

CIVIL WAR PAPERS OF THE CONSTABLE OF HOPE.

By FRANCIS FISHER.

A DETAILED study of the Civil War as it affected Derbyshire has yet to be written. The various county histories deal but cursorily with this period, and their statements derive mainly from the contemporary narrative among the Chandos-Gell manuscripts, calendared by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, but printed before that in Glover's *History of Derby* (Vol. I).

There seems to be no reason to doubt the assertion that this account was written under the direction of Colonel Sir John Gell, who so dominated the county that almost from the outbreak until the end Derbyshire was a bulwark for the Parliamentary party against penetration from north and south. With the support of only one of the more important landed families, the Gresleys, and despite the fact that extensive estates of the "Loyal Duke" lay within its borders, Gell held Derbyshire in thrall throughout the war, and was able furthermore to supply from time to time much needed help to aid the hardly-pressed forces in the neighbouring shires of Nottingham, Leicester and Stafford. It is probable that he merited many of the scurrilous detractions found in contemporary pamphlets, but he was undoubtedly possessed of a gift for organisation and leadership amounting to the exceptional. The brief notice accorded him in the Dictionary of National Biography gives little clue as to where he obtained his military training, and

any account of the campaign in Derbyshire must largely centre on this remarkable man.

For the sparsity of original material available to the student there is of course an excellent reason. The Restoration saw all Parliamentary leaders and sympathisers sink into obscurity, and there must have been a precipitate haste to destroy any incriminating document which might later have brought unwelcome prominence to its possessor. As a consequence, accounts of this period may be unrelieved by those touches of interest which can make a documented article palatable to the general reader.

There is, however, in the local collection of the Derby Reference Library a small bundle of papers¹ which to some extent gives an insight into the duties of at least one individual of the day. They are obviously the carefully preserved records of the village constable of Hope in the Peak, and consist of some twenty-five communications from the Derbyshire Committee for Safety, generally signed by two or more of the members, but sometimes by a "Receiver" for the committee. As they are (as far as the writer is aware) the only extant documents of the Derbyshire Committee, and are in fragile condition, some notes on their contents may be of value.

The earliest in date is for October, 1644, when the war had pursued its sporadic course for over two years. Gell's star was in the ascendant, he having wrested Wilne Ferry from the Royalists, taken Colonel Eyre's troop in Boylestone Church and secured possession of Wingfield Manor. The notices from the Committee indicate that only then was it proving possible to assume the administration of the County's fiscal resources. In this first letter, the fiction of acting in the interests of the King will be noticed, and the threat in the tail is characteristic of most of the communications.

¹ Deed no. 1703, indexed under Hope & Tideswell.

“Whereas his Ma^{ties}, the Queenes and the Princes Revennews have since the beginninge of these unhappy distracons either not bene collected at all or misemployed to their Ma^{ties} and the Kingdomes prejudice, All w^{ch} the Lords and Comons in Parlt assembled takinge into their serious consideracons by speciall Ordinance for the due and orderly collectinge thereof together wth their arrerages have constituted a Committee thereby authorising them or any five or more of them amongst other things to appoint Receivers and other officers who have (for their better informacon and expediting of their Collections and Receipts) full power by the said Ordinance to send for or take into their custody any Books Accounts Rentalls copies of Court Rolls or any other writings to assess the premises, and in case any farmer or tennant shall either refuse or delay to pay his or their Rents or their Arrerages to any of the said Receivers Agents or deputies, such Receivers Agents or Deputies are thereby not only enabled to punish such persons by fine and imprisonment such fine not exceeding Twenty pounds or to certify their names to the said Committee of Revenues at his or their election, but also to call to his or their assistance the trayned Bands, Voluntiers and other forces their Comanders and officers, Constables, Headboroughs and all other officers within their limitt who are thereby injoyed to be aydinge and assistinge as often as they shalbe thereunto required for the procuring a conformitie unto the said ordinance. And whereas for the preventing of all confusions of Accounts, and that there may be kept an exact Account of all such monies levyed accordinge to the sayd Ordinance, it is further ordained that all such Rents and duties wth their Arreares issuing out of any Mannor or Lands that are or shalbe sequestered shall be paid to the Committee, for which sequestrators treasurers or collectors unto such Receiver agent or deputy are appointed and by the said Ordinance of Parlt together with the subscribed Receivers authoritie ready to be shewed to such as make scruple thereof or desire to see the same at the time and place hereafter prefixed will more evidently appeare. These are therefore to require you not only to collect by Distress or otherwise all such Rents debts and arrears as any of the Townes withⁱⁿ your Constabulary have or do stand charged with either for Palfrey silver, Turbary or Pinfield Herbages Wayseleyes increase or Comon silver Liberties or any other Rent duties and customs whatsoever, and pay the same unto me or my lawful Deputy upon Thursday next by eight of the clocke in the forenoone at the house of George Milner in Hayfield, but also to warne all such particular persons as are or have been farmers or tennants to any of his

