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To Raise a Siege: Sir Thomas Fairfax and his journey to relieve Nantwich – December 1643 and January 1644

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ABSTRACT
On 25 January 1644 a series of confused skirmishes at Acton, near Nantwich, led to the rout of a recently formed Royalist army under John Lord Byron, 1st Baron of Rochdale. The 'Battle of Nantwich' only lasted a few hours but the journey of the victorious Parliamentary commander, Sir Thomas Fairfax, had taken nearly a month. The short-lived battle has been described in detail in articles and books but his journey has garnered little interest. This article reconstructs his route and the logistical challenges he faced, using officer accounts, parish loss records, and contemporary newsbooks.

Introduction
Nantwich controlled the Midland Gap, the key corridor between the Midlands and the Northwest. Its loss would have opened the route for English and Irish Royalist troops arriving at Chester to move into Central England. Parliament therefore valued Nantwich strategically and as a counterweight to Royalist Chester.

By late 1643 Royalist fortunes were at their height. Sir William Brereton had fortified Nantwich for Parliament early that year, but Lord Byron's December advance with four thousand foot and a thousand horse, including Irish veterans, rapidly overran Cheshire. By 4 January 1644, Nantwich was Parliament's last foothold in the county.[1]

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DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i3.1994
[1]John Lowe. The Campaign of the Irish Royalist Army in Cheshire, November 1643-1644. *Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire,* 111 (1959), pp.47-76, Joyce Lee Malcolm. All the King's Men: the Impact of the Crown's Irish soldiers on the English Civil War. *Irish Historical Studies.* 21 (1979), pp.239-264.

Brereton's field army had withdrawn to the northeast, unable to challenge Byron. Fairfax was summoned from Lincolnshire to relieve the besieged Nantwich; he re-equipped his cavalry and dragoons and then marched more than two hundred miles in severe winter weather on long neglected roads and having to rely on local guides.[2] His force, dispersed during the long march, only fully assembled during negotiations in Manchester before advancing to victory.

Parliament's options for a relief force were limited. The local forces in the surrounding counties were too weak and had problems of their own. Both Sir John Gell in Derbyshire and Thomas Mitton in Shropshire were reduced to little more than holding their main garrisons.[3] While the Lancashire and Staffordshire forces were pinned in their own counties by the threat of the Royalist forces under William Cavendish, the Marquess of Newcastle.[4] Lancashire was noted as being 'surrounded on every side', and its one attempt to send help to Cheshire had been badly beaten at Middlewich.[5] What should have been the regional army for the association of Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire had broken up on the death of its first commander, Lord Brooke, and its new general, William Fielding, the Earl of Denbigh, had yet to raise any substantial force of his own and was locked in a bitter dispute with the Warwickshire Committee who possessed the strongest local force.[6]

This left Parliament with no alternative but the cavalry brigade of Sir Thomas Fairfax, then trying to settle into winter quarters in south Lincolnshire. This brigade formed the main cavalry strength of Lord Fairfax's Yorkshire army. In October 1643 he was credited with seven hundred horses; although dragoons are not specifically noted, we know that he had at least some dragoon officers with him, so we can tentatively suggest his force at this stage was no more than seven hundred horse and one hundred dragoons. Between then and his setting out for Nantwich, and with no money and no fixed base, he managed to triple his strength, raising not only fifteen hundred men but

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Thomas Malbon and Edward Burghall. Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties. (ed. James Hall). *The Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*. XIX (1889), pp.86-118.

[2]Charles Carlton. *Going to the Wars. The Experience of the English Civil Wars, 1638-1651,* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.90.

[3]Warwickshire Record Office. Denbigh Mss CR 2017/C9/36-37 A Continuation of certain Speciall and Remarkable Passages. No.2, Wed 3rd Jan to Wed 10th Jan 1644. E.81(15)

[4]Donald Henshaw Pennington and Ivan Roots. *The Committee at Stafford 1643-45,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957) pp.lxiv-lxv.

[5]Certain Informations. No. 51, 1st Jan to 8th Jan 1644. E.81(8)

[6]Ann Hughes. *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire. 1620-1660*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp.224-226.

also horses to mount them all. How the eleven hundred horse were armed and equipped is unknown. The new dragoons may have been armed from a convoy of two thousand muskets sent from London in late November, although these were apparently not received by Fairfax until late December.[7] This also means that the 'cloth to provide clothing for 1500 men' that Fairfax stated in his memoirs was provided on his own credit, and presumably went to new recruits rather than the re-equipping of his ragged veterans.[8]

Sir Thomas Fairfax now undertook two journeys: the first from Lincolnshire to Manchester; and the second from Manchester to Nantwich, and the battle that raised the siege and reduced the Royalist threat in Cheshire. In most descriptions of the leadup to the Battle of Nantwich on 25 January 1644 details of these marches are sparse, yet they are part of the overall story and deserve further exploration.

This article is an attempt to recreate the journey Sir Thomas Fairfax made between 29 December 1643 and 25 January 1644 from his winter quarters in Lincolnshire to raise the Siege of Nantwich. While it is easy to trace Fairfax's various skirmishes, battles and sieges during 1643 and 1644, there is little about the journeys between. In particular, Sir Thomas stated he left Lincolnshire and arrived in Manchester before gathering a combined force and marching to Nantwich. The journey information between the venues is minimal but it can be recreated as the regiments of horse he took with him to raise a siege in Cheshire did leave historical hoof prints behind. A combination of an individual officer's account, claims, parish loss accounts and an examination of contemporary newssheets allow a detailed investigation of the journey. These sources give us an insight into the logistics of a cavalry brigade on the move and allow a review of the effect of Royalist interference with Fairfax and Brereton's attempt at recruiting in Staffordshire. The sources needed careful assessment; for example, one of the earliest accounts of Sir Thomas Fairfax's journey is wrong on two counts – the date and the starting point. Clarendon wrote that: 'sir Thomas Fayrefax, upon his victory at Selby, out of Yorkshire brought a good body of horse to Manchester.' Fairfax's victory at Selby took place on 11 April 1644.[9] While the misinformation in Clarendon may not all have been deliberate but based on the 'treacherous foundation of his memory' the same cannot be said of the newssheets.[10]

[7]Parliament Scout 22 Dec to 29 Dec 1643. No. 27 p.229.
[8]Thomas Fairfax, Sir. *A Short Memorial of Thomas Lord Fairfax: A Short Memorial of the Northern Actions in which I was engaged during the War there, from the Year 1642 to the Year 1644,* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1699), p.70.
[9]Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon. *History of the Rebellion*, ed. W, Macray (6 vols), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888), p.iii, p.314 (book viii, para 403).
[10]Sir Charles Firth. Clarendon's History of the Rebellion. *English History Review.* 19, (1904). p.26.

