

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE BATTLE OF AYLESBURY, 1ST NOVEMBER 1642?

The broadsheet *Good and Joyfull News Out of Buckinghamshire* is the only contemporary account of the Battle of Aylesbury.¹ If true, Parliamentary forces inflicted a bloody defeat on the Royalists in which case, logically, the victory would have been widely celebrated and publicised, but it wasn't. There is no further mention of it. Did such a battle really take place? Corroboration (or lack thereof) from other contemporary sources is one very important factor in ascertaining the truth of what happened nearly 400 years ago. The search for truth is hampered by the lack of comprehensive and accurate records of the disposition of forces and their actions at a time of frenetic activity: the first major battle of the Civil War had just been fought and a show-down was looming in London between the armies of the King and the rebel Parliamentarians. There are some records and correspondence as well as broadsheets and newsbooks written for readers on the Parliamentary side. There would have been misreporting as well as failure to report events that deserved to be reported. Certainty about what happened may be elusive but the weight of available evidence does not appear to support the battle claimed by *Good and Joyfull News*. A skirmish between Royalist cavalry and local Trained Bands and townspeople is more of a possibility.

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THE MILITARY CONTEXT IN LATE OCTOBER / EARLY NOVEMBER 1642

Edgehill and the march on London

At Edgehill, near Kineton in the south of Warwickshire, the first major battle of the war took place on 23rd October 1642. King Charles had fielded some 14,300 men; Parliament's army led by the Earl of Essexⁱ: 14,870.ⁱⁱ The outcome was inconclusive but the King retained the field and Essex withdrew his army.

After Edgehill the King would head to London with the intention of ending the rebellion against his rule. Essex also needed to return to protect London, England's capital city, home of Parliament itself and the vital centre of support for the cause he had espoused. London was home to six regiments of Trained Bands which were not part of the "Marching Army" returning from Edgehill. With many experienced officers, though generally part-time soldiers many of whom were young apprentices, the Trained Bands provided a strategic reserve for the defence of the capital. Parliament's hold on London afforded the inner lines from which the Royalists in the regions could be struck and bolstered Parliament's claim to legitimacy whilst being "attacked by a King in alliance with rebels and aliens."²

Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire lay between the routes taken by the opposing armies. In theory, Aylesbury might have seen a serious engagement between the flank guards of the opposing armies; or cavalry against cavalry reconnoitring to establish the position of the opposing army; or a large Royalist force seeking to ransack or seize the town; or a smaller-scale foraging raid. Or it might have been bypassed completely.

ⁱ Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, 1591-1646, according to Brigadier Peter Young in *Edgehill 1642*, pp 64/5 "an officer of some experience" but "no military genius" ... "as an administrator ... decidedly indifferent." His father led an unsuccessful rebellion against Elizabeth I and was executed for treason.

ⁱⁱ The split between cavalry including dragoons ("horse") and infantry ("foot") was: King's army: 3800 horse; 10,500 foot. Essex's army: 2870 horse; 12,000 foot.ⁱⁱ

The Royalists

Moving south from Edgehill on 26th October, the King's army took Banbury (capitulated 27th October) and Oxford and Abingdon (both on 29th October). Advancing along the Thames valley, the army reached Reading (4th November) and Maidenhead (7th), then Colnbrook, just east of Slough (9th November, after an advance guard several days earlier).³

Royalist cavalry had the ability to range widely. After Banbury fell, Prince Rupert, the 23 year-old nephew of King Charles and "General of the Horse," proposed a flying column of 3,000 horse and foot to capture the Parliament House in Westminster before the Earl of Essex could arrive in London. The King's Council of War rejected this plan because of the obvious risks.⁴

Raiding was reported in Oxfordshire and in towns along the Thames valley. According to broadsheets published in London, as at 31st October, Banbury had been "*pillaged and plundered*" and the cavaliers "*range up and downe the Country thereabouts for forrage and spoyle*". On the 2nd November the King's forces had "*plundred all the Townes about Oxford of any noat... Prince Robert [ie Rupert] with his Troops is gone to Henley. And the King is advancing after to Wallingford neere Redding.*" On 3rd November it was reported to Parliament that "*Redding was taken and plundered by the Cavaliers, and that the King lay the last night at Wallingford, and Prince Robert with some of the Forces is come as farre as Colebrook [Colnbrook] some fifteen or sixteen miles from London...*"⁵

Prince Rupert's cavalry raided Staines (Middlesex) and Guildford (Surrey) on 7th November and later the same day summoned Windsor Castle to surrender but was refused. The King met a delegation of Parliamentarians at Colnbrook on 11th November. Rupert's cavalry dismounted and defeated two Parliamentarian infantry regiments at Brentford on 12th November. On the 13th the King's army, tired and low on ammunition, faced a force of 24,000 under Essex at Turnham Green including 6,000 well-armed and enthusiastic members of the London Trained Bands (although they had not been tested in battle). John Hampden had advanced to a commanding position but his proposal to commence artillery bombardment was rejected because there was still hope on the Parliamentary side that there could be negotiation with the King. The King for his part recognised "that he would not take London without first defeating Parliament's armies in the field and that he could not rely on a Fifth Column in the Capital" and decided to withdraw and retire to Oxford.⁶

What is known about raids on Aylesbury?

Foraging for food and supplies would have been a more mundane but essential priority because in order to survive the Royalist army would have needed to replenish its supplies and build up stores for the coming winter.

Two broadsheets (*Good and Joyfull News* and *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries*) described Royalists at Aylesbury: they will be examined later. None of the newsbooks specifically mentioned any raiding in Buckinghamshire around this time.

No evidence has come to light from the Royalist side that, in the week or so after Edgehill, a force was sent to Aylesbury or that it saw any kind of clash. There is evidence of Prince Rupert's activity but comprehensive records of Royalist cavalry forays have not been preserved, if they ever existed.⁷

Raids later in the war

After this early point in the war, it is known that the Cavaliers had some leeway in Buckinghamshire until the war ended in 1646 whenever the Parliamentary army was not in the vicinity and there were several encounters around Aylesbury. The King's headquarters were to be 25 miles away at Oxford protected by a ring of strong points including Brill, 10 miles to the west of Aylesbury. Aylesbury was a border town. Part of the problem was that the garrison at Aylesbury was to consist of foot with only one cavalry troop.⁸

It is worth noting two later published accounts referring to Aylesbury where large scale Royalist forces were said to be involved. Firstly, the parliamentary broadsheet *A glorious and happy victory* reported that on 6th December 1642, a Royalist force of 5,000 approached Aylesbury. The Royalists "*circled Aylesbury but found its*

defences too strong with Bulstrode's regiment in garrison with six guns" and were then, allegedly, heavily defeated near High Wycombe by volunteer forces from surrounding counties. There is no indication that this force engaged in combat in or near Aylesbury. It is not known whether this mission was mounted as a result of an earlier raid or attempted raid.

Secondly, on 20th March 1643, according to the Parliamentary broadsheet *The Perfect Diurnal*, 6,000 Royalists including a large body of cavalry reconnoitred Aylesbury but did not attack the town, though there were "*severall skirmishes without any losse.*" Next day the Royalists drove back a party of cavalry that had come out from Aylesbury. Some firing of weapons occurred but where in relation to the town this took place is not specified. These two occasions when Cavalier forces circled Aylesbury, as well as other skirmishes during the war, might have given rise to material finds such as lead shot in the vicinity of Holman's Bridge.⁹

Finally a minor skirmish near Hardwick on 28th June 1643 was described in a letter from one Richard Smith to his employer. It says 4,000 cavalier horse from Buckingham came to within three miles of Aylesburyⁱⁱⁱ and confronted 3,000 parliamentarian horse under Sir Philip Stapleton. Sir Philip didn't cross the bridge, not wishing to fight in boggy ground on the other side. However an ambush by Royalists in standing wheat killed two members of the Parliamentarian "forlorn hope" (the vanguard), injured four and took three prisoners. It is interesting that this private letter contains the only known account of this minor engagement despite, allegedly, 7,000 participants. Sir Philip acting cautiously and choosing to retreat would not have been a popular story to tell in a broadsheet offered for sale in London.¹⁰

The Parliamentarians

After Edgehill, the Earl of Essex retreated north to Warwick (25th October) despite his army having been reinforced, affording the Royalists what has been described as "a tactical and moral victory."¹¹ After a few days' respite, Essex moved east to Northampton (arriving 31st October), then to Olney (2nd November), Woburn (4th November) and St Albans (5th November), arriving in London on 7th November, perhaps with elements also arriving the day before and the day after.^{12iv} This is similar, in reverse, to the route Essex had taken when he had left London on 9th September moving to his headquarters in St Albans and then to Northampton where his forces met him.¹³ Given the limitations of the available roads, Essex may have used parallel routes as he did during the advance to Worcester in September 1642.¹⁴ For example, part of the army may have taken a shorter route due south from Northampton through Stony Stratford, Brickhill and Dunstable to St Albans, Barnet and London. There is military logic for him to have deployed a flank guard (possibly one of the army's two wings of horse) to the right of his main force, and where there are references to different routes to the east of Aylesbury this would have been consistent with such a flank guard (without it passing through Aylesbury).¹⁵

What is known about Essex's army going to Aylesbury

It would have been theoretically possible for the army or a contingent to take the road south from Stony Stratford to Aylesbury and onwards reaching London from the west. This was the route taken by a Parliamentarian force from London in August 1642 which came through Uxbridge, Amersham, Wendover and Aylesbury on its way to Northampton.¹⁶ Essex knew that the King was moving south and would probably follow the Thames valley towards west London, so taking this route would have been a way of providing reinforcement in that sector. There was military logic for Essex to have sent a force of horse and foot through Aylesbury to protect the right flank of his army as it moved towards London.¹⁷

Parliament had already recognised that Aylesbury itself needed defending. Colonel Henry Bulstrode was authorised on 21 October 1642 to raise a regiment from the Chiltern Hundreds, apparently for service mainly in Bucks. He was to be appointed the first governor of Aylesbury on 2 November 1642, with command of the local Trained Bands and he assembled the new regiment in Aylesbury on 12th November.¹⁸

There was correspondence with Col. Bulstrode about reinforcing Aylesbury. Bulstrode had evidently alerted the Lord Lieutenant of Bucks (Lord Wharton) about his fear that Aylesbury could not be held against a Royalist

ⁱⁱⁱ Simon Marsh puts this confrontation at the stream immediately south of Hardwick.

^{iv} It is not always clear whether reported dates describe the date when some or all of the army arrived. There is conflicting information about how fast Essex's army could travel. Peter Young's account of the journey of Essex's army before Edgehill illustrates how the artillery lagged behind: "Starting from Worcester only on the 19th, he made the 35 miles to Kington in 4 days, an average of 8¾ miles a day. His men arrived between about 9 or 10 at night on the 22nd but much of the artillery, with a strong escort, was left a day's march behind." Peter Young, *Edgehill 1642*, p. 74. Charles Cordell advised, in a talk delivered at the John Hampden Society AGM on 26th March 2023, that troops on a forced march could manage 20 miles in a day, but more realistically 10-15 miles.

attack. Lord Wharton commanded his own regiment which had fled at Edgehill and was disbanded in November 1642. He seems to have been more cautious than courageous in a letter from London on 30th October suggesting Bulstrode and his forces should “retire” to Uxbridge where a convoy was to be assembled, and to join Essex’s army and be paid on the same basis as the other officers and ordinary soldiers.¹⁹

John Hampden’s letters from Northampton, dated 31st October and 1st November, were more bullish. The first letter to “...my noble friends Col Bulstrode, Capt. Grenvil, Capt. Tyrrell, Capt. West, or any of them” said: “The army is now at Northampton” and “we are moving every day nearer to you” and argued against dispersing the force at Aylesbury.^v In the second letter, Hampden explained that the first one had not in fact been sent and there had been a delay: “We cannot be ready to march till tomorrow [ie 2nd November]; and then, I believe, we shall.” He also asked to be informed “what posture you are in, and then you will hear which way we go. You shall kindly do me a favour to certify me what you hear of the King’s forces; for I believe your intelligence is better from Oxford and those parts than ours can be.”²⁰

It is clear that Hampden’s letter dated 31st October from Northampton suggested that the army *might* go through Aylesbury (“we are moving every day nearer to you”) but the next day he had changed his stance to asking for more information from Bulstrode before a decision could be made as to whether the army (“we”) would go through the town or take a different route. Hampden did not say that he personally would come **and if any part of his regiment had been sent on its way already he would surely have said so**. It is not known whether Bulstrode’s reply (if there was one) said the Royalist threat to Aylesbury was undiminished or whether intelligence reports gave him confidence that the Royalists were fully engaged elsewhere and didn’t pose a threat to the town.

