The English Civil War in Nottinghamshire and Newark; by Tamar and Barbara

Introduction to the events leading to Civil War

Tamar began by giving a brief overview of the events and circumstances that led to the English Civil War. There had been a century of religious turmoil affecting everyone and everything in England and the way the English lived.

At the beginning of Henry VIII reign everyone was of the Roman Catholic religion, the Church was very powerful and the Popes authority was above the Kings. The Church was wealthy, but also corrupt, the supposedly Holy relics were big business, as was the selling of indulgences. All this changed when the Pope refused to annul Henry's first marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

Thomas Cromwell, an ardent Protestant, was one of Henry's principle advisors and he supported Henry to renounce the Catholic religion, become Protestant and make himself head of the Church of England. He could then grant himself a divorce. It also made him very wealthy as he took all the assets of the church and all its land which he sold off.

Henry was excommunicated by Pope Leo X, which devastated Henry. In the last years of his life Henry passed the Six Articles decreeing that the English Church remain Catholic and anyone who disagreed faced death by burning at the stake!

Edward VI succeeded his father, he was only 9, he died aged 16. During his six year reign laws were passed making the Church Protestant, the Six Articles were repealed. Most of the population were used to Catholic doctrine and worship so changes would have been very difficult for them as religion was a way of life.

Mary I, a staunch Roman Catholic, succeeded her brother; she reintroduced the law of Heresy and between 1555 and 1558 she had 300 Protestants burned at the stake. England became Catholic again. She married King Philip of Spain but died after only 5 years as Queen.

She was succeeded by Elizabeth I, the daughter of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII, a Protestant. Elizabeth was initially lenient as to how people worshipped. This changed in 1570 with Catholic unrest and plots to remove the Queen and replace her with Mary Queen of Scots. By the mid 1580's facing this and the threat of a Spanish Armada Elizabeth ordered all Catholic Priests out of the country. Priests ignoring this order were arrested and executed. Elizabeth now saw all Catholics as potentially treasonous. Mary Queen of Scots was executed and the Spanish Amada defeated in 1588.

Elizabeth died in 1603 with no heir and the throne passed to James VI of Scotland, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, he became James I of England, such is irony. He had been brought up a strict Protestant and he introduced strict anti-Catholic laws which made him even more unpopular with the Catholics leading to plots to kill him, famously the Gun Powder Plot of 1605 during the opening of Parliament.
His son Charles I succeeded to the throne and his actions lead to the English Civil War. It is called the English Civil War but in fact it involved the whole of Great Britain to some extent.

Charles made himself very unpopular with Parliament. He believed in the Divine Right of Kings that his word was law and that he could bypass Parliament. He also married a Catholic French princess; Henrietta, who Parliament did not approve of as they thought she may bring up their children in the Roman Catholic faith. Charles introduced harsh religious reforms. He imposed the Armenian form of Protestantism which is very close to Roman Catholicism and the reading of the Common Book of Prayer in all churches. These acts upset the Puritans and caused rebellion in Scotland. When Parliament complained he dismissed them and ruled without a Parliament for eleven years. He fought wars against Spain and France. He was continually short of money. So he introduced unfair taxation. Most taxes could only be levied by Parliament but English monarchs could levy some taxes by prerogative without the approval of Parliament. The attempt of King Charles I from 1634 onwards to levy ship money during peacetime and extend it to the inland counties of England without Parliamentary approval provoked fierce resistance, and was one of the grievances of the English propertied class in the lead-up to the English Civil War. Opposition towards him grew and he was forced to flee London making his headquarters at Oxford.

He then travelled north to Newark in July 1642; Newark was seen as the gateway to the north and remained loyal to the crown throughout the Civil War. On August 22nd 1642 he rode to Nottingham Castle and raised his Standard, it blew down overnight and was considered a bad omen. It was raised again the next day outside of the castle on Standard Hill and marked the beginning of the Civil War. Nottingham unlike Newark was staunchly pro-parliamentarian and the city was taken by Parliamentary forces five days later.

**Newark Civil War Trail.**

**The Castle.**

Newark has a unique strategic position on the road north; it commanded both the crossing of the Trent, the Fosse Way and the Great North Road.