There was a known 'credibility gap' at the time which needs to be taken into account in the development of the story of Fairfax's journey.[11] Even Fairfax's own 'Memorials' often lacked details of his campaigns and are described more as 'an attempt to restore his reputation and honour and rebalance his relationship with Cromwell'.[12] The parish loss accounts have been described as an imperfect source of historical fact due to 'the partisan origins of the enterprise and the suspiciously broad numbers deployed by informants, with much recourse to such qualifiers as 'about', 'at least' or 'as I conceive'.[13] However, this was primarily a reflection on the financial information, not the associated cause of the loss. Hughes does conclude that they offer a rewarding insight into the history of the Civil War.

The English Civil Wars generated itineraries, diaries and memoirs that give us access to the journeys made by the rival forces. The King's and Prince Rupert's marches are covered in detail.[14] Cromwell's itinerary has been constructed by Peter Gaunt and covers the period from the outbreak of the war in August 1642 to include all of his campaigns until August 1651.[15] While on campaign the armies were expected to live off the land and this obviously produced a conflict between moving forward and 'straggling' for food and forage. None of these sources tell us much about the disposition of the regiments or individual companies while on campaign or how widely they were dispersed while seeking food and fodder as well as accommodation. However, on all campaigns the widespread dispersion of troops must have had led

[11]Brownlees, Nicholas. 'He tells us that.' Strategies of reporting adversarial news in the English Civil War. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics.* 18 (2), (2017). p.238.

[12]Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille. The 'grave of oblivion': Remembering the English Civil War in Sir Thomas Fairfax's Short Memorials (1699). *Mémoire et oubli dans le monde anglophone des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle.* 81, (2024). p.3. https://journals.openedition.org/1718/13503. Accessed 24 January 2026.

[13]Ann, Hughes. 'The Accounts of the Kingdom': Memory, Community and the English Civil War. *Past & Present.* 230, Supplement 11. (2016). p.316.

[14]Edward Walker, Sir. *Iter Carolinum being a succinct relation of the necessitated marches, retreats, and sufferings, of His Majesty Charles the I from January 10, 1641, till the time of his death 1648*, (London: W. Godbid, 1660), Richard Symonds. (ed. Charles Edward Long). *Diary of the Marches of the Royal Army During the Great Civil War*, (London: The Camden Society, 1859), Firth, C.H. (1898). The Journal of Prince Rupert's Marches, 5 Sept. 1642 to 4 July 1646. *The English Historical Review*, 13 (52), (Oct., 1898), pp.729-741.

[15]Peter Gaunt. *The Cromwellian Gazetteer. An illustrated Guide to Britain in the Civil War and Commonwealth*, (Barton-under-Needwood: Wren Park Publishing, 2000). pp.224-227 – tables and pp.228-235 – maps.

them to converge regularly at assembly points. These are hinted at in the King's itinerary as some of the daily entries are prefaced with the term 'Rendezvous'.[16]

While a soldier can carry several days' supply of food in his snap sack and can march and even fight after irregular access to food and little rest, this cannot be said of a horse. The feeding of horses could have had a significant impact on the operations of armies. If horses were malnourished they became unserviceable and ultimately died. It is likely that poor nutrition, combined with overwork, contributed significantly to the wastage of horses, although Robinson noted that none of the available sources give enough information to quantify this.[17]

A horse had a daily requirement of fourteen pounds of hay, seven pounds of straw, one peck (8 lbs) of oats and half a peck (4 lbs) of peas.[18] In modern terms, an individual horse needed thirty to fifty litres of water, eight to twelve kilos of hay and up to a kilo of high-energy feed every day.[19] The water and hay could not be carried and had to be found daily from local sources. Fairfax's mounted force was made up of eighteen hundred horse and five hundred dragoons. The dragoons rode smaller and lighter horses and if we make an allowance by taking them at two-thirds the weight of a cavalry horse, the total daily needs of the regiments were 92,000 litres of water and between 17 and 25 metric tonnes per day of hay. It was this insatiable demand for the forage for horses that tended to restrict campaigning to the grass growing seasons. There would have already been a relentless demand for provender throughout 1643, as well as a disruption of farming and the damaging of standing crops. This would have created an unusually severe seasonal shortage of fodder for the horses and scarce stored foodstuffs. Therefore Fairfax's force would have been split into small units, often widely scattered.[20]

On campaign, cavalry and dragoons were usually quartered in villages, where individual householders would have to accommodate and feed a number of horses and men. Ideally, this was supposed to be paid for by the soldiers from their own pay. However, this was very rare in practice, particularly because pay was often far in arrears. The distribution of the men amongst the households of the hamlets and villages would have been dealt with by the quartermaster of the troop, who probably relied on the help

[16]Edward Walker, Sir. *Iter Carolinum.* pp.24-25
[17]Gavin Robinson. *Horse Supply in the English Civil War, 1642-1646*. PhD Thesis. (University of Reading, 2001) pp.208-210.
[18]Peter Edwards. Logistics and Supply, in John Kenyon and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds). *The Civil Wars. A Military History of England and Wales 1638-1660,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.257.
[19]All figures based on a 15.2 hands horse weighing between 450 and 500 kg.
[20]Carlton. *Going to the Wars*. p.90.

of local guides and officials. When resources were drawn from their parish for military use, whether food, money, fodder or other goods, the local constables often entered these into their account books. As such, surviving examples of these accounts can provide insight into the forms and types of resource drawn from localities. Worton discusses billeting and free quarter in Shropshire; and while he has not used them to assess how widely a regiment was dispersed in the local community he gives numerous examples of the effects on individuals.[21]

