

Salcombe Maritime History Paper No. 5

Salcombe and the Civil War, 1642-6

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Ship Money and Irish Captives

A primary cause of the English Civil War was the controversial 'ship money' tax levied by Charles I without the consent of Parliament. In October 1634 a writ was issued to mayors and justices in West Devon requiring them to fund the provision of a ship of war of 400 tons (later named as the *Mary Rose*).¹ As a result the inhabitants of towns in the vicinity of Plymouth and Barnstaple were assessed for the payment of the tax according to their substance. Malborough and Salcombe were assessed for £156 (Plymouth's levy was £185, Modbury £169 and Aveton Gifford £105).



Sir Edmund Fortescue

(Bodleian Library, Oxford)

Another cause of the Civil War was parliamentary opposition to the King's Irish policy. In 1640 Charles started negotiations with the Irish Catholic gentry to recruit an Irish army to put down the rebellion in Scotland. Early in 1641 Parliamentarians, alarmed that such an army could be used against them, welcomed the news that a ship carrying Irish exiles from France to Ireland to join the King's army had been detained at Salcombe by Edmund Fortescue, the eldest son of John Fortescue, of Fallapit, East Allington. On 14 February the House of Commons passed a resolution thanking 'Fortescue for his 'faithful Service, in apprehending those Irish Commanders that came out of France, in a Bark, into the

Port of Salcombe, and bound for Ireland; and for causing a Stay to be made of the said Bark'. For his fidelity and diligence Fortescue was appointed as Commissioner of the Peace for the County of Devon. The ship and its goods were seized and the master, mariners and Irish commanders sent to London under strong guard.²

Salcombe: A Royalist Stronghold

At the start of the Civil War in 1642, the authorities in Devon supported Parliament but in the following year, a Royalist army under Prince Maurice invaded and occupied all of the county except Plymouth, which, in spite of a long siege, was held by Parliamentary forces throughout the war. The Navy had declared for Parliament in 1642, but its resources were stretched and Royalist frigates and privateers, operating from ports in the West, the Channel Islands and Ireland, regularly evaded Parliamentary blockades, in order to capture prizes, relieve beleaguered garrisons and carry Royalist agents and messengers across the Channel to France.



When Dartmouth fell to the Royalists in October 1643 the King instructed the Earl of Marlborough to raise a squadron of frigates there and in the following year Sir Nicholas Crisp equipped a small fleet in Cornwall.³ Sir Edmund Fortescue – the same Fortescue that two years previously had earned the approbation of Parliament – had by now joined the Royalist cause and, on 9 December 1643, he was commissioned by Prince Maurice to rebuild the 'Old Bullworke' in Salcombe Haven and hold it for the King.

Fortescue had been captured at Modbury in December 1642, and after his exchange he was assigned by Prince Maurice to rebuild the old dilapidated Tudor Castle, lying on rocks at the end of a flooded causeway. Fortescue had authority to seek assistance from the royalist Sheriff of Devon and the governors of the various garrisons in the South Hams. Shortly after his arrival, Fortescue re-christened the old bulwark Fort Charles and began restoration work immediately. Well over £4,000 would be spent on rebuilding and re-arming the old work, and by the end of 1645 Fort Charles looked capable of withstanding a moderate siege.⁴

With himself as governor, Sir Edmund's garrison comprised 2 gentlemen, 2 majors, 6 captains, 1 lieutenant, a chaplain, a surgeon, a master gunner and 2 mates, an armourer, 3 sergeants, 6 corporals and 39 men – 66 men in all, together with two laundresses.⁵

Sir Edmund kept meticulous accounts detailing the 'payments and disbursements on Fort Charles, both for the building, victuallynge, and fortifying it with great guns and musquets. Perfected January ye 15th, anno dom. 1645. In the building: £1355 and for



Reconstruction of Fort Charles as it may have appeared in the early 1640s prior to the siege of 1646. The fort had a battery of six cannons facing the sea and a tower and a kitchen behind. On the first floor were domestic quarters, with a gun platform above. The landward side of the defences were strengthened in the Civil War by the addition of a second skin around the drum keep (R. W. Parker)

timber, ordnance, powder, shot, muskets, swords, and various warlike articles: £1032'. Added to this were two additional charges, one for 'more great shot' at £33, and a second for £16, 'to replace great shot and musket shot used when the fort was twice attacked'.^{6, 7}

