



THE CAMPAIGN

By Tony Spicer

The English Civil War lasted from 1642 to 1651. Although usually called the English Civil War it was a much wider conflict also involving Scotland Ireland and Wales. So far as England was concerned, it was divided into three phases sometimes called the 1st Civil War, the 2nd Civil War and the 3rd Civil War. The 1st Civil War, which was the main one, lasted from 1642 to 1646 and ended with the defeat of Charles I. The 2nd Civil War was in 1648 and was Charles I's attempt to reverse his defeat by means of a Scottish invasion coupled with an English uprising. It failed and led to his execution in 1649. The 3rd Civil War was in 1651 and was the attempt by Charles' son, also called Charles and later Charles II of England, to regain the throne which his father had lost.

The origins of the Worcester campaign lie in Scotland. In the 17th-century, England and Scotland were separate kingdoms although from 1603 under the same King. This was before the Act of Union so they had separate parliaments and institutions. Therefore when in 1649 the English Parliament executed Charles I as King of England, they also executed him as King of Scotland so causing a constitutional crisis north of the border.

In June 1650, Charles I's eldest son accepted an invitation from the Scots to become King of Scotland. Consequently the English Parliament declared war on Scotland and invaded it with an army under Oliver Cromwell. On 3rd September 1650 Cromwell won a dramatic and somewhat lucky victory over the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar. However this did not end the war. The summer of 1651 saw Cromwell at Edinburgh and Charles at Stirling which was too strong a position to be taken by assault. This stalemate favoured Charles because as summer turned into autumn and then winter Cromwell's army was likely to be weakened by disease and desertion. In July, in order to break the deadlock, Cromwell's army advanced over the Firth of Forth, bypassing Stirling, and laying siege to Perth, the ancient capital of Scotland. Apart from the dishonour of losing Perth, this meant that Charles's supply lines from the north were threatened. On the other hand, it left the south open, with no parliamentary troops between Charles and London except 4000 men under Major General Thomas Harrison at Berwick and about 1000 left at Edinburgh under Col Robert Lilburne.

Charles' army consisted of 13,000 men, comprising 11,000 Scots and 2000 English who had joined him in Scotland. Confident that royalists in England would rise and support him and urged on by the 2000 English who were already with him Charles made the decision to march on London. His army left Stirling on 31 July 1651. By 6 August he had reached Carlisle and was proclaimed King of England.

As soon as Cromwell heard that Charles was on the march, he detached his 2nd in command, Major General John Lambert with 3000 cavalry, to join up with Harrison. Supplementing their combined forces with local militias, they marched westward and attempted to stop Charles at Warrington. However they were unable to concentrate sufficient troops there in time and the small Battle of Warrington Bridge on 16 August was a royalist victory.

At this point, Charles was beginning to receive support from English Royalists. The Earl of Derby joined him with 300 men from the Isle of Man and there was further assistance from the Manchester area, notably from Sir Thomas Tyldesley who raised a regiment of foot. These were not just the traditional cavaliers but also included moderates who had become embittered with the rule of Parliament. Charles reinforced them with a detachment from his own army and left them to raise recruits while he continued his march south.

The business of government in London was carried on by a powerful parliamentary committee called the Council of State. It was alarmed by Charles' march into England and ordered the town and county militias from all over central and southern England to assemble at Banbury and form a new army under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Fleetwood. This included the Worcester Militia, so long before Charles arrived in Worcester, the Worcester Militia had joined the parliamentary army at Banbury and consequently fought on the parliamentary side at the Battle of Worcester.

By the time Charles reached Lichfield, it was becoming apparent that a march directly on London would fail. In front of him was the parliamentary militia army. Behind them were the forces of Lambert and Harrison whose reverse at Warrington had done little damage and were able to follow Charles, interrupt his supplies and impede recruitment. Last but not least, Cromwell had left his subordinate, Major General George Monck, to continue the siege of Perth and was hurrying down the east side of England with the main Parliamentary army.