Did Hampden, as one of several colonels in the army, have any special insight into Essex’ plans? He was one of the two MPs for the constituency of Buckinghamshire (along with Arthur Goodwin) and colonel of a regiment drawn from the county, so he had a strong interest in trying to determine the level of threat presented by the King’s army to the county town. It therefore seems entirely plausible that he would have made it his business to ask Essex about the route the army would take. It would make sense that it was after discussing with Essex, and receiving push-back from him, that Hampden changed his tune from “we’re coming” to “tell us what’s going on down there and then we’ll see whether we need to come.” **In any case, aside from claims in *Good and Joyfull News (which will be carefully examined)* there is no evidence that Essex sent any force to Aylesbury whether on (or before) the 2nd November or the following few days.**

In addition to the letters from Hampden there is other evidence that Essex **intended** his army to go through Aylesbury but then changed his mind. This change is shown in newsbooks published in the early part of November.

- The first account, printed on 2nd November, stated: “from the Army it was informed that the Lord Generall [Essex] is advanced from Warwick and on Monday [31st October] came to Northampton and on Tuesday [1st November] to Alisbury.”
- The claim that the army had already reached Aylesbury was quickly “clarified” by another newsbook the next day, 3rd November: the Lord General: “**intended to have advanced from Warwick to Oxford after his Majestie, but that the passage was so difficult, by reason of cutting bridges by the Cavaliers**” who had pillaged so much that he could not get provisions for his army; and that he now considered it “*more advantagious to get before his Majesties Army than to follow after them, that so he might intercept them in their passage this wayes and thereupon his Excellency with his [Army] advanced from Warwick to Northampton, and from thence to Alisbury whether he intended to be on Tuesday last [the 1st Nov] whereby his Excellency will bee very neare to the Kings Army and can with much conveniency pursue after them any wayes upon their remove, if not intercept them.*” This appears to be saying that Essex had intended to advance from Northampton to Aylesbury, where he intended to be on the 1st, but was not there yet and when he does get there, he will be very near the King’s army and able to pursue if not intercept it. None of these bold claims seem to have been underpinned by any serious intent, as shown by the next newsbook to appear.
- A newsbook covering events for the week to 7th November reported that, as at 3rd November, “the Lord General with our Forces is come as far as Dunstable” and would have caught up with the King’s Forces but “**was enforced to stay some time longer in Northampton than he expected to mend his carriages which were out of order with hard marching: But the Lord Generals Army for certain is much stronger than the Kings.**”

^v Hampden refers to “the army” rather than his own regiment implying “we” in his next letter again refers to the army.

- Finally, another newsbook covering the week to 7th November, in its account for the 3rd November, reported that Essex had “marched yesterday [2nd November] out of Northampton to Oulney in Buckinghamshire and intended to be this night in Brockhill in Buckinghamshire” (presumably Little Brickhill on Watling Street/ the A5, parallel to the road through Woburn 3 miles to the east); and on 5th November that “The Lord Generall with his Army will bee this night at St. Albans” which is about 23 miles from Little Brickhill going down Watling Street.²¹

These reports say that the army took a route to the east of Aylesbury. Are the reports of the route reliable? It might be reasonable to expect that such reports had some degree of authorisation from the army’s Captain General.

The point was made earlier that it would have made military sense to put a flank guard onto a parallel path between the main body and the enemy. Whilst Essex might have opted to send a force down the road through Aylesbury in order to guard his right flank, there is no firm evidence that this happened. Aside from *Good and Joyfull News*, no other broadsheet mentions the passage of such a force through Aylesbury nor any victory won by a contingent from the army. If Essex had sent a force through Aylesbury, he would surely have made this known rather than reporting that the army was there on the 1st, then that it had not gone there but had intended to, then that it had taken a different route. If any force had been sent to Aylesbury, logically it would have been reported in order to make Essex appear less indecisive and weak: a victory would have been grabbed as a newsworthy addition to one of the otherwise dry reports describing the passage of the army on its way back to London which provided retrospective accounts of events day by day.

This sequence of newsbook reports together with Hampden’s letters, provide evidence that Essex changed his mind about the route to London and chose to keep his army to the east of Aylesbury (at the nearest point some 15 miles or a good day’s march away) rather than sending a contingent through the town.

If part of John Hampden’s regiment had taken part, the earliest feasible date for the battle would have been later than 1st November. The evidence for that is Hampden’s letter headed “Northampton, Nov. 1, 1642” which says: “We cannot be ready to march till to-morrow; and then I believe we shall.”²² He does not refer to any intelligence received about Prince Rupert going to Aylesbury and in fact his letter indicated that he knew less than the recipients. The most direct route from Northampton to Aylesbury is some 34 miles. The crucial point is that the march, if it took place, would have taken all of the 2nd November and a good part of the 3rd so, if part of John Hampden’s regiment took part, the battle could not have been until 3rd November in the afternoon at the earliest, while the sun was shining.²³

If a contingent of Hampden’s regiment and any other infantry or cavalry left Northampton *earlier* than 2nd November, logically, as already mentioned, Hampden would have said so in his letter to Bulstrode, the local commander with most to gain from reinforcement, but also the newsbooks would have reported this instead of saying the army intended to but did not go to Aylesbury.

The only way any of Essex’s army could have skirmished with a Royalist cavalry force at Aylesbury as early as 1st November would be if cavalry had pushed ahead of the main force, but there is no evidence for that.”²⁴

In summary, the army’s return to London was of vital importance to Parliament’s war-effort, accordingly much anticipated and under the media spotlight of the day. The evidence strongly suggests that Essex judged it necessary to keep all his forces on roads to the east of Aylesbury in line with the strategic imperative to reach London with all due speed and to defend it. If there had been a victory at Aylesbury, one or more of the several newsbooks reporting during early November about the progress of Essex’s army would have been expected to include such good news. Even allowing for prevailing turbulence and disruption, it must be regarded as significant that none of the various newsbooks (or even another broadsheet about Aylesbury a few weeks later - to be considered below) provide any corroboration of any engagement involving Essex’s army at Aylesbury.^{vi}

THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS

An unprecedented crisis was facing the Parliamentarians after the Battle of Edgehill in late October 1642. The fear was that the King was coming to take London. The parliamentary stronghold of London was the nation’s

^{vi} Essex’s military career would end with defeat at Lostwithiel on 2nd September 1644. A separate army under Fairfax with Cromwell, foreshadowing the success of the New Model Army, achieved victory at Marston Moor on 2nd July 1644.

hub for news and propaganda. Its printing presses put out nearly twenty weekly papers (sometimes called "newsbooks") and 30,000 pamphlets (or "broadsheets") favouring the parliamentary cause before the monarchy was restored in 1660.²⁵ There were altogether fewer Royalist publications in the Civil War and apparently none to describe the events in October/ November 1642. The Royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* was not produced until June 1643.

Parliament battled for hearts and minds using published material of various kinds as part of its effort to bring waverers over to their side and to deepen the commitment of supporters. Parliament was counting on the people to be fully committed to defending London especially the Trained Bands and the apprentices who signed up in large numbers. On 24th October 1642, exercising power to an extraordinary extent, Parliament ordered all people in London and Westminster "to shut up their shops and forebear their trades so that they may with greater diligence attend the defence of the said places."²⁶ Morale had to be maintained at all costs. Parliament needed to bolster its support in London and elsewhere by highlighting the threat posed by the Royalists. Parliament's propaganda aimed to anger and frighten the population in its depiction of Royalist attacks on people, property, and the Protestant religion and to convince people that Parliament provided the only possible defence against the enemy. Propaganda sought to convince men to join army regiments or Trained Bands; and to convince the wealthy to help pay for the war.

The Royalists were described as *ungodly* and *malignant* enemies who plundered honest citizens, waged war on Parliament, threatened the established order and offended God. Any encounter with the Royalists provided a propaganda opportunity. A victory against the Royalists could be used to demonstrate it was possible to beat them; any losses from a Royalist raid could be used to whip up fear, hatred and the desire for revenge. For example "Terrible News from York" published on 19th October 1642 highlighted "The barbarous Actions of the Cavaliers at Yorke, in plundering the houses, seizing the goods, and imprisoning the persons of those Citizens that refuse to contribute money to maintaine a War against the Parliament...Also how they cruelly threaten to kill diverse godly and religious Ministers ...if they will not preach as they would have them." It gave the warning: "the Cavaliers endeavour to come towards London, and plunder by the way..."²⁷

Parliament needed to win the hearts and minds of the people or lose the war. The King had a traitor hanged drawn and quartered in Oxford in later October. There was a strong incentive for the leaders of the Parliamentary cause to go beyond the reporting of facts. It follows that published material from this period must be examined critically in an effort to determine what is true or false.

So what did the broadsheets report about the battle of Aylesbury and was it reliable?

THE BROADSHEETS DESCRIBING COMBAT IN AYLESBURY

GOOD AND JOYFULL NEWS OUT OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Background

Because it is the only source of the Battle of Aylesbury the broadsheet *Good and Joyfull News* deserves the most intense scrutiny. It claims on its cover to be: "an exact and true Relation of a Battell... on Tuesday last, the first of November... London, Printed for Francis Wright, 1642."²⁸ The original print in the collection of Thomason Tracts shows that it was published on 3rd November.

Outline of content

Good and Joyfull News begins with a preface. The writer acknowledges that the people are eager for news but face a lot of untruths: "never were the people so appetitious of newes; never were their desires so answered with diversity of narrations; and to say truth, never were there broacht so many false and improbable relations". The purveyors of falsehoods are described as having as little affinity with the truth as Copernicus^{vii} and

vii Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543, the Polish catholic proponent of heliocentrism. The prevailing cosmological theories were those of Aristotle and Ptolemy. "[Not until] after Isaac Newton formulated the universal law of gravitation and the laws of mechanics [in his 1687 *Principia*], which unified terrestrial and celestial mechanics, was the heliocentric view generally accepted." Wikipedia references Donald H. Kobe (1998), *Copernicus and Martin Luther: An Encounter Between Science and Religion*, American Journal of Physics. 66 (3): 190.

Domingo Gonzales, the lead character in the 1638 novel "The Man in the Moon". The preface ends with the statement that *"our present discourse needs no preface to excuse it, being a positive and confirmed truth"*.

Good and Joyfull then claims, that after being routed and bloodied in the recent battle (Edgehill) and going on to plunder Buckinghamshire, a force of some 10,000 Royalist "horse and foote" entered Aylesbury at 6am on Tuesday last, All Saints Day, the first of November.²⁹ Led by Prince Rupert, *"there they remained in indifferent peaceable disposition"* until mounted sentinels warned that an enemy force of some 6,000 was half an hour away. This, claimed the broadsheet, was because the Earl of Essex had sent Sir William Balfour^{viii} with *"careful directions, to advance through the neighbouring Counties... to consider distant dangers of his friends and confederates"* and Essex had intelligence that the Prince had returned to Buckinghamshire and would rendezvous at Aylesbury. It also explains that Balfour in fact had only 1,500 horse and foot.