Included in the victualling charge of £848 was 3¾cwt. of coal, 100 bushels of charcoal, and the cost of the surgeon's chest at £16; also large quantities of sack, punch, beer and cider at a total cost of £122; 600 lbs of tobacco, and 500 candles. £443 was spent on food which included beef, pork, bacon, 36 poultry, 'five sheeps', ox tongues, 'poor Jacks' (salt hake), dried whiting, pease, butter, cheese, fruit, almonds, lemons, oil, vinegar, sweetmeats, and 'a great box of all sorts of good dry preserves'. All found, Sir Edmund's total disbursements, for which he was refunded, amounted to £3,269.⁸

In addition, Sir Edmund stood the cost of furnishing the castle with beds, bedsteads, cerecloths, sheets, blankets, bolsters, pillowes, curtinges, vallances, curtain-rods, pewter and much else. It was said that during the siege Sir Edmund's bed was hit by enemy shot and a leg fell off the bed. In haste he rushed outside in his nightshirt, but was unharmed.⁹

Royalist Shipping

Under the fort's protection Salcombe became a convenient refuge for Royalist ships and a base for privateers, while the local fishing fleet provided an important source of revenue. Between 9 January, 1644 and 15 January 1645, 111 ships were recorded in the Governor's account and £5,000 was received in customs receipts. Pilchard exports accounted for a large proportion of the income.¹⁰

Details of some of the ships entering and leaving Salcombe during this period have survived.¹¹ Early in 1644, one of the Earl of Marlborough's frigates, captained by Michael Martin, was forced to take refuge in the harbour, and on 31 March another, under the command of Captain George Bowden, sailed from Salcombe and caught a Parliamentary packet carrying despatches for Plymouth. John Kingston, one of Fortescue's captains in the fort, wrote to King Charles and asked for protection for his father's barque *Maidenhead*, of Salcombe, to carry slate and horn to Holland. During April, the richly laden 400 ton, 22 gun *Golden Pelican*, of Amsterdam, homeward bound from Genoa, was chased in by ten Dunkirkers (privateers in the service of the Spanish monarchy). Also in 1644 three Royalist ships belonging to Topsham, the *Rose*, the *Richard* and the *Jane*, sought refuge after being chased by Parliamentary vessels. The *Elizabeth*, of Jersey, arrived with a Mr. James, with letters for His Majesty, and sailed loaded with beef, pease and wool for Colonel Carteret, the Royalist governor of Jersey. The *James*, of Salcombe, Master Francis Courtenay, went in and out on several occasions.

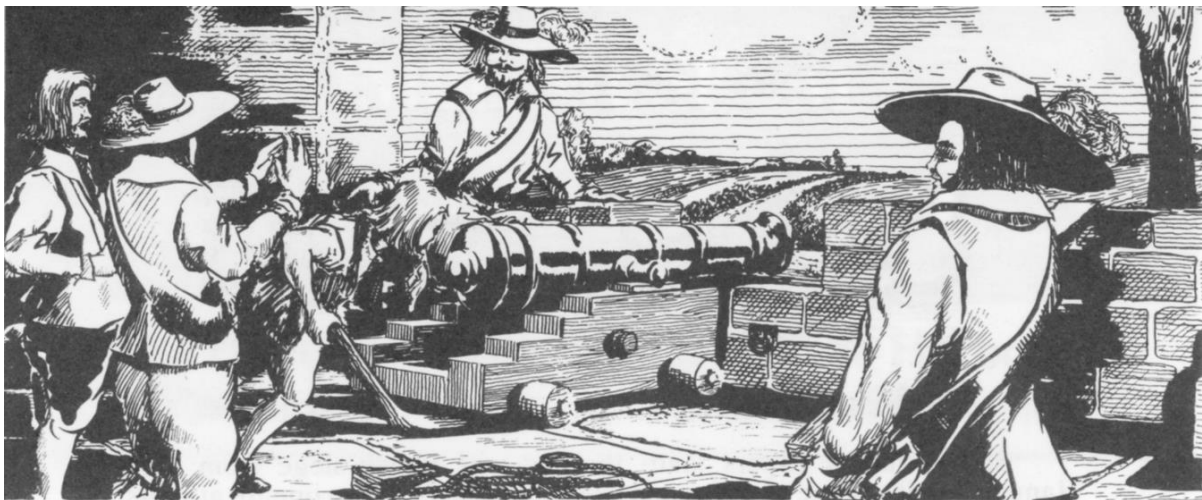
In June 1644, the Earl of Warwick, Lord High Admiral of the Parliamentary navy, reported that he only had eight ships to patrol the south west. One, the *Providence*, was busy keeping enemy frigates bottled up in Salcombe.¹² The town was obviously regarded as something of a 'hornet's nest' by the roundheads and so, on 13 July, two hundred Parliamentarian troops were sent there by ship from Plymouth.¹³ Once disembarked, the soldiers marched into the town where they captured a ship and seventeen prisoners. Although Fort Charles was incomplete, the Royalist garrison felt confident enough to refuse a demand to surrender and so, lacking the means to conduct a siege, the roundhead soldiers returned to Plymouth on the 15th, leaving the hornets still buzzing.

