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Siege Famine in Northern England during the British Civil Wars, 1644–1649

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ABSTRACT

During the 1640s several Royalist fortresses in Northern England were subject to lengthy sieges, particularly after the defeat of the major Northern Royalist field army at Marston Moor in 1644. The difficulty of directly assaulting these strongholds led to starvation becoming the Parliamentarian and Covenanter besiegers' main weapon. This article analyses the methods used by the Royalist garrisons to try and alleviate siege famine, including raiding, rationing and ersatz foodstuffs, and their consequent collapse owing to hunger-induced popular unrest or the effects of famine diseases such as scurvy, starvation and dehydration on the soldiers themselves.

Introduction, Historiography and Method

A fortified space is, by definition, a space for the execution of warfare. This meant that during the British Civil Wars, or the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, they became *foci* for conflict. The fortified spaces of Northern England, when properly garrisoned, supplied and organised could withstand the limited capabilities of most besiegers for significant periods. Starvation, or the diseases associated with malnourishment such as scurvy, was common in lengthy sieges.¹ The lack of food, which was the eventual cause of the collapse of resistance in most prolonged sieges, would result in famine conditions within the walls.² If the fortified space was a town or city this meant that there was a large civilian population who had to be fed, reducing food stocks, and thus the period the garrison could resist, opening the possibility of food riots once the last

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¹Isaac Tullie, *A Narrative of the Siege of Carlisle*, (Whitehaven: Michael Moon's Bookshop, 1988), pp. 13–14, 34–35; C. H. Firth, 'Sir Hugh Cholmley's narrative of the Great Siege of Scarborough', *English Historical Review*, 42, 128 (1917), pp. 568–587 (pp. 585–587).

²Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, pp. 13–14, 34–35; Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', pp. 585–587.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

virtuals ran out.³ If a siege was forced to a storm, such as was attempted at Scarborough and successfully carried out at Bolton, the attacker was forced into the most personally dangerous form of warfare, namely attacking defended positions designed to give every advantage to the defender.⁴ As a consequence, ultimately the most common reason that a fortress surrendered was due to the defenders running out of food and water. No matter how great the courage of the besieged, it was not possible to sustain resistance if they were too weak to walk.⁵ Furthermore, if there were many non-combatants within the defences famine conditions would occur more quickly, and potentially resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties.

Following the collapse of the northern Royalist field army at Marston Moor, the various Royalist garrisons of England from the Trent to the Borders were isolated.⁶ While the Parliamentarian and Covenanter armies progressively reduced them each in turn, ultimately most were put to siege before they surrendered. Famine was an essential weapon in subduing these isolated garrisons as the new rulers of the North lacked the forces to systematically storm all of them owing to the continued successes of the Royalists in Western England, Northern Scotland and parts of Eastern Ireland.⁷ The employment of starvation as a weapon of war in Northern England was motivated by pragmatic military necessity and not as a deliberate means of destroying a potentially rebellious population. It should also be clarified that contemporary military ethics did not regard starving besieged civilians as improper; there was no equivalent of the common denunciations of supposed atrocities – typically massacres or the use of torture – that filled polemical newsbooks.⁸

³Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 47.

⁴Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', pp. 584–586; David Casserley, *Massacre: the Storming of Bolton*, (Stroud: Amberley, 2011) pp. 116–118.

⁵Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', p. 587.

⁶Richard Spence, *Skipton Castle in the Great Civil War 1642–1645*, (Otley: Smith Settle, 1991) pp. 66–67; Jack Binns, *Yorkshire in the 17th Century* (Pickering: Blackthorn Press, 2007), pp. 83–85; Charles I, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland [attributed], *The Kings cabinet opened: or, certain packets of secret letters & papers, written with the Kings own hand, and taken in his cabinet at Nasby-Field, June 14, 1645, By victorious Sr. Thomas Fairfax; wherein many mysteries of state, tending to the justification of that cause, for which Sir Thomas Fairfax joyntly battell that memorable day are clearly laid open; together, with some annotations thereupon*, (London: Robert Bostock, 1645), p. 13.

⁷Jack Binns, *Yorkshire in the Civil Wars: Origins, Impact and Outcome* (Pickering: Blackford Press, 2012), pp. 83–87.

⁸For contemporary military ethics see Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace, including the Law of Nature and of Nations, translated from the Original Latin of Grotius, with Notes and Illustrations from Political and Legal Writers*, by A.C. Campbell, A.M. with an Introduction by David J. Hill (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), pp. 323–345, 359–25

Famine has no place as a separate subject of analysis in the historiography of the British Civil Wars. The only entries in the Bibliography of British and Irish History (BBIH) on the subject are general histories, normally of Ireland, stretching from as far back as 900 to 1900.⁹ This is noteworthy considering the importance of hunger as a weapon of war and the relatively abundant historiography of massacres; despite their similar concentration in Ireland, massacres continue to form an important, if minor, component of the historiography of the wider conflict.¹⁰ This is largely owing to the lack of significant wider famines in Great Britain during the Civil Wars despite bad harvests in the 1640s and significant troop movements.¹¹ Similarly, siege-famine's historiographical position is limited to a place in local histories of particular sieges; these local histories are generally excellently researched – this article does not seek to criticise or even significantly revise their work – but their narrow focus prevents

372; Barbara Donagan, 'Codes and Conduct in the English Civil War', *Past and Present*, 118 (1988), pp. 65–95 (pp. 73–74); Anon, *A True and Perfect Relation of A victorious Battell Obtained against the Earl of Cumberland And his Cavaliers, By the Lo: Fairfax and Capt: Hotham. Also. The manner of the Lo: Fairfax his besieging of the City of York; with divers other remarkable Passages concerning the same. And. The Taking of Eight of Sir John Hothams Souldiers prisoners by the Cavaliers, and the tormenting deaths they put them unto. With. The Resolution of Captain Hothams Souldiers thereupon*, (London: William Ley, 1642).