4000 Royalist forces led by John Henderson secured Newark for the Crown. As Governor of Newark he set about strengthening the defences demolishing a number of houses which caused overcrowding in the Town. The Parliamentarians laid siege to the Town and canon ball pock marks and black power marks can still be seen on the remains of the castle. This cannon fire was aimed mostly at river traffic to prevent resupply of the town. In total the town withstood three sieges from 1642 to 1646. Sir John Digby of Mansfield Woodhouse (1603 to 1684) took 400 men to Newark and was present during all three sieges. He was knighted in July 1642. He fought at Edgehill and Pontefract in 1647. He returned to Mansfield Woodhouse after the war.
and saved George Fox, a Quaker preacher, from an angry mob in 1649. He was at one time High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, and in 1659 was involved with Lord Byron in the plot to restore Charles II to the throne, the plot failed. He is buried in St Edmunds Church, Mansfield Woodhouse along with his wife, Lucy.

The Prince Rupert
Stodman Street is now a pub. The building was about 200 years old at the time of the Civil War and would have been used as a billet for soldiers.

The Governors House.
This house can be found where Stodman Street meets the Market Square. Built in 1474 it became the Governors House during the Civil War. Charles I stayed here when he visited Newark. A plaque on the wall opposite the Governor's House - now National Westminster Bank - shows the site of Hercules Clay's house, which was destroyed by a bomb on March 11th 1643.

The Old White Hart pub
Market Square, is the oldest surviving inn in Newark. It dates from the early 14th century and would certainly have billeted soldiers. It has an ornate façade to the front and part of it houses the Nottingham Building Society today.

The Church, St Mary Magdalene.
The church spire was used as a lookout tower and still has a hole in it from Parliamentary cannon fire. In the churchyard there is a memorial commemorating the lives of those killed and beneath it are buried their remains.

Queen Henrietta's Lodgings.
This is now the “Charles I Coffee House” on Kirk Gate. Queen Henrietta Maria stayed here when returning from abroad with mercenary soldiers on her way to Charles I in Oxford. There are in fact two buildings of differing styles, one 15th and the other 16th century. The 15th century building used far more timber than the 16th century one as by that time timber was becoming quite expensive.

Millgate
This is the area where, not only flour was ground, but also the making of gunpowder for the defence of the town.

Queens Sconce
Travelling south along Millgate (old A46 Fosse Way) will bring you to the Queens Sconce on the outskirts of the then town. This was one of a pair of large earthwork fortifications built for artillery. The other was to the north of the town on the A46 and was known as the Kings Sconce (now disappeared under housing).
In 1646 with the war going badly the King travelled to Southwell and on 5th May 1646 he surrendered to the Scots and the official surrender took place at the Bishops Palace Southwell on 6th May 1646. The King wrote to the Governor of Newark ordering him to surrender, which he refused to do. Newark therefore remained in Crown hands throughout the war and only surrendered when hostilities ended. The King was taken by the Scots army to Newcastle where he was sold to the Parliamentary forces for £40,000. This ended the First Civil War. Charles was imprisoned but in March 1648 escapes and the Second Civil War began which lasted only 5 months and Charles was captured again in August. This led to his trial and execution on 30th January 1649 and the foundation of the Commonwealth of England.

The country was ruled by Parliament but this was ineffective and corrupt. Oliver Cromwell with the aid of the army dismissed the rump Parliament and ruled as Lord Protector, in effect as a dictator!

On the death of Cromwell there was no real successor so Charles 2nd was named as King and the monarchy restored. Charles 2nd died without any legitimate children and the throne passed to his brother James 2nd. Unfortunately James was a Catholic and there was much unrest in the country. There was a plot to overthrow James and bring in his niece, daughter of Charles 2nd, Mary as Queen. She was married to William of Orange, a Dutch protestant Prince. In November 1688 William with a Dutch Army landed in England, the English Army and Navy quickly went over the William and James escaped to France. With his fleeing to France James was deemed to have abdicated and in February 1689 the crown was offered to William and Mary as joint sovereigns. In December 1689, Parliament passed one of the most important constitutional documents in English history, the Bill of Rights. This measure established restrictions on the royal prerogative; it declared, among other things, that the Sovereign could not suspend laws passed by Parliament, levy taxes without parliamentary consent, infringe the right to petition, raise a standing army during peacetime without parliamentary consent, deny the right to bear arms to Protestant subjects, unduly interfere with parliamentary elections, punish members of either House of Parliament for anything said during debates, require excessive bail, or inflict cruel or unusual punishments. The Bill of Rights also confirmed the succession to the throne. It was the birth of Parliamentary Democracy.