Ma^{ties} land or late in possession or hould or occupy any Delinquents estates from the Committee for Sequestracon withⁱⁿ the county that they fayle not to make payment of their Debts Rent and Arreares at the time and place afforesaid unto me or my deputy as they will incurre the danger of being proceeded ag^t according to the severall Ordinances of the Parl^t. Fayle not of yo^r due execucon hereof at yo^r utmost p'ill.

Given under my hand this sixteente day of October 1644.

John Bretland
Rec p Com

Hope. for palfrey money turbaries wayseleyes and liberties for 2 yeares last past in arreare	£1 10 10
Aston in arreare	11 4
Offerton in arreare	2 6
Thornhill in arreare	6 4

Less than a fortnight later, another communication arrived at Hope from the Committee, making what must have appeared to be quite exorbitant imposts. The compounding for a twentieth part of the personal estate was not, it will be noticed, confined to delinquents, but applied to all freeholders and others.

“To the Constable of Hope

These are to charge and comand yo^u to give warning to all psons within your Constabery as well Freeholders as others that are possessed of Lands, stocks of money or other goods, That they appeare befower two or more of us at Chappell in le Fryth at Nich Smythe's house upon Satterday next to compound with us for y^e fifth pte of their yearly renew and twentieth pte of their personall estate according to the ordinances of Parliament. And likewise that you give warning to all the severall Tennants within your said Constabery belonging to the Earles of Newcastle Devonshire Row Eyre of Hassop John Milward John Shalcrosse Esquires that they bring in their rents at the tyme and place abovesaid and pay the same to us or to whom we shall appoint to be employed for y^e present service of the Parliament.

Tho Saunders	John Gell
Robt Eyre	Geo Gresley
J. Wigfall	Tho Gell
Jo. Wigley	

Next in chronological sequence comes a warrant for the appointment of tax assessors for the district, naming two persons each for the townships of Hope, Woodland, Edale, Offerton, Brough and Shatton, Aston, Thornhill, Bradwell and Castleton. This is dated December 28th, 1644, and is coeval with another demand to the constable to collect all assessments that had been made for the Parliament's service. Any refusing to pay were to be brought to Derby to justify their case. Both these papers are signed by John and Thomas Gell.

That the excessive demands made on one who was only something of an honorary officer of the village were by no means fully met is obvious from the context of many of the orders, and Receiver Bretland must have experienced a good deal of resistance, as the following letter reveals.

"To the Constable of Hope

Whereas formerly a warrant issued under my handwriting directed unto you purporting to give notice and warning unto his Ma^{ties} tennants and other inhabitants w^{thin} yo^r Constabulary that they failed not to make paym^t of their Rents and arrears due to his Ma^{tie} unto me spe^{ally} authorised at a certaine tyme now past forasmuch therefore as there hath beene no conformitie or obedience thereunto but apparant contempt thereof though grounded upon supreame authoritie, These are therefore to Chardge and Command yo^u once more to give notice to the said Tennants and Inh[']itants that they and su^ddry of them faile not to make payment of their said rents and arreares unto me upon Wednesday the Eight day of January next by eight of the clock in the afforenoone at the house of Nicholas Smith in Chappell in le Frith wthout faile as they will prevent the forfeiture of their severall estates &c. (for w^{ch} the said rents and arreares are payable) and to be proceeded ag^t according to severall Instrucons and ordinances of parliam^t. Faile yo^u not in the reale execucon hereof (you haveinge neglected the former) or yo^u will answer the contrary. Given under my hand this Thirtieth day of December in the twentieth yeare of his Ma^{tie} raign that now is Anno Dm 1644

p me Johem Bretland
Rec p Com

His day at Chapel-en-le-Frith was wasted, and he promptly reiterated his demand in another warrant which he accompanied with this letter of remonstrance.