The harbour saw considerable activity in 1645, the year that saw the decisive defeat of

the Royalist's at Naseby and Parliamentary gains in the west. On 2 April, 1645, Sir William Berkley's 150 ton frigate and the *Sun*, of Topsham, both bound for Virginia where Sir William was governor, were chased by Parliamentary vessels and forced to take refuge in the harbour. Later in April, one of Sir Nicholas Cripp's Royalist frigates sailed from the harbour, as did the *John*, of Salcombe, loaded with wheat for the relief of Portland Castle. In June, the *Tyger*, of Salcombe, Master John Cookworthy, sailed twice for Morlaix, loaded with bale goods and carrying messengers with state papers from the King to Queen Henrietta in France. On 15 June the *Sarah*, of St. Malo, laden with coal and Spanish tobacco, was forced into harbour. She later sailed for Brittany with bale goods and another messenger with letters for the Queen. Also forced in were the *Mermaid* of Flushing from St. Kitts, chased by Dunkirkers, and the *Fanny* of Dartmouth from St. Malo. Later in the year the *Owl*, of Salcombe, Master Thomas Hopper, sailed with 30 tons of stores for Holland.¹⁴

In December 1645, Captain Shepherd, in Sir Hugh Pollard's Royalist man-of-war, sailed with two prizes from Salcombe for Dartmouth, where Sir Hugh had recently been appointed governor.¹⁵

Salcombe Besieged



Defending Fort Charles in 1646 (Norman Glason)

Meanwhile, Parliament's New Model Army commanded by Cromwell and Fairfax was besieging Exeter and advancing into South Devon and a little later, on a wintry night in January 1646, Dartmouth was captured by General Fairfax. At the same time a small force of roundheads, commanded by Colonel Richard Ingoldsby, was detached by Fairfax from the main army and sent 'to fall upon a fort in Salcombe, a harbour that lies between Dartmouth and Plymouth, and hath frigots in it that much infest the seas'. Bringing up heavy guns from Dartmouth, Ingoldsby established a battery on Rickham Common on

the Portlemouth side and, on 15 January 1646, commenced the siege of Fort Charles. At first the calibre of the artillery was insufficient to batter down the walls, but by March the Royalists had abandoned the siege of Plymouth – the fall of Dartmouth had meant the blockade could no longer be sustained – and, its governor, Colonel Weldon, was able to bring up a number of heavier guns to bombard what was now the sole remaining Royalist stronghold in Devon.¹⁶

