

BATTLE OF WORCESTER WALK – NOTES

To be read at the locations specified in the headings

1. The viewpoint information board

- The Civil War was a conflict between Parliamentarians (or Roundheads) and Royalists (or Cavaliers), which appeared to have ended with the execution of King Charles I in 1649. Cromwell established as the main power in the land. This however was merely the end of the second phase of the English Civil War.
 - Importantly, the former King's son, also called Charles, had not given up. He became exiled in France, but preserved his Monarchist ambition. He found support among the Scots who were far from happy with the English executing their King and suppressing their religion. Hence, on 5 February 1649, the Covenanter Parliament of Scotland proclaimed Charles II as "King of Great Britain, France and Ireland" at the Mercat Cross, Edinburgh. Charles landed in Scotland in June 1650 and The Third phase of the Civil War followed, with an English army, under Oliver Cromwell, invading Scotland and defeating Scottish forces at the Battle of Dunbar in September of that year. Undeterred, in January 1651, the Scots crowned Charles as King. Charles then invaded England with a Scottish Army, heading south in a forlorn hope of igniting a general uprising. When he was denied entry to Shrewsbury, he headed for Worcester which was known to harbour Royalist sympathies and was also close to Wales from where it was anticipated significant quantities of new recruits would be forthcoming.
 - Worcester was held by a 500 strong Parliamentary force under Colonel James – however they chose not to defend the city and it was taken by the Royalist army on 23 August 1651. They immediately started re-fortifying including building a redoubt, Fort Royal, to command the high ground overlooking Sidbury Gate.
 - Within five days of the Royalists securing Worcester, Parliamentary forces converged on the city. By 28 August the eastern approaches had been blockaded but an all-out attack was delayed until Parliamentary troops were in a position to secure the western side – Cromwell did not want the Royalists simply retreating into Wales. By 3 September 1651 he was ready to begin his assault and the Battle of Worcester commenced.
 - At 5:00am on that day his army held Upton on Severn and, for reason which will become clear, he started to send pontoon boats down the River Severn over which we will soon cross.
 - A bit later, the initial action was at Powick village, in particular the church, which can be seen a mile away, towards the Malvern Hill, and that is where the walk goes to next. The Royalists lost that skirmish, but still were able to hold Powick Bridge, over the River Teme by the chimney over there – the second stop.
 - At that point Cromwell was holding the land to the East – Redhill – behind us. The Royalist held the city and the land to the west protected by the Teme and the Severn where we are going.
 - Cromwell had 28,000 troops, Charles, 16,000.
 - Charles himself had watched the initial stages of the battle from the tower of Worcester Cathedral. We will get good views of the tower later on.
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2. Powick Church

- **Noon:** This was the site of the first skirmish, at noon. Royalist troops were sent out to see what was happening and here they encountered Parliamentarians – they were overwhelmed, bullet holes in the Tower still testify to their destruction.
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3. Powick Bridge – start of Monarch's Way

- **2:00pm** Here though the Royalists had something to defend, and so were more successful. They held off the Parliamentarians and continued to use the Teme and the Severn as protective barriers. Note monument to Scottish soldiers.
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4. Confluence information board

- **3:00pm.** Is the point where Cromwell overcame this river barrier by use of two pontoon bridges to attack the Royalist army. Very likely, the first batt bridge was built south of the confluence and then, with all his forces joined on the north bank of the Teme, they attacked from there; the battle was engaged and many men died. A brutal and hideous conflict, rarely has this country seen anything like it since. Let us all be thankful for that.
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5. Sculptures at approach to city

- If we can pause here – interesting sculptures – but let's recap about the battle. It is now **4:00pm.** Cromwell has won the Southern Battle while Charles has been watching from the Cathedral. Charles now decides to retaliate. He realised that an opportunity existed to attack the now-exposed eastern flank of the Parliamentary army. As the defenders on the Western side of the city retreated into the city, Charles ordered two sorties to attack the Parliamentary forces to the east of the city. A north-eastern sortie through St. Martin's Gate was commanded by the Duke of Hamilton and attacked the Parliamentary lines at Perry Wood. The south-eastern one, through Sidbury Gate, was led by Charles himself and attacked Red Hill. Cromwell, seeing the difficulty that his east flank was under, rushed back over the Severn pontoon bridges with three brigades of troops to reinforce the flank.
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6. Watergate entrance to Cathedral Grounds

- Note the markers of water levels
- The Cathedral whose ground we are now entering, was founded in 680. The earliest surviving fabric dates from 1084, when the cathedral was rebuilt in the Romanesque style by Bishop Wulfstan. It was then a Benedictine Monastery. The chapter house dates from 1120, and the nave was extended in the 1170s. Between 1224 and 1269 the east end was rebuilt in the Early English Gothic style. The remainder of the nave was rebuilt in the 1360s, and tower completed in 1374.

