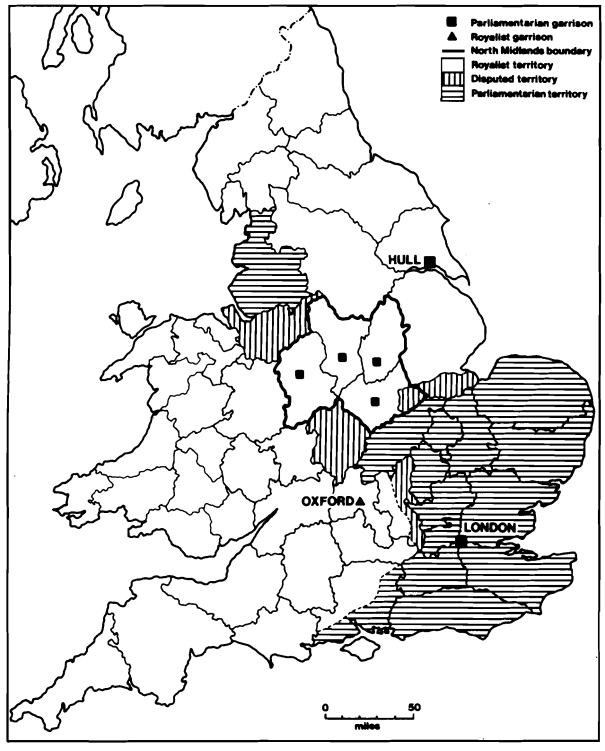
The Commissions of Array

Wars cannot be fought and won by armies dependent upon plunder. As Charles I well knew 'Money is the sinews of war'. Regular supplies of money and other resources were needed to keep the civil war armies in the field and in their garrisons. These could only be gained from a compliant people. Sporadic collections and punitive raids neither ensured regular supplies nor compliance from the populace who were the suppliers.

The original machinery for providing funds and equipment for the Royalist cause was embodied in the Commissions of Array created by the king in the summer of 1642. Primarily these bodies were the king's answer to the attempted seizure of control of the county Trained Bands — the only armed land forces in the country — by Parliament's Lords Lieutenant. Whilst the Commissions were chiefly concerned with the mustering of the Trained Bands, there were facilities provided for the levying of funds and additional equipment open to the commissioners. As it became evident that neither the king nor Parliament could rely upon the trained bands, the raising of troops (and the cost) was passed on to individuals to whom commissions were issued empowering them to raise regiments themselves, for the Royalist cause. As autumn descended additional finance was raised through loans. These were not suitable means by which a long war could be financed, and the stalemate at Edgehill had ended hopes of a quick conclusion. In response to this, Parliament began the creation of county committees from December 1642. These were empowered to levy taxes within their own county and to cooperate with neighbouring counties in the prosecution of the war. The Royalists utilized their almost defunct Commissions of array in the same manner with the high sheriffs, who were co-opted onto the commissions working with their neighbouring counterparts to similar effect. Henry Hastings, created Colonel General of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland and Staffordshire was just one of the regional commanders appointed by the king. By the end of 1643 he had dominated these counties despite Parliament holding onto the county towns. **(10)**

The revenues needed to finance the war efforts had to be gleaned from the whole regional community. The commissioners of array called in the high and petty constables and thus began the collection of Contribution. This became a weekly tax collected in both cash and goods and was the major Royalist levy, mirroring the Parliamentarian 'assessment'. It was not the only source of income. Like their opponents the Royalists sequestered their enemies' estates. Initially they attempted to sell the whole estate in what was, due to the uncertainty of the war's outcome, a very poor market. Eventually the Royalists settled, as Parliament had done earlier, for the more efficient method of utilising the incomes from the estate, rents and the sale of produce, and the use or sale of timber. Just as the Westminster parliament enacted an excise tax in 1643, that summoned to Oxford in 1644 created one to supply the Royalist cause with additional finance. Offices were established in the major market towns to assess and collect the tax. However, as the excise went into operation when there was a downturn in the Royalist fortunes, particularly in Loughborough's region, it is not likely that the tax was a major source of income: for Parliament it was the second largest source of money, after the assessment. Many documents relating to Royalist finances were destroyed at the end of the war as they provided incriminating evidence of involvement. The operation of sequestration and excise in the North Midlands is shrouded by this action. Nevertheless contribution collected in the North Midlands can be examined in some detail using the papers of the petty constables, who had the task of collecting the money at the ground level.

The commissioners of array divided their counties up, generally on an hundredal basis, between the various garrisons established therein. Despite the use of these traditional boundaries, it was possible for garrisons such as Ashby de la Zouch and Tutbury, due to their proximity to county boundaries, to receive contribution from the hundreds of several counties. Between the various hundreds, the sum for the county requested by Oxford was divided up. At meetings between the commissioners and the constables the sums were further divided between the communities within each hundred. It was then the duty of the constables to allot the community's sum between those eligible to pay. This allotment was undertaken at meetings within the villages or towns. The money collected would cover the lewns of the constable — the traditional funds to cover his expenses — and the taxation money. Levies were based on property such as livestock and, probably, buildings. In 1643 at Stathern in Leicestershire the rates were 8d an acre, 8d a score of sheep and 4d a pasture beast. In Nottinghamshire, at Coddington, in the same year the charges were 2d an acre, 2d a score of sheep and a penny a piece for pasture beasts and buildings. There were, of



11: England at the end of 1643 showing Lord Loughborough's crucial central position. From June 1644 onwards Parliament's four chief garrisons in his region were to become increasingly important. (copyright: Dr. M. Bennett, 1986)

course, several regional variations and increases as time went on. At Coddington, the following year saw a doubling of the rates. With the money allotted to the tax the constable then purchased foodstuffs and other provisions from the producers in the village as these formed part of the contribution. These latter reflected the specialities of the area. Branston in Leicestershire sent oats, veal, beer and cheese to the garrison at Belvoir. Mavesyn Ridware in Staffordshire supplied coal as well as 'provisions' to Lichfield.