⁹Online search of the Bibliography of British and Irish History (<https://www.history.ac.uk/publications/bibliography-british-and-irish-history> [Subscription service]) 10 January 2020.

¹⁰Mark Stoye, 'The Road to Farndon Field: Explaining the Massacre of the Royalist Women at Naseby', *English Historical Review*, 123, 503 (2008), pp. 895–923; Casserley, *Massacre: the Storming of Bolton*; John Morrill, 'The Drogheda massacre in Cromwellian context', in David Edwards (ed.), *Age of atrocity: violence and political conflict in early modern Ireland*, (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), pp. 242–265; Micheál Ó Siochrú, 'Propaganda, rumour and myth: Oliver Cromwell and the massacre at Drogheda', in Edwards, *Age of atrocity*, pp. 266–282; Inga Jones, 'Massacres during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms', in Philip Dwyer & Lyndall Ryan (ed.), *Studies on War and Genocide*, 30 vols., *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History*, (New York: Berghahn, 2012), vol. XXX, pp. 63–78.

¹¹Jonathan Healey, 'Coping with Risk in the Seventeenth Century: The First Age of the English Old Poor Law: A Regional Study', in Masayuki Tanimoto, R. Bin Wong (eds.), *Public Goods Provision in the Early Modern Economy: Comparative Perspectives from Japan, China, and Europe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), pp. 100–117 (p. 111–112).

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

them from providing a broader analysis of siege famine on a regional basis.¹² The wider, global historiography of siege-famine is more extensive, famous case studies such as Kut-al-Amara or, most infamously, Leningrad have resulted in significant historical analyses.¹³

This article seeks to incorporate the British Civil Wars into this wider historiography through a comparison of the sieges of Carlisle, Scarborough and Chester, with supplementary information from the siege of Pontefract; analysing how the besieged secured supplies, organised rationing systems amidst tensions between urban and military governments and how these systems ultimately failed, and resistance collapsed, amidst varying degrees of localised famine. While all three main case studies were Royalist fortresses held to the bitterest extremity between 1644 and 1645, there were otherwise some considerable differences. At Scarborough, the Royalists withdrew quickly into the castle and did not contest the town.¹⁴ By contrast, at Carlisle the entire city was held by the Royalists until the final surrender and the Royalists actively raided the surrounding countryside for victuals until a few weeks before their surrender. At Chester the Royalists were forced back within their defences and were unable to secure additional foodstuffs by raiding, contributing to the brevity of the siege compared to Carlisle.¹⁵

Securing Supplies

The main source for the siege of Carlisle, October 1644–June 1645, is the account written by Isaac Tullie, a young resident of the city during the fighting.¹⁶ Throughout Tullie's narrative, food was one of his central preoccupations. He wrote that 'Some 6 weeks past without much action, except for catching now and then of a few Cowes, some Foles accompanied wth carousing, and some scirmishing w[i]th the Scotch hors[e] w[i]thout order.'¹⁷ Throughout his narrative Tullie recounts multiple battles over cattle, often resulting in casualties. In a siege situation, such 'meat on the hoof' was an extremely valuable resource. Before withdrawing inside the fortress, the Royalists had scoured the surrounding countryside of 'Corn from all the adjacent fields, besides

¹²Jack Binns, *A Place of Great Importance: Scarborough in the Civil Wars 1640–1660* (Preston: Carnegie Publishing, 1996), pp. 131–182

¹³Ilona Koupil, Dmitri B. Shestov, Pär Sparén, Svetlana Plavinskaja, Nina Parfenova, and Denny Vågerö. 'Blood Pressure, Hypertension and Mortality from Circulatory Disease in Men and Women Who Survived the Siege of Leningrad', *European Journal of Epidemiology*, 22, 4 (2007), pp. 223–234; W. H. Ogilvie, 'Effects Of Chronic Starvation During The Siege Of Kut', *The British Medical Journal*, 2, 3214 (1922), p. 237.

¹⁴Binns, *A Place of Great Importance*, pp. 131–182; Firth, 'Siege of Scarborough', p. 581.

¹⁵Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 12.

meat, salt, coles and coves'.¹⁸ Interestingly, there was a punitive as well as pragmatic motive behind this process. Tullie stated that the confiscations were 'cheifly from about Wigton, y^e nest of the Roundheads'.¹⁹

Even without the added motive of punishing dissent and weakening potential allies of the invading Covenanters, confiscated cows represented a ready source of essential victuals for the garrison. Indeed, so many cattle were seized that 'an Oxe might have been bought in their towne for 18d at this time', a bargain considering that a pound of beef normally cost around two and a half pence in this period.²⁰ But the defenders' cattle had to be grazed outside the city and were therefore at risk of attack from the besiegers' cavalry troops. Royalist troopers were assigned to protect the livestock, resulting in repeated small skirmishes. Indeed, these battles are the most common single feature of Tullie's narrative, being mentioned 13 times in all.²¹ Battles over cows, set to graze beyond the walls, were a relatively common occurrence at sieges and often posed a significant risk to civilians. At Pontefract, on 26 May 1645 during the second of the castle's three Civil War sieges, a boy cutting grass to feed the animals within the walls was shot in the face. Likewise on 10 June 'the enemy shott a boy of ours [who] was houlding of a Cow at gras'.²²