Keeping a troop of horse and two companies of foot in the town, Prince Rupert organised the rest of his force into one single body outside the town. By this time Balfour's force of cavalry and infantry, including part of John Hampden's regiment and part of Grantham's regiment, was only a quarter of a mile away. Prince Rupert led a cavalry charge at Balfour's *"narrow body of horsemen, his troopes being drawn out like a pyramid"* but *"was bid a bloody dinner in the heart of his squadrons. The horsemen being there at least ten broad in Rank, thundering death from those engines of destruction, their Carbines and Patronels, into the bosome of the Princes Souldiers; who neither knew well to advance or retreat."* Pym's troop then charged Prince Rupert's right flank. The Prince was only saved by a charge led by Sir Lewis Dives, whose horsemen each had a musketeer sitting behind them who dismounted and started firing at Balfour's men: *"some ten or fourteene falling."* Then the Earl of Peterborough's troop *"came in with much courage to the aid of [Balfour's] Troope, and the foot forces on our side having gained both wind and Sun, sent cheerfull vollyes of fire, smoak, and bullets on the left flank of the Prince's Squadrons..."*

Commissary General Wilmot then joined the fray, leading the Prince's reserve and killing 60 of the enemy. Balfour brought his cavalry *"up to the face of the Enemie"* while his infantry wheeled about and charged the Royalist infantry, killing *"at least"* 200. The Royalist cavalry continued fighting until Wilmot was shot in the shoulder. Collapse followed: *"They began to shock together, and as it were to retreat"*. Cavalry and infantry took flight. The Royalist rear-guard came out from the town but were *"undertaken by Captain Ascough's Troop and some foot forces"*, then behind them came 200 well-armed townsmen (presumably Trained Bands) who, supported by cavalry, pursued the Royalists for a mile as they fled towards Oxford *"killing in the chase and the fight to the number of six hundred"* mostly infantry, taking 200 prisoners.

The broadsheet presumably targets a faithful Puritan readership, ascribing both martial prowess and godly devotion to the Lieutenant-General: *"Sir William Balfore after his victory , marching to Alisbury, spent the rest of that day in prayers and thanksgiving."* It ends on a prayerful note recognising it was the Lord of Hosts that gave victory to the few against the multitudes of the enemy: *"To him therefore wee ought to ascribe all praise, trusting that hee will deliver us from all our enemies. Amen."*

Outcome: 600 to 800 Royalists killed.³⁰ 90 Parliamentarian dead.

Comments on this broadsheet

The size claimed for the Royalist forces was implausible. The King's strategic aim was to take London and he was occupying various towns on his way south. A force of 10,000 would have represented 70% of the army fielded at Edgehill. As already noted, Prince Rupert had been refused a flying column of 3,000 horse and foot: entrusting him with most of the army, leaving the King exposed, is just not credible. Prince Rupert actually commanded smaller forces before Edgehill at Powick Bridge (1,000 horse); and the next year at Chalgrove (1,500 horse and 500 foot).³¹

Such a large force would have spread outside the town. Claiming such a large force had entered this little town seems completely unrealistic. Aylesbury was a small town of probably less than 500 households.³² "The old town lay entirely on the hill in the immediate neighbourhood of the church, Kingsbury and the market-place. The low-lying ground now covered by the modern part of Aylesbury was occupied by swamps, 'lees' or meadows, water-yards and willow-beds, so that stone causeways were necessary at the main entrances." Draining enabling houses to be built in those areas was not carried out until the 19th century. A force of 10,000,

^{viii} Sir William Balfour, Lieutenant-General of the Horse, second in command of Parliament's cavalry, reporting to the Earl of Bedford, Lord General of the Horse.

presumably with a large number of horse, would have been too large to accommodate in the town. It suggests a writer without knowledge of the local geography.

The Royalists were portrayed as extremely inept militarily: It would have been a basic military precaution to have sent out reconnaissance patrols, knowing that the enemy would need to return to protect London and through Aylesbury ran one possible route. If there were such a large force, with much of it having to remain outside the town, the Royalists would have been well placed to have sent patrols ranging far along the roads north and east. Instead the Royalists were “entertained”, apparently relaxing rather than carrying out any foraging let alone acts of violence against the townspeople. They were then caught totally unprepared and spent so much time attempting to organise their force before leaving the town that the enemy had already taken up strong positions on the field of battle. Despite their numerical advantage (nearly 7 to 1), the Royalists were then unable to fight effectively and were routed by the much smaller force. The magnitude of this military incompetence does not stack up against the actual performance of Royalist cavalry at Edgehill and elsewhere.

Prince Rupert was depicted as ineffectual but could not have been present. A feared bogey man, Prince Rupert, General of the Horse, had swept Essex’s cavalry from the field at Edgehill and before that, won a minor but psychologically important victory at Powick Bridge (23rd September) which “*rendered the name of Prince Rupert very terrible indeed*” and engendered talk of the “*incredible and irresistible courage of Prince Rupert and the King’s Horse*.”³³ Prince Rupert could not have been in Aylesbury over this period because he arrived in Abingdon from Oxford on 31st October and went from there to Henley on 2nd November and to Maidenhead on the 4th. If he had been at Aylesbury on the 3rd or at any time after Edgehill, surely the journal would have said so.³⁴ To depict him and his forces as inept was clearly important for propaganda purposes, hence the claim he was at Aylesbury.

Wilmot, Commissary-General of the Horse wounded and routed. Henry Wilmot, 30 years old, was a veteran of the Dutch war against the Spanish. As second in command of the Royalist cavalry, reporting to Prince Rupert and was shortly to be promoted to lieutenant-general. He had been wounded at Powick Bridge but just four weeks later led the left wing of Royalist cavalry at Edgehill. He led the force that stormed and captured Marlborough on 5th December. In this broadsheet, the shoulder wound he allegedly suffered outside Aylesbury was serious enough to trigger the rout of the cavalry followed closely by the infantry. However there is no record of Wilmot being wounded again weeks before Marlborough. Was he really at Aylesbury? Another broadsheet also says he was there. Charles Cordell argues for the military logic of his brigade of Royalist cavalry being at Aylesbury as a flank guard between the King’s main body and his enemy. It is not known exactly where he was, so this is a possibility and is considered later in this paper.³⁵

The number of claimed Royalist dead was high by English Civil War standards and the massacre of retreating soldiers would have been notorious. A total of at least 600 dead approaches Royalist losses at Edgehill. 800 dead would be more than at Edgehill (where total dead numbered some 1,000-1,500, considered to be evenly spread between the two armies).³⁶ If losses on that scale had been suffered, the battle would surely have received a lot of publicity. The numbers quoted are suspiciously rounded: 200 killed, 600 killed, 200 prisoners etc. Also, considering that the Royalists were “*indifferent peaceable*” in the town, for the townspeople to rush out and help the army kill many of them when they were running away, despite taking 200 prisoners, seems harsh even by the standards of the time and lacks plausibility. Such a rout and massacre would surely have attracted more publicity if it had occurred but there is no further mention of it in any newsbooks. Again, it would surely have affected the attitude and behaviour of the Royalists, leading to more brutality on their part but there is no evidence that this happened. In 1643, for example, King Charles offered his personal physician to help treat the wounded John Hampden after Chalgrove, indicating gentlemanly behaviour was still possible.

Questions about tactics. Vagueness about the battlefield. The account goes into detail about the tactics, officers and units involved yet said nothing about the conditions or features of the field of battle. Something about the weather and time of day can be inferred from the mention that Balfour’s musketeers “*gained both wind and Sun*”. It should be noted that nothing was said about any river, bridge, boggy ground or indeed any feature or landmark whatsoever, again suggestive of the writer lacking genuine knowledge of the battle he describes.

Prince Rupert’s initial charge is described as getting stuck in the centre of a pyramid-shaped force of enemy cavalry, which at 10 ranks wide was still fairly narrow. His much larger force might have been expected to envelop or outflank Balfour’s cavalry even if he could not have driven through it. It was not a contemporary military tactic for cavalry to charge the centre, but typically to charge enemy cavalry on the wings.³⁷ Balfour’s infantry were not mentioned at this point in the account; later they were described as wheeling and

manoeuvring. There was no reference to pikes although infantry regiments had two types of soldier: pikemen and musketeers, organised in companies together. Musketeers would have been shielded by pikemen.³⁸

Although musketeers riding on the same horse as cavalry troopers seems like a desperate tactic, apparently there is evidence that it was used subsequently by the Royalists. Dragoons certainly dismounted in order to fire muskets at this stage in the war.³⁹

The story is heavily biased: All on the parliamentary side perform brilliantly despite overwhelming odds, not only the cavalry led by Balfour (who had proven his worth at Edgehill where much of the other Parliamentary cavalry had been routed) but also the infantry and local Trained Bands. The Royalists are portrayed as hopeless militarily, which does not match up with their combat performance at this stage in the war.

Observations about style and choice of language: The style and language of the broadsheet deserves to be considered. Rhetorical tricks are used in order to appeal to the readership. The language seems hyperbolic and fails to convey a sense of real events taking place. Every aspect seems exaggerated: the huge numbers of Royalists, the scale of victory following a humiliating rout, the courage and professionalism of the Parliamentary side, and the language used. In the preface, the author makes extravagant claims for the accuracy of his account contrasted with examples of fantasy in literature. The author is clearly well aware of various literary genres: the fantasy novel about Domingo Gonzales flying to the moon on the back of *ganzas* (an imaginary bird); and *As you like it*, another fantasy tale, in quoting "good wine needs no bush."⁴⁰ Unwittingly, despite his claims for accuracy, he introduces a sense of unreality. The battle itself is strangely detached from any geographical feature or landscape. His use of an overblown literary style ("*thundering death from those engines of destruction, their Carbines and Patronels*") may be conventional for the time but fails to convey a sense of reality to the battle and the ensuing massacre of fleeing Royalists. After the battle, the author jarringly changes into a devout and religious mode where Balfour offers himself up for prayer and reflection. Catering to the sensibilities of puritan readers, Balfour is portrayed as an abstemious godly warrior serving the will of the Old Testament Lord of Hosts who gave victory to the Parliamentary few against the enemy multitudes, suggestive of a David and Goliath struggle. The final sentence calls for praise to God and appropriates a phrase from the Lord's Prayer substituting the Royalist *enemies* for the word *evil* ("deliver us from all our enemies. Amen"). Not unusually for a broadsheet, the Almighty is co-opted in favour of the rebel cause and the Royalists are equated with evil. The title *Good and Joyfull News out of Buckinghamshire* has strong New Testament connotations (ie the good news of Christ). Overall the style seems contrived and does not convey a sense of authenticity or lend credibility to the substance of the account.

Lack of any other supporting evidence. *Good and Joyfull News* is the only account of the alleged battle. Neither Prince Rupert's "war diary" nor a journal of his marches mentions it, and nor does any other contemporary source that has come to light so far.⁴¹ It does not appear in any of the principal histories of the period. The *Memorials* by the Parliamentary Bulstrode Whitelocke, records only that '*Prince Rupert ranged abroad with great parties who committed strange insolences and violence upon the county. At Ailsbury he failed of his design, by the care and stoutness of Colonel Bulstrode, governor there... Colonel Henry Bulstrode being about sixty years of age, yet underwent the hardships and hazards of war in this cause, and was a discreet and stout governor of Aylesbury in his home county.*' Whitelocke would have been very familiar with Henry Bulstrode (who was his uncle and godfather) and it is telling that he receives credit for the defence of Aylesbury, not Balfour.⁴² No personal papers have emerged as evidence from those named in this broadsheet (such as Balfour and Wilmot) or not named but who would have been aware of a battle at Aylesbury (such as Henry Bulstrode). A counter argument has been made that there *could have been* other documentary evidence of the battle but it would have been destroyed by the time of the Restoration because supporters of Parliament would not have been keen to preserve documents showing their involvement with the cause.⁴³ It is perhaps valid as far as personal diaries, letters and official papers are concerned but it doesn't overcome the lack of corroboration from other broadsheets produced by Parliamentarians during the war. None of the newsbooks referred to this battle involving Balfour's brigade and local forces joining to defeat the Royalists. Apart from this one broadsheet, nothing further is written about such a battle. The lack of corroboration, even during a time of turmoil in the land, is telling and does undermine the credibility of *Good and Joyfull News*.

