

## Culture and conflict: York in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century

Text and images C Jonathan Brockbank, unless otherwise noted.

### Catholic or Protestant?

Between the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries England alternated between being officially a Catholic or a Protestant state. To make a complex situation as simple as possible:

- ❖ Henry VIII: 1509-1547. King Henry falls out with the Pope. England remains officially Catholic but some Protestants attempt to push England towards complete Protestantism, which Henry VIII resists. Both ultra-devout Catholics and Protestants executed, including Sir Thomas More (Catholic). This is the subject of Robert Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons* (1954 radio, 1960, stage). What most subjects would have noticed is the dissolution of the monasteries, the abolition of monasteries, priories and nunneries and the confiscation of their land by the king (1536-41).

[http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/dissolution\\_monasteries.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/dissolution_monasteries.htm)



**In York one of the most notable casualties of dissolution was St Leonard's Hospital (Library Square). The chapel and entrance passage (above) are all that is left of a complex that once covered the area now occupied by the Library, St Leonard's Place and the Theatre Royal. This included a church almost as big as St Mary's Abbey in the Museum Gardens.**

By the end of his reign Henry had sold most of this land to private citizens.

The anonymous 1592 play *Arden of Feversham* dramatises an actual murder case. According to the dramatist, one of the main reasons for Arden's unpopularity was his involvement in the land deals that followed the dissolution of a local monastic establishment.

- ❖ Edward VI: 1547-1553. A militantly Protestant king. Altars and pictures of saints removed or mutilated in many churches. The heads of wayside crosses are removed, including the cross at Fulford Cross, Fulford Road, York. Often this destruction is confused in local tradition with the iconoclasm of hard-line Parliamentary Protestants during the Civil War.
- ❖ Mary 1: 1553-1558. A devoutly Catholic Queen. Several leading Protestants burned as heretics including Archbishop Cranmer in Broad Street, Oxford. The rich allowed the re-adoption of Catholicism provided they did not have to return ex-monastic land (see dissolution of the monasteries). See Anna Whitelock, *Mary Tudor*, (London, Bloomsbury, 2009) Chap 42 et seq.
- ❖ Elizabeth 1: 1558-1603. Unwilling to open 'a window into men's souls'. Nevertheless she was forced to act against many Catholics after she was excommunicated by the Pope. During her reign the Catholic Margaret Clitherow, of York, was pressed to death in 1586 for refusing to plead.  
<http://www.historyofyork.org.uk/themes/tudor-stuart/margaret-clitherow>  
Elizabeth protested about Clitherow's treatment in a letter to the citizens of York. Clitherow is one of the 40 English Catholic Martyrs.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Clitherow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Clitherow)



**The house, now a shrine, of Margaret Clitherow in the middle of The Shambles, York**

Many of the Yorkshire gentry remained Catholic. When Ripley Castle was converted from medieval strong tower and walled court to mansion, several 'priest

holes', concealed rooms for hiding Catholic priests, were installed. Had the priests been caught, they would have been executed.



**Ripley Castle, near Knaresborough: the hidden rooms are in the tower flying a flag.**

- ❖ James I: 1603-1625. A learned Protestant king, imported from Scotland because Elizabeth I had died without heir. James preferred the Church of England compromise; Bishops and some use of ritual together with a Protestant theology, to the anti-ritual, anti-bishop Calvinistic Presbyterian Church in Scotland. James sponsored the King James translation of the bible, to combat the more radical Geneva version. The Geneva version was the favourite of many leading English writers, especially Milton during the Civil War and its aftermath.
- ❖ Charles I: 1625-1649. Had a Catholic wife and was suspected by many Protestants of wishing to make England a Catholic country. One of the first causes of the Civil War was Charles I's attempt to force the Presbyterian Church to accept a more formal Prayer Book and accompanying church rituals.
- ❖ Charles II: 1660-1685. A pragmatic king. Returned, on terms, after the execution of his father and 11 years of republican Britain, he accepted a subsidy from France to turn his kingdom Catholic. The closest he came to doing so was his own death-bed conversion. In the guise of tolerating extreme Protestants, religious tolerance was extended towards Catholics.
- ❖ James II: 1685-1689. Tolerance for Catholics was strained when James II, a keen Catholic, produced a male heir. He was deposed in a bloodless coup and replaced by the Protestant William of Orange, imported from the Netherlands. James II's failed attempt to reconquer England through Ireland is still



commemorated by the loyalist Marchers of Northern Ireland and opposed by Catholic demonstrations and counter-marches.

