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‘Coursing the Tinkerley Fox’: Tactics of Garrison Warfare in the West Midlands during 1643 and 1644

Jonathan Worton

Department of History and Archaeology, University of Chester, Chester, UK

ABSTRACT

A military defeat for the parliamentarians in south Staffordshire in March 1644 involved the capitulation of their outpost at Stourton Castle to Worcestershire royalists. The beaten parliamentary commander was Colonel John Fox, who in autumn 1643 had established a garrison near Birmingham at Edgbaston. This, like Stourton Castle in turn, was one of the number of strongholds in the West Midlands the opposing sides held as a strategy for territorial control. Indeed, much of the fighting of the English Civil War of 1642–6 involved clashes between local garrison-based forces, sometimes fought for the possession of rival strong-points. In March 1644 Fox enabled the parliamentary seizure of Stourton Castle for reasons that also impelled inter-garrison warfare elsewhere. The subsequent short campaign to besiege or relieve the castle is reconstructed here, as a case study of the tactics and conduct of the localized military action that shaped the course of the wider war.

KEYWORDS

English Civil War; Stourton Castle; garrison warfare; royalists; parliamentarians; ‘Tinker’ Fox

Introduction and Contexts

In mid-April 1644, in the third year of civil war in England, the lead writer of *Mercurius Britanicus*, one of the London-based pro-parliamentarian periodicals reporting the war, encouraged his readership to disbelieve recent news in the royalist mouthpiece journal *Mercurius Aulicus*, ‘of a little defeat we had in Staffordshire’. ‘But I must profess I scarce believe it, for he hath such a trick’, continued the parliamentary columnist, ridiculing Aulicus’s editor, for:

telling lies today, and asking pardon tomorrow, that I dare say the next week he will be desiring an excuse from the reader, and that he was mistaken in shire, or the men, or that the news was brought by some that came away too soon and stayed no longer than the forenoon of the fight.¹

For its part, *Mercurius Aulicus*, published at the end of March out of King Charles I’s wartime capital and headquarters at Oxford, had reported in some detail how royalists

CONTACT Jonathan Worton  j.worton@chester.ac.uk  Department of History and Archaeology, University of Chester, Chester CH1 4JB, UK

¹British Library (BL), E.42(27), Thomason Tracts (TT), *Mercurius Britanicus*, 8–15 April 1644, 244. Note that while contemporary spellings of titles of journals have been retained, other quotations have been modernized and corrected.

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captured the parliamentary stronghold at Stourton Castle in south Staffordshire, after having routed a relieving force. Those parliamentarians were said to have been ‘piteously banged’, their commander Colonel John Fox heading their flight across nearby Stourbridge Heath: ‘the first running rebel was the jovial Tinker himself, whose example was well followed by all his worthy train’.² Fox had already been stigmatized in royalist propaganda as a Tinker, and therefore socially unfit to hold a commissioned rank, probably because of his artisanal background as a metal-worker or dealer in the West Midland trade.³ The victorious royalists were commanded by Sir Gilbert Gerard, a protégé of Prince Rupert appointed in mid-December 1643 to the governorship of the city of Worcester and as such the de-facto commander of royalist forces in Worcestershire.⁴ Confirming the fact of the ‘little defeat’ of the parliamentarians at Stourton, on 2 April Gerard reported the action in a dispatch to Rupert as the regional commander-in-chief. Gerard likened his men’s pursuit of the enemy to the chase of the hunt, boasting of having ‘recently been coursing the Tinkerley Fox’.⁵ In situation reports written to his immediate and parliament’s regional commander the Earl of Denbigh, on 27 March, Fox admitted how in that day’s engagement his soldiers were ‘forced to retreat disorderly’, and next day confirmed that Stourton Castle had been surrendered to Gerard’s royalists.⁶

Colonel John ‘Tinker’ Fox’s Civil War military career has previously featured in *Midland History*, making this a complementary work. Andrew Hopper’s 1999 paper was an overview of Fox’s service in the parliamentary cause in the West Midlands during the 1642–6 conflict, in the context of the ‘politics’ of Civil War garrison warfare in which Fox’s force engaged from their base at Edgbaston House, Warwickshire.⁷ This work in turn informed Hopper’s biographical essay on Fox in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.⁸ In *Midland History* in 2010, C. D. Gilbert re-examined Fox’s most notoriously successful operation of 3 May 1644, when he raided the royalist-held town of Bewdley, on the River Severn in Worcestershire, taking the governor captive.⁹

Gilbert’s appraisal of the ‘dramatic incident’ of Fox’s sortie upon royalist Bewdley endorsed Hopper’s conclusions about Fox’s effectiveness in hit-and-run raiding; the contemporary phrase ‘beating up of quarters’, referred to the tactic of surprising the enemy in their billets or encampments. Such occasional small-scale engagements, limited in objective and duration by Fox’s modest military resources and the effectiveness of his men, coupled to a regionally strategically useful role in gathering intelligence, were the mainstay of Fox’s operations. The sole occasion when Fox, in Hopper’s phrase, ‘attempted something more ambitious than a raiding party’, in advancing parliamentary territorial hold and engaging the enemy in the open field, was in

²BL, E.42(26), TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 30 March 1644, 908.

³A. J. Hopper, ‘Tinker’ Fox and the Politics of Garrison Warfare in the West Midlands, 1643–50’, *Midland History*, 24.1 (1999), 100–1.

⁴R. Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort 1642–1646*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 121, 127.

⁵William Salt Library (WSL), SMS 518/3, Prince Rupert’s Papers.

⁶Warwickshire Record Office (WRO), C2017/C9/73, Civil War Letter Books of the Earl of Denbigh, Vol. I, Fox to Denbigh, 27 March 1644 (from which the quotation is taken); C2017/C9/74, Fox to Denbigh, 28 March 1644.

⁷Hopper, ‘Garrison Warfare’, 98–113.

⁸A. J. Hopper, ‘Fox, John [called Tinker Fox] (bap. 1610, d. 1650)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, 23 September 2004 < <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/66618> > [accessed 10 December 2020].

⁹C. D. Gilbert, ‘A Dramatic Incident in Royalist Worcestershire: ‘Tinker’ Fox’s Raid on Bewdley of May 1644’, *Midland History*, 35.1 (2010), 129–35.

March 1644 by enabling the occupation of Stourton Castle and attempting its relief when beleaguered by royalists.¹⁰ Those actions are examined here.

Revisiting the military career of ‘Tinker’ Fox, a figure whose contemporary notoriety still engages the attention of historians, this article furthers regional English Civil War military history by reconsidering the prevailing garrison warfare of the time in the setting of West Midland counties during 1643 and 1644. While previous regional studies of garrison forces have tended to focus on their fiscal demands and other requisitioning (how military taxes were levied and disbursed, and how those and other exactions affected civil–military relationships),¹¹ the approach here is concerned with combat and the tactics of garrison warfare. Tactics in this respect are taken as the immediate plans and means of achieving operational military objectives, as well as the ways action was conducted once in contact with the enemy. Having firstly established the background context, and secondly reviewed the wider basis of Civil War garrison warfare, this article is a tactical case-study, presenting a conjectural reconstruction of military activity in the area of Stourton Castle during March 1644.

Those operations along the Staffordshire/Worcestershire border merit a lengthier explanation than previously attempted. Part of his wider narrative, Hopper’s paragraph on ‘Tinker’ Fox’s sally into south Staffordshire in March 1644 was the fullest account since Willis-Bund’s similarly paragraph-length piecing-together of events in his 1905 county history of the war in Worcestershire.¹² Otherwise, in histories of the Civil Wars to date, the action at Stourton is mentioned only in passing in wider narratives.¹³ Where a little more column space has been allotted, Willis-Bund’s summary of events has been followed.¹⁴ The more detailed approach taken here is to re-evaluate the sources and view these actions together as a campaign, conducted within a defined area of the West Midlands. Although of short duration, and, relatively small scale in the numbers of troops involved, it was characteristic of other similar sequential regional engagements of the 1642–6 conflict. In this way, this work argues for the continuing relevance of local military studies of the war. A.H. Burne and P. Young, professional soldiers who became military historians, once opined that the historiographical pre-occupation, as they saw it, with fighting at county level had ‘led to an exaggeration of the view that the war was nothing more than a disconnected series of petty local struggles’.¹⁵ This view of the Stourton campaign instead argues that parochial actions were connected and operationally coherent, and that the undercurrent of smaller-scale engagements protracted what became a territorial war of attrition. This was recognized by a London journalist in spring 1644, who, reporting recent skirmishing in Shropshire

¹⁰Hopper, ‘Garrison Warfare’, 107.