Evidence that Essex did not send Balfour's brigade to Aylesbury and the date of the battle is not feasible. Over and above the issues raised about the credibility of this broadsheet is the evidence from John Hampden's letters and various newsbooks discussed earlier indicating that a) Essex did not send a force to Aylesbury and b) if there had been a battle as described it could not have taken place on 1st November but on 3rd at the earliest if the brigade led by Balfour participated. However *Good and Joyfull News* was published on 3rd November in London. Given the time needed for writing (wherever the writing took place), riding to London, typesetting and

printing, it would not have been feasible for the broadsheet to describe events that took place on 1st November, let alone 3rd November.^{44 45} **This means that any real events would have had to take place several days earlier.** If a clash of some kind occurred in the latter part of October, the brigade led by Balfour could not have fought at Aylesbury because the army did not leave Northampton until 2nd November.

When was *Good and Joyfull News* written?

It has been discussed earlier how Essex would have known several days beforehand that he would not be in Aylesbury on the 1st November: the newsbook *Certain Special and Remarkable Passages* published the same day as *Good and Joyfull News* revealed that the army had intended to go to Aylesbury but had not.⁴⁶ Essex therefore had the opportunity to put the best possible gloss on events through *Good and Joyfull News*, even reporting that the Battle of Aylesbury took place on 1st November, which was the date the army was supposed to be there.

The short gap between writing and publishing *Good and Joyfull News* would have been comparable to *An exact and true relation of the dangerous and bloody fight*, the account of the Battle of Edgehill by Denzell Hollis, William Balfour and others which was published on 28th October.⁴⁷ Assuming they wrote it on 24th or 25th October, a day or two after the battle, it was published within 3 or 4 days. By that yardstick, someone authorised by the Earl of Essex would have been able to write *Good and Joyfull News* on 30th or 31st October and get it to London for printing and publication by 3rd November. Alternatively, a messenger rode to London and provided information, in writing or in person, which was written up on arrival.

How reliable is *Good and Joyfull News* as evidence of the battle it describes?

Some historians have taken the view that this broadsheet provides a realistic account of events in Aylesbury. For that to be true would require: John Hampden to have been error when writing his letters about going and then not necessarily going to Aylesbury; the series of newsbooks to have provided erroneous reports about the progress of the army (which were presumably based on bulletins from Essex); and for there to be a solid explanation for why no other written account of the battle has ever been found, including the next published account of events in the same town published a few weeks later in December 1642 in *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* which is examined below.

The evidence taken together suggests that the battle as described was largely “imagined” for propaganda purposes: a false narrative, a crowd-pleaser (nevertheless with an important propaganda agenda) rather than a serious dispatch from the battlefield, whether or not Essex commissioned it (and the timescale would have been so tight that he would have been best placed to do so).

The evidence outlined does not seem to support the theory that Balfour, pushed out to the south west of Essex’s main body as a flank guard, came into contact with a force led by Wilmot that had pushed north and east of the King both as a flank guard and also to seize the cattle fattening in the Vale of Aylesbury in late October/ early November.

Whilst it does not appear credible that Balfour’s brigade was involved in a significant battle together with Trained Bands and townsfolk, **Royalists might have raided Aylesbury (perhaps with a view to seizing cattle) and skirmished with the Trained Bands.** *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* is consistent with such a possible scenario.

Why was *Good and Joyfull News* produced?

From the evidence outlined above, it seems clear that *Good and Joyfull News* was not written as factual news reporting but as propaganda helpful to Parliament’s war-effort.

But why was it thought necessary to produce an account of which much appears to be ludicrous propaganda that could surely be disproved afterwards?⁴⁸

Firstly, it responded to the existential crisis faced by the Parliamentary side in the aftermath of Edgehill at this specific critical point in the war. To prevent the King defeating Parliament, **it was imperative for the people of London and its Trained Bands to be reassured that the Royalists could be defeated; and to be motivated to stay and help defend the city against the army that was advancing on the capital.** The Parliamentary side would win (having better leaders, cavalry and infantry, better tactics and morale and enjoying more support from townsfolk); that the Royalists on the other hand were losers (who committed crimes against women and property) and therefore all citizens (as potential victims), the army and the Trained Bands should stand firm against them.

Secondly, the broadsheet describing a fictitious victory at Aylesbury cast Essex himself and his army in the best possible light. It is the case however that the Earl of Essex had been given the widest powers by Parliament as Captain General of the army and would have had the authority to permit it to be written. His army and his own regiment would no doubt have included classically educated officers capable of writing the text. An alternative is that Essex, preoccupied as he was by military and logistical problems, did not authorise it and the account of the battle was written independently by someone in London. **It was still very favourable to Essex and the cause whether authorised by Essex or whether it was a narrative produced in London by someone more interested in selling sensational broadsheets to the public for profit.**

Whoever may have authorised it or written it, such propaganda served the strategic purpose at this crucial stage in the war of maintaining confidence in the army and in Essex's leadership. This was days after the indecisive battle at Edgehill and the retreat which took him further from London while the King came closer. The public had been misinformed that Essex had arrived in Aylesbury on 1st November, then later that he had intended to go there but did not and then later still that he took a different route. It would have been apparent to Essex that reports published in London had been unconvincing. This victory would give his army (and his own reputation) a major boost before reaching London and compensate for those misleading and potentially embarrassing reports about the army reaching Aylesbury. There was potential for the army and Essex himself to be criticised as soon as he reached London if the published reports had been closely examined. He might have been accused of failing to secure Aylesbury but also, more seriously, of failing to defeat and pursue the King and failing to return to London in time to meet the threat posed by King Charles's army. Essex must therefore have realised he could risk losing the confidence of the people of London and Parliament itself. **Leaving to one side the rather unconvincing explanations about why the army intended to but did not reach the town, a broadsheet could provide a vivid description of military success in Aylesbury. Making a virtue of a necessity, Aylesbury could therefore be used as the setting for a major triumph.**

As to worrying that claims made in the broadsheet could be disproved, those who knew the truth would have accepted it as a necessary tactic at a critical moment in the war. This would explain why Henry Bulstrode and other well-placed officers and officials in Buckinghamshire chose not to set the record straight or otherwise argue about this account of the alleged battle, nor to claim credit for any part of it. Perhaps they even welcomed *Good and Joyfull News* for raising awareness of Aylesbury as a strong point on London's western flank and hoped it would attract support from Parliament in the form of money, reinforcements and artillery to protect the town and themselves. Other readers no doubt accepted it as true and/or lacked the means or desire to check the facts. Then as now it was hard to prove a negative.

ABINGTONS AND ALISBVRIES PRESENT MISERIES

Background

This broadsheet was published on 1st December 1642.⁴⁹ This followed the Battle of Brentford on 12th November where Royalist cavalry dismounted and destroyed two parliamentary regiments; and Turnham Green on 13th November from where King Charles had decided to withdraw his army from London and return to Oxford at the end of the campaigning season.

Since *Good and Joyfull News* was published, the threat to London had receded. The people of Abingdon continued to live under Royalist control whereas Aylesbury in the neighbouring county was a Parliamentary stronghold gearing up its defences and Trained Bands.

Outline of content

Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries described how a smaller force ("*a thousand of the Cavaliers, all Troopers*") under Commissary Wilmot arrived in Aylesbury and was billeted overnight in the best inns and other houses of quality. They were "*indeed indifferent courteously entertain'd by the inhabitants...more for feare than love*". The next morning the cavaliers showed their true nature with "*their rapine and theft*" and started stealing their hosts' money and metal plate, destroying beds and furniture and shooting or houghing cattle in adjoining yards.^{ix} The cavaliers were "*violaters of all divine and Humane lawes*" with "*divers of them in their*

^{ix} Presumably cutting open mattresses in search of concealed valuables. "*Houghing*" of cattle is the cutting of their leg tendons. "*Rapine*" means violently plundering. The words "*violaters of all divine and human laws*" and the description refer to nothing more than violence in taking valuables and ransacking houses, plus the killing and maiming of cattle.

beastly and libidinous fury offering violence to the honest Matrons and beautifull Virgins" of the town. Some of these ladies were *"more savage than the Turks themselves"* as they defended themselves with knives and spits. Trained Bands arrived from neighbouring towns and hamlets and together with townsfolk, armed with muskets, pikes, pitchforks *"and what weapons they could possibly get"* attacked the cavaliers. Most of the cavaliers rode off leaving 400 of their number in the market place where 20 of them were killed. The survivors were chased *"through the streets"* and suffered 50 more killed by musket fire.

Outcome in Aylesbury: 70 Royalist dead. No casualties reported on the Parliamentary side: *"the greatest damage that the townsmen receiv'd, being in the losse of their Money and Plate."*

While the looting and violence was taking place in Aylesbury, Royalists led by Prince Rupert *"were performing the like abominable outrages in and about the good towne of Abington"*. In Abingdon there was no resistance by the population and there were no casualties. Cavaliers took at least £2,000 from a gentleman called Master Ashcombe before going into Abingdon and being billeted there for the night. The next morning, following the same pattern as in Aylesbury, they began looting. They later sold some of the looted items in Oxford.

Comments on this broadsheet

No mention of the battle described in *Good and Joyfull News* but some points of similarity: *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* was published in December 1642 without mentioning Balfour and his force winning a victory over the Royalists in Aylesbury, helped by the townspeople, a few weeks earlier. Not mentioning Balfour's brigade is consistent with the evidence already presented that none of Essex's army came through Aylesbury in late October/ early November 1642. Logically, if Balfour had played a central part in a decisive victory, it would have received a mention as a good news story relating to the same town and worth repeating. It would be understandable if the Royalists had chosen not to publicise a humiliating defeat at the hands of Balfour and the townspeople but its omission from this Parliamentary broadsheet further undermines the credibility of *Good and Joyfull News*, the sole account of the pitched battle. This appears to be additional evidence that the account of the battle in *Good and Joyfull News* (notably the involvement of Balfour's brigade) was fabricated. However this later broadsheet also describes the townspeople and/or Trained Bands being involved in a smaller scale fight with Royalists who are ejected from Aylesbury, and in both cases Wilmot is said to be present. These points of similarity may provide a degree of corroboration and perhaps lend some credibility to the broadsheet. It would also have implications for dating the events.

Commissary General Wilmot's presence in Aylesbury: *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* claims Wilmot led the raiding party. There is no other documentary evidence aside from *Good and Joyfull News* that Wilmot was in Aylesbury. Charles Cordell has strongly argued using logic and military principles that he would have been present in the town: *"Wilmot commanded the second Royalist wing (or brigade) of horse and if Prince Rupert took the vanguard position on the right, it would make 17th Century military sense that Wilmot took the rear-guard, usually placed on the left flank. It would have been military folly for the King not to have pushed a flank guard out to his left (north) between his line of march and Essex (on Watling Street). I think Wilmot would have commanded this. If not, where was he? Wilmot was also the Commissary-General of Horse. This would have included a logistical role in ensuring the horse were supplied. I think he would, therefore, have had an interest in the beef droves that were in the Vale of Aylesbury in early November. Finally, Wilmot stayed at the Catherine Wheel Inn in Colnbrook from 5 November."* There is also the unanswered question of precisely when Wilmot may have arrived and departed.

