

Siege of Gloucester Notes: Roger Peel

(1) The Cross: Setting the Scene

We are at the very heart of Gloucester where four main streets meet.

These streets are known as Gate Streets and are a reminder of when the city had walls and each street led to a gate in the city wall.

The English Civil War started in 1642 when Members of Parliament were dissatisfied with the total power that the Monarch (Charles I) enjoyed. It finally ended in 1652 when the King Charles II (Charles I's son) was defeated at the Battle of Worcester.

The Siege of Gloucester was an engagement in the [First English Civil War](#). It took place between August 3 and September 5, 1643, between the defending Parliamentary garrison of [Gloucester](#) led by Edward Massey and the besieging army of [King Charles I](#) led by Prince Rupert. The siege ended with the arrival of a relieving Parliamentary army under the [Earl of Essex](#).

In 1643 the siege took place after a run of Royalist successes, directed from their Headquarters in Oxford, known as the "Royalist summer". After the fall of [Cirencester](#) in February 1643 and Bristol in July 1643, Gloucester was one of the few remaining Parliamentary strongholds in the west. During a [council of war](#) at [Bristol](#), the King faced a decision to either attack a weakened London, or to consolidate the South Western Royalist stronghold by attacking the small garrison at Gloucester. Although the reasons for his decision to attack Gloucester are not known, Gloucester's position cut the overland route between Royalist-held Wales (recruitment), Bristol (Royalist's main Port) and the Forest of Dean (source of raw materials) and made it a favourable target; and with the city having only a very small garrison the King may have believed that Gloucester would fall quickly.

Five days before the arrival of the Royalist army the defenders had discovered they were to be attacked and messengers were sent to London to ask Parliament for assistance. A fifteen thousand strong parliamentary army assembled in London and headed to Gloucester's support on August 26, under the command of the Earl of Essex.

At the Tolsley (town hall), city dignitaries received an ultimatum from the Royalist army that the King had complete Power and ordered the city to surrender. The city had two hours to consider the King's ultimatum. The besieged Parliamentarians rode outside of the city walls to deliver their reply saying that the Monarch's power should only be obeyed through the elected members of Parliament.

Edward Massey

Only 23 years old, and of uncertain loyalty to Parliament, having only left Royal service in 1642, and who had at one point offered to negotiate the surrender of Gloucester. However, Massey had spent his time well improving the defences of the city. Massey became a mercenary soldier and supported the Royalist during the latter parts of the civil war

Prince Rupert

A nephew of Charles I, his reputation was made as a dashing commander of cavalry, but his record in command of major battles was poor. He was popular with the rank and file of the Royalist armies, but made enemies of almost every other senior commander. During the siege Prince Rupert made his headquarters at Matson House in the shadow of Tuffley Hill.

(2) Wheat Market

The city's wheat market was at this point, it was a very large building. Col Massey used the building as stabling for his forces and their equipment.

There was also a public water supply here, it was known as Scriven's conduit and piped water from nearby Robinswood Hill. One of the first acts the Royalists did, in an effort to force the defending forces of Gloucester to give in, was to cut the water supply to the city. Local inhabitants living in close proximity used wells in the rear of their properties, but because of the poor sanitation and nearby cesspits this water was contaminated with ammonia.

(3) Facing St Mary de Crypt Church

Talk about the South Gate area. Part of the City wall still intact in the furniture shop. Talk about the city walls the route of which would have been based on the lines of the walls that the Romans built in the first century AD.

(4) St Mary de Crypt Churchyard

A place of worship here since 1140; the church reached its present size in the late fourteen hundreds and the work is accredited to Henry Dene.

Medieval times – Crypt used as a charnel house. In 1576 – used as a tavern for a hundred years or so and it was during this time during the civil war when the church was used as an explosives factory. Experts were able to make about three barrels of gunpowder each day.

Both the Royalists and the Parliamentarians had spies who would infiltrate each others camps and with the information that the Royalist spies had gathered this church was a prime target. The building suffered direct hits and there are still the marks from shrapnel.

Speak about the close proximity of the city walls

(5) Greyfriars Monastery

Also situated very close to the city walls this monastery was severely damaged during the siege as it was in the firing line to St Mary de Crypt church.

The most vulnerable parts of the city defensive walls were on this south easterly and southerly side.

Talk about the '*via sacra*' (Latin for Sacred Road) markings on the pavement; mainly the route of a guided tour designed about 35 years ago primarily along the route of the old city walls. Not here though, the city walls were about a hundred metres to the south of this point.

(6) By the Library

Weakest and most vulnerable part of the wall, and the Royalists knew that.

The Royalists aimed most of their canon fire at this part of the wall and we are at a point when the wall almost collapsed during the bombardment of the city.

The city workforce of mainly women and children were tasked with rebuilding the wall with mud, stones and anything else that could be carried. Stones were from buildings elsewhere in the city that had been destroyed by the enemy action. Over the next days the defenders made several sallies (raids) from the gates attacking and disabling Royalist artillery, taking prisoners and tools. Breaches in the wall were filled with cannon baskets and wool sacks. The defenders burned houses and other obstacles outside the city walls so that snipers could have a field of view to shoot at the soldiers manning the Royalist canons.

