

3

Well Street

Near this spot Major General Webb had his horse shot from under him by a parliamentarian musket volley which also fatally wounded Lord Hopton's horse and hit Captain Harper in the head. Lord Hopton's horse was able to carry him to his "lodging door and there fell down dead". It is also likely Hopton's personal colour was captured in this particular engagement and that he suffered a pike wound in the face.

4

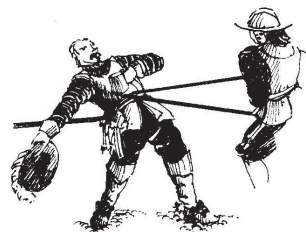
Royalist Barricade

Near this spot stood the main Royalist barricade, scene of the bloodiest fighting in the Battle of Torrington. The barricade was contested for over an hour "at push of pike": meaning that the pikemen level their pikes horizontally at shoulder height and thrust them at the enemy. Accounts of the battle testify to the courage of the Cornish troops who defended it, "at push of pike and with the butt end of their muskets".

5

Great Torrington Public Houses

There were a large number of pubs in Great Torrington in the 17th Century. One such pair was the Rising Sun on the corner of Castle Street and facing it on Cornmarket Street, the Setting Sun. In one Great Torrington alehouse in 1642 John Heddon was drinking with company and asked William Hocking if he



Thomas Moncke slain.

7

An Unfortunate Incident

In 1644 the town was garrisoned by the King's forces. An unfortunate incident occurred when Thomas Moncke, gent Lieutenant to Colonel Thomas Moncke of Potheridge, was slain close to this spot on the 9th day of July 1644 about 12 o'clock at night, by some of his own company on guard when he failed to give the correct password. Perhaps he had been drinking and his speech had become incoherent.



Swords and daggers pricked John Heddon near the belly.

8

Retreating

Foot soldiers from the defeated Royalist Army of Lord Hopton fled down this street and over Taddiport Bridge towards Cornwall. This area at the northern end of Mill Street was the scene of much industry in the mid 17th Century. A 17th Century pottery site was found at Caynton House, 100 yards down Mill Street, and Rack Park was the area where woven cloth was stretched whilst being bleached in the sun.

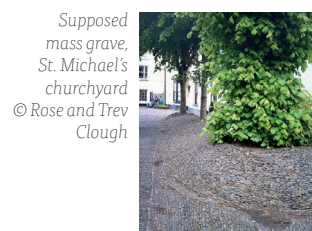


Royalist Army of Lord Hopton fleeing down Mill Street.

9

House Destroyed

The house that formerly stood on this spot was destroyed when the Royalist powder magazine in the church exploded on the night of 16 February 1646.



Supposed mass grave, St. Michael's churchyard
© Rose and Trev Clough

10

St. Michael and All Angels

This church served as the Royalist powder magazine. During the battle 80 barrels of powder exploded killing 200 Royalist prisoners and their guards. At first the explosion seemed to be accidental but a Royalist soldier, Robert Watts, was found in the rubble and accused of being the culprit, having been offered it was said, £30 as a reward from Lord Hopton for the deed. A stone set into the wall of the transept to the right of the entrance to the church records the explosion and the rebuilding of the church.

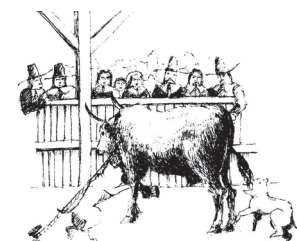


St Michael and All Angels church after being rebuilt following the Civil War.

11

Burial Mound

The mound near this spot is reputed to be the burial place of the mortal remains of those soldiers killed when the 80 barrels of powder, stored in the church, exploded. Research by local diviners has suggested the burial pit is 7 feet deep and contains the remains of 67 bodies.



12

Bull Ring

The area behind 3 High Street was the site of the town's Bull Ring where people watched the sport of bull baiting. It was thought baiting a bull tenderised the meat.



