Division and the Outbreak of Civil War: Hull, 1642

This learning resource aligns with AQA A-level History, Component 2E: The English Revolution, 1625-1660, Week 20: Division and the Outbreak of Civil War.

The background reading and activities in this resource should together take around 90 minutes to complete.

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Learning objectives

Events in Hull in the spring and summer of 1642 have been called by historians 'the spark that lit the powder keg of Civil War'. In this lesson, we examine these events, focusing on:

- Sir John Hotham's refusal to allow King Charles I entry into Hull on 23 April 1642.

- The royalist siege of Hull that followed in July 1642.

We will also explore the role of flooding in helping the town of Hull repel the royalist attack in July 1642 and find out more about the role water played in Hull's reputation as a military stronghold on the eve of Civil War.

On completing this learning resource you will be able:

- To explain the cause and affect of events in Hull on 23 April 1642 and their contribution to the outbreak of Civil War in September 1642.
- To place local grievances in the context of national events.
- To understand and be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living with water in the East Yorkshire port town of Kingston upon Hull.
- To reflect on whether historical monuments like Beverley Gate can continue to have value today in helping individuals and communities relate to the history of their local regions.

A Closer Look: **The strategic military importance of Hull**

Alongside Portsmouth and London, Hull was one of the three largest arsenals during the pre-war period. As a defensible east coast port with good access to London and the Continent, it was also a town of strategic military importance to both King and Parliament and had been used as a convenient half-way point between London and Scotland during the Bishops' Wars of 1638-39.

Hull was well defended by the rivers Hull and Humber to the south and east, and by a network of walls, moats, and blockhouses serving as gun platforms and garrisons for soldiers. Charles I had commissioned additional defensive works to protect the town arsenal in the lead-up to the Bishops' Wars in the late 1630s, and at this time drawbridges and gun batteries were erected before Hull's main gates.

The town could also defend itself by opening sluice gates along the banks of the river Humber to deliberately flood land outside the town walls, as happened during the town's two Civil War sieges of 1642 and 1643. Many of these defensive improvements are shown in Wenceslaus Hollar's map of Hull, produced around 1640, which gives an impression of the town on the eve of Civil War (**Figure 1**).

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Figure 1: Wenceslaus Hollar, Map of Hull (c.1640). Copperplate etching. Hull History Centre, Hull. U DDMM/33/8.

Activity 1

This activity should take around 10 minutes to complete.

Examine Wenceslaus Hollar's map of Hull in detail (**Figure 1**). How well defended was the town of Hull on the eve of the First Civil War? Note down a minimum of three features of this map which look like they would help defend the town from a military attack. How many can you list? Discuss your notes in pairs and share your ideas with the group.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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The appointment of Sir John Hotham as Governor of Hull

As relations between King and Parliament deteriorated following Charles I's failure to arrest the Five Members in January 1642 (for context, see Oxford AQA History for A-Level, *The English Revolution 1625-1660* (2015: 98-99), both sides recognised the strategic military importance of Hull and quickly appointed military governors to seize the town and its arsenal of weaponry.

Hull's mayor and aldermen initially resisted both parties but eventually yielded to parliament's choice of governor, Sir John Hotham (1589-1645), who arrived in Hull in March 1642 to take charge of some 800 soldiers housed in the town. Importantly, he had specific orders not to surrender the town or its armoury without the prior authority of both Houses of Parliament.

Key profile: Sir John Hotham (1589-1645)

A soldier and MP for his hometown of Beverley, East Yorkshire, Hotham lost his long-standing position as Governor of Hull in 1639 due to his support for John Pym and his opposition to the Bishops' Wars. He was re-appointed Governor of Hull by Parliament in 1642 and played a key role in Hull's refusal to admit Charles I into the town in April 1642. Opposed to puritanism and anxious about the threat the Civil War posed to the established social order, Hotham later attempted to defect to the royalist camp but was arrested in the attempt, along with his son, John Hotham, in June 1643. Both were imprisoned in the Tower of London and were later executed by Parliament in January 1645.

Figure 2: Sir John Hotham (by unknown artist)

The stand-off at Beverley Gate

Figure 3: *George Arnald, Charles I demanding entrance at the Beverley Gate, Hull, 23 April 1642 (c. 1819). Oil on canvas. Hull Museums Collections KINM: 2005.4712.*

On Friday 22 April, the King's son, James, duke of York, arrived unannounced in Hull with a retinue of some fifty followers and was received and entertained by the mayor and civic leaders. The following morning, the town received news that the King was intending to dine in the town and had already set out with some 300 followers on horseback from nearby York.