Campaigning in the winter of 1643–44 was particularly difficult.[22] The 1640s sat within the period known as the 'Little Ice Age', and contemporary accounts describe severe cold and snowstorms.[23] Fairfax wrote to Lady Fairfax on 28 January 1644,

> I have endured some hardship since I parted with you, being forced to march and watch night and day this frost and snowy weather. [24]

There must have been considerable snow in Cheshire as an overnight thaw on the eve of the Battle of Nantwich led the River Weaver to flood. The spate was enough to sweep away the temporary bridge erected by the Royalists.[25] Were other rivers also in flood? The route Fairfax chose meant crossing five rivers. Major rivers were bridged at Leicester, Tamworth, Stafford, Congleton and Leek.[26] Also, the state of the roads had deteriorated due to parishes being unable to maintain the highways, with rain and snow making the roads especially treacherous. As well as the weather and poor road conditions Fairfax would have had to avoid Royalist-dominated parts of the Midlands

[21]Jonathon Worton. *To Settle the Crown. Waging Civil War in Shropshire 1642-1648*. (Solihull: Helion and Company Limited, 2016). pp.163-166.
[22]Weather in History 1600 to 1649 AD. https://premium.weatherweb.net/weather-in-history-1600-to-1649-ad. Accessed 20 October 2024.
[23]Markus Stoffel, et al. Climatic, weather, and socio-economic conditions corresponding to the mid-17th-century eruption cluster. *Climate Past*, 18 (2022), pp.1083–1108.
[24]Robert Bell. *Memorials of the civil war: comprising the correspondence of the Fairfax family with the most distinguished personages engaged in that memorable contest,* (London: R. Bentley, Year), pp.74-75.
[25]Thomas Carte. *A Collection of Original Letters and Papers Concerning the Affairs of England. From the Year 1641 to 1660. Found among the Duke of Ormonde's Papers at the expense of the Society for the Encouragement of Learning*, (London: James Bettenham, 1746), p.38.
[26]Leicester – River Stour; Tamworth – River Tame; Stafford – River Sow; Congleton – River Dane, a tributary of the River Weaver; Leek – River Churnet, a tributary of the River Dove.

in the planning of his route. Indeed, in a dispatch to the Committee in Stafford he makes clear his need for intelligence,

> My desire is, that I may by your means receive information which way from thence I may most safely march; what your intelligence is concerning the interposition of the enemy's forces; where it is expected I should fall in with the forces of any of our friends… [27]

In November 1643 the Parliamentary garrison at Leicester reported that the Royalist garrisons at Belvoir and Ashby [de la Zouch] were confining traffic on the road to Nottingham, Derby and Manchester. Because of their 'small strength of horse' it meant that they could only provide support for convoys going north and south.[28] The situation had deteriorated by December with Sir George Gresley, Parliamentary Governor of Derby, stating that the Marquis of Newcastle had left 'to vex us his own garrison at Bolsover and six colonells of his own country, whereof five, namely Sir John Harpur [at Burton bridge], Mr. Fretcheville (Frenchville or Frescheville), [at Stavely in Scarsdale]. Mr. Eyre [at Chatsworth] and Mr Milward [at Bakewell].[29] Colonel James King had moved in to the High Peak in late December.[30] This activity

[27]Robert Bell. *Memorials.* pp.68-69. The dispatch is catalogued as being sent to Stansford which has been reported as Stamford. There is no settlement with the name of Stansford. This has been transcribed as Stamford in Lincolnshire but this seems unlikely as the town did not have a permanent garrison nor was it the seat of the County Committee. If the 'sf' in the title is actually a long 's' next to the 'f' then the name of the town would be Stanfford, with Stafford being the most likely interpretation. The original letter was sold in the 1993 sale of the Fairfax archive described as a letter to Stamford. It is now in private hands and unavailable for examination. The content of the letter makes no sense unless it was dispatched to the Committee at Stafford. Further support for the letter having been sent to the Committee at Stafford is that their replies were to be 'sent towards my quarters, and I doubt not but he will meet us on our march'. This could not refer to information coming from Stamford, many miles behind his march.

[28]Historical Manuscripts Commission. *The Manuscripts of his Grace the Duke of Portland, preserved at Welbeck Abbey.* Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Volume 1, Part 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1891), p.160.

[29]Stephen Glover. *A true account of the raysing and employing of one foote regiment under Sir John Gell, from the beginning of October 1642*. The History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby. Volume II, part 1. (Where: Henry Derby: Mozley and Son, 1829), Appendix p.72, Major John Frecheville was a Royalist Commander with an estate at Staveley Hall near Chesterfield. Colonel Rowland Eyre of Hassop Hall in Derbyshire. Colonel John Milward of Snitterton Hall near Darley Dale, Derbyshire.

[30]Remarkable Passages. December 9-16 1643. No. 5. Note 20. Unpaginated.

is backed up by a remark made by Margaret Cavendish that her husband had left 'no visible enemy behind him in Derbyshire, save for an inconsiderable party in the Town of Derby'.[31] Along with Colonel Henry Hastings garrisons at Ashby in Leicestershire and Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire the Royalists had effectively cut off all these east to west routes for Fairfax. His only option was to travel south to Leicester before moving west hoping that the Royalist garrison at Lichfield would not intervene.

Daylight was also limited. On 29 December, sunrise was 08:20 and sunset 16:00, giving little more than seven hours of daylight. Thus, the first long march from Lincolnshire to Manchester was undertaken on horse, in freezing conditions, in poor light, and through snow-covered landscapes.