*The anniversary of the
Battle of Torrington
is remembered in February
each year with a torch-lit procession.*



GREAT TORRINGTON

CIVIL WAR TRAIL

THE BATTLE OF
TORRINGTON
16 FEBRUARY 1646



GREAT TORRINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
Castle Hill, Great Torrington, Devon EX38 8AA

Civil War Trail © John Wardman & Philip Dixon 2021

The English Civil War: The Battle of Torrington 1646

The years prior to the outbreak of civil war in 1642 had seen a growing challenge to the powers of Charles I in ruling England and Scotland. The king claimed he had been chosen by God to rule the country (The Divine Right of Kings theory). Parliament increasingly challenged this right and was able to limit the King's power by refusing to pass laws to allow the King to collect enough in taxes to effectively run the country. The King's effort to raise money without calling parliament, together with changes to religion added to the King's unpopularity. There was a fear the King might use force to establish his supreme power. A rebellion in Ireland, and the King's need to raise and command an army led to a final breakdown of trust. Parliament feared any army raised to crush the rebellion would be used to bring an end to parliamentary democracy and establish a royal dictatorship. In 1642, amidst anti-royalist rioting in London, the king fled to Oxford to raise an army to

crush his rebellious parliament. From 1642 civil war raged across Britain until a victorious army led by Fairfax and Cromwell surprised the last effective Royalist army at Great Torrington in February 1646. The outcome of the battle would determine the way Britain, in future, was to be governed.

The Battle of Torrington was the last major battle of the civil war 1642-46. Later in 1646, the King had no option but to surrender and start negotiating with Parliament on his future rights as king. Behind these negotiations however, he was planning a fresh attempt to defeat parliament's armies. The Battle of Preston in 1648 ended a second civil war and a defeated Charles I was brought to trial, charged with shedding unnecessary blood, and beheaded outside his own palace of Whitehall. During 'The Interregnum' 1649-1660, Oliver Cromwell, and later his son Richard, governed Britain as Lord Protectors. In 1660 General Monck, a general in Cromwell's army, and incidentally born at Potheridge 5 miles South of Great Torrington, invited back Charles I's son Charles II to take the throne. Charles II recognised the limits on his royal power as a condition of the restoration. This became the start of a new and effective working relationship between monarch and parliament which has developed down to the present day.



Sir Thomas Fairfax, Parliamentarian



Vs. General Lord Hopton, Royalist



THE BATTLE OF TORRINGTON 16 FEBRUARY 1646



1 The Black Horse Inn

Local tradition has it that this was the Headquarters of Lord Hopton, General of the King's Army defending the town. Hopton would no doubt have picked the most opulent inn in which to lodge. One account states how Hopton hurriedly left his quarters during the battle. "The Lord Hopton left his dinner on the table and fled leaving behind him his Trunks of plate and silver and other treasure".



The Black Horse Inn
Character Grade II Listed 16th Century Coaching Inn. Rebuilt and reopened in 1681 after being damaged in the 1646 battle.

2 Great Torrington Town Hall

From a balcony close to this spot, Hugh Peters, a chaplain with the New Model Army, preached to the parliamentarian soldiers and townspeople on Saturday 21st February 1646, it being the market day following the battle. The town saw the coming and going of Parliamentarian and Royalist troops several times during the Civil War of 1642-46. In August

1645 when Lord Goring's Royalist forces occupied the town, one soldier by the name of Henry Boose was hanged next to where the pillory stood in front of the Town Hall. He was a Lancashire man charged with mutiny. This was the market area for the town and goods were brought into the town in panniers carried on the backs of packhorses and then sold straight from the panniers. Through the archway to the rear can be seen the Shambles, an area of the town where the butchers had their stalls and where meat was sold. This area also

contained within it a Leather Hall, Cordwainer Chamber, Yarn Hall and Council Chamber. The rear of the Council Chamber can be seen from the Shambles and while the new Town Hall was built in 1861, the rear is much older, almost certainly there in 1646. The rear of the buildings with their frontage on Fore Street also show 17th Century building styles.



Great Torrington Town Hall
Civic records and documents were destroyed in a serious fire in July 1724 so there is no knowledge of its appearance before that date. The building as we see it today dates from 1861 and is Grade II listed.



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