**York's contribution:**

York gave birth to Guy Fawkes, the only plotter of 1605 who is remembered from a group of Catholics who plotted to blow up the houses of Parliament and replace James I with a Catholic. Had all their gunpowder exploded it would have been powerful enough to destroy a considerable area of the City around the Houses of Parliament.



**Though the pub on the right with the *V for Vendetta* like sign in Petergate, York, claims to be the site of Guy's birth, all that is actually known is that Fawkes was born somewhere in this parish.**

Fawkes went to St Peter's School, Bootham, York. This is still an active public school. According to local legend, on November 5 pupils are requested not to burn Guys out of respect for an old boy ...

The plot had at least two echoes in drama:

1] Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, c1606. The drunken Porter mocks the equivocation adopted by Jesuit priests under interrogation.

2] Ben Jonson's *Catiline*, c1611. An account of a Roman conspiracy, brought up to date with imagery of fire and explosion.

## **The English Civil War: Fairfax, Marvell, Poetry, Killing and Culture**

**Text and images C Jonathan Brockbank, unless otherwise noted.**

One of the turning points of the First English Civil War, 1642-1646 was the siege of York, in 1644, where the besieged Royalists surrendered after the battle of Marston Moor. Three Parliamentary armies were involved, from Scotland, from the south and from the north, the latter led by a local man, Sir Thomas Fairfax.

### **Chronology of The Siege of York**

(compiled from Peter Whenham, *The Great and Close Siege of York*, Kington, Roundwood Press, 1970, and, in quotes, the diary of Robert Douglas, chaplain to the Earl of Leven, the commander of the Scots army.)

#### **1644**

**June:** Scottish Army moves South.

**April 11:** Fairfax wins the Battle of Selby.

**April 16:** Marquis of Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish's husband, and a Royalist army enter York.

**April 17-22:** The Scots besiege York on the West, Fairfax on the East. Fairfax makes either Heslington Hall or Middlethorpe Hall his headquarters.

**May 18:** "A serjeant & six our soldiers killed before Akam. [Acomb]"

**June 04:** The Earl of Manchester arrives and completes the encirclement of York on the north side.

**June 04-08:** a] Fairfax borrows guns from the Scots to set up a battery on Heslington Hill. (now called 'Lamel hill'; at the end of the grounds of The Retreat, above Fairfax House on Heslington road)

b] The 3 small forts [sconces] protecting the south-west ridge overlooking the city taken by the Scots.

c] The middle sconce [on The Mount] is retaken.

d] The royalists burn the suburbs of Bootham. Manchester's men loophole the ruins for use by sharp-shooters [snipers].

**June 08-12:** a] Fairfax takes the Royalist fortified churches of St Nicholas and St Lawrence (Lawrence Street).

b] Sets up mortar in St Lawrence's churchyard.

c] Digs a mine under Walmgate Bar. The Royalists discover this

- mine, through a prisoner, and flood it.
- June 12-15:** Parley.
- Sunday June 16:** Lt-Gen Laurence Crawford explodes an undetected mine under St Mary's tower. The attack fails because he has not told any other part of the Parliamentary army.
- June 24:** Royalist sally from Monk Bar driven back.
- June 28:** Royalist cavalry from Pontefract free 40 prisoners from Cawood.
- Monday July 1:** The Parliamentary army withdraws to try to intercept Prince Rupert's relieving force. Rupert outflanks them and relieves city.
- Tuesday July 2:** Rupert sets out after Parliamentarian army. Finds their rear guard on Marston Moor. Newcastle leads his men up later. Rupert and Newcastle argue. At evening the battle begins. The Royalists are defeated. Newcastle and Rupert argue again. Rupert leaves the city, to continue the fight elsewhere, Newcastle gives up the war and sails to Hamburg. Sir Thomas Glenham takes over command in York.
- Thursday July 4:** Siege renewed.
- July 12:** Toft Tower shot down.
- July 13-16:** Negotiations lead to Royalist surrender with 'honours of war'.



### **Walmgate Bar, Walmgate, York**

The craftsmen who worked on this, William Arkendale, George Stydde and Edward Wilson, (*City of York: Volume II The Defences*, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1972, p142d) might have been surprised to find the old bar in the forefront of a modern war. In 1644 the bar came under heavy fire from batteries on Heslington Hill, at the end of the Retreat's grounds and St Lawrence's churchyard. The church was so badly damaged that it was mostly pulled down.