More like a foraging raid: beef cattle targeted: Aspects of this account seem more credible than *Good and Joyfull News*, for example there is description of foraging whereas there was none in *Good and Joyfull News*. The claimed size of the Royalist force was perhaps more appropriate for a foraging party. Charles Cordell has pointed out that each year in October/ November, cattle were driven (ie on the hoof) from Wales and elsewhere for fattening in the Vale of Aylesbury before being driven onward to markets serving London. He argues cogently that seizing or denying large quantities of beef to the enemy would have been a good reason to raid Aylesbury. There would have been military logic in denying to the enemy this stock of beef on the hoof, by making it impossible for cattle to be driven on the hoof to markets serving London if it were not possible to seize it for the benefit of the King's army. Seizing London's supply of winter beef would have been a blow for the people of London. Beef was a very important and widely consumed food. It would have sunk morale ahead of Christmas and denied the protein necessary to get the population through the winter. The broadsheet itself lends support to this theory where it describes cavaliers shooting or houghing cattle.

The Parliamentarian response seems feasible: The Royalists may not have known at this point how well Aylesbury could defend itself and might perhaps have been carrying out reconnaissance in order to find out.

Trained Bands existed and a regiment was in the process of being organised under Col Bulstrode in October/November so would have been capable of engaging in combat to some effect using the muskets, pikes and other weapons described in the broadsheet.⁵⁰ There is no reason to believe the defences were impregnable in late October or early November. Cannons were deployed around the defences of the town in December and helped deter a much larger force.

Relatively high casualties on the Royalist side, none on the other side: Whilst 70 Royalist dead is considerably fewer than in *Good and Joyfull News* it would still have been a significant number. By comparison it would have been approximately double the number lost by the Parliamentarians when they were defeated at Powick Bridge on 25th September 1642 at an encounter involving fighting between cavalry forces of around 1,000 on each side.⁵¹ Furthermore, there is no mention of any of Aylesbury's men (or women) being casualties of the Royalists, only the loss of valuables ie "*the greatest damage that the townsmen receiv'd, being in the losse of their Money and Plate.*" It seems implausible for there to have been no Parliamentarian dead if a force of 1,000 well-armed cavaliers was attacked. The omission of Parliamentarian casualties combined with the disproportionately high number of Royalists allegedly killed by the townsfolk undermines the credibility of the account and suggests exaggeration therefore casualties much lower than reported, if there were any at all.

Military ineptitude and lack of fight shown by the Royalists: The Royalists are described as being caught off guard while plundering, starting to bunch together for self-defence and then fleeing the scene leaving two fifths of their number in the Market Place. This group then also flee, pursued through the streets while being fired on by musketeers. Wilmot was a leading Royalist general and would presumably have taken precautions if he had led a well-armed regiment of cavaliers into the town because it was known to support Parliament. He should have anticipated the presence of local Trained Bands and reinforcements coming from outside the town and would have had sentinels and patrols on the lookout. The lack of military preparedness or any coherent defensive or offensive tactics on the part of the cavaliers; and the description of fighting as completely one-sided with no mention of any counter-attack or any of Royalist weapons being discharged, seems unrealistic especially considering the battle of Brentford.

Vagueness about the fight and location: The Market Square is mentioned and "*the streets*" along which musket fire supposedly brought down fleeing cavaliers, but there is still some vagueness about how the fire was delivered (organised salvoes? sniping?); the direction taken by the cavaliers (no road or direction out of Aylesbury is specified - did they leave going north in the direction of Holman's Bridge or west towards Oxford?); and no information is given about any feature of the landscape or conditions on the ground. There is no mention of a river or boggy ground.⁵²

Dating the raid described in Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries

The text of the broadsheet provides a basis for dating because it is known that Abingdon was occupied by the Royalists on 29th October (and Prince Rupert was in Abingdon on 31st). The broadsheet says Master Ashcombe was robbed outside the town and then the cavaliers went into Abingdon apparently for the first time and were billeted there for the night. Assuming this refers to the occupation of Abingdon, then that day was 29th. (The following morning when they began their looting would have been the 30th.) The text explains to the effect that during the looting at Aylesbury, Master Ashcombe was being robbed. That puts the looting and fighting in Aylesbury on the 29th October, following the cavaliers arrival in Aylesbury on 28th October. **Allowing for a degree of unreliability in what was reported, the raid might have been say a day later, possibly occurring on 29th or 30th October.**⁵³

The above assumption is consistent with the preamble to the broadsheet which says that "*Alisbury...preceded Abington some dayes in her misfortune*". That would fit with the Cavaliers arriving in Aylesbury on 28th and the looting in Abingdon beginning in earnest on the 30th ie two days later.

The preamble also says that the Cavaliers arrived in Aylesbury "*some five dayes since*". The word "since" appears in this context to mean "ago". This appears to refer to five days before the broadsheet was published (rather than the interval between the two towns being raided^x). If the events were some five days before publication on 1st December, they would be around 26th November. However there was no other report of such a raid in the latter part of November. Also cattle market sales were held earlier in November. As described

^x If taken as meaning that Aylesbury's misfortune started 5 days before Abingdon's, and assuming Abingdon was pillaged on 29th October, the Cavaliers would have needed to have arrived in Aylesbury on 24th October and been routed there on 25th, which would be implausibly early, being the day after Edgehill and three days before the taking of Banbury.

above, there is evidence within *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* for the raid being on 29th October or a day or so later. The phrase “*some five dayes since*” seems best explained by the publication of the broadsheet having been postponed because *Good and Joyfull News* had been given priority (at the time of crisis when the King’s army was moving towards London), but consequential amendments to the text were not made.

Was there one raid or two?

Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries described Trained Bands and townspeople defeating the Royalists and to that extent there is similarity with *Good and Joyfull News*. Were there two separate raids or did both broadsheet accounts arise from the same raid in late October?

- **Two separate raids?** There are two reasons why *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* could not logically describe a *second raid* on Aylesbury following on from the *Good and Joyfull News* claimed took place on 1st November. Firstly, if Royalists had already been routed and massacred by the people of Aylesbury, they would not have come back a few weeks later with a smaller force, willing to spend the night billeted with townsfolk before starting to plunder the following day, all without taking any security precautions or being at all concerned following the slaughter described in *Good and Joyfull News*. Secondly, *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* would logically have mentioned the extraordinary achievement of its townspeople/ Trained Bands if they had already beaten off an earlier raid led by Prince Rupert. *Good and Joyfull News* likewise would have surely mentioned an earlier raid.
- **Both broadsheet accounts from the same raid?** This all points to a single foraging raid (assuming even one occurred) and that, despite discrepancies, the same foraging raid led to the accounts in both broadsheets. Referring to *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries*, Ian Beckett concluded: “It seems much more likely that this is a truer account of what occurred on 1 November - if indeed anything took place at all.”⁵⁴ Obviously, if the same raid informed both accounts, it must have happened before the publication of *Good and Joyfull News*. *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* was published in December: *Good and Joyfull News* on 3rd November. Assuming a single raid on Aylesbury took place on 29th or 30th October, it could have been written up for *Good and Joyfull News* and the same events could have received different treatment when *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* was published, after a delay, December.

Why the delay? Why was *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* produced and whose interests were served by its publication?

If the same raid informed both broadsheets, why was *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* published so much later than *Good and Joyfull News*? Published in London, the author is unknown. Although it might possibly have been written simply for profit by an unknown individual of his own bat, it provided propaganda for Parliament and was perhaps more likely prompted by individuals seeking such a corrective to *Good and Joyfull News*, the account which gave credit to Balfour for routing the Royalists (despite evidence that none of Essex’s army was there). *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* could therefore have been intended to present an alternative narrative, so as to set the record straight (or at least somewhat straighter). This description of courageous local people and Trained Bands in Aylesbury routing a sizeable and heavily armed Royalist raiding party led by an eminent general (whilst sustaining no casualties) would have been crafted with an eye to encouraging resistance elsewhere. It would have demonstrated defence of the town by determined citizenry with no lethal consequences for the defenders and contrasted this with Abingdon where the population was robbed without fighting back (showing the downside of **not** resisting). Describing the behaviour of cavaliers in two English towns would have served as a warning to other towns and cities, so a wider motivational purpose would have been served.

Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries would also have served the interests of Aylesbury by helping make the case that the town merited tangible support from Parliament (in terms of money, equipment, ammunition etc). It would have helped Col Bulstrode make the case for fortification and artillery.⁵⁵ It may also have served as a low-key corrective to *Good and Joyfull News* that claimed Balfour’s brigade had played the leading part in defeating the Royalists.

Was any of it true?

A raid at this time targeting beef cattle (as previously discussed) and an encounter between Cavaliers and Trained bands seems credible in principle.

Aspects of the account however appear to be propaganda and lack credibility, for instance: the incompetence and lack of fight on the part of the Royalists despite being led by a general whose determination had already been proven in battle; the number of casualties suffered by them with none on the part of the town/Trained Bands; the one-sided nature of the fighting and the lack of specific detail in the description.

Further, if there had been loss of life on the scale claimed and such a significant figure as General Wilmot had been defeated, this would likely have been reported by newsbooks which gave accounts of encounters week by week. This suggests that Royalist casualties were greatly exaggerated so perhaps there was little or no loss of life. Perhaps the encounter was very different: the Cavaliers decided to ride out of the town at an early stage when they realised they were going to be confronted by Trained Bands and were fired at as they left; they were deterred from entering the town or skirmished outside the town.

Another scenario would be “No Combat Took Place”: that the same raid was echoed in the second broadsheet but the original account was fiction; both accounts were concocted so as to present the Cavaliers as violent barbarians looting and destroying the property of honest townsfolk and how the townspeople of Aylesbury pulled together to rout the enemy. Under this scenario, a story was written to motivate the people of London and elsewhere to support the Parliamentary cause and, like *Good and Joyfull News*, not to describe actual events.

Looking at the evidence so far, it seems credible that there may have been a raiding party and an encounter of some kind with the Trained Bands and people of Aylesbury, exaggerated for propaganda purposes and possibly there were few or no casualties.

LATER ACCOUNTS: WHAT EVIDENCE DID THEY PROVIDE?

LORD NUGENT'S ACCOUNT

Lord Nugent's account in his book *Some Memorials of John Hampden* (1831) needs to be carefully examined for two important reasons. He was the first writer to place the Battle of Aylesbury at the River Thames by Holman's Bridge and he also linked the human remains that were found in 1818 to the battle he believed took place there.

There would no doubt have been sound tactical reasons for using the River Thames to bolster a defensive position but Lord Nugent provided no evidence for placing a battle there. He cited only *Good and Joyfull News* as his source but nevertheless made various changes.⁵⁶ For example Prince Rupert's force was “some thousands”, Balfour's force wasn't quantified; the town had been left unprotected because: “*The small garrison of new-raised militia at Aylesbury had been moved to some quarter which was more closely threatened*” and “*the inhabitants were made to suffer all sorts of outrage from his soldiers*” (unlike *Good and Joyfull News* but reflecting the account in *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries*).

As in *Good and Joyfull News*, after sentinels warned that a brigade was approaching, Prince Rupert left a force in the town and moved out to meet the advancing enemy. Then, in his description of the battle, Lord Nugent made a number of significant changes. The words in bold below are not found in *Good and Joyfull News*:

*“But he had not gone farther than **the brook** about half a mile to the northward of the town, where there was no passage but **a bad ford, swollen by the rains**, when he found himself checked by Balfore's horse **and foote, in column, on the opposite bank**. After the first volley or two, Rupert **charged across the ford** through Balfore's **first two lines of infantry**, lunged into the centre of his horse...the musketry of the foot, the carbines and petronels of the cavalry, **swords, and pole-axes**, all doing the work of death, and the soldiers of **all arms mixed and fighting in one close and furious throng**. It lasted but a few minutes. The King's troops were **driven back across the stream**...” etc.*

So Lord Nugent added the brook and ford and charges across the ford. Two lines of infantry have appeared which were not previously in front of the cavalry. Instead of Prince Rupert's cavalry charge being stopped by Balfour's cavalry in pyramid form, infantry armed with pole-axes are present. This weapon was not mentioned in *Good and Joyfull News* (nor was the pike although the latter might have been expected to be used for the protection of musketeers from cavalry).