The Royalists though were starting to suffer from ill health, camping out in the open etc and were disappointed with the resilience that the Parliamentarians were showing. Previously the Royalists were on a high, having previously taken both Bristol and Cirencester.

(7) Brunswick Road (Murals)

Stop at the murals depicting various military achievements in and around Gloucester.

Roman conquest
AD40

Barons' War.

First Barons' War (1215–1217) in England during the reign of John. This war resulted from King John's refusal to accept and abide by the Magna Carta he had sealed (not signed) on 15 June 1215

Second Barons' War (1264–1267) was a civil war in England between the forces of a number of barons led by Simon de Montfort, against the Royalist forces led by Prince Edward (later Edward I of England), in the name of Henry III.

Siege of Gloucester.

August 3 and September 5, 1643

English Civil War

"The English Civil War" was a series of armed conflicts and political machinations that took place between [Parliamentarians](#) and [Royalists](#) from 1642 until 1651 and includes the [Second English Civil War](#) (1648–1649) and the [Third English Civil War](#) (1649–1651).

8) Outside Boots

Stand in the centre of the paving that shows the shape of the northern gate tower, the southern one is can be seen under the glass viewing area.

Talk about the Roman wall, raiding parties from both sides, climbing through drains etc. Spiking the cannons

For two weeks Royalist engineers and miners brought in from the Royal Forest of Dean had been digging under the walls of the city, and on 24 August the Royalists gave Massey one more chance to surrender before saying they would destroy the walls. Unluckily for the Royalists, that night the weather broke, and the excavations were flooded, giving the city another two weeks of grace.

Most of the properties outside of the East gate were destroyed by the besieged Parliamentarians to allow a clear view of the enemy.

Talk about snipers, a force of 20,000 Royalists and only 1,500 Parliamentarians.

Large losses up to 5,000 soldiers on the Royalist side, due to fatigue, out in the open. But, only 50 or so on the Parliamentarian side, due to snipers and raiding parties.

(9) Kings Walk (Halfway along)

Point out the *via sacra* markings, route of the city walls, on the tiled floor

(10) Kings Square or Halfway Along St Aldgate Street

Here the wall had a sharp corner and was a good vantage point to defend the city.

To the north and in the Kingsholm area it was susceptible to flooding and the Royalists were not able to position their canons, remember it took a team of twelve oxen to move each canon.

(11) St Johns Lane, near Sweet Success

Here the wall was well fortified and difficult for the Royalist to overcome.

The cathedral provided a massive obstacle, and the Royalists wanted to avoid damaging the building

(12) Millers Green

We have just walked through the cathedral precincts into the inner court of the abbey that is today known as Millers Green. It is called that because the abbey water mill stood on a tributary of the River Twyver near the site of number 2 Miller Green. The tributary flows underneath us now.

At the time of the siege, it was a very important area and well protected, from the west by the River Severn, to the North by the swampy ground and in other directions it too far away from the Royalists bombardment of the eastern and southern sides of the city.

The Royalists had blocked off the River Twyver that worked the mill, so the Parliamentarians used their horses to turn the water mill. It was from this point that the citizens of Gloucester managed to process wheat to keep themselves fed.

(13) King Charles II Statue

Follow the period of the English Civil war which lasted from 1642 – 1652 this statue was first set up in 1662 at the northern end of the Wheat Market in Southgate Street as part of the city's political rehabilitation following the restoration of the monarchy and Charles II's visit to Gloucester..

A pledge of allegiance given to the King by the men of Gloucester and was graciously accepted. However, Charles, but no doubt mindful of the city's pro-parliamentarian sympathies and the part it played in the downfall of his father returned the compliment by ordering the demolition of the city walls so that the city could no longer be defended.

This statue of Charles II was removed and ultimately lost when the wheat market was taken down in the eighteenth century. It was rediscovered at a garden at Chaxhill near Westbury-on-Severn in 1945 and erected here in the 1960s.

(14) The Crown Inn

The Old Crown re-opened in 1990 and re-established "the original Crown Inn" which closed in about 1760, nearly 230 years beforehand.

The Inn probably dates back to at least the 13th century, it is claimed to have been the HQ of Colonel Edward Massie during the Siege of Gloucester in 1643.

Talk about the Earl of Essex on his way from London, relief was on its way.

(15) Westgate Street (opposite Maverdine Entry).

Talk about number 26 Westgate being rumoured as the HQ of Edward Massie.

30 Westgate – was built in 1622 and during the time of the siege was occupied by James Commeline, an apothecary who had fled from the Netherlands to England to escape the religious turmoil in Europe, however unbeknown to him his peace was about to be shattered because on the night of the 15 August flaming cannon balls came through the roof of the building, the Royalists were attempting to set fire to the city, and set fire to his bed!!

Talk about Westgate having buildings in the street, and was basically two narrow lanes each side of the Trinity well, Trinity Church and St Mary in the Market Church.

(16) Relieving Forces travel up From London).

News of the siege had had a dramatic effect in London, where Parliament had become gloomy. Now, the new cause revived their enthusiasm, and that of the Londoners, and a new army was raised. On 26 August this army left for Gloucester under the command of the Earl of Essex.

Late on 5 September, Essex and the Parliamentary army reached site on the outskirts of Gloucester, and fired a salute to let the defenders know relief had arrived. In the night, the King abandoned the siege, and his army marched away into the Cotswold Hills towards Oxford.