¹¹See for example: M. Bennett, ‘Contribution and Assessment: Financial Exactions in the English Civil War, 1642–1646’, *War & Society*, 1 (1986), 1–11; S. Osborne, ‘The War, The People and the Absence of Clubmen in the Midlands, 1642–1646’, in *The English Civil War: The Essential Readings*, ed. by P. Gaunt (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd., 2000), pp. 226–48; I. Atherton, ‘Royalist Finances in the English Civil War: The Case of Lichfield Garrison, 1643–5’, *Midland History*, 33.1 (2008), 43–67.

¹²Hopper, ‘Garrison Warfare’, 107–8; W. Willis-Bund, *The Civil War in Worcestershire, 1642–1646; And the Scotch Invasion of 1651* (Birmingham and London: Midland Educational & Simpkin Marshall, 1905), p. 121.

¹³Hutton, p. 134; M. Atkin, *The Civil War in Worcestershire* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995), p. 69; M. Atkin, *Worcestershire Under Arms: An English County During the Civil Wars* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004), p. 68.

¹⁴R. E. Sherwood, *Civil Strife in the Midlands 1642–1651* (London: Phillimore & Co., 1974), p. 127. Sherwood echoed Willis-Bund in length and narrative but misdated these events to 1643.

¹⁵A. H. Burne and P. Young, *The Great Civil War: A Military History of the First Civil War 1642–1646* (Moreton-in-Marsh: Windrush Press, 1998), pp. xi–xii.

involving the short-held occupation and capture of local strongholds, observed: ‘Thus our present wars are likely to be prolonged, by this vicissitude and gaining and losing’.¹⁶

‘Tinker’ Fox and the Edgbaston Garrison

John Fox became a parliamentary officer under the leadership of Robert Greville, Second Baron Brooke. In 1642, Brooke as Warwickshire’s lord lieutenant was the driving force of the parliamentary cause in the county. In recognition of his activism, on 31 December parliament appointed Brooke commander-in-chief of parliamentary forces in Warwickshire and Staffordshire in expectation that under his leadership they would ‘associate themselves, and mutually aid, succour, and assist one another’ in co-ordinated action.¹⁷ Historians have termed this regional command geographically as the West Midland Association, although to contemporaries these were the ‘associated counties’, or simply ‘the Association’. Fox was commissioned as a captain of a troop of Horse (cavalry) in the Association around the time Brooke took command. Fox’s troop may have been serving with the associated Warwickshire and Staffordshire forces at Lichfield when Brooke was killed on 2 March 1643 while directing siege operations against the Royalist-held cathedral close.¹⁸ Denied Brooke’s energetic leadership, the Staffordshire and Warwickshire parliamentarians forsook the military cooperation intended by the Association and instead looked inwardly to their own defence. Shropshire was by then also attached to the Association, but the county was under royalist control since the previous autumn and its belligerent parliamentarians were a diaspora.¹⁹

After the three-month hiatus in leadership of the Association, on 12 June parliament appointed the Warwickshire peer Basil Fielding, Second Earl of Denbigh, as general in command, and added royalist-controlled Worcestershire to his territorial responsibilities. Denbigh was a moderate parliamentarian of royalist-aligned parentage, and his command began inauspiciously in late August 1643, when, after leaving London for the West Midland theatre with a cadre force, he was summarily recalled after rumours spread questioning his loyalty. It was not until November that Denbigh, with his fidelity to the parliamentary cause acknowledged at Westminster and by parliament’s commander-in-chief the Earl of Essex, finally established his headquarters at Coventry. There he became entrenched in a pre-existing quarrel with the late Lord Brooke’s associates dominating the parliamentary county committee for Warwickshire. What had begun as a dispute over military finances deepened when the committee challenged Denbigh’s authority to deploy the Warwickshire forces across Association territory.²⁰ This was because in October, during his prolonged absence, the committee attempted to disband Denbigh’s advance guard from London, reasoning they could not afford to

¹⁶BL, E.40(10), TT, *The Military Scribe*, 26 March–2 April 1644, 47.

¹⁷C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660*, Vol. I (London: HMSO, 1911), pp. 53–5.

¹⁸Hopper, ‘Garrison Warfare’, 100; A. Hughes, ‘Greville, Robert, second Baron Brooke of Beauchamps Court (1607–1643), Parliamentarian army officer and religious writer’, in *ODNB* (2004) < <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11518> > [accessed 14 May 2021].

¹⁹A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620–1660* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 181–2; J. Worton, *To Settle the Crown: Waging Civil War in Shropshire, 1642–1648* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2016), pp. 85–6, 95.

²⁰Hughes, pp. 221–5, *passim*; Worton, pp. 95, 149–50.

pay them.²¹ From Coventry on 1 December 1643, Denbigh wrote to Westminster complaining of being ‘hindered from carrying the forces of this county to the relief of our friends’, meaning the Shropshire parliamentarians then holding out in their isolated county stronghold at Wem.²²

Under Denbigh’s unremarkable generalship, the West Midland Association never functioned as a unified regional command. His final military operations in Shropshire and briefly into southern Cheshire were in July 1644, after which he made what turned out to be a permanent return to London, ostensibly to pursue his grievances against Association committeemen he believed had hamstrung his war effort. This was particularly disadvantageous to John Fox. His semi-independent Edgbaston garrison was outside the administrative organization of both the Warwickshire and Staffordshire parliamentary county committees. Fox therefore would have benefitted from financial and logistical centralization of the Association, but Denbigh never achieved this. Denbigh’s operational decisions were also often disputed. These factors contributed to Fox’s military misfortune in south Staffordshire in March 1644.

On 3 April 1643, Prince Rupert’s field army stormed parliamentarian-held Birmingham. Warwickshire, Staffordshire and East Midland royalists had already defeated Lord Brooke’s field force, taken under the command of the Derbyshire parliamentary leader Sir John Gell, with Cheshire allies in battle at Hopton Heath, near Stafford, on 19 March. This cleared the way for Rupert during April to regain and garrison Lichfield. These royalist successes were counter-balanced in mid-May when the allied Staffordshire and Cheshire parliamentarians took Stafford from the royalists by surprise. It became the headquarters of the county committee garrisoned in opposition to the main royalist bases within Staffordshire, at Lichfield and Dudley.²³

Beyond the hinterland of Colonel Thomas Leveson’s hilltop fastness at Dudley Castle (Dudley was then an enclave of Worcestershire inside Staffordshire), during summer 1643, southern Staffordshire, northern Worcestershire, the outlier of Shropshire at Halesowen along with the Birmingham district, in north-west Warwickshire, formed a no-man’s land unoccupied by garrisons of either side. It was into this still to be contested part of the West Midlands that in the autumn Captain Fox established his base at Edgbaston, in the first attempt to site a permanent parliamentary military presence in the area since Prince Rupert had swept through Birmingham in April.

Hopper’s dating of Fox’s occupation of Edgbaston House to October 1643 concurs with the first mention of the garrison in the London press.²⁴ In mid-December, *Certain Informations from Severall Parts of the Kingdom* reported: ‘Out of Warwickshire it is informed, that near Edgbaston within a mile of Birmingham in that county’, at ‘the house of one Master Middlemore, a great Papist, whose estate is estimated to be worth about six thousand pounds per annum, Captain Fox [was] keeping a garrison in the said house for king and parliament, about a month since’.²⁵ In seizing Robert Middlemore’s manor house Fox seems to have acted on his own

²¹Worton, p. 150.