Sir John Hotham resolved that he had no choice but to refuse the King entry into the town according to his instructions from Parliament not to surrender the town or its arsenal. He sent a messenger to intercept the King, but Charles I continued on, arriving at Hull around 11am to find that the new drawbridge at Beverley Gate had been drawn up and the gates shut.

The King demanded entrance into the town but Hotham, standing on the parapets at Beverley Gate (**Figure 3**), steadfastly refused. The stand-off continued until around 5pm, when Charles angrily had his heralds declare Hotham a traitor to the crown and retired to the nearby town of Beverley, eight miles to the north of Hull.

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Hotham's refusal to give Charles access to the town and its arsenal has been called 'the most important of a sequence of events that turned into a reality a recognition that the country might dissolve into civil war' (Kishlansky and Morrill 2023). The national significance of the stand-off between Charles I and Sir John Hotham was also recognized at the time by writers in the 1640s (see **Source 1** and **Source 2**).

Source 1

Extract from *Hulls Managing of the Kingdoms Cause* (London, 1644), p. 2

Forasmuch as the managing of the Cause of God and the Kingdom, against the Enemies of both, is the public business of our times, and *Hull* was the *Scene* whereon the *Prologue* was acted, yea, I may say the action there was the very *Argument* of the work, and *Epitome* of the whole war, it is very requisite that the Kingdom should be truly informed of occurrences there, and of the many wonderful deliverances that God wrought for that place; and the whole Realm thereby, and the instruments which his heavenly hand used for managing the business, wherein it is observable, he hath done like a cunning workman, who doth many times with crooked instruments, make a straight piece of work.

Source 2

Extract from *Eikon Basilike: The Pourtraicture of his Sacred Majesty in his Solitudes and Sufferings* (Cork, 1649), pp. 54-55

My repulse at *Hull* seemed at the first view an act of so rude disloyalty, that My greatest enemies had scarce confidence enough to abet, or own it: … I was resolved how to bear this, and much more, with patience: But I foresaw they could hardly contain themselves within the compass of this one unworthy act … This was but the Hand of that Cloud, which was soon after to overspread the whole kingdom, and cast all into disorder and darkness.

Activity 2
This activity should take around 15 minutes to complete.

Read the extracts from *Hulls Managing of the Kingdoms Cause* (**Source 1**) and from *Eikon Basilike* (**Source 2**). **Source 1** gives a parliamentarian perspective on Sir John Hotham's refusal to admit Charles I to Hull in 1642. **Source 2** voices Charles I's own reflections on this event.

Working in pairs, use the table on p. 13 to list similarities and differences between these two accounts, thinking especially about:

- The language each extract uses to describe Sir John Hotham's refusal to admit Charles I.
- Their assessment of the wider importance of Sir John Hotham's actions in relation to national events.
- Their understanding of how far Sir John Hotham was acting as an agent of God.

Stretch and Challenge: Is there anything about the events in Hull in 1642 that both sources agree on? Whose account do you find most convincing? Discuss in pairs and share your answers with the rest of the class.

Source 3

Extract from *Eikon Basilike: The Pourtraicture of his Sacred Majesty in his Solitudes and Sufferings* (Cork, 1649), p. 59

Poore Gentleman, he [Hotham] is now become a notable monument of unprosperous disloyalty, teaching the world by so sad and unfortunate a spectacle, that the rude carriage of a Subject towards his Soveraigne carries always its own vengeance, as an unseperable shadow with it.

Activity 3

This activity should take around 20 minutes to complete.

Source 3 gives Charles I's reflections on Sir John Hotham and his execution in 1645 at the hands of Parliament. Charles I describes Hotham as 'a notable monument of unprosperous disloyalty' but the scene of Hotham's stand against Charles I at Beverley Gate is more often today considered a monument, not to 'unprosperous disloyalty', but to local pride in what has been called Hull's 'rebellious' history. This activity asks you to reflect on how you think Beverley Gate and the events of April 1642 should be remembered, and what part the excavated remains of Beverley Gate (**Figure 4**) should play in this remembrance.

The future of the Beverley Gate site has been the subject of much debate on social media, after plans by Hull City Council to fill in the Beverley Gate site sparked considerable controversy in 2015. A public consultation in 2015 offered Hull residents two options:

1) To fill in and landscape the excavated remains shown in **Figure 4**.
2) To leave the excavations open but provide a new access point, illuminations, and seating.

continued

Of the almost 4000 responses to this consultation, 87% voted to keep the site open (Option 2). This suggests that Hull residents today still value Beverley Gate, and the history of Civil War rebellion that the monument represents, as markers of local identity and civic pride.