**Canon-Ball impact, East tower, Walmgate barbican**





**All that is left of the old St Lawrence's church**

## Sir Thomas Fairfax and Andrew Marvell



Sir Thomas Fairfax wearing heavy cavalry armour of the day: from an oil painting by John Hoskins, 1650.



**Heslington Hall, Heslington, now the administration centre of York University with the best architecture and toilets on campus; probably the headquarters of Sir Thomas Fairfax during the Siege of York.**

*The Hall was built in 1568 for Sir Thomas Eynns, who, like Richard III before him, served on the Council of the North. It testifies to the increasing wealth and importance of the aristocracy as landowners as they expanded to fill the gap left in the economic and power structures of the 16<sup>th</sup> century after Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries of England and Wales.*

### **Fairfax's family.**

Fairfax came from a family that had risen to prominence in Yorkshire since the end of the Middle Ages <http://www.british-civil-wars.co.uk/biog/fairfax.htm>. One of the family properties has a name that testifies to its appropriation of lands previously occupied by a nunnery: Nun Appleton Hall. In the playful protestant myth inscribed into Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House', Marvell claims this act sanctified the place: 'Twas no *Religious house* till now.' ('Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax', XXXV, 280) Fairfax showed his love of York by putting a guard on the Minster after the city fell to prevent any ultra-Protestant defacement of the contents, such as the kings on the Rood Screen, and collected up the medieval records that had been scattered when St Mary's Tower was destroyed by mining during the siege.





**St Mary's Tower, showing the join where it was reconstructed to a narrower diameter after destruction in the Civil War.**

Such actions showed Fairfax attempting to bring under control the violence unleashed by civil war. At Ripley, a village outside Harrogate, there are bullet holes in the church wall, allegedly left after the execution of Royalist prisoners.





**Ripley Church: many of these bullet holes occur low on the church wall, which might suggest they are random shots not the aftermath of a firing squad.**

Later branches of the Fairfax family gave their names to the Fairfax House, in town and the Fairfax house on Heslington Road now used as university accommodation



### **Fairfax house: Castlegate, York**

#### **Literacy, entertainment, poetry and war.**

The theatres of London closed during the Civil War and did not completely reopen until the restoration of Charles II in 1660. Popular literacy was sufficient by this date for both sides to think it worth producing propaganda, usually in the form of pamphlets or newspapers to give competing accounts of the war and its progress. Poetry could get caught up in this battle. Abraham Cowley's *The Civil War* was abandoned in 1643 when it became evident the Royalists he supported were losing. Andrew Marvell's 'An Horation Ode upon Cromwel's Return from Ireland' deployed creative ambiguity to embody the confusion and hope occasioned by the execution of Charles I. Fairfax employed Marvell as a tutor for his daughter.



**Marvell: from an anonymous oil of the 1660s.**

Marvell repaid him by writing the masque-like 'Upon Appleton House, to my Lord Fairfax', praising Fairfax's estate on the Ouse south west of York near Tadcaster,



**Nun Appleton in Marvell's day. The present building is the successor to this.**

and 'Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow', celebrating the small hill that now overlooks the A64 dual carriageway. Sir Thomas was buried in the church.