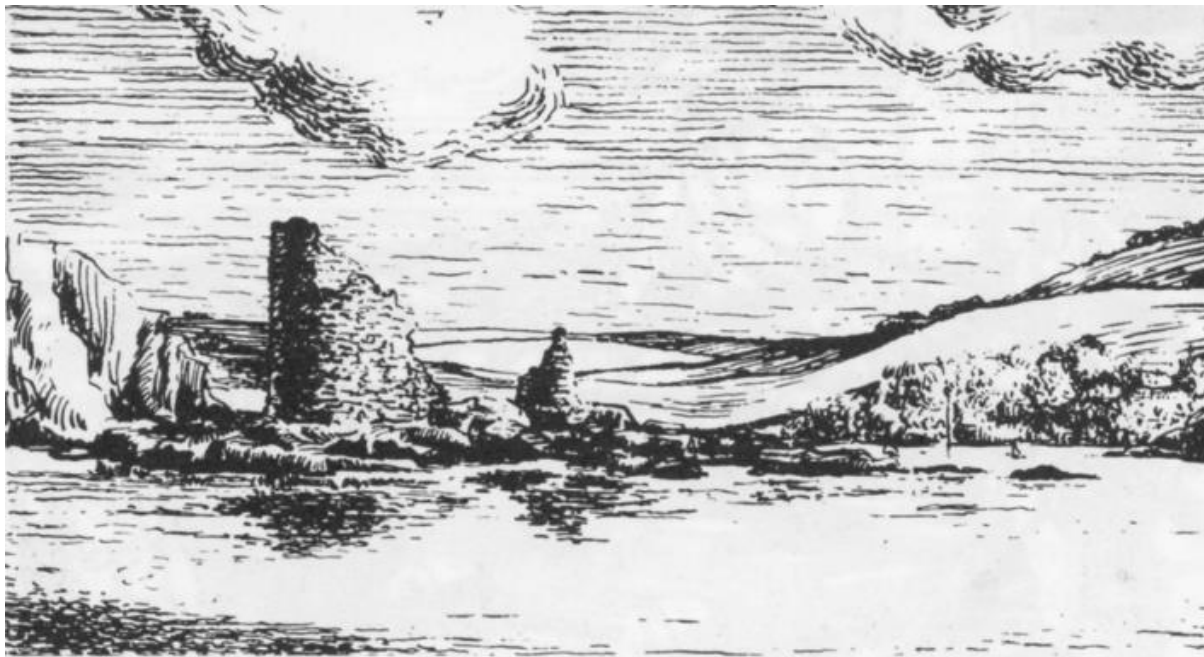
On 24 March, after nine weeks of long-distance artillery fire, Colonel Weldon, now commanding the roundhead batteries, sent in a demand for surrender, but Fortescue refused and the siege continued.¹⁷ On 27 March Lieutenant John Ford deserted and, four days later, Samuel Stodard was 'shot through the head'. Other Royalist casualties were Corporal John Hodge, 'shot and lame', and Thomas Philips 'shot thro' the left arm and side'. Thomas Quarme, 'being sick', 'went by leave' and two other men deserted.¹⁸ On the Parliamentary side, Malborough parish registers record the burial of 'Roger, son of Phillipp Hingston, slaine against the fort of Sale'.¹⁹

With no hope of relief and supplies running short, Sir Edmund and his officers finally agreed to articles of surrender on 7 May, two days after King Charles had surrendered to a Scottish army in Nottinghamshire. After nearly five months of siege, the Royalist flag was lowered at 10am on Saturday, 9 May, 1646. Shortly after, the garrison marched away to Fallapit with drums beating and colours flying. With the war in Devonshire now at an end, Parliament received the welcome news that 'Charles Fort, sometimes called Salcombe, is surrendered to us, to the obedience and use of the Parliament, which is the only considerable place that the enemy has lately held in all the west parts, except the strong garrison of Pendennis Castle'.²⁰

In the following year Parliament ordered that Fort Charles should be demolished but this was not immediately carried out, as entries in the Malborough parish registers suggest that a garrison was maintained there until at least 1658. The registers record the burial of William Evorie, 'a soilder of Fort Charles' in 1654 and the births of children to John Sunter 'leftenant of the ffort' in 1649 and to Corporal Thomas White of Fort Charles in 1652 and 1658.^{21, 22} How much longer the fort remained in service is unknown but it is possible that the building was abandoned and 'slighted' before the Restoration in 1660.²

After the surrender of Salcombe in 1646, the town lapsed into obscurity for nearly 150 years. From the few written records that survive it would appear that the harbour continued to provide a haven for vessels escaping from foreign privateers and that the

small community earnt its living from fishing and smuggling. (See *Maritime History Paper 4: Piracy and Privateering* and *8: Smuggling*).



The ruins of Fort Charles (Norman Glason)

For a full account of the siege of Fort Charles, see Chapter 9 of Anne Born's *History of Kingsbridge and Salcombe*. The archaeology of Fort Charles is described in *Fort Charles, Salcombe: A Coastal Artillery Fort of Henry VIII, Refortified in the Civil War* by Richard Parker, Andrew Passmore and Mark Stoye, published in the Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society, Vol. 63, 115-1137, in 2005.

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