

Siege of Gloucester

The English Civil War .

King Charles arrived in Bristol in August 1643 to settle disputes amongst his generals who had captured city of Bristol which had been besieged in November 1642 and lost by the Roundheads after heavy casualties.

The loss of Bristol meant that the only Roundhead city left between Bristol and Lancashire was Gloucester.

Gloucester was an important city . it was quite large by 17th century standards , it was wealthy and it was strategically important because it was the lowest crossing point from England into Wales.

Prince Rupert had taken Cirencester in February 1643.
He was a Czech and the son of King Charles' sister. (His nephew)

King Charles left some of his troops to Garrison Bristol, sent some to round up some remnants of Roundheads in Dorset and Devon but took his main force (led by Prince Rupert) to Gloucester, 35 miles north of Bristol. The King had some loyal supporters in Wales and Gloucester stood in his way and disrupted his lines of communication.

In the meantime the Roundheads in London were in a state of despondency having lost to the Cavaliers in successive battles including Bristol.
Oxford was the King's main base and it stood between London and Gloucester.

Gloucester was ruled by a Puritan alderman called Tom Pury who had recruited a Colonel Massie to oversee the Garrison of Gloucester.
The City was surrounded on three sides by a crumbling Roman Wall which had stood for more than 1300 years and the castle was in a state of disrepair and being used as a prison.

Colonel Massie had been in the King's army, serving in the Netherlands but had been refused a commission by the King so joined the Roundheads.
He was 23 years old.

Massie had been a very effective colonel during earlier battles on the Welsh Borders serving with Sir William Waller in spring 1643.

Massie knew that Gloucester couldn't withstand a siege so immediately began the work of reconstructing the walls and outer defences of the city.

He also wrote to Parliament asking for help including money, weapons and reinforcements .

Local residents piled in to help shore up the walls , lead was brought from the roofs the vineyard palace to make shot and a gunpowder factory began to make

supplies of explosive in the crypt of the church in Southgate Street (St Mary de Crypt. The city only had 40 barrels of gunpowder.

Massie also ordered the pulling down or burning of all buildings outside the city walls in order to ensure that the King's men had no cover as they approached. Altogether 241 houses and barns , total value £28,720 in 1646.

Help from London was not going to arrive. Oxford was between Gloucester and London and the King controlled it and the surrounding roads.

Prince Rupert thought that Gloucester would be easy to storm but King Charles was reluctant to inflict heavy casualties on his men after the losses at Bristol, so he settled for a siege.

The King sent an envoy to demand that Gloucester surrender. demanding a reply within two hours.

The City kept him waiting several hours before sending this message.

"We the inhabitants, magistrates, officers and soldiers within this Garrison of Gloucester, unto his majestys' gracious message retorne this humble answer,- That we doe keep this city according to our oaths and allegiance to and for the use of his majesty and his royal posterity, and doe accordingly conceive ourselves wholly bound to obey the commands of his majesty, **signified by both houses of Parliament**, and are resolved by God's help to keep this city accordingly".

The siege had begun.

The land to the north was marshy, the river Severn was to the west so the King set up his camp at Gaudy Green to the south east and began his bombardment. During the siege the king and his children stayed at Matson House.

The king's army cut off the main water supply to the city which was a pipe (laid by the Romans) from Robinswood hill to the cross. The king also brought miners from wales and the Forest of Dean to burrow under the walls.

Gloucester had a garrison of some 1500 soldiers.
The King had 30,000 soldiers and cavalry.

There is a lovely account written at the time of a lieutenant Harcus leading a group of men out through a city wall door in the middle of the night and stealing all of the miner's shovels and pickaxes. The following day he did the same but stole their guns.

Efforts by the King's miners to dig tunnels were thwarted by the natural springs which kept flooding their tunnels.

In early 1643 Colonel Massey had led a force out across the causeway and had surrounded a force of Welsh royalists. They were captured and marched back to Gloucester and imprisoned in St Mary de Lode church cellar.

They were fed on cabbages for 10 days but the city already had 1500 garrison soldiers and 4500 inhabitants and because they were virtually cut off from supplies couldn't feed the prisoners.

Some of them changed sides but most swore an oath not to fight against Gloucester again and were set free.

Immediately before the siege began, Massey and Waller took a force to Tewkesbury and Hereford defeating the Royalists but didn't have enough troops to hold them so they returned to defend Gloucester.

Why did the King want Gloucester?