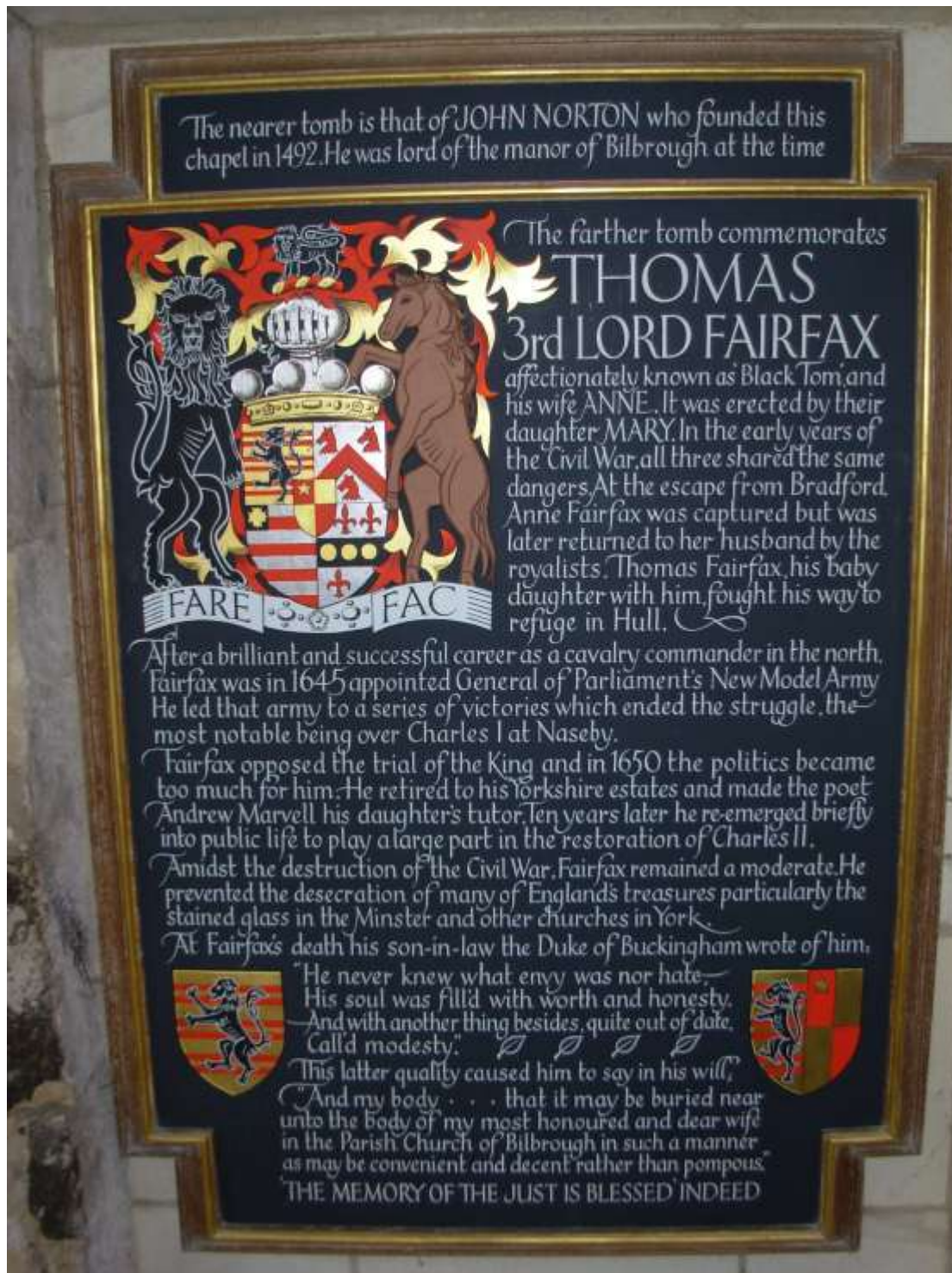
**Bilborough Hill:** 'Nor for itself the height does gain,  
But only strives to raise the Plain.' 23/4

These lines may carry a political sub-text.



**Fairfax Arms on Sir Thomas Fairfax's Tomb, Bilborough. The arms and the inscription on the tomb, celebrate their daughter Maria's marriage to George Villiers, The Duke of Buckingham to indicate how far the family had risen.**





**Modern Tablet, Bilborough Church: The History of Sir Thomas Fairfax.**

As with many young women of her class, Mary's personal interests were overridden by family ambition. 'Upon Appleton House, to My Lord Fairfax' acknowledges her likely fate through its metaphor of sacrifice:

'Whence, for some universal good,  
 The *Priest* shall cut the sacred Bud;'

LXXXXXIII, 741-2

She was originally engaged to the Earl of Chesterfield, though she loved George Villiers. Villiers fought for the Royalists and had his lands confiscated but returned

to marry Mary. This proved a shrewd move come Restoration; Fairfax was able to integrate his family interests with those of the new regime as Villiers became the 2nd Duke of Buckingham, 20th Baron de Ros of Helmsley. Despite its romantic origins, the marriage was not a happy one, Villiers became one of the leading rakes of the age. Consequently he was used by Alexander Pope to epitomise the libertine abuse of body and riches. Pope accepts that George Villiers died in a disreputable inn on the edge of the North York Moors; Kirby Moorside and Helmsley compete for the dubious honour of possessing:

‘the worse inn’s worse room, with mat half-hung,  
The floor of plaister, and the walls of dung’

Pope, ‘Epistle III, To Allen, Lord Bathurst of the Use of Riches’, 299-300.