²²Bodleian Library (BodL), Tanner Mss 62, The Clerk of Parliament’s Papers, f. 402, Denbigh to ‘Mr More’ (probably the Shropshire parliamentarian and MP for Bishop’s Castle Sir Richard More).

²³Sherwood, pp. 58–62, *passim*, 67; Hutton, pp. 46–7, 62; M. Bennett, ‘Henry Hastings and the Flying Army of Ashby de la Zouch’, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 56 (1980–81), 64.

²⁴Hopper, ‘Garrison Warfare’, 101–2.

²⁵BL, E.79(8), TT, *Certain Informations*, 18 December 1643, 379.

initiative: in June 1644 parliament commended him for having done so ‘with great courage’.²⁶ According to *Mercurius Aulicus*, Fox with his weakened troop of Horse, reduced to 16 cavalrymen from 40 in July 1643, marched the eleven miles southward from Walsall and occupied Middlemore’s mansion unopposed. Given his later reputation for scouting, Fox would have acted on timely intelligence and in the knowledge of local support from Birmingham. Hopper has shown that Fox recruited from the Birmingham area, and therefore the mention in *Mercurius Aulicus* that by February 1644 the Edgbaston garrison was ‘swollen up to 200’ can be accepted at face value.²⁷

Having made Middlemore’s manor house defensible, including by rendering the adjacent church of St Bartholomew unusable as a position for an attacking force by partial demolition and salvaging materials to build makeshift fortifications, Fox’s garrison made its presence felt in the surrounding region.²⁸ The hostile *Mercurius Aulicus* reported that they did so by robbing and pillaging ‘very sufficiently’.²⁹ Around 10 December, Fox raided 10 miles north-west into Colonel Leveson’s backyard at Dudley while the strength of the garrison was deployed elsewhere. Fox’s men sprung 26 parliamentary captives from the lightly guarded St Edmund’s church at the foot of Castle Hill, seized some of the royalists’ horses, and withdrew unopposed.³⁰ By January 1644 the Edgbaston parliamentarians had engaged another royalist garrison in Staffordshire, skirmishing with Colonel Lane’s troopers from Rushall Hall near Walsall, a manor house north-east of Fox’s hometown, taking two prisoners.³¹ It can be assumed, given their proximity to the action, that from 25 to 27 December 1643 Fox’s men joined in the successful assault against the royalist garrison recently established nearby in Sir Thomas Holt’s mansion at Aston near Birmingham, although the parliamentary press billed it as an independent operation by an 800-strong body of Horse and Foot with artillery support from the Warwickshire county forces commanded by the soldier-committeeman Colonel Godfrey Bosseville.³²

Tactics of Garrison Warfare

Those royalists briefly occupying Aston Hall were a detachment from Leveson’s garrison at Dudley 10 miles eastward, sent there on or around 18 December to hold it as an outpost nearer to parliamentary-aligned Birmingham.³³ In late October or early

²⁶W. D. Hamilton, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, 1644* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood for HMSO, 1888), p. 222.

²⁷BL, E.37(1), TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 24 February 1644, 839; Hopper, ‘Garrison Warfare’, 100, 102–3.

²⁸The Royalist cavalryman Richard Symonds noted in his campaign journal for 1645 that at Edgbaston ‘the rogue Fox pulled down the church to make the works’ (i.e. fortifications). C. E. Long, ed., *Diary of The Marches of the Royal Army During the Great Civil War kept by Richard Symonds* (London: The Camden Society, 1859), p. 190.

²⁹BL, E.37(1), TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 24 February 1644, 839.

³⁰F. Bickley, ed., *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on the Manuscripts of the late Reginald Rawdon Hastings, Esq. of the Manor House, Ashby de la Zouch*, Vol. II (London: HMSO, 1928), p. 134.

³¹D. H. Pennington and I. A. Roots, eds., *The Committee at Stafford, 1643–1645* (Manchester: Staffordshire Record Society, 1957), p. 40.

³²BL, E.252(14), TT, *A Perfect Diurnall of Some Passages in Parliament*, 1 January 1644, 186–7; BL, E.81(14), TT, *The Weekly Account of Certain Special and Remarkable Passages from Both Houses of Parliament and Other Parts of the Kingdom*, 3–10 January 1644, 3.

³³W. Hamper, ed., *The Life, Diary and Correspondence of Sir William Dugdale, Knight* (London: Harding, Lepard & Co., 1827), p. 57.

November, Leveson had similarly gained an outpost garrison 15 miles north-westward of Dudley, when detachments of Leveson's Horse and Dragoons (mounted infantry) took by surprise the 110 parliamentarians occupying Chillington Hall near Wolverhampton.³⁴ Chillington was in turn the jumping-off point on the night of 21/22 December for an attack by Leveson's men upon Lapley House just three miles northward. According to the sole, royalist, report of the action, the 82 parliamentarians at Lapley, occupying All Saints Church and the adjacent surviving priory house and walled enclosure of the medieval Benedictine priory, were quickly overrun and surrendered. Strengthened by reinforcements from Dudley, Lapley became a royalist garrison.³⁵

At the end of December 1643 Colonel Bosseville's taskforce capitalized on its success at Aston Hall with a foray into north-east Worcestershire, capturing, looting and then probably burning the Roman-Catholic William Sheldon's manor house at Beoley, reportedly 'a strong hold in the edge of Warwickshire', garrisoned by royalists.³⁶ This and those actions at Lapley, Chillington, Aston, and Dudley, and at Stourton to follow, were typical engagements of the inter-garrison warfare of the 1642–6 Civil War.³⁷ In addition to counteracting enemy field armies, occupying territory was a strategic preoccupation of both sides. This required the siting and fortification of numerous garrisoned strongpoints. This proliferation of places and individual buildings, including market towns, manor houses, castles, and even parish churches, in which troops were stationed, sometimes on a more, sometimes on a less permanent basis, shaped the course of the fighting. While new garrisons were sited amid the fluctuating military front lines, the imperative to secure territorial gains coupled to the fluidity of the fighting caused established garrisons to remain occupied. Across Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire in early summer 1645, for instance, there were reportedly 29 parliamentarian and 17 royalist garrisons.³⁸ These ranged in size and strategic importance, from garrisoned county towns, for example parliamentarian Warwick, to manor houses held to control particular localities, such as royalist Longford House near Newport in east Shropshire. Large numbers of soldiers were assigned to garrison duty.³⁹ While the resultant effect of garrisoning may have been to limit the scope for achieving decision on the battlefield, garrisons provided reserves to reinforce or to form field armies and taskforces. Garrisons also pinned

³⁴BL, E.77(33), TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 25 November 1643, 670–1.

³⁵BL, E.81(19), TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 30 December 1643, 741.

³⁶Quotation from BL, E.81(3), TT, *The Scottish Dove, Sent out and Returning*, 29 December–5 January 1644, 95; TT, *Perfect Diurnall*, p. 187; Hamper, *Dugdale*, p. 57; 'Parishes: Beoley', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 4*, ed. by W. Page and J. W. Willis-Bund (London: Victoria County History, 1924), pp. 12–19, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol4/pp12-19>> [accessed 29 December 2020].

³⁷For commentaries on English Civil War garrison warfare, see for example: R. Hutton and W. Reeves, 'Sieges and Fortifications', in *The Civil Wars A Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland 1638–1660*, ed. by J. Kenyon and J. Ohlmeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 198–233; P. Gaunt, *The English Civil War: A Military History* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2014), pp. 102–4; Hutton, pp. 100–4; P. Harrington, 'Siegefields: An Archaeological Assessment of Small Sieges of the British Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 1.1 (2005), 93–113; C. Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars 1638–1651* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 150–4.

³⁸As recorded in Symonds's *Diary*, pp. 167, 172–3, 176, 178, 190–1.

