

THE LONG PARLIAMENT AND JOHN HAMPDEN

PREFACE

This work is in no way intended to be a History of the Long Parliament. It is written mainly for the members of the John Hampden Society, and thereby assumes a degree of knowledge of the period and the events leading up to the opening of the Parliament on 3rd November 1640.

Researching John Hampden's activities in the Long Parliament has been made infinitely easier by the publication in recent years of first, the Yale History of the Parliament edited by our member, Maija Jansson; this immense work in 7 volumes up to September 1641 recounts the day-to-day proceedings of the House of Commons from the Common's Journal with additions from various diaries kept at the time. It is the most complete record of that time ever to be published. The second is the vast work *The Noble Revolt* by John Adamson, already well-known to the Society, and gives a most detailed analysis of the motives, fears and hopes of the principal characters involved; and dispels for all time the commonly held view that it was Pym and the Commons who led the charge against King Charles; it was the peers. Thirdly, the availability of the Journals of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the internet. Other sources include Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion*, the *Memoirs* of Bulstrode Whitlock, and S.R. Gardiner's *History of the Civil War*, all in the author's possession.

As in the Short Parliament, there is not much evidence of Hampden making speeches; his interjections were mostly of a few sentences. Adamson makes little mention of him, and in the Journals he is mostly mentioned as being elected to a committee and this is the clue to his activities; he worked behind the scenes almost as though he deliberately shunned publicity of which he had had enough in 1637.

Of course Hampden was not present for many of the sittings. In the autumn of 1641 he was one of a committee appointed to accompany the King to Scotland ostensibly to confer with 'our Scottish brethren', but actually to observe the King's activities. He did not reappear in the Commons until November 13th 1641. From early September 1642 he marched north with the rest of the Parliamentary army under Essex to the campaign which ended in the battle of Edgehill, the King's occupation of Oxford, and Essex' return to London. He was therefore present, as Derek Lester has shown, at the battles of Brentford and Turnham Green. He attended Parliament in January 1643 when he twice acted as a teller, and then left in April 1643 to take part in the siege of Reading, and thence to the Chilterns and his death after Chalgrove on June 24th 1643.

It may be appropriate to quote here some comments about Hampden. Clarendon says "Mr Hampden was a man of much greater cunning, and, it may be, of the most discerning spirit, and of the greatest address and insinuation to bring anything to pass which he desired, of any man of that time, and who laid the design deepest.....He was not a man of many words, and rarely began the discourse, or made the first entrance upon any business that was assumed; but a very weighty speaker, after he had heard a full debate, and observed how the House was like to be inclined, took up the argument, and shortly, and clearly, and craftily, so stated it, that he commonly conducted it to the conclusion he desired; and if he could not do that he was never without the dexterity to divert the debate to another time, and to prevent the determining anything in the negative, which might prove inconvenient in the future"¹. Gardiner in his great history says "Hampden, the wisest and most temperate of the opposition.....It is remarkable how little can be discovered about him. All that is known is to his credit, but his greatness appears from the impression he created upon others"². On the other hand, Symonds D'Ewes, the diarist and fellow MP, accused him of 'serpentine subtlety' when he got Sir Robert Harley to propose the Bishops Exclusion Bill (instead of doing it himself).

There are two features of the 17th Century parliaments which no longer apply. There were plenty of 'Select Committees' chosen to consider specific problems, but on occasions the House dissolved into 'Grand Committee' or a 'Committee of the Whole House'; in these circumstances the Speaker left the chair, and the Grand Committee elected a chairman. The proceedings were not recorded in the House Journals, but at the end the speaker resumed the chair, the House

was deemed to be in session, and the chairman would make a report of any decisions made, which was recorded. The other was the system of joint conferences. The Lords or the Commons would send two messengers to the other house requesting a joint conference “if it will stand with their conveniency” to discuss a certain subject, usually in the Painted Chamber. Then certain members from each house would be chosen to represent that house and then report back the proceedings at a later stage. This ensured that on all matters of vital importance Parliament stood united.

As with the Short Parliament, it will be best to consider Hampden’s attitude to the issues facing Parliament separately though it must be remembered that often several different issues and ‘grievances’ were discussed on the same day. These issues may be listed as follows:-

Chapter 1 The background and the Calling of Parliament.

- 2 The opening weeks, elections, the dissolutions of 1629 & 1640**
- 3 The trial of the Earl of Strafford**
- 4 The Star Chamber, Court of High Commission, Prynne, etc**
- 5 The Bishops Exclusion Bill.**
- 6 Reform of Religion**
- 7 The Protestation.**
- 8 Taxation, Ship Money, Tonnage and Poundage.**
- 9 The Grand Remonstrance.**
- 10 Scottish affairs.**
- 11 The Committee of Safety**
- 12 The last months and war**

**CHAPTER 1
THE BACKGROUND**

In August a group of twelve peers had formed a petition calling on Charles to stop the war, to call a Parliament and to redress the Nation’s grievances, but with the threat that if he did not, they would invoke an act of 1258 which enabled twelve peers to call a Parliament if the King failed to do so³. Charles decided to call a council of all the Peers of the Realm in York to ask their advice, and on September 24th 1640 he announced that he would call a Parliament. The ensuing election campaign was hectic. Hampden, Pym, Fiennes, Vane and many of the petitioning peers scoured the country exhorting the local electorates to choose members most likely to favour reform and support their objectives. Whereas the Short Parliament had been most conciliatory to the King, this was a very different body, determined to stand no obstruction in settling its, and the country’s, grievances. Between April and October much had changed; there were fears of ‘Popish plots’; dislike of the dissolution of the previous May, dislike of the war and the pressing of soldiers for it, (many English were sympathetic to the Scots) and the taxes to pay for it. There was moreover an army in the north of England and there were doubts as to how the King might use that army; indeed there were rumours of a plot by some army officers to bring the army south and forcibly dissolve the Parliament if it should meet. The church ‘innovations’ of Archbishop Laud were widely resented as was the overweening power of his bishops; indeed there was a suspicion that there was a covert plot to return the country to Rome. But the power of the purse was the deciding factor; Charles’ treasury was empty and he had two armies to pay and he was determined to crush the Scots ‘rebellion’. He hoped that his Parliament would tamely provide the money and make no complaint; but this Parliament was a different creature to that which met the previous April.