In fact he seems to have settled on his estates at Helmsley, due to reduced income, and to have died in a tenant’s house from a chill caught through hunting. More details on Villiers at

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Villiers,\\_2nd\\_Duke\\_of\\_Buckingham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Villiers,_2nd_Duke_of_Buckingham)

Marvell later became MP for Hull and one of the most skilled poet-satirists of his day. It’s worth noting that his famed seduction poem ‘To his Coy Mistress’ is partly set on the muddy, unromantic shores of the Humber estuary:

I by the tide  
Of *Humber* would complain (6/7)

Marvell both compliments and criticises Fairfax on his withdrawal from politics after the execution of Charles I.



**The statue of Charles II trampling down Cromwell. Originally a statue showing John Sobieski, King of Poland, trampling down a Turk, it was never paid for or sent to Poland; after the Restoration Sir Robert Vyner had the statue altered to represent Charles and Cromwell and set up in Stocks-Market Place near Lombard Street. It is mocked in a satire attributed to Marvell ‘The Statue in Stocks-Market’. It was transported to Newby Hall, near Ripon, in 1883.**



## Sites of the Siege



**The Walls near Bootham Bar. One of the most dangerous places for Royalist defenders for it was in easy range of Manchester's sharpshooters stationed in the ruins of houses just outside the walls.**

## Targeting the Minster





**The Scots captured the Royalist sconce on what is now Wilton Rise (above the long grey roofed building halfway behind the bush on the right hand side). From here they could hit the Minster. Contemporarily reports describe how the cannon balls smashed through the windows and bounced from pillar to pillar.**

**A skirmish at Acomb**



**Parliamentary cavalry under the banner of Sir Arthur Hesilrige charging.**



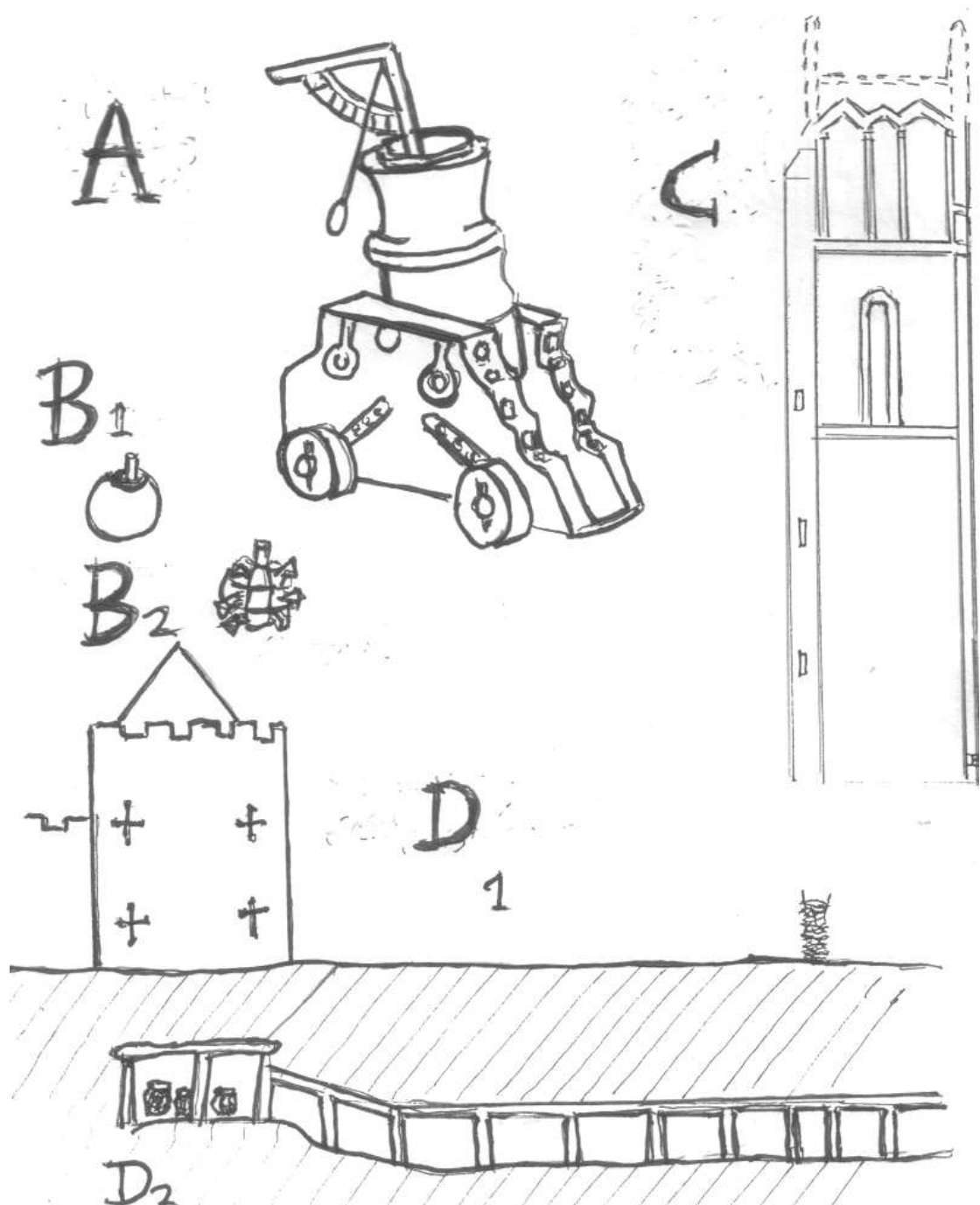
**Churches became important parts of the defences. The tower of St Olave's on Marygate was manned by Royalist sharpshooters. On St Lawrence Street St Lawrence's Church and St Nicholas's Church were converted into strong points. St Nicholas was so badly damaged, it had to be dismantled after the war whilst only the old tower of St Lawrence's remains.**