³⁹Charles Carlton estimated that at the time of the campaign leading to the decisive Battle of Naseby, by June 1645, 48% of Royalist soldiers were on garrison duty. Carlton, p. 150. Parliamentary numbers were probably similar.

down and threatened similar numbers of enemy soldiers occupying opposing strongholds.⁴⁰

Attacks against fortified places have been categorized as the characteristic military engagement of the Civil Wars across the British Isles.⁴¹ A compelling argument can also be made that actions to relieve or prevent the relief of a stronghold were equally influential. Indeed, some key battles occurred in this way. The First Battle of Newbury, 20 September 1643, resulted from the Earl of Essex's successful campaign to relieve the endangered parliamentarian garrison of Gloucester. Prince Rupert's breaking on 21 March 1644 of the parliamentarian encirclement of Newark relieved a garrison of equal regional importance to the Midlands royalists as Gloucester was to parliament in the West. Rupert's defeat, in one of the war's decisive battles, at Marston Moor on 2 July 1644, was against allied Scots and parliamentarian armies the day before he had out-manoeuvred and forced to abandon their siege of royalist-held York. These are three examples of campaigns conducted at strategic level for the possession of garrisons. The smaller-scale contestation of Stourton Castle in March 1644 was undertaken for similar reasons at a local operational level.

The advantages to the belligerents of controlling by garrisoning key regional urban centres like Gloucester, Newark and York were self-apparent. Smaller garrisons such as those in the West Midlands were sited according to local opportunities, as much as for any higher appreciation of strategic advancement. For instance, both Captain Fox and Colonel Leveson at Edgbaston and Aston, respectively, seem to have acted to pre-empt the enemy by occupying advantageous positions. Similarly, in December 1643 the parliamentarian committeemen at Stafford sent a cavalry detachment to secure the Shropshire-based royalist Sir Richard Leveson's Staffordshire house at Trentham, in order 'to prevent the enemy from making a garrison there'.⁴² Garrisons, depending on their size, exerted control over their hinterlands, particularly by the reach of their horsemen, and harassed enemy forces. Indeed, garrisons were often closely positioned to counter the activity of opposing strongpoints. In December 1643, this sort of escalation in the West Country was seen by a parliamentarian correspondent to have resulted from the arrival of royalist reinforcements from Ireland:

Into Gloucestershire, where they possess themselves of all the strongest holds, towns, and houses, and fortify them; so cautious [i.e. careful] is the enemy to take all advantages of ground, and to provide fresh quarters continually near our garrisons, which should animate the parliament's soldiers to be politic the other way, and to grow as much upon the enemy's quarters as near their garrisons may be.⁴³

Such proximity fomented an inter-garrison warfare of usually small engagements. Typically involving low hundreds or sometimes just tens of soldiers, these actions were fought as skirmishes between patrols, opportunistic attacks upon supply convoys and marching detachments, including 'beating up' enemies in their billets, and more concerted attacks, including sieges, mounted against enemy strongholds. Given the intensity of the fighting, some strongpoints frequently changed hands. In Shropshire, for example, Moreton Corbet Castle, strategically situated between the garrison towns of Shrewsbury and Wem, held by royalists and parliamentarians, respectively, as their

⁴⁰Hutton and Reeves, p. 198.

⁴¹Ibid, p. 195.

⁴²Pennington and Roots, *Committee at Stafford*, p. 12.

⁴³BL, E.79(18), TT, *Mercurius Civicus, or London's Intelligencer*, pp. 21–28 December 1643, 346.

county headquarters, was occupied twice by both sides during 1644.⁴⁴ In Staffordshire, Chillington Hall was first held by royalists, but they surrendered to allied Cheshire and Staffordshire parliamentarians in August 1643 after a two-day siege. As mentioned previously, Chillington and the neighbouring garrison at Lapley were regained by royalists from the Dudley garrison in December 1643. However, by June 1644 they were back in parliamentary hands, when the committeemen at Stafford decided both outposts should be abandoned and ‘demolished and made unfit for the like service hereafter’.⁴⁵

Garrisons could secure their own sides and endanger enemy lines of supply and communication. They were staging posts for friendly forces and couriers and served as intelligence-gathering hubs. Fox’s scouts, or informants, for example, reporting to Edgbaston House in mid-March 1644, not only commented on the size and condition of Prince Rupert’s army then marching eastward through south Staffordshire but also accurately revealed that ‘they are bound for Newark’.⁴⁶ Outlying satellite garrisons were positioned to shield key strongholds against enemy incursion. Great Chalfield manor house in Wiltshire, for example, a parliamentary garrison from October 1644, was, in the words of its tax collector a ‘naked [unfortified] house and made a frontier garrison to Malmesbury and Gloucester, and was environed about by five of the King’s garrisons, some within two miles, the farthest but six miles from it’.⁴⁷ If an opposing field army advanced into a territory, garrisons provided a refuge and rallying point and, unless neutralized, perhaps requiring lengthy siege operations, restricted enemy exploitation of newly gained ground. The force-multiplying effect of inserting a garrison into opposing or hitherto undisputed territory was an effective stratagem to destabilize the enemy and put them on the back foot. Garrisons were especially active in securing revenues and provisions while denying those resources to the enemy. So, garrisons were intended to be largely self-supporting, paid and supplied by monetary taxation and produce in kind from the local populace. The tax collector William Tarrant, for example, received ‘contributions’ from 32 villages and townships to sustain the Great Chalfield garrison. In lieu of cash, ‘the country [people] had liberty to pay their contribution in victual, hay, oats or might work it out at the fortifications’.⁴⁸ Sequestration of enemy assets was another source of garrison revenue. The reported chance discovery of Robert Middlemore’s estate records – the ‘bonds and evidences for his lands enclosed’⁴⁹ – by one of Captain Fox’s soldiers, enabled him to sequester the rental of Middlemore’s tenants for the upkeep of the Edgbaston garrison, although it was not until June 1644 that Fox gained parliament’s authorization for the levies he had unilaterally imposed for the previous eight months.⁵⁰ In exchange for their cash, labour, and supplies, civilians received dubious commitments from garrisons to protect them from similar demands

⁴⁴Worton, p. 150.

⁴⁵J. Hall, ed., ‘Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties by Thomas Malbon of Nantwich, Gent.’, *The Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, XIX (Cheshire: The Record Society, 1889), p. 71; Pennington and Roots, *Committee at Stafford*, pp. 128–9.

⁴⁶WRO, C2017/C9/64, Fox to Denbigh, 18 March 1644.

⁴⁷J. H. P. Pafford, ed., *Accounts of the Parliamentary Garrisons of Great Chalfield and Malmesbury, 1645–1646* (Devizes: Wiltshire Historical and Natural History Society, Records Branch, Vol. II, 1940), p. 45.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 45–7.

⁴⁹TT, *Certain Informations*, 379.

⁵⁰Hamilton, *State Papers, 1644*, p. 222.

made by the enemy. In March 1644, the reasons why Stourton Castle was garrisoned and contested were a combination of the above factors.