- It was heavily restored in the nineteenth century, and contains furnishings by George Gilbert Scott English architect, one of the most successful and prolific exponents of the Gothic Revival style.
 - It contains several important tombs, including those of King John; Arthur, Prince of Wales; and 1930s prime minister Stanley Baldwin.
 - We will be going through the grounds that are now largely school buildings. Look out also for the ruins of the monastic hospitality hall. Also, for the gate house which was, at the time of the Civil War, part of Worcester Castle which then operated as a prison.
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7. Bridge before Commandery

- More battle reminders - a plaque and some reproduction armaments. Here we are very close to Sudbury Gate, where Charles' Forces would have left to confront the Parliamentarians.
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8. Garden of Commandery

- The Commandery is a very ancient and wonderful building. It has an extraordinary history:
 - In the Medieval period, it served as an alms-house as well as a place of hospitality for pilgrims and other travellers and was most probably founded by the Order of St John of Jerusalem, the Knights Hospitaller, who named their administrative areas commanderies.
 - In the Tudor period, following the suppression of the Monastic Orders in 1540, the Commandery became the residence of the Wyldes, a family of clothiers who remained in possession of it until 1785.
 - During this period, in the Civil War, the period we are considering, it was used by Charles' forces as headquarters during the Battle of Worcester. Notice to the rear how it is overlooked by Fort Royal.
 - Then, in the Eighteenth Century, it was split into family homes.
 - And in the Victorian period, it housed a pioneering school for the "blind sons of gentlemen".
 - Moving on, in the 1950s, it was used as a printing factory by the Littlebury family.
 - Finally, to date anyway, it opened as a museum in 1977 and was for a while the only museum in England dedicated solely to the Civil War.
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9. Fort Royal

- This location, now a beautiful park, is the key to the city battle. Have a look at the great views of the city.
- **5:00pm.** Remember how Charles had led his forces towards Cromwell's base at Red Hill. His attack did not quite succeed, mostly due to Cromwell bringing his forces back, and this location, the Royalist stronghold, Fort Royal, was overrun. Royalist guns were turned on Worcester and the Battle was lost. See here three monuments:
 - Firstly Replicas of the guns turned back on the city
 - Secondly A grisly bas-relief of the battle provided by the Battle of Worcester Society.

Have a good look at this and let's remember the victims of war. About 3,000 of Charles's men were killed during the battle, and a further 10,000 were taken prisoner at Worcester or soon afterwards; the Cathedral served as a short-term prisoner of war camp. Most English prisoners were conscripted into the New Model Army and sent to Ireland. Around 8,000 Scottish prisoners were deported to New England, Bermuda, and the West Indies to work for landowners as indentured labourers; others were sent to work on fen drainage or were taken to London. Many died from disease and starvation at prison camps such as Tothill Fields. Parliamentary casualties numbered in the low hundreds.

- Thirdly - an oak tree, sadly not thriving, called the Liberty Oak provided by the USA in 2009 in recognition of Cromwell's contribution to liberty (Obama was President).
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10. Commandery again

- Returning to the city, legend has it that Charles II used an overturned ammunition cart to climb over Sudbury Gate, removed his armour and found a fresh horse; he attempted to rally his troops, but was unable to do so. A desperate Royalist cavalry charge down Sidbury Street and High Street allowed King Charles to escape along Friar Street to his lodgings. We will go there now.
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11. King Charles Pub – Lunch

- This is a part of the house where Charles lodged during his days in the city.
 - He fled to here from Sudbury, soon exited via the back door while Parliamentarians entered by the front. Meeting with many of his officers at the rear of the building he escaped via St Martin's gate.
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12. St Martin's Gate,

- **6:00pm** Charles then made his way out of the city on horseback via St Martin's gate and met with some sixty of his officers at Barbourne bridge, about a mile along what is now the A38. The future of the British Monarchy hung by a thread; capture meant execution for Charles, escape offered hope for a restoration. The rest of the story is to be found along the Monarch's Way.
 - Charles retreat with most of the offices effectively meant the battle was decided, but some of the Royalist soldiers fought on.
 - By **10:00pm** however the last of their number had surrendered. It was the last significant battle of the English Civil War and prompted Cromwell to say 'It is, for aught I know, a crowning mercy', words commemorated on the bridge by the Commandery and referring to the end of the Civil War.
 - The historic tour is at an end, a good a good time to pause for lunch before heading back along the waterways of the Worcester/Birmingham canal and then the River Severn.
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