It would give him access to the iron foundries, it would allow his supporters to join him from Wales to attack London, Customs taxes from the port of Gloucester would give him money.

On 6th August skirmishes took place at Painswick and Wotton Pitch and 10 Cavaliers were taken prisoner.

Royalists plundered Tuffley on 7th August and settled at Brookethorpe.

The King came through Tetbury, Cirencester and Painswick before setting his headquarters in Matson House.

At Brockworth during a skirmish with King's men a young boy ran out of lead shot so put a stone in his pistol and killed a Cavalier commander.

On August 10th. 6000 men and horses faced the city from Tredworth fields. 2000 were at the North wall and the King's sons with Prince Rupert were at Kingsholm.

Another division was at Llanthony priory to the south of the City.

Lastly, between Barton village and Bristol road was an unknown number of cavalry and foot soldiers. Altogether 30,000 men.

Inside the City

Because the cavaliers had cut the water supply people had to drink water from wells in the city but these were heavily polluted with open sewers so they fetched water from the muddy river Severn.

They had no water to drive the corn mills so horse and mules were used until corn ran out.

A little boy and a little girl were shot when they peeped over the wall to see the King's forces.

On August 13th three 23pound cannons were brought to Gaudy Green Where Brunswick square is today and began to fire lead balls over the wall.

The King ordered that the moat be drained and that men from the village of Barton should make Faggots to fill in the trench when it was dry (on pain of death)

Every time a breach was made in the wall by cannon fire the local people quickly blocked it with woolsacks and baskets.

When the men of Barton tried to fill the trench they were beaten off with musket fire .

There were battles all around the city every day with city garrison troops venturing out to steal Cavalier weapons and fighting .

Monday 14th August , Tuesday 15th, Wed ., Thurs., saw hundreds of cavalier troops killed by Colonel Massey's men who only suffered the loss of a couple of men.

On Saturday 150 cannon balls were fired at the city from Gaudy Green. One hit a pig which , before they ate it the city people put it on the wall with a little boy whistling to draw their attention to the fact that they still had food. (Pig and Whistle). Six Grenades fell in the town wrapped in rags and tar to cause fire. One was put out by a woman with a bucket of water but another went through a roof of a Mr. Commeline, an apothecary who lived in Westgate Street. He was in bed when it landed on the bed and started a fire . The only thing he had to put it was his chamber pot .

Sunday 200 musketeers left the City to attack the King's men but got stuck in mud and had to retreat.

However. On that day , unknown to Gloucester a proclamation had been read in London to close all shops until Gloucester was relieved. ***The beginning of rescue.***

In the meantime....

The king's army started building siege engines in order to scale the walls. The biggest one got stuck in the mud outside the city wall and under weight collapsed and no attempt to mend it succeeded.
Humpty Dumpty.....

Two men approached the North Gate with a message from the king that if the City didn't surrender the King would hang the twelve leading Aldermen. They were sent away with a message.....

Made up rhymes...

Two pettifogging lawyers came of late
..to tell us of our present state.
But for their threats so huge and big
..seven score cannons can but kill one pig..

On August 25th some townsfolk had become scared and began to worry about being defeated by the king and three men climbed up the tower of the Cathedral. They were supposed to be on lookout duty but they took a shot at Colonel Massey through the window of the Crown Inn and missed.

They didn't realise that their escape route included coming down 300+ steps and by the time they descended Massey's men had them captured.

The man who fired the shot was hanged. One of the men who was a city mace bearer had all of his fingers cut off and the third was let go.

The lookout at the top of the cathedral was there to see whether or not relief was coming.

News had got through to the city that Colonel Essex had raised an army of roundheads and had left London.

Unfortunately they needed to skirt north around Oxford which was Royalist and approach Gloucester from the North.

They came through Stow then Prestbury but a storm made the road impossible to descend from the hill.

It was three days before they got to the village of Cheltenham where they found no food. However the beacon on Wainlode hill had been lit and spotted by the people of Gloucester.

Gloucester Market re-opened and the King's forces made a rapid withdrawal.

When Essex got to Gloucester he was to find that the city only had three barrels of gunpowder left.

Only 35-40 people had been killed by the enemy and most of them had been shot whilst peeping over the walls.

Over 400 cannonballs and 20 grenades had fallen on the City but over 1000 Royalists had been killed.

A plaque was put up on the re-built Southgate which read:-

A CITY ASSAULTED BY MAN BUT SAVED BY GOD.

EVER REMEMBER THE 5TH SEPTEMBER 1643.