As to losses, Lord Nugent is vague. He merely says: “*some hundreds of Rupert's men fell, and of the Parliamentarians above ninety.*” It seems no coincidence that he crafted this form of words so as to be consistent with the number of skeletons reportedly found in 1818.

OTHER ACCOUNTS

Some later historians have based accounts of the Battle of Aylesbury entirely on *Good and Joyfull News* or on Lord Nugent's account, others have been sceptical or not mentioned it at all.⁵⁷ The range of views can be illustrated with some examples.

Sarah Griffin (1998) wrote an account based on *Good and Joyfull News*.⁵⁸

Kevin Peter's account (on the Aylesbury Town Council website, undated) is based on Lord Nugent's account which embellishes *Good and Joyfull News* and locates the field of battle around Holman's Bridge.⁵⁹

Peter Gaunt (1987) considered that a Royalist detachment advancing on London was repulsed at Aylesbury by Colonel Balfour.⁶⁰

Stuart Reid (2007) took the view that the *skirmish* at Aylesbury resulted in the final destruction of Grantham's regiment, basing this on the observation by Stuart Peachey (1987) that Grantham's regiment disappeared from view after the encounter described in *Good and Joyfull News*, seeing that broadsheet as the evidence for its disappearance.⁶¹

Charles Cordell has recently argued that military logic would have meant that Balfour provided a flank guard to the west of Essex's main force but also Henry Wilmot would have provided a flank guard to the east of the King's army; that Wilmot's force would probably have consisted of two regiments of cavalry aiming to seize large amounts of beef on the hoof for the King's army and thereby to deprive and demoralise London; and that after a running battle along the road between Weedon and Aylesbury, Wilmot failed to hold Aylesbury or seize the beef but he protected the King's advance and then moved on to occupy Colnbrook on 5th November.⁶²

Arthur Taylor (1974 - history teacher at Aylesbury Grammar and expert on the Civil War) argued for a more limited encounter: "...if the battle had taken place it would have been one of the most important of the war...The King was about to start his march on London and if he could have taken Aylesbury the way would have lain open..." It was more likely "a minor engagement that the Parliamentary propaganda machine exaggerated out of all proportion. Both armies ...would have been feeling for one another with cavalry. They may well have continued down into Bucks in this way. My guess is that what we had here was a smallish clash between cavalry that was reconnoitring the area...not... more than a couple of hundred men on either side."⁶³

Ian Beckett (2015) concluded *Good and Joyfull News* was unreliable and *Abingtons and Alisburies present miseries* more likely a truer account of what occurred "if indeed anything took place at all."⁶⁴

As well as documentary accounts and the views of historians there is other evidence to consider.

THE HUMAN REMAINS

The finds

The Northampton Mercury reported on 14th November 1818:⁶⁵ "About **150 human skeletons** have lately been discovered at place called Homer's Bridge in the parish of Aylesbury, by the workmen who were digging for materials for repairing the road...no warlike instruments have been found, and as the bodies appear to have been thrown in promiscuously (the greater part on their faces) it is generally supposed they were buried at the time of the plague, about the year 1603." Then on 27th February 1819 the same paper reported more human remains had been found, in total "**about 258 but twenty skulls only**...They appear to be all males, and full grown. Lord Nugent has collected the bones together, and intends erecting a tablet over them."⁶⁶

The Gentleman's Magazine of 12th October 1819 provided different information and more detail. As outlined by Bob Zeepvat, this article described the burials as very near the Aylesbury -Winslow turnpike road; haphazard in nature at differing depths between three and five feet; **38 in number**; all adults below middle age with few exceptions.⁶⁷ The author of the article (an "old correspondent") suggested they could be Saxon burials but concluded they are of Civil War date primarily because of their state of preservation. The Battle of Aylesbury was not mentioned.

The next account of the burials was from the Bucks Herald, 12th November 1825. The ***number of skeletons is now recorded as 247***. By this time the remains had supposedly been reinterred at Hardwick Parish Church. The newspaper quoted in full *Good and Joyfull News* together with the inscription on the memorial provided by Lord Nugent which included this: "*Within are deposited the bones of 247 Persons who were discovered AD 1818, buried in a field adjoining to Holman's Bridge...From the History and appearances of the place where they were found, they were considered to be the bones of those officers and men who perished in an engagement fought AD 1642, between the troops of K. Charles I, under the command of Prince Rupert, and the Garrison who held Aylesbury for the Parliament.*" It is noteworthy that this inscription refers to the Aylesbury garrison but not Balfour's brigade despite Lord Nugent's own book claiming it played a major part in the battle; also that no precise date is given.

Bob Zeepvat provided details of an article in the 1860 Records of Bucks placing the burials in the west of Bierton parish, in a field called "Goodson's" quarried most likely for gravel which the original newspaper articles said workmen were using for road surfacing.⁶⁸ He then discussed the three possible locations for the burials: in the parishes of Aylesbury, Weedon and Bierton. He discounted the location of the remains being found in Aylesbury to the south of the Thame or in Weedon parish to the north of Holman's bridge because there was no trace of gravel in those areas. He considered the most likely location for the burials, at an appropriate distance from the centre of Bierton, to be a Saxon cemetery, not consistent with any account of a Civil War engagement. He also tellingly described the box-tomb, measuring about 1.8 x 1 x 0.9 metres within which the remains are supposed to be held, as "*far too small to hold 247 human skeletons.*"

Comments

The number of human skeletons

The newspapers reported a huge variation in the number of skeletons found: 150, 258 (only 20 skulls), 38, and finally, 247. There would have been a lack of scientific rigour in the whole process by modern standards so if professional osteo-archaeologists were able to examine the remains with the benefit of modern techniques it would probably produce a more accurate different body count and establish whether death arose from injuries sustained in battle or otherwise. Perhaps several sets of bones were discovered in different places. The number of persons represented by the bones held in the tomb at Hardwick Church would give an indication of the scale of a military engagement, if it contained all the dead discovered back in 1818/ 1819. However the small size of the tomb makes it unlikely that so many dead could be accounted for.

There are three main theories for dating the remains described by the newspaper articles:

a) Civil War dead

The remains were said to be of men of fighting age, which would allow the possibility they were Civil War dead. There was a report that their state of preservation was consistent with that.

Arthur Taylor believed that the human remains found near Holman's Bridge were more likely those killed at an engagement in March 1643, and that both the latter and the November 1642 skirmish were cavalry engagements in the area of Quarrendon, after which bodies were moved for burial.⁶⁹

Simon Marsh has suggested that the Bierton dead, if they date from the Civil War, could be typhus victims because when Essex's army passed Bierton in late August 1643 before marching to Gloucester when the army was riddled with typhus. He has also suggested that, given there were various engagements around Aylesbury during the Civil War, the different newspaper accounts may relate to different places and therefore different incidents.⁷⁰

b) 1603 plague victims

Aylesbury was devastated by the plague in 1603. If the remains were correctly identified as male adults below middle age with few exceptions, they were essentially men of fighting age. That would seem to exclude plague victims who would presumably be more representative of the general population.

c) Remains from Saxon period

The 1818 report that many of the remains being headless provides support for the theory that the remains were from the Saxon period. The wholesale decapitation of enemies was not practiced during the Civil War. In Saxon times, however, the heads of enemies and criminals were more commonly removed and sometimes displayed. The headless remains of some 50 men described as Vikings, from Scandinavia and eastern Europe,

including Belarus, were found by Oxford Archaeology in a mass grave at Ridgeway Hill near Weymouth, their skulls in a separate stack. The grave was considered to bear all the hallmarks of an Anglo-Saxon execution cemetery. The Vikings were executed during one event which took place in the 10th or 11th century AD. Some of the features common to this class of burial site might perhaps apply to the vicinity of the Aylesbury finds, for example "location upon or adjacent to county boundaries, hundreds or boroughs; and proximity to prehistoric monuments and visibility from, or proximity to, communication routes (by water or road)." ⁷¹

Aylesbury itself was apparently attacked and laid waste by the Danes in 921 AD so it is possible that victims from that time could have been found in 1818.⁷²

Bob Zeepvat concluded that the remains were probably Saxon.

Possible further research

Forensic analysis of the remains, radio carbon dating and DNA analysis would enable conclusions to be reached about how many people were represented by the remains placed inside the monument at Hardwick, their age and origin. This would provide pointers towards the scale of a military encounter (if one is indicated) or another cause of death (such as typhus) that may have been associated with the finds. Dating would show the approximate age of the bodies but it would not be able to pinpoint when death occurred or, obviously, the precise date of a battle but it would provide details about the individual people involved.

THE POWDER BOX CAPS AND BULLETS

The finds

Glenn Foard led a metal detecting survey in 1999 over the area of around 0.6 sq. km around Holman's bridge, bounded by the A413, the Thame, Quarrendon and the northern edge of the area to be developed for housing. Twenty-five lead balls, one slug and four lead powder box caps were found. Musketeers typically wore 12 powder boxes on a bandolier, each box containing enough gunpowder to fire one lead ball. Foard was unequivocal: the powder box caps clearly indicated mid-17th century military action.⁷³

The larger proportion of the small arms bullets (16 balls of small calibre) indicated cavalry in action using pistols and carbines. Only 5 bullets were of musket calibre, indicative of infantry or possibly dragoon action which Foard found "*appears to be compatible with cavalry action against infantry where the latter did not deliver a major musket volley.*" Foard noted the possibility of "noise" in the graph of the calibre of bullets caused by small calibre sporting rounds of earlier or later date; and that the graph had "*similarities with graphs of background noise seen from work in Northamptonshire and in other non-civil war battlefield survey (Foard 2008)*".

Interpretation and possible further research

Notwithstanding the background noise, Foard provided an evocative description of what might have occurred: "*Interpretation of this material suggests that the infantry, as indicated by the powder box caps, were engaged immediately north of Holman's Bridge. The musketeers were either standing or, perhaps more likely, in flight along the Aylesbury- Winslow road. The majority [of musket balls] could be argued to have been fired westward by the musketeers standing close to the road.*"

Foard acknowledged that the material found: "*is too small to draw definite conclusions as to the nature of the action in the area surveyed. The demonstration that combat did occur in this area in the Civil War provides limited support for the interpretation of the burials reported in the 19th century as Civil War casualties and indicates the need for more intensive metal detecting survey on any undisturbed land between Holman's Bridge and Weedon Hill should the opportunity arise.*"

These findings amount to some evidence that combat, perhaps *cavalry action against infantry*, occurred in the vicinity of Holman's Bridge at some time during the Civil War.

COMBAT SCENARIOS

During the Civil War there was misreporting of events and lack of reporting of events that really did take place. Certain knowledge of what really happened in Aylesbury is elusive. It is possible to consider scenarios for

various military engagements and by examining how far a) military logic and b) other evidence supports each scenario, suggest which scenario is the most likely.