The route of the journey to Manchester

Fairfax's own description of his journey to Manchester is brief,

> The twenty-ninth of December we set forward from Falkingham, in Lincolnshire, with 1800 horse, and 500 dragoons, and power to call the regiments of foot in Lancashire and Cheshire to make up the body of the army.[32]

In an early biography of Sir Thomas Fairfax by Clements Markham the suggested route is 'Passing through Derbyshire and Staffordshire, he reached Manchester…' [33]

This reference has been taken by many later historians to indicate that Fairfax reached Manchester through Derbyshire and across the Pennines.[34] A totally different route for Fairfax's journey to Manchester is hinted at in the dispatch to the Committee at Stafford. The dispatch adds a little extra to Fairfax's brief description, suggesting that he was to travel via Leicester and that he would be there on Monday or Tuesday next. As the document is dated 27 December 1643, a Wednesday, the arrival date in Leicester would have been Monday, 1 or Tuesday, 2 January 1644.[35] The *Parliamentary Scout* newsbook for the week 5 to 12 January reported the defeat of Sir William

[31]Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle. *The Life of the thrice noble High and Puissant Prince, William Cavendish, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle …,* (London: A. Maxwell, 1667) p.39.
[32]Fairfax. *A Short Memorial.* pp.69-70.
[33]Robert Markham Clement, Sir. *A life of the great Lord Fairfax, commander-in-chief of the Army of the Parliament of England*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1870), pp.128-129.
[34]Nick Lipscombe, Colonel. *The English Civil War: An Atlas and Concise History of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms 1639–51*, Chapter 7. Nantwich and Newark. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2020), p.154, Andrew Hopper *'Black Tom': Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2007), p.47.
[35]Robert Bell. *Memorials,* pp.68-69.

Brereton and suggested that Fairfax had gone to his aid and that he was currently in Leicester 'with my Lord Grey'.[36]

Can the southern route by Fairfax be supported by any other sources? The most complete route plan can be derived from the accounts submitted by Captain, later Major, George Gill of Fairfax's Yorkshire Horse. This included a list of all the quarters taken by his men. Unfortunately it contains very few dates but does specifically mention the battle. See Figure 1 for all places subsequently mentioned in this text.

To ffalkingham [Folkingham]
To Aslebie, [Aslackby] and from thence wee marched towards Nantwiche
To Post Witham [South Witham]
To Twiford in Leicestershire [Twyford]
To Evington [Leicester]
To Nelson [Nailstone]
To Ibstock
To Paulsworth in Warwickshire [Polesworth]
To Haywood in Staffordshire
To Newcastle-under-Lyme
To Asbury in Cheshire [Astbury]
To Ancoats in Lancashire
To Bowden in Cheshire
To Carington [Carrington]
To Tabley
To Aston [Aston by Sutton?]
To Tabley Hall
To Norwich [Northwich]
To Tilston Hall [Tilston Fearnall]
And the next day the battle at Nantwich [37]

A pamphlet proposes an alternate route beginning in Nottingham, with overnight stops at Hinkley, Bosworth, Tamworth, then Stafford.[38] Although much of the pamphlet is unreliable, its account of the Nottingham route is unique and may reflect local

[36]The Parliamentary Scout. From Friday the 5. of January to Friday the 12. of January 1644. No.29. p.250.
[37]The United Kingdom National Archives (hereinafter TNA) SP28/41/143-144, Accounts of Major George Gill.
[38]The Kings Letter Intercepted coming from Oxford with A Joyful Relation of the Happy Successe of the Parliaments Forces at Raising of the Siege from Nantwich (London: Robert Bostock, 1643).

knowledge. Should this source be dismissed, or does any evidence suggest Fairfax might have diverted to Nottingham?

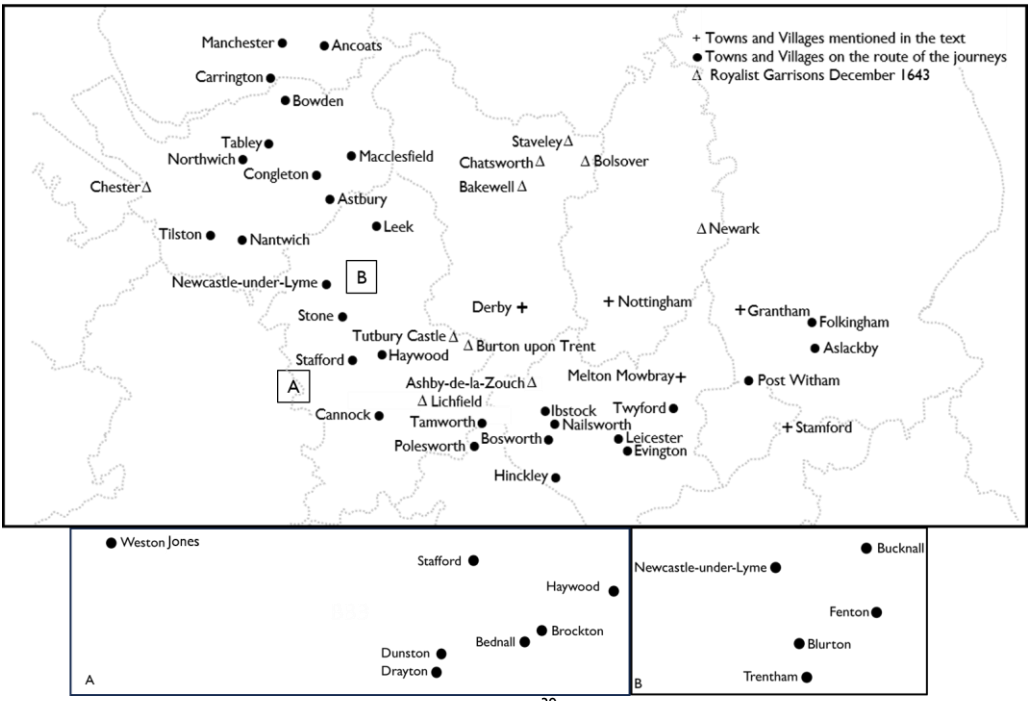


Figure 1: Places mentioned in the text.[39]

Those with a round marker lie on the direct route of the march, the triangles represents Royalist garrisons in December 1643, and other sites are marked with a cross.