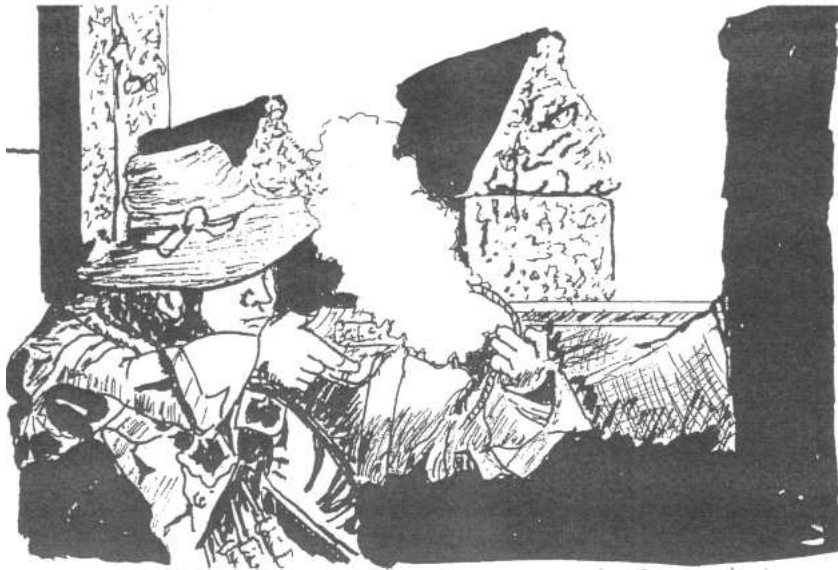
**The churchyard of St Lawrence's. Fairfax set up a mortar battery here that lobbed shells into the heart of the city market place.**



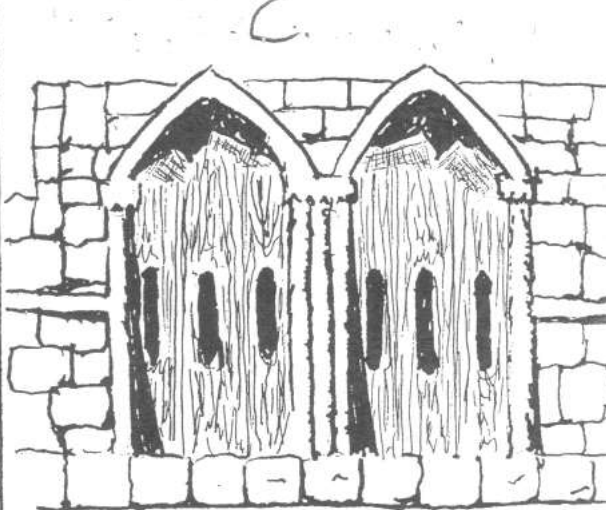
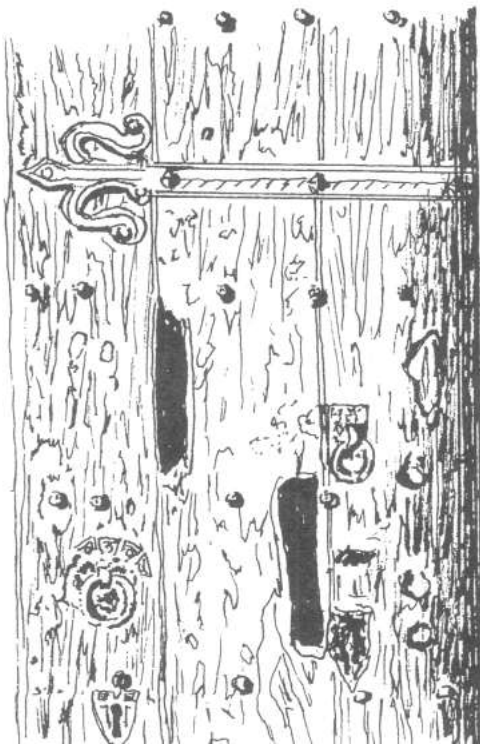


