

## THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

*'Colonell Hampden put himselfe in Captaine Crosse his Troop, where he charged with much courage, and was unfortunately shot through the shoulder'*.<sup>2</sup> By writing that Hampden had been shot in the shoulder when, if as alleged in the paper found by Lord Nugent,<sup>3</sup> his injuries were caused by his pistol exploding and shattering his hand, Essex would have been deafened by the accusing cries of the witnesses. Although many common people in 1643 could not read or write themselves, sufficient numbers were able to read newspapers and pamphlets to them. The report of Hampden's injuries were, even before his death, carried in a pamphlet called the 'True Relation of a Gret Fight'<sup>4</sup> and also in a Royalist newspaper 'Mercurius Aulicus'.<sup>5</sup> The 'Parliament Scout',<sup>6</sup> with an avid readership throughout the Lord General's army, later reiterated the facts printed in the 'True Relation',<sup>4</sup> with the addition that Hampden had now died.

Sir Robert Pye, a captain of a troop of horse in the Earl's army and son-in-law to Hampden, is said to have presented a brace of pistols to him. It is one of these guns, that his servant is purported to have overloaded with supernumerary charges, which is reputed to have exploded at the start of the battle. If the Earl had knowledge of this and for whatever reason had wanted to protect Sir Robert's honour above that of Hampden's, it would have meant that the Lord General of the Parliament Army had to deliberately lie to the House of Commons in his despatches. If he had written this fabrication, he had to bear in mind that Hampden was still very much alive and expected to live. This deception, had it been written and later discovered, would have endangered Essex's own standing with Parliament. All contemporary evidence concurs that the wound was in the shoulder. The chances of the Earl of Essex concealing a lie from Hampden's Regiment, the soldiers who helped him back from the battlefield, the witnesses to his sorry plight on his trek from Chalgrove, the visitors to his death bed, the town's people and the 15,000 strong army around Thame, would have bordered on the impossible.