There were reasons why Fairfax may have wanted to take part of the brigade and visit Nottingham. One could be suggested by an entry from Lucy Hutchinson, the governor's wife. Fairfax had ordered 'all the horse in the garrison' to join him but 'the horse would not obey Sir Thomas Fairfax.'[40] The entry is undated and there is no specific sign Fairfax visited the city. There remains a chance that, despite this refusal,

[39]Keith Lawrence

[40]Julius Hutchinson, Rev. *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, governor of Nottingham. By his widow Lucy,* edited and revised by Charles Harding Firth, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1906), pp.163-164.

he may have hoped a final personal appeal would work. However, Hutchinson further states that a quantity of arms Fairfax stored in the town was sent by convoy to Leicester, which counts against Fairfax's presence. Overall, the diversion seems unlikely.

The two routes would have met near Tamworth. Parish loss accounts show troops were quartered in Polesworth, Austrey, Newton Regis, Wilnecote and Tamworth, with a horse taken in at Grendon. The rate was four pence per meal and four pence per day for a horse, totalling eight pence per trooper per night. Numbers recorded are: 136 in Austrey, 47 in Newton Regis, 98 in Polesworth, 97 in Wilnecote and 42 in Tamworth, a total of 420, though Fairfax claimed eighteen hundred horse and five hundred dragoons.[41] The force was dispersed across many communities, likely extending into Leicestershire, where records are missing. The need to avoid overburdening settlements influenced the choice of this more populated route over a sparser, more direct one through Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and North Staffordshire. One stray Warwickshire record which escaped the transcribing project is for Seckington between Newton Regis and Tamworth: 'Sr Tho ffairefax marching towards ye witch quartered one Troope wth us'. Unfortunately the amount of the loss is unclear so the size of the troop cannot be estimated.[42]

Moving into Staffordshire, there is also an entry for Cannock where the reference is quite specific and the expense would cover around 120 troopers,

> Cannock 'To Sr Thomas ffayrefax in prvision for his souldiers in theire march downe to releeve Namptwch [3 pounds] …
>
> … Paid more than I reced of the comander for quartering Sr Tho ffayrfax his men [3 pounds 11 shillings 4 pence].[43]

Troops were quartered around Stafford at Bednall, Billington, Brockton, Drayton, Dunston, Hayward and possibly Weston Jones. All the surviving quartering records in this grouping show a stay of two nights, the only ones found along the route that do

[41]These documents were generated in compliance with an ordinance of 27 June 1645. 'For the better taking and expediting he Accompts of the whole Kingdon', which led to the issuing of warrants to parishes to record the costs of the war associated with the Parliamentarian forces. The majority of those surviving for Warwickshire have been transcribed and are available online at https://heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/catalogues-databases/warwickshire-civil-war-loss-accounts. Accessed 4 June 2026, Fairfax. *A Short Memorial.* p.69-70

[42]TNA SP28/37/78, Loss Accounts Seckington.

[43]TNA SP28/176/Cannock, Constable Accounts Cannock.

so.[44] Those housed around Newcastle-under-Lyme were in Blurton, Bucknall, Knutton and Trentham.[45] The entry for Bucknall and Trentham shows a significant number of troops and also records some loss of personal possessions, including a guide being deprived of his mount:

> ffree quartering 1643 in Trentham...A troope belonging to Sr Thomas ffairefax one night about 40 [2 pounds]' In the same parish in January 1643 [1644]'
>
> Blurton did quarter of Sr Thomas ffairfax his men one night 200 men & horse [10 pounds] …
>
> When Sir Thomas ffairefax came to raise the seige att Nampwitch some undr that comand did take from Thomas Stockdale a coat of his backe & tenn shillinge forth of his purse [1 pound 10 shillings] …
>
> At the same tyme did Thomas Lowe take a mare from Rich Craddocke to guide some of those troops to theire quarters, wch mare was then taken from him valew [4 pounds] … [46]

Having left Stafford for Manchester we know the initial route took part of Fairfax and Brereton's combined forces through Stone. This is because of the reaction to warrants issued by Fairfax in respect of carriages and horses. Stone is specifically mentioned in complaints set before the Stafford Committee by Leacroft and Atkins:

> 10 Feb 1644. Whereas the Constablewick of Walton juxta Stone was charged to fetch a wagon from Stafford to Stone to conveigh Sir Tho. Fairfax in his march. And whereas Thomas Leacroft and John Atkin two of the inhabitants of Walton aforesaid did not only fetch the said wagon from Stone aforesaid but was constrained to carry the same with six horses and two men to Manchester.[47]

And Colyer:

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[44]Ibid., Loss Accounts Acton Trusell & Bednall, TNA SP28/200/unfolliated, Loss Accounts Brockton, TNA SP28/176, Loss Accounts Dunston and Dreaton; Ibid., Loss Accounts Western Jones.

[45]Ibid., Controller Accounts Trentham (incudes Blurton): TNA SP28/197/Pt2/53-62, Bucknall Accounts (includes Bucknall) - the dating of the entries is suspect. Knutton is filed under Fenton.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Pennington and Roots. *The Committee.* p.52.

> Whereas Sir William Fairfax in his march from Stafford did take from James Colyer of Stone one bay nag ….
>
> Fairfax's dragoons under Major Thomas Morgan were identified marching from Stafford to Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was reported to the Stafford Committee on 17 January that they took a mare at Darleston [Darlestone], just to the north of Stone.[48]

The route continued towards Congleton with Nicholas Hobson's, the constable of Church Lawton), accounts showing Mr John Chantler,

> Plundered from him, by souldiers yt weare under Command of Sr William Farefaxe, Two flaxon sheets, five yards of woollen Cloath, two silke garters, one hatbande, sixe hand carchaffes, Two bands & one payre of stockinges [£1].[49]

It is not certain how large Fairfax's forces would have been after he left Stafford, as he had met Sir William Brereton and at least some elements of his Cheshire horse or dragoons. It would appear that a portion of these forces, including both Fairfax and Brereton, did not travel via Newcastle-under-Lyme and Congleton. Fairfax did not have a warrant to recruit in Staffordshire, so it is only after he joined with Brereton that we record any musters. For instance, they had remained at Stone to attend a muster of Moorlanders, probably those from Pirehill Hundred.[50] The next day they proceeded to Leek via Tittensor, just north of Stone, laying out for '9 horses and men wth them from Stone to Leeke wth Sr Thomas ffairefaxe [1 pound 10 shillings].' [51] The reason for this diversion was presumably an attempt to muster the men of Totmonslow Hundred.[52] There are many general references to quartering both Sir Thomas's and Sir William Fairfax's men in and around Leek that probably relate to the march. One that almost certainly did was that of William Jolley of Leek, an active member of the Committee at Stafford, who paid 'For qrtering Sr Tho ffairfax men Sr