Local civic officers, primarily constables, were also used to secure supplies. In late 1648, when Royalist insurgents retook Pontefract from its Parliamentary garrison, they relied on coercion to ensure the compliance of the local constabulary.²³ In one such directive the governor, John Morris, ordered that a constable report to the castle 'to doe such service as shall be appointed', a sufficiently open-ended order that it could imply almost anything.²⁴ Dozens of these receipts, unsorted, are held by the UK National Archives.²⁵ Six demanded that foodstuffs, typically various types of grains but also beef, butter and cheese, be brought to the castle.²⁶ Four demanded that the constables collect wood, presumably for fuel in the winter of 1648/9, along with a

¹⁸Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 7; Gregory Clark, 'The Price History of English Agriculture, 1209–1914', *Research in Economic History*, 22 (2004), pp. 41–123 (p. 63).

²¹See Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, pp. 7, 12–14, 18, 25–34, 42.

²²Alison Walker (ed.), *The first and second sieges of Pontefract Castle: Nathan Drake's diary* (Pontefract: Gosling Press, 1997), p. 41.

²³The UK National Archive, Kew, ASSI 47/20/11, *John Morris, receipts for the garrison of Pontefract*.

²⁴The UK National Archive, Kew, ASSI 47/20/11, *John Morris, receipts for the garrison of Pontefract*.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

single demand for coal.²⁷ The problems of transporting these goods were settled by a pair of orders for horses, oxen and their attendant wains and wagons. There was even a single warrant for plaster, indicating that the castle required some renovations after the previous sieges. There were also five orders that constables escort 'draughts', presumably conscripts, to the castle for the garrison.²⁸

Only obliquely, through threats, did any of Morris' warrants want money. This is significant, for the use of constables to collect money for garrisons was ubiquitous and a majority of surviving receipts, such as the large collection in the Morley Archive, concern the collection of such 'contribution money'.²⁹ The contrast with the Morley receipts is due to the very different conditions in which they were issued. Morris was the governor of an isolated insurrectionist stronghold, in need of emergency renovation and resupply before the inevitable siege, not a component of a wider fiscal-military system that had to support a field army in addition to various garrisons.³⁰ Given these circumstances, a focus on the essentials, men, transport, food and fuel, was rational. However, he was still dependent on the local constabulary to gather these resources and it is not credible that he would have been able to sustain resistance through the bitter third siege of Pontefract without their compliance.

Urban rationing at Carlisle and Chester, a comparison in urban military administration

While one would expect the cost of meat to skyrocket during a siege, and therefore beef to be out of reach of all but the wealthier citizens, this was reportedly not the case at Carlisle, owing to the governor's imposition of rationing in Christmas 1644.³¹ Tullie wrote that:

Now was all the corn taken from the Citizens, and carried to the Magazeene, a portion thence distributed weekly to every family according to their Number,

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹The West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds Branch, WYL100/PO/2/15, *Civil War Assessments, Pewter etc.*, B I-IV.

³⁰Thomas Paulden, *Pontefract Castle: An account how it was taken: and how General Rainsborough was surprised in his quarters at Doncaster, anno 1648. In a letter to a friend / By Captain Tho. Paulden. Written upon the occasion of Prince Eugene's surprising Monsieur Villeroy at Cremona* (London: Edward Jones, 1702), pp. 2-6; B. Boothroyd, *The History of the Ancient Borough of Pontefract, containing an interesting account of its castle and the three different sieges it sustained, during the civil war, with notes and pedigrees of some of the most distinguished Royalists and Parliamentarians, chiefly [sic] drawn from Manuscripts never before published* (Pontefract: Boothroyd, 1807), p. 260.

³¹Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 13.

and their Cattell w[he]ⁿ they were to be killed, taken to the Castle thence from time to time distributed, no more to y^e owner, but y^e head, heart, and liver; then to any other.³²

The Royalist military administration's concern for private property was secondary to their concern for keeping the city adequately provided with foodstuffs, although it should be noted that the head and organs of the slaughtered cows were retained by the owner. This kept the majority of the meat within the castle's magazine, whilst providing some material compensation to the original owners, helping to reduce the impact of the policy on the cattle owners, who may have been wealthy and connected to the urban oligarchy of Carlisle and consequently pose a possible threat to the Royalist military authorities.

That administration was fragmented between two officials, the first being the military governor, Sir Henry Stradling. He was the son of the first Stradling baronet, the Glamorgan MP Sir John Stradling.³³ Stradling had a military career before the Civil Wars, serving as a naval officer as early as 1628 and commanding warships throughout the later 1630s, with his most prestigious appointments being during the Spanish war scare of 1637.³⁴ Stradling briefly served in the army during the First Bishops' War, while in the Second Bishops' War he was back at sea.³⁵ He was also active in the Irish Rebellion, attempting a relief of Limerick by river before he was 'called away from that employment by His Majesties Command'.³⁶ With the outbreak of civil war in England

³²Ibid.

³³Michael Baumber, 'Stradling, Sir Henry (d. 1649?)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press 2004

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26627?rskey=gTbKZo&result=2>. Accessed 30 January 2018.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Anon, *A list of his Majesties Navie Royall, and merchants ships their names, captaines and lieutenants, their men and burthens in every one, now setting forth for the guard of the narrow seas, and for Ireland this yeare, 1642. With an order, for the speedy rigging of the navie for the defence of the kingdom. Algernon Percy, Earle of Northumberland, Lord Percy, Lucy, Poynings, &c. Knight of the most noble order of the garter, and one of his Majesties most Honourable Privy Counsell, Lord high Admirall of England, and Lord Generall of his Majesties Navy Royall*, (London: John Rothwell, 1642).