The Stourton Castle Campaign

The royalist diarist William Dugdale and Colonel John Fox, reporting to the Earl of Denbigh, recorded that parliamentarians occupied Stourton Castle during the night of 21/22 March intending to garrison the place. While the operation was under Fox's overall direction, his brother Reingold led the 200-strong force sent from Edgbaston.⁵¹ According to Dugdale, they simply 'entered' the castle; and the parliamentarians seem to have been unopposed. In a regional situation report to Prince Rupert written at Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, early on probably 25 March, Henry Hastings, Baron Loughborough, commanding royalist forces in the East Midlands, mentioned that 'Fox and some of his fellow rebels have put a garrison into Stourton Castle upon the edge of Staffordshire next Worcestershire', without suggesting royalists were expelled.⁵² Neither did Sir Lewis Kirke, recently appointed by Rupert to the governorship of the royalist garrison town of Bridgnorth in east Shropshire, in a dispatch to the Prince written on 25 March mention any fighting at Stourton. The castle was only 12 miles south-east of Bridgnorth, so had it been royalist held, Kirke would surely have mentioned it. Kirke laconically noted that Stourton Castle was 'the dwelling of one Whorwood, a disaffected person'.⁵³ This was John Whorwood, whose forebears had been granted the manors at Kinver of Stourton and adjacent Compton by King Henry VIII. The royalists seem to have rightly suspected Whorwood's loyalties. He joined in the postwar parliamentary and later commonwealth administration of south Staffordshire, sitting as a JP by 1647 and into the 1650s and as such also as a commissioner for the army assessment tax in 1649. Whorwood's other, and probably principal, residence was at Dunsley Hall, near Kinver, but whether he was at Stourton when the parliamentary soldiers arrived remains unknown.⁵⁴ These circumstances suited John Fox as a military opportunist acting on reliable intelligence, in the knowledge of Whorwood's allegiance and that Stourton Castle was unoccupied by the enemy.⁵⁵

At Edgbaston House on 24 March, Fox penned the Earl of Denbigh 'a more perfect account of Stourton Castle than formerly'. The officers left in command liked the position 'very well for situation and strength it lying near the roads that leads from Worcester to Bridgnorth and from Worcester to Dudley and in the midst of the enemy's quarters'. Fox envisaged that the royalists 'apprehend themselves undone if this garrison be not prevented'.⁵⁶ Unexpected by the enemy, the parliamentarians had at Stourton established a foothold in a salient of hitherto uncontested territory bordered

⁵¹Hamper, *Dugdale*, pp. 63–4; WRO, C2017/C9/70, Fox to Denbigh, 24 March 1644.

⁵²WSL, SMS 550/4, Prince Rupert's Papers.

⁵³BL, Additional Manuscripts 18981, Prince Rupert's Papers, f. 103.

⁵⁴M. W. Greenslade, ed., *A History of the County of Stafford, Vol. XX, Seisdon Hundred (Part)*. (London: Victoria County History/Oxford University Press for the Institute of Historical Research, 1984), pp. 130–1; S. Erdeswick. *A Survey of Staffordshire, containing the Antiquity of that County* (Westminster: Nichols & Son, 1844), pp. xv, xix; W. Hackwood, *A History of West Bromwich* (Birmingham: Birmingham News & Printing Co., 1895), p. 56.

⁵⁵Hopper, 'Garrison Warfare', p. 107.

⁵⁶WRO, C2017/C9/70.

by four royalist strongholds within a 12-mile radius: Dudley Castle to the north-east, Bridgnorth westward, and Hartlebury Castle and Bewdley southward in Worcestershire. The largest royalist garrison in the immediate region was Worcester, only 22 miles away (Figure 1). Sir Lewis Kirke warned Prince Rupert that Stourton Castle in parliamentary hands would be ‘a great hindrance to the intercourse [from and into Shropshire] with Worcester on the east side Severn’.⁵⁷ However, whilst the enemy’s seizure of Stourton Castle had alarmed the royalists and endangered their lines of communication, within the salient the parliamentary outpost was isolated and vulnerable to counter-attack.

Stourton Castle lies within what in the seventeenth century was the southern extremity of Seisdon Hundred in the far south-west corner of Staffordshire, bordering Shropshire and Worcestershire.⁵⁸ It stands on rising ground in the broad shallow valley of the River Stour:

On a commanding eminence to the west of the river stands the ancient castle’, as it was described in 1832, ‘overlooking a verdant vale beneath [...] nor is the opposite acclivity on the left [meaning east] bank of the river deficient in picturesque effect.’⁵⁹

The ‘ancient castle’ originated in the 1190s as a royal hunting lodge, and while there was rebuilding of its timber buildings and perimeter defences in stone, as a country retreat it lacked strongly defensive architecture. During the sixteenth century, it was rebuilt as a compact rectangular arrangement of brick-built accommodation and service ranges enclosing a small square courtyard, and incorporating a medieval masonry entrance gate-tower on the west side.⁶⁰ Stourton therefore was architecturally similar to many ‘sixteenth-century mansions built with more or less symmetry around square courts, embellished with gatehouse towers and corner towers, but from a military point of view, not meant for serious business’.⁶¹ Nonetheless, its ‘strength’ to the parliamentary officers in 1644 was the sum of bulletproof walls, advantageous firing positions, and barrack and stabling and storage accommodation. Eastward the River Stour was a defensive obstacle close above which the castle stood on its ‘commanding eminence’, a steeply scarped outcrop, terraced and perhaps surmounted by a low perimeter wall. However, higher ground to the west overlooked the castle, and its Tudor brickwork fabric and fenestration was vulnerable to artillery fire. It was standard practice for garrisons to strengthen existing buildings with earth and timber-work defences, to guard any weak points or to completely enclose with circuits of ditches, ramparts and palisades. However, it seems unlikely that the Stourton parliamentarians would have had time to effectively complete any such outworks.⁶²

Willis Bund opined that Fox was ‘instrumental in carrying out Lord Denbigh’s policy of establishing new garrisons’.⁶³ While there is no firm evidence Denbigh pursued that strategic aim, it seems that at the turn of November 1643, uncooperative Warwickshire

⁵⁷BL, Additional Manuscripts 18981, f. 103.

⁵⁸See the map of Staffordshire in John Speed’s *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (London: John Sudbury, 1611), Book I, Chap. 36, unpaginated.

⁵⁹W. Scott, *Stourbridge and its Vicinity* (Stourbridge: J. Heming, 1832), p. 134.

⁶⁰Staffordshire Historic Environment Record, ‘Stourton Castle, Stourton, Kinver’, <<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>> [accessed 28 December 2020]; *History of the County of Stafford*, pp. 130–2.

⁶¹M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 71.

⁶²Harrington, p. 97; Hutton and Reeves, p. 213.

⁶³Willis-Bund, *Worcestershire*, p. 121.

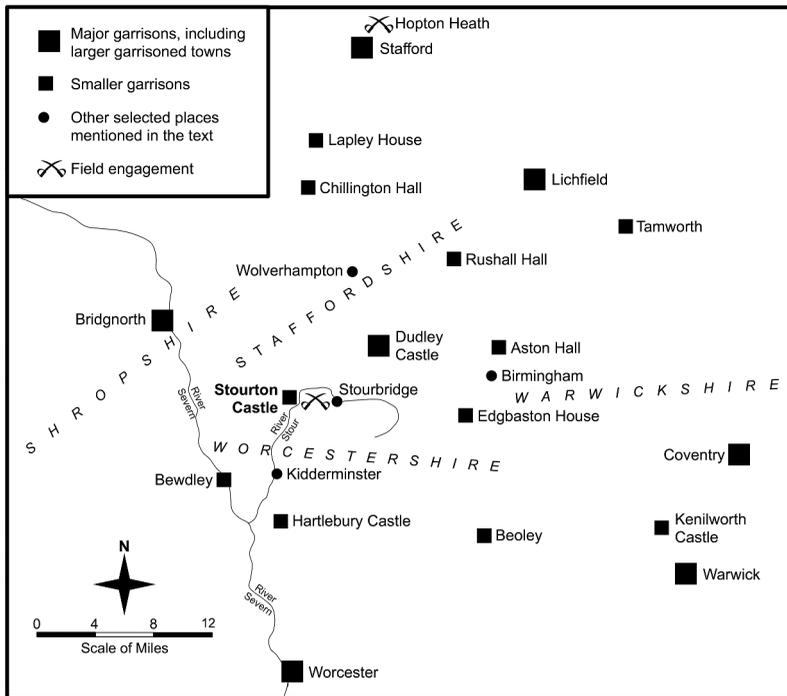


Figure 1. Map of the region of the military activity during 1643–44 under discussion. (Author's own).

officers forestalled Denbigh's plan to enter Worcestershire to pre-empt royalist occupation of Hartlebury Castle.⁶⁴ That Stourton Castle had previously been considered as an objective may be inferred by Fox writing to brief Denbigh more fully 'than formerly' once it was taken. If Fox felt confident of his superior's backing to seize Stourton Castle, he also had the immediately pressing motive of diverting the actions of fellow parliamentarians who recently had jeopardized the maintenance of the Edgbaston garrison. On 15 March, Fox wrote to Denbigh angrily complaining that officers of the Earl's units recently posted to the Warwickshire/Worcestershire border in the vicinity of Edgbaston had seized provisions and horses, issued warrants to levy cash in Denbigh's name, and had looted certain households, in 'places as are obedient to my impositions and are promised protection from me'.⁶⁵ Officers disrupting Fox's protection racket and contributions to the Edgbaston Garrison included the company commanders Captains Robert Tuthill and Roger Fenwick of the Earl of Denbigh's own Regiment of Foot (infantry). It was therefore no coincidence that Tuthill's and Fenwick's men formed the infantry component of the Stourton garrison.⁶⁶ Having helped settle them there, Fox could restore the status quo of funding and provisioning his Edgbaston garrison.