[48]Ibid., *The Committee.* p.35.
[49]Guy Lawton. Church Lawton Court Rolls 1631-1860. *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 147 (2013), p.165.
[50]The Moorlanders or the Moorland Dragoons were an irregular militia raised in the in the Leek area uplands of north-east Staffordshire, initially the only effective opposition to the Royalists. The Pirehill Hundred includes the boroughs of Stoke-upon-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and part of Stafford.
[51]TNA SP28/242/404.
[52]The Totmonslow Hundred contains four market towns, Leek, Longnor, Cheadle, and Uttoxeter, and about 70 townships.

Wm Brereton's men Sr William ffairfax men [30 pounds].'[53] Meanwhile John Dale paid 'for drawing Sr Tho ffairfax cariages to Manchester [6 shillings].[54]

Having established the routes taken to Manchester, a timeline can be created from other sources. The dispatch to Stafford suggests that Fairfax left Falkingham in Lincolnshire on Wednesday 29 December 1643, arriving in Leicester on either Monday, 1 or Tuesday 2, January 1644. A newsletter confirmed that 1 January was most likely in a mischievous quote dated Monday 22 January,

> Upon New-yeares-day last, Sir Thomas Fairfax his men coming to Leicester, and seeing the Captaines there so fine, their breeches being garded with six silver laces, very broad, said, they never saw the like before, and thought they were too fine to fight. [55]

It is also possible to fix his arrival in Stafford from newssheet reports as the evening of 7 January:

> Tuesday, January 16. - A Letter from the Town of Stafford dated the eight of this instant month of January, certifies that Sir William Brereton was then in that Towne, and that Sir Thomas Fairfax came thither the evening before.[56]

'By a Letter from Sir Wil. Brereton, dated the 9 of January, we are assured that he was then at Stafford, where he met with Sir Tho. Fairfax.' [57]

In a broadsheet, *Certaine Informations,* a news item dated 15 to 22 January reported 'that those two noble Chieftains, marched with their Army out of Stafford upon Wednesday last [10 January]'.[58] The entry for 17 January in the same broadsheet reported that Fairfax and Brereton had marched to Stone and then Leek, where they joined with the Moorlanders. A short march to Macclesfield seems to have been planned to meet the Lancashire forces. This meeting with the Lancashire forces may have been hinted at in a letter received by Alexander Rigby from Col. Ashton, Col.

[53]TNA SP28/176/Leek, f12r.
[54]Ibid., f16r.
[55]Certaine Informations From the 22 of January to the 29 of January 1644. No. 54. p.423
[56]Certaine Informations From the 15 of January, to the 22 of January 1644. No. 53. p.414.
[57]The Scotish Dove From Friday the 12 of January to the 19 of the same 1644. No. 14. p.110
[58]Certaine Informations From the 15 of January, to the 22 of January 1644. No. 53. p.414

Holland and Sir Thomas Fairfax. The comments from Rigby to Colonel Moore do much to confirm his localism and could explain the subsequent difficult discussions in Manchester:

> 13 December 1643, Preston. Lord Chief Baron Rigby to Colonel Moore. 'I this last night received letters from Sir Thomas Fairfax, Col. Ashton, and Col. Holland to prepare all my forces in readiness, and to expect a pressing call from them to join with them for a present expedition…' .[59]

The date of the arrival of Fairfax and Brereton in Manchester is somewhat confused with both 12 and 16 January being quoted. The earlier date is presented by John Rushworth who in 1645 would become Sir Thomas Fairfax's secretary and the latter date within a Parliamentary newssheet.[60] From Gill's itinerary it is likely that elements of Fairfax's forces could have arrived in Manchester between 12 and 14 January. There are no indications that the Royalists had hampered Fairfax's journey to Manchester despite Byron's claim to have intercepted the march at Newcastle-under-Lyme.[61] We know from a letter to his wife, Lady Fairfax, that the relations between Fairfax, Brereton and the 'Lancashire Gentlemen' were fractious.[62] This was confirmed in his later memorial of the actions between 1642-1644 when he related that he had problems using his,

> power to call the regiments of foot in Lancashire and Cheshire to make up the body of the army when I came to Manchester, for some were thirty, some forty miles distant, besides the dissatisfaction of some of their collonels, who went as their particular safety or interest swayed them.[63]

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[59]Historical Manuscripts Commission. *The manuscripts of the Earl of Westmorland, Captain Steward, Lord Stafford, Lord Muncaster, and others*. Tenth report : appendix. Part IV, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1885). pp.68-69. It appears possible that this item is mis-dated. On 12 December 1643 Fairfax was operating in Lincolnshire and in no position to be sending letters jointly with Lancashire Colonels. A date of 13 January makes much more sense of the contents.

[60]John Rushworth, *Historical Collections: Military action in 1643*, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: 1642-45,* (London: D. Browne, 1721), p,5, pp.263-309
A Perfect Diurnall, Munday the 22 of January, till Munday 29 January Anno. 1643. No. 27. p.212.

[61]Carte. *A Collection of Original Letters*. pp.36-37.

[62]Robert Bell. *Memorials.* pp.74-75.