A = 17<sup>th</sup> century mortar with ranging device. B = Mortar shells, 1 = concussion, 2 = shrapnel. C = the tower of St Nicholas's Church. D1 = Marygate Tower. D2 = siege tunnel.

How to fortify a church:

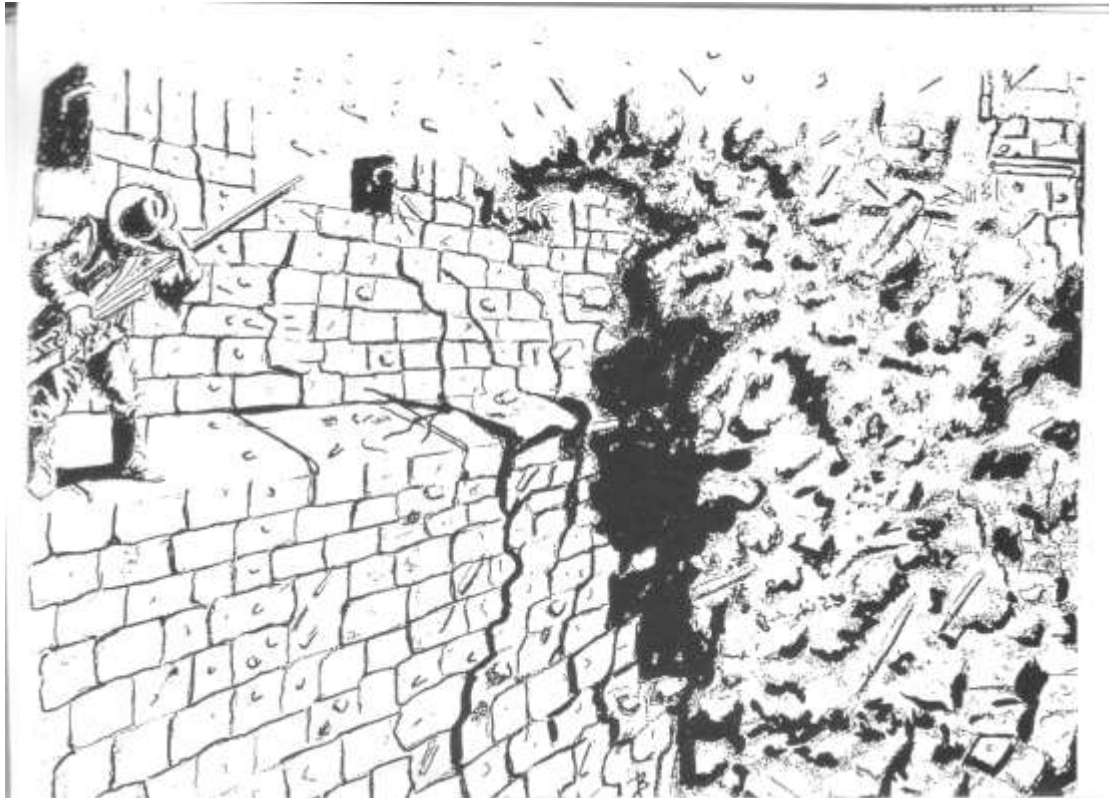


B.