⁶⁴BodL, Tanner Mss 62, f. 454, Denbigh to the Warwickshire county committee, 15 December 1643.

⁶⁵WRO, C2017/C9/58.

⁶⁶Both officers are mentioned in the Commonwealth Exchequer Papers at The National Archives (TNA), Kew: for Fenwick, SP28/131 Part 12, f. 15a, SP28/242 Part 3, f. 442; for Tuthill, SP28/131 Part 12, f. 15a, SP28/131 Part 12, ff. 11, 13. Fox mentions Fenwick's men in action at Stourton on 23 March, in WRO, C2017/C9/70, while Tuthill was at Edgbaston on the 18th. WRO, C2017/C9/64.

Meanwhile, the Stourton parliamentarians could exact their own contributions further into enemy territory. Communities in north Worcestershire in reach from Stourton included the towns of Stourbridge and Kidderminster, and the villages and townships of Oldswinford, Hagley, Belbroughton, Pedmore, Churchill, Chaddesley Corbett and Lutley, which were already contributing towards the £4,000 monthly county levy imposed by the royalists.⁶⁷

Tax collection and enforcement was undertaken by the horsemen, cavalry or Dragoons, who were also a garrison's strike force and scouts. As Robinson has indicated, the routine activities of a garrison to command its hinterland could not be undertaken without a mounted unit.⁶⁸ At Stourton this would be the attached troop of Horse commanded by Captain Humphrey Tudman, Fox's brother-in-law. Fox had recently received a colonelcy from the Earl of Denbigh to recruit and command a mounted regiment, already partly formed by the Edgbaston garrison, and Tudman's was one of its six troops of Horse and two of Dragoons. The Stourton garrison, comprising Tudman's Horse, and Tuthill's and Fenwick's Foot, perhaps numbered 140 officers and men at most, with Tuthill, probably the senior captain, in overall command.⁶⁹

It was not long before Tuthill's garrison encountered the enemy. The first clash occurred during the morning of Saturday 23 March, when a three-man scouting party sent to reconnoitre Sir Edward Sebright's mansion at Prestwood, two miles north-east of Stourton, fired upon passing royalists. They were the outriders, or picquet, of a convoy escort making the return journey to Worcester from Dudley Castle, having delivered to Leveson's garrison munitions including 20 barrels (20 hundredweight) of gunpowder and a supply of match cord.⁷⁰ Prince Rupert personally had ordered these supplies from the magazine at Oxford, and the consignment had been sent via Evesham to Worcester by direction of the Master-General of the Ordnance (artillery) Sir Henry Percy.⁷¹ Skirmishing intensified when some of the Stourton garrison, alerted by one of the scouts who had swum the River Stour, sallied out and rescued the other two members of the patrol. The parliamentarians fell back to the castle as the royalist main body, commanded by Major Harvey of Sir William Russell's Worcestershire Regiment of Foot, approached, numbering according to *Mercurius Aulicus* 110 Horse and Foot whereas the parliamentarians reckoned the enemy numbered 200 altogether. Tuthill summarily rejected Harvey's summons to surrender the castle, and after further desultory exchanges of fire the royalists withdrew at nightfall, probably remaining in the area and having reported back to Worcester.⁷²

⁶⁷J. W. Willis-Bund, ed., *The Diary of Henry Townshend of Elmley Lovett, 1640–1663, in 3 Volumes*, Vol. II (London: Worcester Historical Society, 1920), p. 113.

⁶⁸G. Robinson, *Horses, People and Parliament in the English Civil War: Extracting Resources and Constructing Allegiance* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), p. 5.

⁶⁹Hopper, 'Garrison Warfare', p. 102; TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 30 March 1644, confirms on 907 that Tuthill was in command, and on 908 Tudman's presence – 'Colonel Tinker's brother-in-law'.

⁷⁰Match, supplied in coiled bundles, was a slow-burning cord fuse consumed in great amounts by Civil War armies as the means of igniting the charge in a matchlock musket, the standard-issue infantry firearm.

⁷¹W. A. Day, ed., *The Pythouse Papers: Correspondence Concerning the Civil War, the Popish Plot and a Contested Election in 1680* (London: Bickers & Son, 1879), pp. 61–2, Percy's letters from Oxford to Prince Rupert, 21 and 28 March 1644; WSL, SMS 537, Prince Rupert's Papers, letter Henry Jermyn, Oxford, to Prince Rupert, 16 March 1644.

⁷²WRO, C2017/C9/70; TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 30 March 1644, 907.

The purpose of Fox's second-hand reporting from Edgbaston early next day relating the action to Denbigh was urgently to solicit reinforcements and supplies to be sent to Stourton; 'to keep that garrison strong which stands fit to annoy the enemy'.⁷³ On 23 March, however, Denbigh was preparing to leave Coventry next morning with a body of Horse and Dragoons. He marched to Leicester in support of the East Midlands parliamentarians, who were fearful of where Prince Rupert would strike next after having dramatically relieved Newark and inflicted a defeat on the besieging parliamentarian army on the 21st. When Fox's dispatch reached Coventry later on the 24th Denbigh was gone. He did not return there until 2 April, on the same day that Prince Rupert was near Wolverhampton heading back to his headquarters at Shrewsbury.⁷⁴ Rupert had limited his operations in the East Midlands to the relief of Newark, but on 26 March the parliamentary committee at Nottingham, convinced the Prince would assault Nottingham next day, urgently requested Denbigh's help. Believing the royalists had as many as 10,000 men deployed in the East Midlands, Denbigh wrote from Leicester urging the Committee of Both Kingdoms, the newly formed London-based war cabinet of the Scots-parliamentary alliance, to organize reinforcements. Denbigh's actions were also hampered by the disorderly and disobedient behaviour of the main body of Horse ostensibly under his command.⁷⁵ With few reliable troops, and preoccupied with the military situation in the East Midlands, Denbigh was unable to intervene in the unexpected side-show at Stourton.

Fox's dispatch on 24 March was instead opened at Coventry by Humphrey Mackworth. He was a Shropshire lawyer, and by 1644 an army officer and a leading member of the parliamentary county committee for Shropshire. When royalists took over Shropshire in 1642 Mackworth had taken refuge in Coventry, where he associated with the Warwickshire county committee.⁷⁶ While at Coventry, he also undertook administrative and logistical duties, including receiving arms consignments Denbigh had sent from London.⁷⁷ Mackworth, then, was an influential figure in the Association, and although he grew increasingly critical of Denbigh's military leadership, at this time he was trusted by the Earl to be party to his correspondence. In the annotations, he made to Fox's dispatch before it was sent after the Earl to Leicester, Mackworth wrote that the Warwickshire committee 'would afford some assistance if needs be'. Further reading between the lines suggests he instigated hurried arrangements to send some military supplies and reinforcements to Edgbaston in aid of the Stourton garrison.