[63]Somers Tracts. *A collection of scarce and valuable tracts, on the most interesting and entertaining subjects: but chiefly such as relate to the history and constitution of these kingdoms. Selected from an infinite number in print and manuscript, in the Royal, Cotton,*

Manchester to Nantwich

Their departure from Manchester appears to have been delayed by 'several days of humiliation' as they wrestled with God before the final decisions.[64] Sir Thomas Fairfax's army left Manchester on 21 January, spending the first night at Bowdon Heath near Altringham after a ten mile march. William Barrat's receipt book notes their stay at Bowdon, 'Item to a messenger which was sent to several places with warrants when the armie was at Bowden going to raise the siege at Nantwich 00li:01s:00d.' [65]

Fairfax's departure had not gone unnoticed by the Royalists, as a letter from Randolph Egerton to Lord Loughborough, dictated at 8pm on 21 January, reported: '… the enemy is still offering to advance upon us for the raising of the siege of Namptwich, they being now at Knutsford with seventeen colours of foot and ten of horse.' [66] This letter refers to a gathering of Yorkshire Parliamentary forces that had been dispersed at the defeat at Adwalton Moor who had been ordered to muster on Knutsford Heath ahead of the larger force.

Fairfax did not arrive at Knutsford Heath for a rendezvous with these Yorkshiremen until 22 January; he travelled only eight miles. This is confirmed by Captain Hodgson who recalls in his memoirs that: '… Sir Thomas sends an order for our companies to meet him at Knutsford-heath, near Manchester'.[67] The third night, 23-24 January, was spent near Northwich. The third day the newly merged forces had covered eight miles. It is possible that Fairfax had deliberately slowed the march, as on 23 December he had ordered ten barrels of gunpowder and two thousand pounds (weight) of match

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Sion, and other public, as well as private, libraries; particularly that of the late Lord Somers, (London: Cadell and Davies, 1811), p.5, p.387.

[64] Magnalia Dei. A Relation of some Remarkable Passages in Cheshire. (London: Robert Bostock, 1643/44) p.10. Scotish Dove. From Friday the 19. of January to the 26. of the same. No. 15. pp.116.

[65]Harleian Manuscripts. Accompt of William Barrett's Receipts & Disbursements, from the 9th of November 1643. to the 24th day of Julie 1645. MSS 2130 40 in *A catalogue of the Harleian manuscripts, in the British Museum. With indexes of persons, places, and matters,* (London: British Museum, 1808) p.521.

[66]Historical Manuscripts Commission. *Report on the manuscripts of the late Reginald Rawdon Hastings, Esq. of the Manor House, Ashby de la Zouch*. 2 Vols (London, 1928). p.117.

[67]John Hodgson. *Memoirs of Captain John Hodgson of Coally-Hall near Halifax, touching his conduct in the Civil War, and his troubles after the Restoration. In: Original Memoirs written during the Great Civil War being the life of Sir Henry Slingsby and the Memoirs of Capt. Hodgson with notes.* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co, for Archibald Constable, 1806.) pp.100-101.

from Manchester. The match was dispatched that day by William Sunderland.[68] On 24 January, while in Delamere Forest, the relief force clashed with a Royalist patrol. Egerton, in his letter to Loughborough, reported that a cavalry force had been dispatched to intercept Fairfax on 20 January. 'We have sent as yesterday a party of 500 horse to muse them and fight if they light of a fitting opportunity.'[69] After a 10-mile march the fourth night, 24-25 January, found the troops on Rhudall and Tilston Commons.[70] It is difficult to assess the amount of protection from the cold weather available at any of the sites, but all were exposed heathlands. Malbon suggested that Tilston Common offered 'but simple quarters'.[71] However, George Gill's accounts suggest that the officers were settled comfortably in Tabley Hall while at Knutsford and at Tilston Hall overnight on 24/25 January.[72] The Battle of Nantwich took place the next day, 25 January, after Fairfax's army had marched a further ten miles, with Colonel Morgan and his dragoons skirmishing with the Royalists at a mill near Barbridge.[73] The journey to the Battle of Nantwich came to an end on a ridge overlooking the battlefield where Fairfax and his commanders considered their strategy whilst awaiting the arrival of their makeshift army.

One question arises from an examination of the journey to Nantwich: why choose to approach the town from the west? The road via Middlewich was the faster route, probably saving at least a day's march. It has been suggested that this was based on intelligence that placed the bulk of the Royalist forces on the east side of the river Weaver.[74] There may well be another explanation. There is a suggestion that the strategies of both the Earl of Essex and Fairfax during 1643 had 'revolved around avoiding champion landscapes where the Royalists could unleash their superior cavalry.'[75] Indeed the Battle of Adwalton on 30 June 1643 was fought within small, enclosed fields and would have been seen as a major victory for Fairfax before a last

[68]James Malcolm Gratton, *The Parliamentarian and Royalist War Effort in Lancashire, 1642-1651* PhD thesis. (Manchester, 1998), p.501.
[69]HMC. *Reginald Rawdon Hastings.* 2 Vol. p.117.
[70]Lowe. Campaign. p.67.
[71]Malbon and Burghall. *Memorials.* p.113.
[72]TNA SP28/41/143-144, Accounts of Major George Gill.
[73]Thomas Fairfax, Sir. A Short Memorial of Northern Actions during the War there from the Year 1642 till 1644. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*. 5 (1926), p.22, p.168.
[74]Robert Norman Dore and John Lowe, (1961). The Battle of Nantwich 25 January 1644. *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.* 113 (1961), p.105
[75]Andrew Hopper, 'The Armies'. in Michael J. Braddick (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). pp.260-274

ditch charge by the Royalist cavalry.[76] A 'champion landscape' referred to the large open fields common in the Midlands, which allowed the cavalry full rein in any conflict. Was the hard-learned lesson of Adwalton now used by Fairfax to his advantage at Nantwich? It would certainly support Byron's excuse for his defeat, 'The place of the battle was in an enclosed field, where horse could do little service.'[77]

When Fairfax reached Northwich en route to Nantwich, he could have taken the direct old Roman road via Middlewich, a distance of about seventeen miles, but instead moved west into Delamere Forest, then south to Rhuddall Heath near Tarporley, and finally east to Nantwich, about twenty one miles). However, was this really a significant difference in the distance travelled, even for a slow-moving army? Perhaps what was more important was the nature of the area into which they would arrive as they neared Nantwich. Via Middlewich they would have arrived on Beam Heath, which was then a large open heathland much like a 'champion landscape'. It stretched from Marshfield, near Wistaston, to the Beam Bridge on both sides of the road, then southwards to the walls around Nantwich. It was a large area that appears to have been used for hay and other crops, as there are descriptions of field barns being torn down and fodder being brought into the town by the townsfolk just before the battle.[78] Fairfax and Brereton may well have considered this to be cavalry country, putting them at a disadvantage. The alternative arrival point via Acton was a network of small fields – musketeer territory, effectively disabling any advantage held by the Royalist cavalry.