³⁶Tristram Whetcombe, *A true relation of all the proceedings in Ireland, from the end of April last, to this present: sent from Tristram Whetcombe, mayor of Kinsale, to his brother Benjamine Whetcombe, merchant in London. With a certificate under the hand and seal of Sir William Saint-Leger, lord president of Munster. As also the copy of an oath which was found in a trunk in Kilbrittaine Castle neer Kinsale, after the rebels were fled from thence, the first of June, 1642*, (London: Joseph Hunscomb, 1642), p. 8.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

in 1642, Stradling sailed to Newcastle with four warships; he was forced ashore at the Tyne when his crew mutinied at the approach of a larger Parliamentary squadron.³⁷ This brought Stradling into the proximity of William Cavendish, the First Earl of Newcastle, soon to become Charles I's deputy in Northern England, suggesting that Stradling found service with Newcastle around this period. However Stradling met Newcastle, the Earl had a high enough opinion of his capabilities to commission him as colonel and deputy commander of a foot brigade raised in Northumberland and Durham.³⁸ However, Stradling only briefly served in this position, for in October of that year Newcastle made him governor of Carlisle.³⁹ He had no connections to the local civic oligarchy, regarded by contemporaries as an important prerequisite to effective governorship, but succeeded in maintaining the compliance of the city without difficulty late in the siege despite his position as an alien. This was most likely due to the city's recent history of militarisation during the Bishops' Wars and its previous existence as a border fortress, the corporation was used to cooperating with military authorities and raised few objections.⁴⁰

Stradling's assistant, competitor and possible rival during that siege was Sir Thomas Glemham, the former governor of York who had travelled to Carlisle with the remains of his command following the city's surrender.⁴¹ Glemham evidently took control of some of the military functions of the garrison but the, admittedly sparse, evidence suggests that Stradling retaining his control over the city governance, despite Glemham's prior history of staging an armed putsch against the York corporation on Newcastle's (and Charles I's) orders in January 1643.⁴² This was demonstrated when in mid-January 1645 the garrison also assumed control over the city's alcohol supply at Stradling's command, which both conserved valuable victuals and helped to cut down on drunkenness amongst the townsfolk and soldiers alike.⁴³ Tullie recorded that:

³⁷Baumber, 'Stradling, Sir Henry (d. 1649?)', *ONDB*.

³⁸Cumbrian Archive Service, Carlisle Archive Centre (CAC), DPH/1/89/1, *Copy of the appointment William, Earl of Newcastle, General of the King's Forces in the North of Col. Henry Stradling as Colonel and [deputy] commander in chief under Col. Gray of the brigade to be raised in Northumberland and Durham, 7 July 1643*.

³⁹CAC, DPH/1/89/2, *Copy of appointment of Col. Henry Stradling as Governor of Carlisle, 29 October 1643*.

⁴⁰R.T. Spence, 'Henry, Lord Clifford and the First Bishops' War, 1639', *Northern History*, 31, 1 (1995), pp. 138–156.

⁴¹Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, pp. 8–9.

⁴²York Civic Archive, Y/COU/1/1, *Minutes of full council (pre-1835), House Book 36*, ff. 81–82; Tristan Griffin, 'The Guildhall Putsch: The York Civic Corporation and Royalist Military Government, 1643–44', *Northern History* 58 (2021), 27–45.

⁴³Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 15.

About this time, Dr. Basire, in his sermon, seasonably reproving the Garrison's excessive drinking, called drisling, prevailed so, that the Governours forthwith appointed a few brewers in every street, to furnish each family sparingly and p'portionably.⁴⁴

Control over both food and drink was centralised under the control of the governor and his officials, before being distributed to the townspeople as they required it.⁴⁵ It is important to note that the restriction of alcohol occurred after there had been a noticeable problem of drunkenness in the garrison itself, but that the response was implemented across the entire town.⁴⁶ As well as consuming resources, drunkenness amongst the soldiery could potentially cripple the fighting capabilities of the garrison, encourage mutinous dissent, or poison relations between the soldiers and the townspeople. As a result, the punishments for drunkenness according to the Royalist articles of war were severe. 'In an Officer shall be punished with losse of place: in a common Souldier with such penalties as the Lord Generall or Court=Marshall shall see fit.'⁴⁷ Stradling also limited the supply of alcohol to the general populace, helping to extend the available supply and preventing popular drunkenness from undermining public order.

While owing to the normal paucity of garrison records, most of which were destroyed before the Royalist surrender in line with normal practice, it is unknown how exactly these requirements for both food and drink were calculated, the implementation of rationing marked the end of normal market relations in Carlisle. The same policy was also attempted by the Royalist garrison of Chester but with far less success. The Chester Royalists did not enjoy the same hegemony of force as did their counterparts at Carlisle and York; a succession of short-lived governors and an assertive civic corporation combined to weaken military officials control over the garrison.⁴⁸ John Byron, 1st Baron Byron was appointed by Charles I's Council of War to take charge of Chester on 7 November 1643.⁴⁹ Byron was an active governor, bringing the corporation into closer cooperation with the garrison, establishing a fire brigade and

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Anon, *Military orders and articles established by His Majestie, for the better ordering and government of His Maiesties army* (York: Robert Barker, 1642), p. 4.