How would you have voted if offered the two options that Hull residents were offered in the public consultation of 2015? Would you have voted to keep the site, and the history it represents, visible to residents and visitors to Hull, or would you have chosen to fill in the site, thereby 'burying' the history beneath the ground?

Reflect and discuss your chosen option in pairs (10 minutes) and then feedback on your discussion to the rest of the group (10 minutes). How many in the group would have voted for Option 1 and how many for Option 2? How similar is the result of your vote to the outcome of the public consultation in 2015?

Figure 4: The excavated remains of Beverley Gate today, Whitefriargate, Hull. Source: Citizan.org.uk

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# Flooding and the 1642 siege of Hull

Figure 5: Detail from *Wenceslaus Hollar, Map of Hull (c.1640). Copperplate etching. Hull History Centre, Hull. U DDMM/33/8.*

Repulsed by Hotham in April, in early July 1642 Charles I attempted to take the town of Hull by force, laying siege to the town for almost a month but ultimately failing in his attempt to cut off supply lines to Hull by boat. The siege was the scene of several minor skirmishes, including a surprise raid on the royalist quarters at nearby Anlaby during which fourteen royalist soldiers were taken prisoner and much of the royalist magazine destroyed.

On the night of 6 July, the town also opened the sluices along the Humber banks to flood the low-lying land surrounding the town walls and so prevent royalists taking up gun-posts within range of the town walls. Flooding was a strategy that the town would again deploy in September 1643 when the royalists under the command of the earl of Newcastle returned to besiege Hull for a second time. Again, however, the siege failed and the royalists retreated from Hull – at this point in the Civil War, Yorkshire's only remaining parliamentarian stronghold – a month later on 12 October 1643.

There were disadvantages as well as advantages to the use of flooding as a defence strategy in siege warfare. As **Source 4** explains, saltwater flooding of the fields surrounding Hull affected the ability of farmers to produce crops on those fields. There was also severe flooding in and around Hull in 1646-47 which local communities blamed in part on the fact that soldiers garrisoned in the town during the First Civil War had deliberately destroyed the flood defences along the Humber banks, as **Source 5** conveys.

Source 4
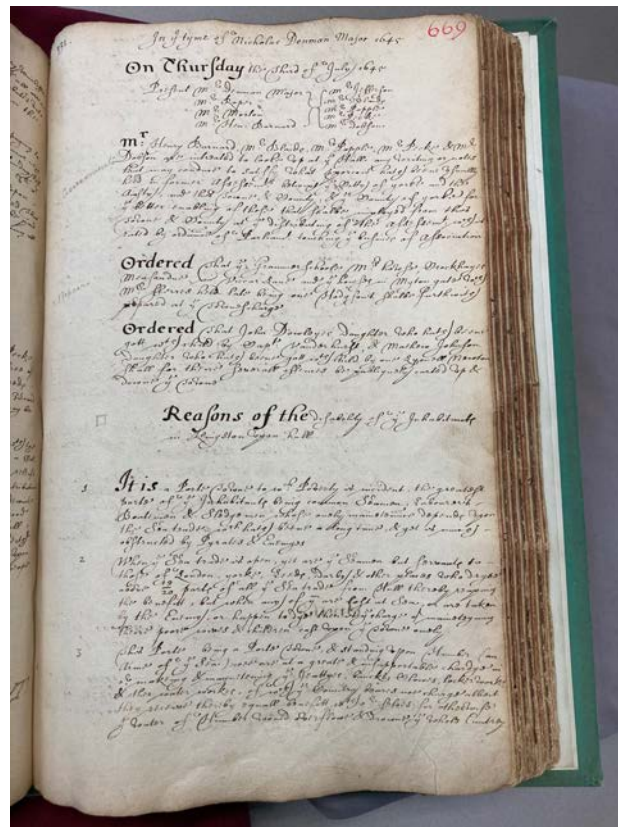
'Reasons of the disability of the Inhabitants of Kingston upon Hull' (July 1645). Hull History Centre, Hull. Bench Book, 1609-1650, C BRB/3: 669-70

This Port being a Port town, & standing upon Humber (an Arm of the Sea) we are at a great & insupportable charge in making & maintaining the jetties, banks, clowes, lockerworks, & other water works, of which the Country bears no charge albeit they receive thereby equal benefit with our selves for otherwise the water of Humber would overflow & drown the whole Country. …

   We have been much impoverished by the wasting & pulling down of houses, digging up of enclosures and fences and by drowning of grounds with salt water on purpose to hinder the enemy's approaches.