There are several possible scenarios for an engagement in or near Aylesbury during the critical period:

- a. Pitched battle between cavalry and infantry from the two armies plus local forces on Parliament's side:** This is the scenario described in *Good and Joyfull News*, subsequently re-imagined and set at Holman's Bridge by Lord Nugent. **Military logic:** The King's army was moving through Oxfordshire and the Thames valley towards London. Essex's priority was to move his army rapidly to London. Aylesbury was a known Parliamentary stronghold and whilst it would have presented a target for a raid, both armies may have wanted to avoid the distraction of a major clash at this stage. **Other evidence:** No document corroborates the account of the battle and Parliamentary victory in *Good and Joyfull News*. Newsbook reports about Essex's army say nothing about part of the army going to Aylesbury. Reports had to backtrack on a claim the army had already arrived. Reports of the progress of Essex's army on its way to London would logically have included a triumph if it had taken place. Even *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries*, published weeks after *Good and Joyfull News*, made no mention of it, indicating the account of the battle was seen as inaccurate. The metal evidence discovered so far is insufficient for a major clash. **Given the priorities of both armies to reach London and the lack of other evidence, the pitched battle scenario seems highly unlikely.**
- b. Running battle between the flank guards of the two armies:** This is the scenario suggested by Charles Cordell. **Military logic:** The presence of flank guards consisting of cavalry forces protecting each army on the march was conventional and it can be theorised that flank guards provided a screen for each army. Flank guards would have needed to move some way distant from simply protecting their own main bodies and aggressively towards the opposing army in order to have clashed. However there is a rationale for the Royalist flank guard to have carried out a raid particularly targeting beef cattle. **Other evidence:** Two broadsheets place Wilmot leading cavalry in Aylesbury but the second one does not place any Parliamentary cavalry there, indeed no part of Essex's army. So there is some corroborating documentary evidence for Wilmot but not for any Parliamentary flank guard (which would presumably have been led by Balfour). Parliamentary broadsheets would logically have reported a victory by Balfour if one had taken place, but it is not mentioned in *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries*. Further, as *Good and Joyfull News* was published on 3rd November, it must have referred to a raid in late October at the latest and must have been produced before Balfour's brigade could have arrived in Aylesbury. If that is true, by the time a contingent of Essex's army came through Aylesbury, if it came, it would have missed the action. **The scenario lacks strong supporting evidence despite any military logic for such an encounter.**
- c. Small-scale skirmish involving cavalry from both armies:** This scenario was suggested by Arthur Taylor: "a minor engagement that the Parliamentary propaganda machine exaggerated out of all proportion... a smallish clash between cavalry ... reconnoitring the area...not... more than a couple of hundred men on either side."⁷⁴ **Military logic:** It seems highly plausible that the two armies sent out patrols in order to understand the disposition of the enemy without necessarily looking for a confrontation. Whether they in fact met and skirmished at Aylesbury is another matter. **Other evidence:** It is possible that *Good and Joyfull News* exaggerated and distorted a clash but there is no documentary evidence of a purely cavalry v. cavalry skirmish. Parliamentary broadsheets might logically have been expected to report a victory and/or a skirmish if it had taken place. On the other hand not all skirmishes might be reported or described in a broadsheet. However, the fact that no such purely cavalry against cavalry skirmish is described in either *Good and Joyfull News* or *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* is unhelpful to this scenario. There's no proof that it relates to this particular skirmish scenario but metal evidence was discovered by metal detecting surveys near Holman's Bridge years after Arthur Taylor's comments and does not point to a cavalry v cavalry clash. **Perhaps it was not reported. Perhaps the broadsheets failed to describe this scenario accurately (if it really happened) but the scenario lacks supporting evidence despite the military logic for such a small-scale encounter.**
- d. Skirmish between elements of the Royalist army and local Trained Bands and townfolk:** **Military logic:** There is a rationale for Royalist cavalry, perhaps led by Wilmot, to have carried out a raid particularly targeting beef cattle. Col Bulstrode was at this time organising local forces for the defence of Aylesbury, so if a raid was attempted it could have been rebuffed (with some casualties) or deterred

by a show of force (thereby avoiding a clash). **Other evidence:** *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseris* described such a scenario: townspeople and Trained Bands (ie without cavalry, Balfour or army infantry) defeating the cavaliers under Wilmot, but exaggerated for propaganda purposes. The raid may be dated tentatively at 29th or 30th October, by reference to when Abingdon was occupied. *Good and Joyfull News* may contain echoes of the same events. Given the lack of other evidence such as newsbook reports, and the implausible aspects of *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseris*, the casualties might have been very few, if there were any, and fighting might have occurred outside the town, rather than around the Market Square. There's no proof that it relates to this particular skirmish scenario but metal evidence discovered so far near Holman's Bridge indicates a cavalry v infantry skirmish at some point during the war. **Given the military logic and the other evidence, although firm corroborative proof is not available, this scenario seems the most likely.**

- e. **No combat took place at this time (October/November 1642): Military logic:** Both armies were moving towards London and stayed sufficiently far apart to avoid any clash. Royalist cavalry may have visited Aylesbury without clashing with Trained Bands or any other force or perhaps they didn't visit at all during this stage of the war. **Other evidence:** With this scenario both broadsheets gave fictional accounts, for propaganda purposes, of the Cavaliers being defeated and there was no popular uprising leading to the Cavaliers being routed by Trained Bands and the people of Aylesbury. The newsbooks made no mention of any raid being resisted because it never happened. The mid-17th century lead shot and other finds near Holman's bridge would have resulted from other fighting around Aylesbury. ***This No combat scenario may be a possibility but proving a negative isn't possible and it would rely on the two broadsheet accounts containing no germ of truth whatsoever.***

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE BATTLE OF AYLESBURY

The following conclusions flow from analysis of the evidence explored in this paper:

- 1) The Earl of Essex may have sent out patrols to determine the extent of any threat to his flanks and there may have been a flank guard to the east of Aylesbury but no documentary evidence of this exists. Military logic and *Good and Joyfull News* notwithstanding, John Hampden's letters and the sequence of published newsbooks presumably issued with Essex's approval indicate that after the Battle of Edgehill, Essex had intended to bring his army from Northampton through Aylesbury to London but changed his mind and judged it necessary to keep his forces on roads to the east of Aylesbury.
- 2) Although there would have been military logic for a flank guard to have gone through Aylesbury, aside from *Good and Joyfull News* there is no other evidence that Essex sent any force to Aylesbury at the time when the two armies were en route to London after Edgehill whereas there is a sequence of published newsbooks describing a different route.
- 3) Much of the broadsheet *Good and Joyfull News* seems very likely "imagined" for propaganda purposes and in particular the claim that Balfour's brigade including part of Hampden's regiment participated in a significant battle at Aylesbury, given the evidence of the dating and content of John Hampden's letters, the date of publication of *Good and Joyfull News*, the sequence of published newsbooks, the lack of any further mention of a battle at Aylesbury, and given that Bulstrode Whitelocke's subsequent *Memorials* credits his uncle Col Bulstrode with the defence of the town rather than any part of Essex's army.
- 4) Despite the lack of what this writer considers persuasive evidence for it and given the weight of evidence against it, it has to be recognised that reporting at this time cannot be relied on for a comprehensive account of all troop movements so it is not possible to say with absolute certainty that a Parliamentary flank guard did not go through Aylesbury and clash with Royalists.
- 5) *Good and Joyfull News* described the date of the battle of Aylesbury as taking place on 1st November. This could have been intended to provide an account purposely fabricated to match the date that Essex had reported the army had reached the town (before he announced he had taken a different route).

- 6) Only one raid on Aylesbury could have taken place, despite that fact that *Good and Joyfull News* and *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* both refer to Royalist forces being ejected from Aylesbury. In both accounts the Royalists are peaceful, unsuspecting and not badly treated when they enter the town. This would have been inconceivable if they had already raided Aylesbury once before and many of them had been slaughtered as described by *Good and Joyfull News*. In both broadsheets Commissary General Wilmot is said to be in command of cavalry, suggesting a degree of corroboration for his presence.
- 7) Given a germ of truth in both broadsheets about a raid having taken place, logically the same raid was alluded to both by *Good and Joyfull News* published on 3rd November and *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* published on 1st December.
- 8) Analysis of the text of *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* cross-referenced to the date Abingdon was occupied and, making some allowance for the language used in the broadsheet, suggests the raid took place on 29th or 30th October 1642, allowing time for *Good and Joyfull News* to be published on 3rd November.
- 9) *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries* is propagandist in nature and cannot be relied on for factual accuracy about the reporting of casualties. If a skirmish between Royalist cavalry and local Trained Bands and townsfolk took place, casualties might have been very few, if there were any.
- 10) There is no documentary evidence of combat at Holman's Bridge but the finds of lead shot and powder box caps show that combat between cavalry and infantry took place in the vicinity of Holman's Bridge, mid-17th century and this may have been as result of a skirmish. This does not prove that combat occurred in October/ November 1642 but it might possibly have been.
- 11) Evidence of combat might exist at other locations in the vicinity of Aylesbury because the Royalists were involved in skirmishes around Aylesbury at various times during the Civil War.
- 12) A more intensive metal detecting survey has been called for along the road to Weedon Hill. This might help clarify the extent of any clash in this specific area. It would be interesting to see metal detecting surveys in the area towards Quarrendon where it has been suggested combat associated with the Holman's Bridge action may have occurred; and in other areas around Aylesbury to understand more about where fighting took place around the town, although it is unlikely that any metal finds could be linked to a specific battle or year of the Civil War.
- 13) Human remains were reportedly found not very far from Holman's Bridge but there is no scientific evidence that they date from the Civil War. If many were in fact headless, this might suggest they were from the Saxon era. If further research were to be permitted and funded, and permissions were received from the relevant authorities, the application of osteo archaeology, radio carbon dating and DNA analysis to the human remains at Hardwick Church would provide clarity about the number, approximate date and origin of those particular remains, although the numbers would be limited because of the modest size of the tomb.
- 14) Establishing the number of persons represented by any Civil War era remains, if there are any, that may be found at Hardwick Church might suggest the scale of a military engagement even if it could not determine precise dates (or show where they were found in 1818/19). Evidence of their approximate date and origin would enable some theories to be discounted and allow the remains to be appropriately commemorated.
- 15) Additional evidence would improve our understanding of what happened at Aylesbury in the autumn of 1642. Over and above any further evidence that might arise from human remains, there may be correspondence, diaries or other documents in private hands, collections or archives that may throw further light on this matter.

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- ¹¹ Peter Young, *Edgehill 1642: The campaign and the Battle*, p. 130. Simon Marsh of the Battlefield Trust takes the view that part of the army also went to Coventry to recover after Edgehill.
- ¹² On the return to London, SR Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol 1, Windrush Press, 1987 (first published 1863), p. 51. Peter Young, *Edgehill 1642: The campaign and the Battle*, p. 131 provides a chronology showing Essex marched from Northampton to Olney on 2nd Nov, then to Woburn and St Albans reaching London on 7th. Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p 137, and Peter Young and Richard Holmes, *The English Civil War: A military history*, 1974, Wordsworth Editions, p. 81 say the 8th November. Charles Cordell says they limped back to the capital on the 6th and 7th at: [Edgehill to London 1642 - CHARLES CORDELL](#).
- ¹³ Peter Young, *Edgehill 1642: The campaign and the Battle*, p. 56. BL, Thomason Tracts, E242 (6) *England's Memorable Accidents From the 31st October to 7th November*, No publication date shown – Whereas Peter Young refers to the army being at Woburn on 4th November, this newsbook says the army would be at Brickhill 3 miles to the west of Woburn on the same day where another road comes south. This indicates that parallel routes could have been used.
- ¹⁴ Email of 22 March 2023 from Simon Marsh drew attention to the possibility of parallel routes and referred to Philip Tennant, *Edgehill and Beyond*, Stroud Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1992, Ch 4 describing the advance to Worcester.
- ¹⁵ Simon Marsh has suggested part of the army may have travelled via Towcester, presumably avoiding Northampton.
- ¹⁶ Letters of Nehemiah Wharton in R Gibbs, *A History of Aylesbury*, 1885, p.160. Online at [Buckinghamshire: A history of Aylesbury with its borough and hundreds, the hamlet of Walton, and the electoral division : Gibbs, Robert, of Aylesbury, Eng : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
- ¹⁷ Charles Cordell email 19 March 2023 about flank guards.
- ¹⁸ Ian FW Beckett *Wanton Troopers* p 59 and email dated 15 March 2023 and G Lipscomb, *History and Antiquities of Bucks*, Vol 4, London, 1847 p. 16.
- ¹⁹ For more on Lord Wharton see Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p.54. R Gibbs, *A History of Aylesbury*, p. 161: says, "Hampden's regiment bore the motto " Vestigia nulla retrorsum'..." (No retreat). This is also the motto of the Earl of Buckinghamshire. See link: [Coat of arms \(crest\) of Buckinghamshire \(heraldry-wiki.com\)](#)
- ²⁰ John Hampden Letters: Lord Nugent, *Some Memorials of John Hampden*, London, 1854, p 307.
- ²¹ BL, Thomason Tracts, E242 (2) *A Collection of Special Passages, October 17 till November 1*, 2 Nov 1642; E242 (3) *A Continuation of Certain Speciall and Remarkable passages informed to both Houses of Parliament, 31st October till 3rd November*, 3 Nov 1642; E242 (7) *A Perfect Diurnall Number 21, Oct 31 to November 7 1642*, No publication date shown; E242 (6) *England's Memorable Accidents From the 31st October to 7th November*, No publication date shown.