⁴⁸Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Z AB/2, *Assembly Books vol. 2 1624–1684*, 56–66; John Morrill, *Cheshire 1630–1660: County Government and Society during the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 128–133.

⁴⁹Eliot Warburton (ed.), *Memoirs of Prince Rupert, and the cavaliers: Including their private correspondence, now first published from the original manuscripts* (London: Richard Bently, 1849), p. 329.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

putting the city's militia under the control of his own officers.⁵⁰ Even in his self-exculpatory account he admitted that this relationship rapidly soured, particularly as he took measures to control the supply of foodstuffs within the town.⁵¹ There was apparently 'Noe publick Magazin of Victuall', and, since the year was drawing to a close with 'Seventeene ~~thousand~~ hundred⁵² mouths att the least to feede, whoe would not bee regulated in their dyett, because they had their provisions in their own custody', efforts at imposing rationing were both critical and difficult.⁵³

In response, Byron had summoned his officers, the Mayor and the Commissioners of Array, before making proposals for the steps required to eke out the city's supplies.⁵⁴ This case demonstrates the complex relationship between civil and military authorities in Royalist Chester. Byron's assertion of supremacy did not entail the wholesale exclusion of the Mayor from military affairs, but his incorporation within a hierarchy of officers as Byron's subordinate. According to Byron, the Mayor rejected his suggestion of a central stockpile of victuals because, since a large number of townsmen formed the garrison 'whoe would not suffer it [their foodstuffs] to bee in any custodie butt their owne', there was a danger of mutiny if the plan proceeded.⁵⁵ The most obvious caution that must be raised in the analysis of this source is that it came from Byron. The essence of his narrative is that he was correct in everything that he did and that everything that went wrong for the Royalists in general, and him in particular, was the fault, in no particular order, of court intrigues, other Royalists' incompetence, the Chester Corporation and citizenry, and the Welsh.⁵⁶ However, it should be noted that the Royalists in Chester were ultimately forced to surrender after around four months in the second siege of the city, 20 September 1645–3 February 1646, comparing unfavourably with the over six months of resistance offered by Carlisle; Byron's failure to establish a centralised rationing service, supported by its absence from extant corporate records, helps to explain this as part of a wider pattern of a dysfunctional civic-military relationship at Chester.

⁵⁰Bodleian Libraries, Oxford (BOD), MS. Rawlinson B. 210, *Lord Byron's Memoir of the Siege of Chester*, ff. 55–57.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, ff. 58–59.

⁵²Note that 'hundred' is crossed out and 'thousand' inserted in the manuscript.

⁵³BOD, MS. Rawlinson B. 210, f. 58

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, ff. 58–59.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, f. 59.

⁵⁶For Lord Byron blaming court intrigue see, BOD, MS. Rawlinson B. 210, *Lord Byron's Memoir of the Siege of Chester*, ff. 54, 63; for Lord Byron blaming other Royalists' incompetence see, *ibid.*, ff. 56, 61, 63; for Lord Byron blaming the Chester corporation and citizenry see, *ibid.*, ff. 55–56, 58–59, 63–64; for Lord Byron blaming the Welsh see, *ibid.*, f. 55.

Starvation, popular unrest and the collapse of gubernatorial authority at Carlisle

Ultimately even the best system of rationing will fail if no new victuals are being added to stockpiles, which occurred at Carlisle in Spring 1645. The last time that Tullie mentioned a skirmish over cattle was dated 29 May, and once the supply of beef ran out the Royalists were forced to resort to less wholesome sources of meat.⁵⁷ Tullie stated that they reduced to a 'small quantity of hors flesh without Bread or Salt', and that 'Hempseed, dogs, and rats were eaten'.⁵⁸ Dogs and rats may be stringy and not particularly good eating, particularly in the case of the latter, but at least they actually had edible meat on their bones. It is difficult to see how much nutritional value hempseed could have provided, and the entire episode demonstrated the desperate condition of the defenders. Indeed, by this stage in the siege, the state of famine in the city became acute for both garrison and townspeople alike. Tullie's entry for 6 June recounted that:

Now were Gentlemen and others so shrunk that they could not chuse but laugh one at another to see their close hang as upon men on gibbets; for one might have put their head and fists between the doublet and the shirts of many of them.⁵⁹

Black humour as a coping method for dealing with trauma was a common feature of warfare, and indeed of the history of suffering in general.⁶⁰ However, this humour belied the desperate state of the Royalist soldiery. The fact that both 'Gentlemen and others' were so emaciated that they resembled corpses demonstrates that rank was no guarantee of sufficient nutrition at this point in the siege.⁶¹ While this illustrates that the ration system was still succeeding in producing an equitable distribution of the remaining victuals, given that the gentlemen of the garrison were starving to death alongside their men, it also meant that the fighting quality of the Royalist soldiers would have begun to drop. While it could be that the gentlemen in question were simply losing excess body fat, it could also demonstrate the loss of muscular tissue owing to

⁵⁷Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 43.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁰Cameron Nickels, *Civil War Humor*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), pp. 83–114; Rosmary Gallagher, "'All this happened, more or less": Making Sense of the War Experience Through Humor in "Slaughterhouse-Five" and "The Sirens of Titan"', *Studies in American Humor*, 3, 6, *Special Issue: Kurt Vonnegut and Humor* (2012), pp. 73–78.