Source 5
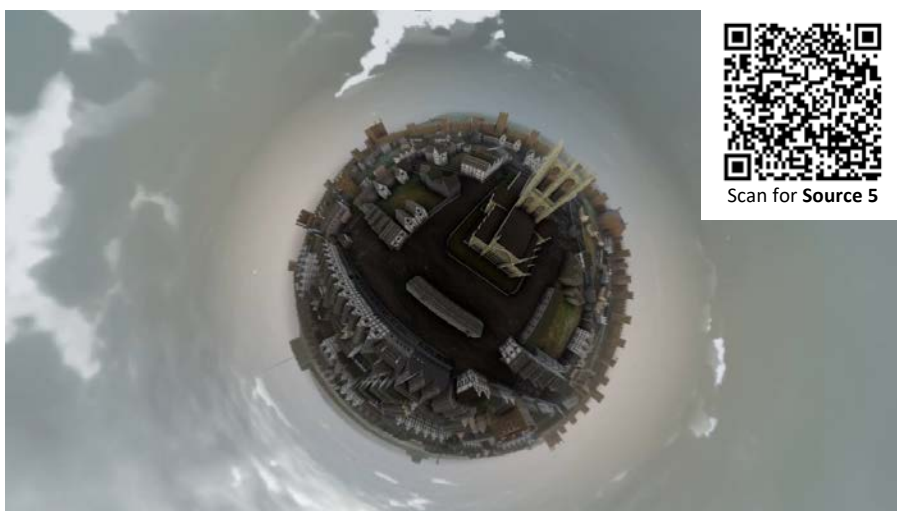
By the rising tide of Humber: Flooding Andrew Marvell's Hull in 360 VR. risingtide.hull.ac.uk

Scan to find out more about how we created the town of Hull and historical flood in the Rising tide of Humber video.

Plenary Discussion

This activity should take around 25 minutes to complete.

Read **Source 4** and watch **Source 5**, a VR (virtual reality) recreation of a flood in Hull in 1646-1647. Note down any unfamiliar words in these sources and look these up in the glossary of Key Terms. Use these sources to discuss whether, in your opinion, the water that surrounded Hull in the 1640s was an advantage or disadvantage to the town during the First Civil War.

In preparation for this activity, you may find it helpful to complete the table on p. 14 listing at least two advantages and two disadvantages of living with water in Hull in the 1640s, based on your engagement with **Source 4** and **Source 5** (5 minutes). Then, spend a further 5 minutes reflecting on these advantages and disadvantages in pairs before moving to the whole class Plenary Discussion.

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Key Terms

- ***Clow*:** see sluice.
- ***Sluice*:** A gate used to control the flow of water between rivers, drains, and other waterways. A sluice that connects drains with tidal rivers like the Humber is often called a 'clow'. These sluices open at low tide to drain water off the land and then automatically shut as the tide rises to prevent salt-water flooding. In the civil water sieges of Hull, the clowes, or sluices, were deliberately left open to flood the low-lying land surrounding the town walls.
- ***Garrison*:** A place in which soldiers are quartered, sometimes used to refer to the body of soldiers themselves.
- ***Arsenal*:** A place where weapons and ammunition are stored or made.
- ***Magazine*:** A store for explosives.

References and recommended reading

- Kishlansky, Mark A., and John Morrill (2023). 'Charles I (1600–1649)'. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5143 [last accessed 1 February 2023].

- McDonagh, Briony (2017). 'Rebellious Hull'. In *Hull: Culture, History, Place*, ed. D. Starkey et al. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 61-85.

- Mottram, S., *et al*. (2023). 'By the rising tide of Humber: Recreating an historical storm surge from 1646 in 360 VR' [video]. https://risingtide.hull.ac.uk/recreating-an-historical-storm-surge-from-1646-in-360-vr [last accessed 1 February 2023].

- Mottram, S., *et al*. (2023). 'By the rising tide of Humber: Flooding Andrew Marvell's Hull in 360 VR' [video]. https://risingtide.hull.ac.uk/rising-tide-of-humber-360-vr-film [last accessed 1 February 2023].

- Scott, David (2023). 'Hotham, Sir John, first baronet (1589-1645)'. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13852 [last accessed 1 February 2023].

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Table for Activity 2

	Notes on Source 1	Notes on Source 2	Similarities	Differences
Language describing Hotham's actions	*e.g. 'wonderful deliverances'*	*e.g. 'unworthy act'*		
Wider importance of Hotham's actions				
Hotham as agent of God				
Other observations				

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Table for Plenary Discussion

Advantages to living close to water in 17th-century Hull	*Disadvantages* to living close to water in 17th-century Hull
Example: Hull's port brings wealth and trade to the town	

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