**A = royalist sharp shooter on top of St Nicholas's church. B = church door loop-holed for muskets from Church Aston. C= conjectural reconstruction of blockading the windows of St Nicholas's Church.**

**The Mine**

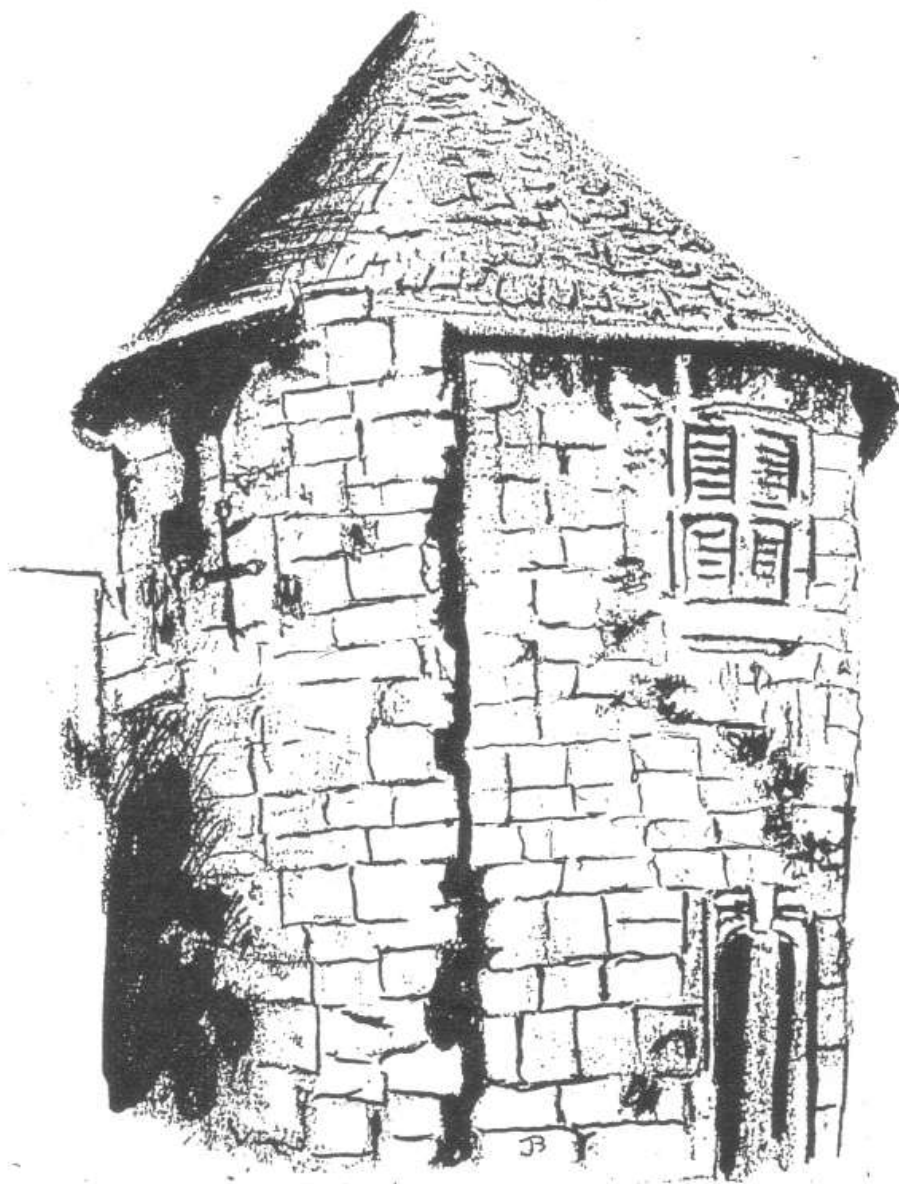


**On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June 1644 Lt/Gnr Crawford fired the mine under Marygate Tower. The Parliamentary troops who stormed the breach were usually dismounted cavalymen using their wheel-lock or flint-lock pistols. Crawford seems not to have notified the rest of the army so the attack was unsupported. The defenders manned the walls around a bowling green and threw back the attackers.**





**The bowling green walls that would have confronted attackers. After the failure of the attack, the wounded lay calling for water as scorched fragments of mediaeval documents that were kept in Marygate Tower floated out of the sky around them. Towards nightfall a truce was arranged and survivors evacuated.**



**Marygate tower from Bootham. After the war Marygate Tower was rebuilt to a smaller diameter.**

**The end of the siege.**

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**Scots pikemen sing a victory psalm as night falls on the battlefield of Marston Moor, Tuesday July 2.**





**Toft Tower, Queen's Street. On July 12 1644 Parliamentary guns shot down toft tower. The city was then considered technically indefensible, so the garrison could surrender with honour and the city's inhabitants would be spared looting and violence.**