As a local landowner Sir William Brereton knew the heathlands and enclosed fields well, with significant holdings around Nantwich at Brindley, Faddiley, Burland and Stoke. Both Burland and Stoke are close to the battlefield at Acton.[79] The heathlands had also been used for mass gatherings, for example on 11 August 1642 when Royalists and Parliamentarians recruited in Nantwich. The Royalists held their muster on Ravensmoor to the west of Acton and the Parliamentarians on Beam Heath to the east. Between the two open heaths were the small, enclosed fields north-east of Acton that became the site of the Battle of Nantwich.

[76]David Johnson, *Adwalton Moor 1643: The Battle that Changed a War*, (Pickering: Blackthorn Press, 2003), David Cooke. 'Chapter VII. A wild and desperate man – the Battle of Adwalton'. in *The Civil War in Yorkshire: Fairfax Versus Newcastle.* (Barnsley: Casemate Publishers, 2004).
[77]John Roland Phillips, ed., *Memoirs of the Civil War in Wales and the Marches, 1642-1649*. Ii, (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1874), pp.129-31.
[78]Malbon and Burghall. *Memorials.* pp.111-112.
[79]George Ormerod. *The history of the county palatine and city of Chester,* (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones, 1819), p.639.

Conclusion

Unlike Edward Montagu, the Earl of Manchester, who refused to support the war effort in Cheshire later on in 1644 and provided a string of reasons to the Committee for Both Kingdoms, Sir Thomas Fairfax accepted his orders and rose to what must have seemed an enormous challenge.[80] From leaving Lincolnshire on 29 December 1643 to arriving at Nantwich on 25 January 1644, Fairfax had travelled over two hundred miles on horseback and in the freezing cold, with brief periods of recuperation at Leicester, Stafford and Manchester. The route was chosen to secure enough food for his men and fodder for the horses. The more direct route would have taken Fairfax through the relatively unpopulated high country of the Staffordshire Peaks and the Pennines. The siting of major river crossings at Leicester, Tamworth and Stafford may also have played their part in the planning. The journey was spread out over nearly a month, during which time Nantwich was in constant danger from the besieging Royalist forces, who must have been aware of his orders, even though it was initially reported in the press as a 'special service' destination unknown.[81] It was openly reported by *The True Informer,* including the size of his force.[82] It was only the exertions of Sir Thomas Fairfax in travelling across the country in bitter weather that reversed the Royalist attempts for dominance in Cheshire. From examining as many details of his journey as can be identified, it suggests that the long-held theory that Fairfax failed to recruit in Staffordshire is partly true.[83] As he had no warrant to recruit in Staffordshire, it was only after he joined with Brereton that any attempts to muster recruits were made. Parliamentary resources in Staffordshire and Lancashire were said to have only become available after the Scottish army crossed into England on 19 January 1644, causing Newcastle to retreat northwards to face a new enemy. Fairfax would have been in Manchester by this date, having missed his opportunity in Staffordshire. Broadsheets had recorded that when Sir William Brereton had met with Fairfax in Stafford they were awaiting a Company of Moorlanders,[84] A week later one of these broadsheets stated that whilst in Manchester Brereton and Fairfax had mustered their forces from 'Leyke [Leek], Ashburne [Ashbourne] and Ulcester

[80]John Bruce. 'The Quarrel Between the Earl of Manchester and Oliver Cromwell, an Episode of the English Civil War'. *The Camden Society* (1875) pp.9-12.

[81]The Parliament Scout, From Friday the 22. of December to Friday 29. of December 1643. No. 27. p.229.

[82]The true Informer. From Saturday January 6. to Saturday January 13. 1643. No. 17. p.129.

[83]Lowe. Campaign. p.67, Dore and Lowe, The Battle of Nantwich p.100, John Dixon, *The Business at Acton,* (Nottingham: Partizan Press, 2012). pp.74-75

[84]The Weekly accompt of Certain Special and Remarkable Passages From both Houses of Parliament and other Parts of the Kingdom From Wednesday the 15 January to the 22 January 1643/4. Unpaginated.

[Uttoxeter].[85] No Staffordshire troops are specifically identified as fighting at Nantwich. If any were at the Battle of Nantwich they may have been divided amongst other regiments to make up numbers or included as part of the 'rabble of cudgellers' travelling with Fairfax's army. [86]

The victory at the Battle of Nantwich was deemed significant enough by Parliament,

> that publicke thanks be given unto God in all the Churches of London, Westminster, suburbs and within the bills of Mortallity upon the next Lords Day for his great goodnesse … in giving so great and absolute victory unto the forces for the Parliament neere Nantwich in Cheshire.[87]

Sir William Brereton rode south with some of his prisoners from the battle and they were paraded in the streets of London in the manner of a Roman Triumph. Brereton himself was thanked by Parliament for his 'great and faithful' service.[88]

A detailed examination of Fairfax's journey from Lincolnshire to Cheshire via Manchester has answered some questions while raising others. The Battle of Nantwich was over within hours but the build-up involved Fairfax in weeks of travel, arranging the logistics of an army on the move, and negotiation. He was fortunate not to be intercepted by the Royalists, as this could have undermined the enterprise before the final march on Nantwich.

[85]The Weekly accompt. From Wednesday the 24 January to the first of February 1643/4 Unpaginated

[86]Peter Young and Richard Holmes. *The English Civil War: A Military History of the Three Civil Wars 1642-1651*, (Malton: Methuen Publishing, 1974), p.174.

[87]Mercurius Anglicus or, A Post from the North: From Wednesday the last of January till Wednesday the 7th of February. (1644) No 1. p.6.

[88]Robert Norman Dore. *The Civil Wars in Cheshire,* (Chester: Cheshire Community Council, 1966) p.38.