Charles needed a place where he could regroup and diverted to Worcester which had been a royalist stronghold throughout the 1st Civil War. He entered Worcester on 23 August 1651. Although he made efforts to improve the defences at Worcester, notably by rebuilding a fort which protected Sidbury Gate and naming it Fort Royal, he was initially concerned with increasing the size of his army. By controlling Worcester, he had opened one of the gateways into Wales and expected recruits from there and he also extended his occupation on the west side of the Severn southwards through Powick to Upton. In charge of the troops there was Major General Sir Edward Massey. Massey had been the parliamentary governor of Gloucester during the 1st Civil War but was a moderate who changed sides when he felt that things had gone too far. Charles hoped that Massey's status in the area would persuade like-minded men to join the royalist cause. Charles also organised a rally for the Worcester gentry at Pitchcroft Meadow just outside Worcester but although some attended such as Thomas Hornyold and Sir John Packington (and were heavily fined by Parliament afterwards for doing so), on the whole the rally was a disappointment. Worse news was to come for while this was going on, Derby and Tyldesley, who had collected a force of 1500 men, were defeated by Col Robert Lilburn on 25 August at the Battle of Wigan Lane. Derby and Tyldesley were marching from Preston to Manchester where they expected to be able to recruit a further 500 men and were followed by Lilburn. Instead of continuing to Manchester to augment their forces, they decided, for reasons which are not entirely clear, to turn and face Lilburn at Wigan. They were heavily defeated. Tyldesley was killed and Derby wounded. Although Derby managed to join Charles at Worcester with a few men, the important Battle of Wigan Lane put an end to any royalist reinforcements from the north-west.

Wigan Lane is now the A49, a very busy thoroughfare and not the place to get any sense of the battlefield. However, leading on to Wigan Lane is Monument Road where there is a memorial to Sir Thomas Tyldesley a most gallant royalist commander who had fought throughout the English Civil Wars from the Battle of Edgehill in 1642 to Wigan Lane in 1651.

Any hopes of recruits from Wales and Gloucestershire were quickly quashed by the rapidity of the Parliamentary response. The divisions of the Parliamentary army – under Lambert and Harrison, Fleetwood and Cromwell himself met at Warwick from where they moved to Evesham. Their combined strength is usually estimated at nearly 30,000 men. Cromwell wanted to be able to attack on both sides of the River Severn and on 28 August Lambert mounted a surprise attack on Upton bridge, took it and drove Massey, who was wounded in the action, back to Powick. On the next day Cromwell advanced towards Worcester and occupied Red Hill apparently without opposition. From there his army spread out to Perry Wood on one side and on the other side to Battenhall and Bunns Hill overlooking the confluence of the rivers Teme and Severn.

Cromwell now controlled the crossing over the River Severn at Upton, where Fleetwood had taken over from Lambert, but he wanted another crossing nearer Worcester and this was to be done by a bridge of boats over the Severn linked with another bridge of boats over the Teme. Construction of bridges of boats was a common tactic in sieges to prevent river supplies to a town but it was rarely used in battle and in England its use in this way is unique to the Battle of Worcester.

On 30 August Cromwell and Fleetwood had a conference to plan the bridges of boats. There is a lack of information about their plan and opinions differ as to how the bridges were made and where exactly they were positioned. The writer's reconstruction is as follows.

Cromwell had with him a boat train which he had brought down from Scotland. This was a column of carts carrying boats suitable for making bridges. Cromwell would be responsible for the bridge of boats over Severn, Fleetwood that over the Teme. As Cromwell already occupied one side of the River Severn, he could prepare his bridge in advance. However as the royalists occupied both sides of the River Teme, Fleetwood would need to capture the south bank of the Teme before he could begin work on his bridge. Cromwell therefore took the boats which he needed and gave the rest of the boat train to Fleetwood who took it with him to Upton via the stone bridge over the Severn there. Cromwell prepared his bridge of boats along the eastern bank of the Severn, opposite the confluence with the Teme, a day or so before the battle, no doubt keeping it carefully camouflaged, with his guns on Bunns Hill firing over the Severn to make sure that the Royalists did not get too near. Fleetwood was to advance from Upton, take Powick and make his bridge of boats over the Teme near the confluence. If Fleetwood achieved this easily, then Cromwell could float his own bridge of boats across the Severn, above the confluence with the Teme, to provide reinforcements as necessary. If however Fleetwood ran into difficulties, then Cromwell could float his bridge of boats across the Severn below the confluence with the Teme to link with Fleetwood and provide assistance.