“Mr. Stayley

The contempt of your p’decessor is not yet remitted and if you faile in the execucon of this warrant as formerly I shalbe enforced to use extremities which I abhorre. I shall sitt noe more but ye day p’fixe in the warrant, one whereof which is to Hathersadge I desire to be sent forthwith the other way, every effort to be executed whereby there may not be any longer abused the patience of yo^r truly lo friend if yo^r manner give not otherwise

John Bretland

10 Jan 1644

I have staded till friday in the afternoone at Chappell expecting the execucon of yo^r last warrant. Let this lre be delivered to Mr. Balgue. I fear I shall be enforced to make you a precedent²: for yo^r father’s sake I desire not.

Several of the warrants make demands for supplies of food and provender. An order dated February 26th repeats a former demand for fourteen strikes of oats to be delivered weekly to the Quartermaster at John Ward’s house in St. James’ Lane, Derby. In this instance, it is probable that the unduly high rate fixed led to total disregard: a later missive urges compliance, but a warrant of April 16th seems to have recognised that a more moderate demand might be enforceable, and requires only four loads of hay and four strikes of oats, to be delivered to Quartermaster Henshawe at Mr. Fisher’s house by the Jail Side.

One or two of the letters deal with such relatively trifling matters as to suggest that delegation of authority was not encouraged. It can scarcely be supposed that the following needed the signature of three members of the Committee.

² ‘p’sident’ in the manuscript.

"To the Constable & Inhabitants of Hope

Whereas Thomas Needham of Castleton has had a fatt cow taken from him and employed in the service of the Parliament: These are therefore to charge and comand yo^u to make an equall assessment within yo^r Townshippe of the sume of foure pounds And pay it unto Tho Needham for his Cow that were employed in the Parliament service. And hereof faile nott.

Chappell Novemb 2^d 1644

H. Wigfall
Robt Eyre
Jo Wigley "

Whilst the probability is that the general basis of taxation was largely arbitrary, each township had to answer for the maintenance of a specified number of trained soldiers. There is unfortunately no indication of the number for which Hope was accountable, but several of the communications deal with levies on this footing. A notice dated June 10th, 1645, threatens to distrain for arrears of £61, being the assessment of 20/- a week for every trained soldier, and five days later the Constable has to collect 16/- for every chargeable soldier to pay for mowing and making hay. In October of the same year another summons calls for 38/- for every trained soldier in the township towards an assessment of £29. 3s. 4d. on Derbyshire for twelve months' maintenance of the British Army in Ireland.

A noticeable feature of all the warrants is the brief time allowed for compliance with the demands: even allowing for the exigencies of war it is still difficult to see how the following order could have been carried out.

"To the Constable & Inhabitants of Hope

These are to charge and comand yo^u forthwth upon sight hereof to provide withⁱⁿ yo^r Constablership two sufficient horses Mares or Geldings wth Bridles Saddles Brestplates & Cruppers for y^e use of the Lord Fairfax his Regmt of horse, and that the charge may be more easy you are to levie an equall assessment in yo^r Constablership to make satisfacon for the said horses and furniture etc., each man to be charged according to his abilities and the said horse with furniture you are to send to my quarters

in Tidsall on Tuesday next by 9 a clock in the morning. Faile not herein or you will answer the contrary at yo^r uttmost p'ill.

Will Spencer

Tidsall 18 May, 1645

(postscript) In regard of our march to Stony Middleton you are to send y^r horses and furniture thither tomorrow."

There is a certain sameness in most of the papers which would make further extracts wearisome, but enough has been given here to afford some indication of the administrative work of the Committee, and to make us realise that, like Gilbert's policeman, the lot of the village constable in the Civil War was not a happy one.