

# THE SHIP-MONEY TRIAL

*Twixt kings and subjects there's this mighty odds,  
Subjects are taught by men; kings by the gods.*

ROBERT HERRICK

John Hampden's refusal to pay Ship-Money in 1635 took his name into every household and made it a byword for patriotism. Before that historic stand, wrote Clarendon, 'he was rather of reputation in his own country than of public discourse or fame in the kingdom, but then he grew the argument of all tongues, every man inquiring who and what he was that durst at his own charge support the liberty and property of the kingdom, and rescue his country from being made a prey to the court.' Why did this wealthy man resist the demand for a mere twenty shillings assessed on his land in Stoke Mandeville? What principles underlay his opposition to Ship-Money?

Beneath the apparent success of the monarchy in governing without Parliament since 1629 there lay the ever-imminent danger of financial crisis. Without the authority of Parliament and despite much grumbling and some resistance from the merchants concerned, the government collected the important tonnage and poundage customs duties. Yet they could not suffice for all the demands on the public purse nor support the stately splendour of the Court at Whitehall. Nor could such expedients as levying large fines on those who had inadvertently broken the ancient forest laws make up the balance, although Lord Treasurer Weston showed considerable ingenuity in exploiting these opportunities from the feudal past. The brilliant idea of resurrecting the Ship-Money tax, however, is attributed to William