⁶¹Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 44.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

low nutrition.⁶² Even long before this condition becomes life-threatening, typically due to the heart muscle weakening, this would result in a precipitous decline in the sufferer's physical fitness.⁶³

Despite and because of these conditions, it was necessary to continue the raids on the surrounding countryside to acquire more foodstuffs. At the beginning of June, six troopers were sent to gather sacks of grain from a mill, to bring back into the town.⁶⁴ While they did possess some draft horses in addition to their mounts, it is difficult to see how such a small party of men could carry enough grain back to Carlisle to sustain the garrison for very long. Neither was the expedition without violence, for they were blocked on their return by Covenanter horsemen. Incredibly the charge of six Royalists managed to scatter their opponents, and they made it back into Carlisle.⁶⁵ Tullie, with his typical 'spin' on events, declared that 'What could [nt] these worthies have atchieved, if they had not co in a pinfold and pined with hunger?'⁶⁶ While undoubtedly valorous, the troopers' actions only bought the garrison a few more weeks. By the end of June, Carlisle was essentially out of foodstuffs, and as a consequence, civic order began to collapse. Tullie recorded that on 28 June:

The towns men humbly petitioned S[i]r Tho[ma]s Glenham y[a]^t their horse flesh might not be taken from them as formerly; and informed him y[a]^t they were not able to endure y^e famine any longer; to w[i]^{ch} he gave no answer, nor redresse, in 4 dayes space; at which time, a few women of y^e scolds and scum of the citty, mett at y^e cross, braling against S^r Henry Stradling there p'sent; who first threatned to fire upon them; and when they replied they [would] take it as a favour, he left them wth tears in his eyes, but could not mend their commons.⁶⁷

Two days after this second protest, Carlisle surrendered. The first protest had maintained the normal forms of civic-military relations, with the townsmen 'humbly'

⁶² Ancel Keys, Josef Brožek, Austin Henschel, Olaf Mickelsen, Henry Taylor, Ernst Simonson, Angie Sturgeon Skinner, Samuel M. Wells, J. C. Drummond, Russell M. Wilder, Charles Glen King, and Robert R. Williams, 'Nature of the Physiological Problems', in *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 2 vols., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950), vol. 1, pp. 575–586.

⁶³ Ancel Keys et al, 'Circulation and Cardiac Function', in *The Biology of Human Starvation*, vol. 1, 607–634; Ancel Keys et al, 'The Capacity for Work, in *The Biology of Human Starvation*, vol. 1, 714–748.

⁶⁴ Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 47.

petitioning the commander-in-chief of the garrison, Sir Thomas Glemham.⁶⁸ However, the contents of the petition, which regrettably, but typically, has not survived, were far from normal. The fact that the Royalists were collecting the horsemeat from the entire town, presumably as part of their rationing efforts, shows the level of control the garrison had over the town's foodstuffs during the siege.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the fact that the citizens, after six months of rationing, were no longer willing to see their last remaining stocks of food confiscated by the garrison for distribution demonstrates that this control had fallen apart.⁷⁰ Given everything else Tullie said about the near-complete absence of foodstuffs at this stage in the siege, the collapse of the rationing system was clearly due to the garrison no longer having any real stocks of food left to ration.

Glemham did not offer any succour to the citizens of Carlisle, as there was none to be had. This precipitated the second protest, which did not maintain the normal forms of civic-military relations at all. By contrast with the 'humble petition', which suggests a degree of formality consistent with the actions of the civic oligarchy, the townswomen's protest was drawn from 'y^e scolds and scum of the city', indicating that they were of relatively low social status.⁷¹ Furthermore, Tullie characterised, and condemned, their protest as 'braling' against the governor.⁷² It is not clear from Tullie's narrative which he found more offensive, the fact that the protesters were women, the fact that they were poor, or the way their protest against Tullie's beloved cavaliers was carried out. The complete breakdown in the civic-military relationship was borne out by Stradling's threat to order his men to fire upon the small crowd.⁷³ Killings of protesters in this way were not a usual feature of the Civil Wars, particularly in the case of a small number of unarmed women. Stradling's reaction to the women's declaration that quick death would be preferable to the continued suffering they were currently enduring suggests that he never seriously intended to open fire.⁷⁴ As much as the protest, the governor's emotional collapse demonstrated that the strain and privation of the siege had become intolerable. Despite the erosion of antebellum norms to the point of threatening a massacre of starving civilians nominally under the garrison's protection, Stradling ultimately yielded.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 47.

⁷⁴Ibid.

Famine diseases and the physical impossibility of resistance at the Great Siege of Scarborough Castle, 1644–1645

While Tullie did not mention diseases such as scurvy in his narrative, it was probably frequent amongst the garrison and the townsfolk alike. A diet of horse, dog and rat meat was ultimately not sustainable, and it is highly doubtful that hempseed would have provided sufficient greenery to make up for the complete lack of fruit and vegetables. This was certainly the case at the contemporaneous Great Siege of Scarborough in Yorkshire. While at Carlisle the garrison's morale finally collapsed owing to the starvation of the civilian population, the garrison of Scarborough Castle continued resistance to the point of complete physical destruction. The Royalist governor, Sir Hugh Cholmley, was a former Parliamentarian who had defected to the Royalists; conscious of his likely death if he was captured and anxious to demonstrate his loyalty to Charles I, he refused to surrender. Cholmley and his garrison had retreated within the castle on 18 February 1645, leaving Scarborough town to be taken by the Parliamentarians.⁷⁵ They had then put up five months of fierce resistance, in which the castle was subject to intensive bombardment and repeated assaults launched by the Parliamentarian commander, Sir John Meldrum, who ultimately died of injuries received in one such assault.⁷⁶ Outnumbered three to one, the Royalists managed to hold off the enemy despite considerable losses and the destruction of most of the castle due to cannon fire.⁷⁷ However, by summer the garrison had run critically low on food and water, and as a consequence, they suffered 'the scurvie which grew to be as contagious as the plague'.⁷⁸ In his account of the siege, Cholmley stated that:

At length the miseries of the Castle began exceedinglie to multiply; halfe of the soldiers were either slaine or dead of the scurvy, of which disease neare the other halfe laid soe miserable handled they were scarce able to stirr hand or foot.⁷⁹

While caution must be taken when relying upon this account, as Cholmley's status as a former Parliamentarian meant that he had good reason to demonstrate the depth of his new-found loyalty to the King, this part of his account is borne out by other

⁷⁵Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', p. 581.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 582–583; Charles Carlton, 'Meldrum, Sir John (b. before 1584?, d. 1645)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press 2004 <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18525>. Accessed 11 June 2021.

⁷⁷Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', pp. 568–587.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 587.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 586.

sources.⁸⁰ Parliamentary newsbooks reported that, at the surrender of the castle, many of Cholmley's men were too weak to walk and had to be carried on stretchers down into the town.⁸¹ Furthermore, while Cholmley's men had been given leave to go to Royalist Newark, only a hundred and sixty men and women went south from Scarborough with Sir Hugh.⁸² Other sources state that 100 men, too ill to be moved owing to scurvy, were left in Scarborough itself.⁸³ While many would have defected, or simply gone home, the evidence for as many as 50% casualties, and possibly even fatalities, is strong. Scurvy ravaged the garrison, and it is probable that if the Parliamentarians had had the stomach for another direct assault it would have managed to carry the fortress given that 'there was but 25 of the common soldiors able to doe dutie'.⁸⁴ Even the disposal of the mounting piles of dead bodies had become difficult, since 'there dyed ten in a night, and manie layed two days unburied for want of helpe to carrie them to the grave'.⁸⁵ Scurvy caused a vicious cycle of famine, as the

⁸⁰For a historical perspective on Cholmley's efforts at self-justification, see Andrew Hopper, 'Fitted for Desperation': Honour and Treachery in Parliament's Yorkshire Command, 1642–1643', *History*, 86, 282 (2002), pp. 140–144 (pp. 147–149); Andrew Hopper, 'The Self-Fashioning of Gentry Turncoats during the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*, 49, 2 (2010), pp. 236–257 (pp. 251–252). For original sources relating to the dire situation within the castle, Anon, *An exact relation of the surrender of Scarborough Castle, By Sir Hugh Cholmley, governour of the same; to Coll. Sir Matthew Boynton, Colonell Lassels, and Coll. Needham, commanders in chief of the Parliaments forces in Scarborough. Together with a copy of the articles agreed upon at the said surrender. Also, that Rabs Castle, Sir Henry Vanes houses in the Bishoprick of Durham, with all the armes and ammunition therein, is yielded up to the Parliaments forces*, (London: John Field, 1645), pp. 3–4; Anon, *God appearing for the Parliament, in Sundry late Victories Bestowed upon their Forces, VVich Command and call for great Praise and Thanksgiving, both from Parliament and People* (London: Edward Husband, 1644), pp. 3–5.

⁸¹Binns, *A place of Great Importance*, p. 162; see James Hopkinson, *The coppie of a letter from major Generall Poines his quarters of the taking of Scarborough. With the coppie of the 12 articles agreed and concluded upon the 22. of Iuly, 1645. between the Honourable Sir Matthew Boynton, Knight and Baronet, one of the militarie committee, for the Northerne Association. And Sir Hugh Cholmneley Knight and Baronet, governour of that castle there, concerning the delivering of the same. As also a list of what was taken in Scarborough. Printed, and published according to order* (London: B. Alsop & J. Coe, 1645).

⁸²Bernard Aslop (ed.), *The Weekly Account: Containing, Certain Special and Remarkable Passages from both Houses of Parlimament; And Collections of several Advertisements, 29 July 1645* (London: Bernard Alsop, 1645).

⁸³Anon, *Mercurius Britanicus, communicating the affaires of great Britaine for the better information of the people*, no. 91, 21 July 1645–28 July 1645, (London, 1645).

⁸⁴Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', p. 586.

⁸⁵Ibid.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

garrison became too weak to carry out the actions necessary to keep themselves alive. Cholmley recounted that:

there was corne sufficient, but not to make the mills goe, in soe much that most in the Garrison had not eaten a bitt of bread for divers dayes before the render, and the Governour had often in person turned the mills to get himselfe bread.⁸⁶

While it is doubtful that the governor had to grind mills himself, the idea that the surrender was due to the final collapse of the garrison's food production system is very probable. But it was not only bread that was wanting, for the garrison had essentially run out of water. The castle had two wells, a deep one by the keep and a shallow one serving the chapel near the sea cliff.⁸⁷ The first had already failed by early 1645, and the second was so shallow that it only filled up with winter rains and was useless in summer.⁸⁸ There were springs at the base of the sea cliff that the castle was built upon, but this involved climbing down the cliff, and then back up again holding containers full of water.⁸⁹ Amazingly, this was to prove the garrisons' main source of water for the final part of the siege, even if it was collected 'with much paines, difficulty and perrill'.⁹⁰ But by July even this supply had been cut off, as the Parliamentarian naval blockade grew tighter, and enemy ships moved into a position to fire directly at the base of the sea cliff.⁹¹ Cholmley wrote that:

There was a well in the Castle but the water if afforded us nott considerable, and the shipps had now debarred access to that under the cliff, soe that manie horses had beene with out water for seaven days together, which occasioned contagion amongst them alsoe.⁹²

It was now impossible to effect further resistance to the parliamentary forces. While the garrison was, according to Cholmley, also running low on gunpowder, the amount of space he spent in describing the problems imposed by want of food and water makes it clear that he considered lack of those essentials for life the main cause of the garrison's collapse.⁹³ With the promise of lenient terms, despite Cholmley's status as a turncoat, the garrison finally surrendered on 22 July 1645. Ultimately his refusal to

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Trevour Pearson, 'Scarborough Castle, North Yorkshire', *English Heritage, Survey Report, Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/11/1999*, pp. 6, 11, 22, 53.