Their sudden encroachment on royalist territory and lines of communication, as the skirmish on 23 March had quickly demonstrated, would have to be contested. Consequently, over the next three days royalist units converged on Stourton Castle intending, in Sir Lewis Kirke's phrase, 'to endeavour the recovery of it'.⁷⁸ Detachments from Worcestershire, from the garrisons of Worcester, Hartlebury Castle and Bewdley,

⁷³WRO, C2017/C9/70.

⁷⁴Hamilton, *State Papers, 1644*, pp. 67–8, 89; C. H. Firth, ed., 'The Journal of Prince Rupert's Marches, 5 September 1642 to 4 July 1646', *The English Historical Review*, 13 (1898), 735–6.

⁷⁵WRO, C2017/C9/71; W. D. Hamilton, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, 1641–1643* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood for HMSO, 1887), p. 454; where Denbigh's dispatch to London of 26 March 1644 is mis-calendared; Hamilton, *State Papers, 1644*, pp. 89–91.

⁷⁶Hughes, p. 179; P. Gaunt, 'Mackworth, Humphrey (1603–1654)', in *ODNB* (2004) < <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37716> > [accessed 1 June 2021].

⁷⁷WRO, C2017/C9/44.

⁷⁸BL, Additional Manuscripts 18,981, f. 103.

and of soldiers then billeted at Kidderminster, formed the strength of Sir Gilbert Gerard's taskforce. They were joined from Shropshire by 30 Horse and 60 musketeers sent by Kirke from Bridgnorth.⁷⁹ Because earlier in March Colonel Leveson had contributed 100 Horse and 200 Foot soldiers to Prince Rupert's field army for the relief of Newark, it seems unlikely Gerard received significant reinforcements from Dudley; however, the wounding of Sir Walter Wrottesley's son in the fighting at Stourton shows that Staffordshire royalists were present.⁸⁰ The royalist regulars may also have been joined by some reluctant militiamen hurriedly conscripted from the Kidderminster area by the zealous royalist landowner Edward Broade of Dunclent. Broade had attempted locally to enforce the traditional levy to arms of all able-bodied men aged 16 to 60 known as the 'posse comitatus'.⁸¹

The size of Gerard's force at Stourton can only be conjectured. Any note Gerard himself made of their number has not survived, and his adversary Fox in reporting the fighting on 27 March ambiguously described how 'we found their Horse something more in number [...] and their Foot as many and more than we had'.⁸² Although the Worcestershire forces had been reorganized since Gerard's arrival, royalist units in the county at the time probably included Colonel Samuel Sandy's Regiments of Horse and Foot, Sir William Russell's Regiment of Foot, and Gerard's own regiments of Horse and Foot.⁸³ At Worcester on 10 February 1644, Gerard and leading Worcestershire royalists meeting with Prince Rupert as their new regional commander-in-chief had revised the county's military establishment at 500 Horse and 2,000 Foot soldiers.⁸⁴ Gerard's force at Stourton may therefore have been 800 or more strong. In addition, and potentially decisively given the relative weakness of the castle's fabric, the royalists deployed three pieces of artillery; one each of types of cannon known in the nomenclature of the period as a Drake, a Saker, and a Demi-Cannon. While the first was primarily an anti-personnel weapon, the other pieces fired larger calibre shot capable of smashing gates and window casements and breaking brickwork.⁸⁵ While moving and supplying contemporary artillery was logistically very demanding, its psychological effect alone could intimidate a small garrison quickly to end its resistance, sometimes without a shot having been fired. In later March 1644, for instance, an 800-man royalist task-force with a single heavy cannon led from Chester by John Lord Byron picked off parliamentary outposts in the Flintshire/Shropshire borderland. 'We lost not one man in taking of both houses', wrote one of Byron's officers, after the defenders of the manor houses at Emral and Hanmer capitulated on 27 and 28 March, respectively, 'for when they saw the piece of ordnance we had they yielded both houses'. The parliamentarians occupying Bettisfield Hall also surrendered next day when confronted by Byron's 'great piece of battery'.⁸⁶

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰*His Highness Prince Rupert's Raising the Siege at Newark upon Trent, 21 March 1643* (1644), p. 1; WSL, SMS 454/2, Letters and Papers of the Swinfen family, 1644–1724.

⁸¹Atkin, *Worcestershire Under Arms*, p. 68; Willis-Bund, *Worcestershire*, pp. 176, 204–5.

⁸²WRO, C2017/C9/73.

⁸³Atkin, *Worcestershire Under Arms*, pp. 82, 179, 182, 184–5.

⁸⁴*Henry Townshend*, p. 160.

⁸⁵Hutton and Reeves, p. 206; Fox listed the royalist cannon, in WRO, C2017/C9/73.

⁸⁶BL, Additional Manuscripts 18,981, f. 118, Byron to Prince Rupert, 30 March 1644; J. Hanmer, *A Memorial of the Parish and Family of Hanmer in Flintshire* (London: Chiswick Press, 1877), p. 71.

The same day Emral Hall fell, on Wednesday 27 March, Colonel Fox's force set out to relieve and resupply the Stourton garrison. Fox does not mention their start point, but given it is 14 miles from the Edgbaston area to Stourton he may overnight have pre-positioned his men at Stourbridge just three miles away. Fox had under command four troops of Horse and mounted Dragoons; two, his own, and his brother, Major Reignold Fox's troop, from Fox's regiment, together with the attached troops of Captain Richard Turton and Captain Hunt. Turton's troop was part of the Earl of Denbigh's Regiment of Horse, while Hunt's men, who on 17 March were based at Tamworth, seem to have been Dragoons from the Warwickshire committeeman Colonel Purefoy's mounted regiment. The strength of Fox's infantry was 110 men in two companies of Warwickshire Foot from Coventry, joined by dismounted Dragoons from Fox's regiment acting as infantry. Fox's force probably numbered upward of 400 men.⁸⁷

The parliamentarians are likely to have approached Stourton westward from Stourbridge in the direction of the present A458 road. Leaving the infantry to escort the military supplies for the garrison, presumably carried on carts or pack horses, Fox went ahead with the horsemen intending 'to give them [the royalists] alarm to encourage the castle'. Crossing the River Stour, they appear to have taken royalists in the immediate vicinity of the castle by surprise; according to Fox, they withdrew 'into a body', perhaps to some earthwork fieldworks begun to emplace and protect the artillery in preparing for a siege. Fox got within earshot of the garrison, who reported they had sufficient gunpowder for two or three days fighting only. However, once, it may be assumed, Gerard and his officers recognized that the parliamentarians were outnumbered, royalist infantry were advanced whose musketry forced Fox to withdraw back across the Stour. He re-positioned his horsemen on 'a hill in sight of the castle where we thought ourselves reasonable secure' to await the arrival of the infantry with the convoy. This feature was the 'opposite acclivity', the higher ground on the east side of the Stour valley described in 1832, in the vicinity of Dunsley bank and, until its demolition in 2001, the site of the landmark Stewponey Inn. Fox's position was within 500 yards of the castle, from the vicinity of which the royalists attacked across the Stour. Fox's horsemen seem to have been further disordered by royalist musketry, this time from infantry deployed as an advanced skirmish line in a tactic known as a 'forlorn hope'. They then made way for a charge by their Horse. A short melee ensued, in which the better-equipped royalists had the advantage. Fox acknowledged the 'strength' of the enemy cavalry, 'being the best as are lately seen'; *Mercurius Aulicus* characterized them as 'volunteers and gentlemen of quality'. A well accoutred Civil War cavalryman, known as a 'harquebusier', was protected by a steel helmet called a 'pot', and by a cuirass of breast and back plates or, and sometimes in addition to, a protective hardened leather jacket known as a buff coat, and was armed with a sword and firearms,