The money and goods were then collected from the constables by members of the nearest garrisons. Royalist collectors seem generally to have been quartermasters of horse regiments who toured a circuit of villages. At Waltham on the Wolds, for instance, Mr Power collected the contribution at regular intervals between December 1643 and October 1644. At Mavesyn Ridware the collections were made fortnightly. In Nottinghamshire at Thorpe and Upton the constables were visited weekly by the collectors from Newark and this pattern of weekly or fortnightly collections is repeated throughout the region.

The financial costs were high, often four times higher than the pre-war levies. In Belton, Leicestershire, during 1638 the constable levied a total of £9-11-8d; during the war his counterpart had to levy £34-4-5d. At Biddulph in Staffordshire peace-time levies totalled between eight and nine pounds a year; in the war they were over twenty six pounds a year. Larger communities paid higher amounts. Mavesyn Ridware's constable in 1644, Henry Lowe, laid out £76-3-6d in cash and handed over £33-14-6d in goods. For five months of the same year he also laid out over forty pounds in cash and goods to the Parliamentarians. At Waltham on the Wolds the total in 1644-5 was £99-16-4d in cash and goods sent to Belvoir Castle. No full figures survive for any annual county outlay in this region. The estimate by Richard Symonds of £97.000 per year for Leicestershire is far too high. Very basic calculations made from the surviving accounts suggest sums varying between twenty and thirty thousand pounds per annum for the four large counties. Nevertheless this is a great increase on the Ship Money sums which varied from three thousand to four and a half thousand pounds.

Contribution was the main, but not the only, levy exacted upon the communities of the North Midland Shires. Beds and bedding were much in demand for the garrisons in the region. 'Visiting' armies also levied funds during their stay. For instance, Upton had to supply money to the regiments of Colonels Eyre and Harpur during the days following the relief of Newark, in March 1644. Both of these Colonels were part of Hastings' army and were normally based in Derbyshire. Wagons and horses too were frequently collected from communities in the region. These were used for a variety of tasks and this form of levy was very much an extension of the peace time levies of horses and carts for both the post and the saltpetre industry. Labour was also required for the construction of defence works at the various garrisons. The tools, pay and costs of transporting the men to the site were the responsibility of the community.

Attempts were made to maintain some elements of traditional county administration. The commissions of array incorporated the high sheriffs and numbered amongst the membership justices of the peace. Orders issued by the commissioners were undertaken by the usual officials by virtue of warrants. Yet despite this continuity of instruments and often of actual individuals, tradition was overridden by the very frequency of weight of the burdens imposed. The horror of Ship Money paled in the memory beside the size of the war levies and the presence of collectors with large armed escorts. Although this was not a true mirror of the devastations of the war on the continent, no-one could escape the constant reminders of the presence of war as almost every asset was used to further its progress.

As Lord Loughborough's and his commander's power declined following Marston Moor and the invasion of the northern parts of his command, the ability of the commissioners to tax the counties also declined and a vicious spiral began. Falling incomes decreased the ability to pay the soldiers who deserted, further reducing the ability to gather taxes. In some areas collections could still be made. The Lichfield accounts show that the garrison was able to gather taxes regularly from Offloe Hundred in Staffordshire until the end of December 1645 at least. Nevertheless in most places collection became more of a raid than an orderly progress through the counties. **(11)** There was a quick dash to the villages and then a run home with supplies — often cattle on the hoof — avoiding the watching Parliamentarians. Naturally towards the end of the war some of these raids became punitive out of sheer desperation. It was an inverse of the situation at the end of 1643 when the local Parliamentarian garrisons had to gather whatever they could from the hostile territories.

Strange Bedfellows

Nonetheless plundering and sporadic levies did not form the backbone of the Royalist War Effort until the latter months of the war. The financial system run by the commissioners was as organised as anything their Parliamentarian counterparts operated, and in the North Midlands it was the more successful for a significant part of the war. For some time the two systems ran side by side and from the middle of 1644 they often shared the same villages. The size of levies was about the same and changeovers from one side to the other often involved little readjustment. When Henry Lowe at Mavesyn Ridware was taxed by Parliament as well as by the Royalists at Lichfield, the amounts of money in each contribution payment declined but the frequency of collection remained the same. In the Nottinghamshire part of the Vale of Belvoir attempts were made at bi-lateral agreement limiting the numbers of horses which could be collected by both sides. Furthermore, when the Royalist garrison at Bolsover surrendered in November 1645 the Parliamentarian force which had besieged them collected in the arrears of pay, due from contribution for them as part of the terms of surrender.

Wicked and debased wretches will be found in any army in any war. The very nature of war — the debasement of society and people — make this inevitable. To the gutter press of the Seventeenth Century stories of wickedness made better reading than did detailed analyses of events. In the absence of masses of detailed papers from the Royalist War Effort, attempts to build up a detailed picture of its operation are difficult and probably ultimately less memorable than the rival images of plunder and rapine. However, this does not alter the fact that the Royalist cause was financed for much of the war by the communities of England and Wales in an organised and systematic, if not always effective, manner.