

The Siege of King's Lynn

Lynn Museum has a collection of items relating to the Civil War. Contact the Museum for details on 01553 775001.

On 28th August 1643 Parliamentary forces began their 3 week siege of King's Lynn as a result of the town declaring its allegiance to King Charles I.

Previously Lynn had appeared to support Parliament and had two Parliamentary MPs. But the local countryside outside Lynn was strongly Royalist and supporters in the town had led disturbances against Parliament. During the summer of 1643 the Royalists had successful campaigns in the nearby Midlands and Lincolnshire. In response Lynn was ordered on 10th July to strengthen its fortifications, in case the Royalist armies reached Norfolk. Work was carried out on the town's gates and walls.



The South Gates

King's Lynn was defended on three sides by walls and ditches. The fourth side was protected by the River Great Ouse. Some of Lynn's defensive walls still remain in the Walks, the North Guanock Gate, and parts of the East Wall on Kettlewell Lane and Wyatt Street. During the Civil War the course of the medieval ditch immediately north of the North Guanock Gate was altered. The South Gate is the only surviving town gate. The East Gate was damaged during the siege of Lynn, and was demolished in 1800. The coat of arms of Henry VIII which adorned the East Gate can now be seen above King's Lynn's Court House. During the Civil War the Red Mount Chapel, the Market Cross, St. Ann's Fort and Trinity Hall were used to store gunpowder. Citizens were also allowed to purchase a quantity of powder to keep in their homes for common defence.

On 13th August Sir Hamon L'Estrange of Hunstanton led a successful Royalist rising in King's Lynn and became the town's governor. Thomas Toll and John Percival, the Puritan MPs of Lynn, were placed under house arrest but managed to escape via a window and left the town by boat. Lynn was now the only openly Royalist town in East Anglia.

In preparation of the Parliamentary retaliation additional work was done on Lynn's fortifications. Any houses which obstructed the defences were demolished and trees were cleared from the surrounding countryside to prevent an army approaching unobserved. The Gaywood Almshouse was burnt down to prevent it being used to shelter enemy troops. The Parliamentary army did eventually arrive, under the command of the Earl of Manchester.

Once the siege had begun Parliamentary forces secured the road and river bridges into Lynn while ships under the command of the Earl of Warwick blockaded Lynn from the sea. Only one royalist ship was able to escape the blockade by giving false signals. The town was bombarded across the Great Ouse River from the village of West Lynn. During one such attack, on Sunday 3rd September, a cannonball went through the west window of St. Margaret's Church and the congregation fled in terror. During restoration work on Hampton Court in Nelson Street a cannonball dating from the Civil War was discovered in the attic. It is now on display in the building's entrance archway.



The cannon ball in Hampton Court, off Nelson Street.

During the siege the town was asked to surrender several times, but the leaders hoped the Royalist army, in particular the Earl of Newcastle, who was outside Lincoln, would arrive to aid them. Meanwhile, the Gaywood River was diverted at Kettlemills and the piped water supply to the town was cut off.

Plans were made by the Parliamentary forces to take the town on Saturday 16th September by boats on the river and ladders on the land. Manchester warned the Royalists to remove the women and children of the town. On 15th September 1643, after three weeks under siege, King's Lynn surrendered. At dawn the next day the Parliamentary army entered the town.

After the town's surrender Sir Hamon L'Estrange was allowed to return to Hunstanton Hall and was required to pay damages to Lynn and the MPs Toll and Percival. Governance of Lynn was passed to Oliver Cromwell's brother-in-law, Colonel Valentine Walton. Although Sir Hamon came under suspicion in 1644 and 1646 of being involved in further Royalist plots concerning Lynn, he remained politically inactive until his death in 165