⁸⁷This reconstruction of the probable order of battle of Fox's force and of the course of the fighting on 27 March is based on Fox's dispatch to the Earl of Denbigh, WRO, C2017/C9/73; on the reporting in *Mercurius Aulicus* for week ending 30 March 1644, 907–8; and on an anonymous account written from Stourbridge on 30 March 1644 published in the 5 April 1644 edition of the journal *Occurrences of Certain Speciall and Remarkable Passages in Parliament, and the Affaires of the Kingdom*, BL, E.40 (26), TT. Turton is identified in WRO, CR 2017/C10/70, an undated officers' petition; Hunt, at Tamworth, in WRO, CR 2017/C9/61 and with his troop listed in WRO, CR 2017/C9/40. As to the strength of Fox's force, *Mercurius Aulicus* reported 250 Horse and Dragoons but no Foot, while the Stourbridge eyewitness reckoned 200 horsemen and 200 Foot soldiers. The latter numbers are here accepted as more probable.

a pair of pistols and/or sometimes a carbine, a shortened musket.⁸⁸ However, in June 1644, of the 281 officers and men of Fox's Regiment of Horse and Dragoons only 74 mustered as being fully equipped and mounted.⁸⁹ Three months earlier at Stourton, then, Fox's troopers as well as being outnumbered were probably also ill-equipped for close combat on horseback. Consequently, part of them, in Fox's words 'failing', broke ranks and rode 'disorderly' towards the support of their infantry, soon followed by the rest with the royalists in pursuit. The remainder of the action may be pictured as a running fight, in which the superior royalist Horse picked off stragglers and harassed the parliamentarians as they retreated more or less in a body towards Stourbridge, over the ridge at Wollaston and across the unenclosed ground of Stourbridge Heath into the town itself: a distance of about three miles as mentioned by *Mercurius Aulicus*, which described the royalists as having 'pursued the execution almost three miles'. Entering Stourbridge, Fox was able to rally his men and they seem to have had the better of the royalist Horse in the ensuing street fighting. Cavalry were ill-suited to fighting in a built-up area, and the royalists lost two horsemen killed and six, including a captain, captured. We can assume that at this point, the royalists broke off the action and withdrew from Stourbridge, leaving Fox with most of his force intact to return to Edgbaston by night-time.

Given the conflicting reports, the total number of casualties remain unknown; as an anonymous eye-witness at Stourbridge admitted: 'But how many were wounded and slain I can give you no exact account'.⁹⁰ Sir Gilbert Gerard trumpeted to Prince Rupert 'we killed 50 men upon the place', an improbable 13% of Fox's likely 400 men, but two days earlier Sir John Mennes, a senior royalist officer at Shrewsbury, reported to the Prince that Gerard had taken Stourton Castle and only eight parliamentarians were killed.⁹¹ Gerard's figures of 38 prisoners and 18 horses taken is not too dissimilar to the 30 men missing in action Fox admitted to on the night of the engagement, as well as two or three killed. There were probably few royalist fatalities: *Mercurius Aulicus* admitted to two officers killed but denied any other casualties: 'not any common soldiers as much as hurt'.

While Fox's defeat was not catastrophic, the outcome of the skirmishing on 27 March was to leave the Stourton garrison besieged with no foreseeable prospect of relief. Having seen from the castle Fox's force being driven away and facing the demoralizing prospect of an artillery bombardment, the Stourton parliamentarians decided to surrender later the same day. Their capitulation was negotiated in accordance with the contemporary consensual codes of military conduct forming customary laws of war. Laws affecting sieges allowed for increasingly harsher terms the longer a garrison resisted. But by acknowledging their hopeless situation and so avoiding further loss of life, the Stourton garrison merited generous terms. The most honourable surrender settlement allowed a garrison to depart freely, remaining fully equipped and with its colours (flags) unfurled, to a designated refuge.⁹² The provisions agreed between Sir Gilbert Gerard and Captain Tuthill, that Fox agreed were still 'honourable

⁸⁸T. Richardson and G. Rimer, *Littlecote: The English Civil War Armoury* (Leeds: Royal Armouries, 2012), pp. 2, 132–3, 269–70, 290.

⁸⁹Hopper, 'Garrison Warfare', 102.

⁹⁰TT, *Occurrences*, unpaginated.

⁹¹WSL, SMS 518/3; WSL, SMS 478/13/36, Mennes to Prince Rupert, 20 March 1644.

⁹²B. Donagan, 'Codes and Conduct in the English Civil War', *Past & Present*, 118 (1988), 78–80, 88–9.

conditions', were the next most virtuous; stipulating that the parliamentarians could leave after surrendering their weapons (the officers kept their personal arms and horses). Gerard accepted Captain Tudman's word as Fox's close relative to comply with the treaty of surrender, and the parliamentarians were allowed to march unguarded with safe passage to Edgbaston, where they arrived during the 28th.⁹³ Gerard returned to Worcester, leaving Stourton Castle garrisoned by the 60-man company of Captain Edward Ashton of Gerard's own Regiment of Foot.⁹⁴

Any later Civil War military history of Stourton Castle is beyond the scope of this article. However, the sources seem silent as to how long it remained in royalist hands, or whether parliamentarians regained control.⁹⁵

Conclusions

The five-day campaign during March 1644 in which royalist and parliamentarian forces contested Stourton Castle involved tactical actions that were characteristic of inter-garrison warfare. These included: the military occupation of an advantageously sited and sizable building complex, suitable as a defensive base and also well situated for offensive operations; skirmishing between opposing scouts and other small detachments; the encirclement of a stronghold and preparation to besiege it; an attempt by a relieving force to break a siege resulting in an open field engagement; and the negotiated capitulation of a garrison according to the accepted laws of war. The reasons why the parliamentarians sited and the royalists sought to eliminate the Stourton garrison, including to destabilize the enemy by encroaching on their territory, and to threaten their communications and resources, and acting in turn to thwart the enemy from fulfilling those objectives, followed the pattern of inter-garrison conflict elsewhere. Stourton Castle itself, as a Tudor mansion in all but name, was a typical improvised stronghold of the period, as were the garrisoned gentry houses at Edgbaston, Aston, Chillington and Beoley.

The outcome of the Stourton campaign for the parliamentarians was a regional setback in attempting to extend their garrison network in the West Midlands into an area under royalist influence. By capturing Stourton Castle the royalists strengthened their hold on those parts of south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire. By defeating the notorious 'Tinkerley Fox' the royalists also gained a propaganda coup alongside their tactical success. Colonel John Fox himself may be reconsidered as being less of a military maverick, for having acted offensively to achieve an objective of wider benefit to the parliamentarian West Midland Association. However, the brief advantage gained by the opportunistic occupation of Stourton Castle was lost when sufficient reinforcements were unavailable for the parliamentarians to beat off the besieging royalists. If Fox riskily had intended to goad his commander-in-chief into co-ordinated offensive action it failed, because at the time the Earl of Denbigh, who anyway lacked substantial and reliable forces of his own, was campaigning elsewhere. These events demonstrate that garrison warfare was more often shaped by tactical exigency than by strategic

⁹³TT, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 30 March 1644, 908; WRO, C2017/C9/74.

⁹⁴WSL, MS 454/2; Atkin, *Worcestershire Under Arms*, p. 185.

⁹⁵Stourton was unmentioned by Symonds in his listing of opposing Midland garrisons in 1645. Long, *Diary*, pp. 167–91, *passim*.

foresight. Those tactics involved reactive approaches to rapidly changing situations, and both sides displayed adaptability while contesting Stourton Castle. The campaign also demonstrated the considerable mobility of Civil War armed forces: the royalists were particularly effective in rapidly concentrating forces at Stourton. Set within the regional context of those other tactical actions across the West Midlands, the Stourton campaign is an instructive case-study of the operational conduct of English Civil War garrison warfare.

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Notes on contributor

Dr Jonathan Worton teaches History and Military History at the University of Chester's University Centre Shrewsbury campus. He has had published two military histories of the English Civil War in the West Midlands and adjacent Welsh Marches: *To Settle the Crown: Waging Civil War in Shropshire, 1642-1648* (2016), and *The Battle of Montgomery, 1644: The English Civil War in the Welsh Borderlands* (2017), both published by Helion & Company.