⁸⁸Binns, *A place of Great Importance*, p. 159.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', p. 586.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 586–587.

surrender had secured his own life and confirmed his Royalist convictions as well as inflicting significant losses on the Parliamentary forces, but at a hideous cost to his garrison. While at most garrisons the signing of the articles of surrender was immediately followed by the defender's vacating their garrison, at Scarborough the pitiful state of the Royalists meant that Cholmley was given three days to evacuate all of the castle's residents.⁹⁴ This was made more difficult, since 'the entrance in the Castle was soe barracadoed as they were forced to make a passage through the maine wall into the ditch, where the besieged passed out, the Governor bringing up the rear.'⁹⁵ Over the space of the three days, Cholmley moved all of the survivors out of the devastated ruin they had held for five months into Scarborough town. A majority were no longer capable of unassisted movement. He wrote that:

At the rendor of the Castle there was a hundred and fowerscore sicke personns, of which most of them not able to move, but were carried out in blancketts, and many of them dyed before they gott into the Towne...Those which had abilitie to march out of the Castle with out helpe, though manie of them infirme in health, were about threescore, most Gentlemen and officers.⁹⁶

Sixty walked out of the garrison, and a hundred and eighty were carried out, some dying on the way.⁹⁷ This was just over half of the four hundred soldiers, plus civilians, whom Cholmley had led into the castle five months before.⁹⁸ While many had died in the Parliamentary bombardment, or in repelling the assaults Meldrum had launched against the castle gatehouse, it was the famine that had finished the Royalists. Cholmley did not record the proportion of fatalities attributable to famine, but if only casualties are considered then those incapable of moving on their own outnumbered their able colleagues by two to one.

Conclusions

Ultimately, mass death from famine was not a common feature of Northern England's experience of the British Civil Wars. Only at Scarborough is there any clear evidence of definite famine-related diseases, from which at least some of the sufferers probably died, and there is only evidence of siege-related hunger at Carlisle.⁹⁹ Compared to the war-famines in contemporary Ireland or Germany, starvation killed relatively few in Northern England during the sixteen-forties. However, as foci of conflict, besieged fortresses still generated significant localised famines, the experience of which was

⁹⁴Binns, *A Place of Great Importance*, p. 162.

⁹⁵Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', p. 587.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Firth, 'Great Siege of Scarborough', p. 587; Binns, *A Place of Great Importance*, p. 162.

⁹⁸Binns, *A Place of Great Importance*, p. 162.

⁹⁹Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 47.

SIEGE FAMINE IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1644-1649

wholly divorced from the rest of Great Britain throughout the period. As a weapon starvation succeeded in reducing otherwise impregnable strongholds such as Scarborough and relieved Leven's army of any need to directly attack 'ye Castle, Citty, and Cittadell of Carlile'.¹⁰⁰ In this way, famine was an essential weapon used by the victorious Parliamentarian-Covenanter forces in subduing the Royalist strongholds that persisted throughout the North even after the catastrophic defeat of the Northern Royalists at Marston Moor.

The Royalists attempted to counter siege-famine through rationing systems and *ersatz* foodstuffs, however establishing such systems relied upon the uncertain cooperation between civic and military authorities and, if there was no possibility of relief by a field army, was utterly futile.¹⁰¹ The King's Northern loyalists ultimately succeeded in prolonging the war in the North for over a year, hoping to buy time for a renewal in Royalist fortunes. While this failed with the Royalist defeats at Naseby and Philiphaugh, it was not an irrational decision; like the decision to starve garrisons into surrender, continued resistance, even at a severe cost to both military and civilian populations, was justified by the logic of military necessity and the perceived illegitimacy of surrender to 'rebels' without Royal authorisation.¹⁰² The consequence of this decision was a complete breakdown in the relationship between civic and military authorities as their priorities dramatically diverged. Civic corporations' concern was the wellbeing of their town and the urban oligarchy that ran it, both of which were seriously endangered by continued resistance. While rationing both extended a food supply and reaffirmed a hierarchical urban social model, starvation resulted in shocking collapses in societal norms; the protest of the Carlisle women, following a failed petition to Royalist authorities through the normal channels of civil life, demonstrated siege-famine's capacity to inspire popular unrest.¹⁰³ Where a significant civilian population was absent, such as at Scarborough Castle, it was possible to continue fighting to the point of literal death by starvation.

¹⁰⁰CAC DPH/1/89/2, *Copy of appointment of Col. Henry Stradling as Governor of Carlisle, 29 October 1643.*

¹⁰¹BOD, MS. Rawlinson B. 210, *Lord Byron's Memoir of the Siege of Chester*, ff. 55–57; Morrill, *Cheshire 1630–1660...*, pp. 128–133.

¹⁰²BOD, MS. Rawlinson B. 210, *Lord Byron's Memoir of the Siege of Chester*, ff. 55–57.

¹⁰³Tullie, *Siege of Carlisle*, p. 47.