²² Lord Nugent, *Some Memorials of John Hampden*, p. 307.

²³ If Hampden's regiment started out in Northampton at first light (about 30 minutes before sunrise) on 2nd November (6:41am) then it would have needed to make an average speed of 3½ mph for 9.6 hours without stopping in order to cover 34 miles just to reach Aylesbury before sunset (4:17pm) the same day. The pace would have needed to be even faster if they were to arrive early enough to take part in a battle that same day during which the broadsheet said the sun was shining. Given all the above and carrying packs, weapons and ammunition, a faster pace for infantry seems very unlikely. By way of comparison the website [Marching pace of the British Army - The Long, Long Trail \(longlongtrail.co.uk\)](http://longlongtrail.co.uk) describes a normal pace during WW1: "Infantry: usual pace ...3 miles per hour including short halts. Mounted troops at the walk: usual pace ... 3.5 miles per hour including short halts.

²⁴ Charles Cordell argues that there was a battle and that it took place on the 3rd: "The key reason I believe the Battle of Aylesbury was fought on the 3rd (not 1st) of November 1642 is that we know Essex did not reach Olney until late on the 2nd. I think it is militarily unreasonable to think that he would have pushed part of his force so far ahead." Charles Cordell email to the writer on 22 Nov 2022. Note: Northampton to Olney is 12 miles. Olney to Aylesbury is 30 miles but not on a direct route from Northampton to Aylesbury.

²⁵ Keith Feiling, *A History of England*, London, Macmillan, 1950, p. 476. Newsbooks, broadsheets and pamphlets were collected by the publisher and bookseller Thomason and are also known as "Tracts."

²⁶ British Library, Thomason Tracts, 669.f.5 (87) *An ordinance of Parliament*, 24th Oct 1642.

²⁷ British Library, Thomason Tracts, 123 (14) *Terrible News from York*, 19th October 1642

²⁸ British Library, Thomason Tracts, E126 (9) *Good and ioyfull nevves*. Online at: [Good and ioyfull nevves out of Buckinghamshire, being an exact and true relation of a battell, stricken betwixt Prince Robert and Sir William Balfore; lieutenant generall to his Excellency, the Earle of Essex, neer Alisbury in that county on Tuesday last, the first of November, wherein the said Sir William obtain'd a happy and glorious victory. \(ox.ac.uk\)](http://ox.ac.uk)

²⁹ The breakdown between "horse and foote" is not specified.

³⁰ The casualty figures: Bob Zeepvat, 'Battles and Burials at Holman's Bridge,' p 136. Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p. 137.

³¹ Bob Zeepvat, *Battles and Burials at Holman's Bridge*, p.137.

³² Julian Hunt provided this information about the population: In his return for the Bishop's Visitation in 1669 the vicar of Aylesbury estimated 500 households (*Bucks Record Society Vol 28*, 1993). Aylesbury in 1563 had 169 households. The 1603 Aylesbury figures were lacking. (A. Dyer & D.M. Palliser: *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603*). Adults in Aylesbury: 887 Conformists, 45 Nonconformists, totalling 1932 (A. Whiteman: *The Compton Census of 1676*). Drainage of boggy ground: see the British History Online website: [The borough of Aylesbury: Introduction and borough | British History Online \(british-history.ac.uk\)](http://british-history.ac.uk)

³³ Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion*, Oxford, 1826, Vol III, pp. 236-7 quoted by Peter Young and Richard Holmes, *The English Civil War*, p.71

³⁴ *Prince Ruperts Journall* p.731. Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p. 137.

³⁵ Charles Harding Firth, *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900, Vol 62* link: [Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900/Wilmot, Henry - Wikisource, the free online library](http://www.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Wilmot,_Henry)

³⁶ Edgehill losses: Peter Young and Richard Holmes, *The English Civil War: A military history*, p. 80.

³⁷ Bob Zeepvat, *Battles and Burials at Holman's Bridge*, p 139.

³⁸ Pikemen: Peter Young, *Edgehill 1642: The campaign and the Battle*, p. 19. Also [The Cromwell Museum - Soldiers | Cromwell](http://www.cromwellmuseum.org.uk)

³⁹ Simon Marsh email of 18th November 2023: "Rupert probably carried his musketeers on the back of dragoon horses during his raid in June 1643 that culminated at Chalgrove and the King escaped Oxford in June 1644 with all his cavalry and 2,500 musketeers riding pillion behind the cavalry." On dragoons: Stuart Reid, *All the King's Armies: A Military History of the English Civil War 1642-1651*, Spellmount, 2007, p.11.

⁴⁰ William Shakespeare, *As you like it*, Act 5, Scene 5. The Folio Edition was published in 1623.

⁴¹ Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p. 137.

⁴² Bob Zeepvat, 'Battles and Burials at Holman's Bridge,' p 137. Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials*, 1732, pp.64 and 76. Whitelocke might possibly have been referring to defence against royalists in December 1642 and March 1643 but not much later because his uncle died in the summer and was laid to rest on 10th August 1643. Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p.10 for family relationships. G Lipscomb, *History and Antiquities*, Vol 4, p. 572 says Henry Bulstrode was buried in the family tomb at Upton on 10th August 1643 but the date of death seems to be unknown.

⁴³ Robert Hammond, *A new battle of Aylesbury*, The Patriot: Newsletter of the John Hampden Society, No 33, 2002, p.1.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Simon Marsh for identifying this date (email of 29th March 2023).

⁴⁵ Email from Simon Marsh dated 24th March 2023.

⁴⁶ E242 (3) *Certain Special and Remarkable Passages 32 October till 3rd November*, 3 Nov 1642.

⁴⁷ BL, Thomason Tracts, E124 (26): *An exact and true relation of the dangerous and bloody fight*, 28 October 1642.

⁴⁸ I am grateful to Beth Rogers, Chair of the John Hampden Society, for posing this question.

⁴⁹ BL, Thomason Tracts, E128 (33) *Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries*. 1st December 1642. Available online at: [\[TCP\] Abingtons and Alisbvries present miseries both which townes being lately lamentably plundered by Prince Robert and his cavaliers : expressly related as it was certified to some of the honourable the high court of Parliament : and therefore published / by G. H. \(ox.ac.uk\)](http://ox.ac.uk) Thomason bought it on 1st December according to the handwritten note on the cover.

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- ⁵⁰ Col. Henry Bulstrode, the governor of Aylesbury, is not however mentioned in this broadsheet (nor was he mentioned in *Good and Joyfull News*). Likewise, although he was responsible for the town and in a position to provide an accurate account of what actually happened, no diary, correspondence or account by Bulstrode over that period has come to light.
- ⁵¹ The Parliamentarians lost some 30-40 killed; and up to 100 wounded according to the Battlefield Trust figures. [The Battlefields Hub → The Civil Wars → The Edgehill Campaign → The Battle of Battle of Powick Bridge \(battlefieldstrust.com\)](#)
- ⁵² If the route taken was towards Oxford it would have avoided the road to Holman's Bridge, so bullets found in that vicinity could not have come from this action.
- ⁵³ *Prince Ruperts Journall*, p.731. Ian FW Beckett, *Wanton Troopers*, p 137. George Lamb in 2001 mentioned a slightly earlier date, suggested by J. Sheahan (in 1869) without providing any reference supporting the claim: "In some accounts, this battle is said to have been fought on the 27th October, 1642..." George Lamb, *Records of Bucks Vol 41*, 2001, pp 183-184. J.J. Sheahan, *History and Topography of Buckinghamshire*, Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862, p. 49.
- ⁵⁴ Ian FW Beckett *Wanton Troopers* p 139
- ⁵⁵ BL, Thomason Tracts, E129 (17), *A glorious and happy victory*, 6th December 1642. It is known from *A glorious and happy victory* that the Aylesbury defences included six cannons but it is not clear when they arrived.
- ⁵⁶ Lord Nugent, *Some Memorials of John Hampden*, pp. 308-310
- ⁵⁷ For example, more sceptical: J.J. Sheahan, *History and Topography of Buckinghamshire* p.49, and George Lamb, 'Aylesbury in the Civil War', *Records of Bucks*, 2001, pp 183-184. No mention of the battle: for example SR Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War* and Peter Young and Richard Holmes, *The English Civil War: A military history*.
- ⁵⁸ Sarah Griffin, *The Battle of Aylesbury*, Stuart Press, Bristol, 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Kevin Peters, 'The Battle of Aylesbury Was Oliver Cromwell really there?', undated, on Aylesbury Town Council's website at [The Battle of Aylesbury | Aylesbury Town Council](#) and pdf [Battle of Aylesbury.indd \(aylesburytowncouncil.gov.uk\)](#)
- ⁶⁰ Peter Gaunt, *The Cromwellian Gazetteer*, Alan Sutton and the Cromwellian Association, 1987 p.8.
- ⁶¹ Stuart Reid, *All the King's Armies: A Military History of the English Civil War 1642-1651*, p.29. Stuart Peachey and Alan Turton, *Old Robin's Foot*, Partizan Press, 1987, p.7.
- ⁶² Charles Cordell emails to the writer and website at: [Edgehill to London 1642 - CHARLES CORDELL](#). There is a running battle outside Aylesbury in Charles Cordell, *God's Vindictive Wrath*, Myrmidon, Newcastle, 2022.
- ⁶³ 'The battle that may never have happened,' and other articles quoting Arthur Taylor, *Bucks Advertiser*, 1st March 1974 pp 8-9.
- ⁶⁴ Ian FW Beckett *Wanton Troopers* pp 137-8.
- ⁶⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 14th November 1818, the British Newspaper Archive.
- ⁶⁶ *Northampton Mercury* 27th February 1819, the British Newspaper Archive.
- ⁶⁷ Bob Zeepvat, 'Battles and Burials at Holman's Bridge,' pp 133-141.
- ⁶⁸ Bob Zeepvat, 'Battles and Burials at Holman's Bridge,' pp 139-140 refers to article by C.P.A., *Historical memoranda of Bierton*, *Records of Bucks*, Vol 2, 1860.
- ⁶⁹ 'The battle that may never have happened,' and other articles quoting Arthur Taylor, *Bucks Advertiser*, pp. 8-9.
- ⁷⁰ Email to writer 22 March 2023.
- ⁷¹ Louise Loe and others, 'Given to the Ground' A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, *Weymouth*, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph Series No 22, 2014, pp. 1, 8, 234. Full report at: ['Given to the Ground' A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth - library \(oxfordarchaeology.com\)](#)
- ⁷² G Lipscomb, *History and Antiquities of Bucks*, Vol 2, p.3.
- ⁷³ Glenn Foard, 'Appendix 1: Early modern small arms munitions, A Romano-British Malt House at Weedon Hill, Aylesbury,' *Records of Bucks*, Vol 53, 2013, pp 36-39.
- ⁷⁴ 'The battle that may never have happened,' and other articles quoting Arthur Taylor, *Bucks Advertiser*, 1st March 1974 pp 8-9.