

Report for the February 2015 meeting of the Malvern Civic Society

On Friday 13 February Vaughan Wiltshire, a member of the Battle of Worcester Society, gave us an interesting and informative talk entitled “1651: *The Battle of Worcester in Historical Context*”. The period covering three civil wars beginning in 1642 was a complicated period of history, culminating in 1651 when the Royalists of Charles II were defeated by parliamentary forces under Oliver Cromwell. In total there were three separate civil wars, all fought by different people for different reasons.

The first civil war began when Charles I raised his standard at Nottingham. He and his army would uphold the Protestant religion and laws of Parliament. On the other side, the difference was that the men of Parliament were Non-Conformists. The Battle of Edgehill was the first battle (October 1642). The Battle of Marston Moor in 1644 and the Battle of Naseby in 1645 sealed the king's fate, with the conquerors being Oliver Cromwell with the Scottish army on the side of the Parliamentarians. The Scots army sided with the Parliamentarians because it wanted to unite the Scottish and English Presbyterians and get rid of the Church of England. Also, since King James had united Scotland and England, all decisions were made at Whitehall whereas the Scots wanted to become political equals. Vaughan commented that this theme has familiar undertones even today. On the conclusion of this first civil war, Parliament was uneasy about the large Scots army on English soil, so paid it off to return to Scotland. Charles I was handed over to Parliament.

The second civil war, which ran from 1647 to 1649, started by discord between the English Army and Parliament. The King tried to exploit this by asking the Scots to help him regain the throne and, in return, he said he would help them have Presbyterianism in England. Eleven thousand Scots came over the border but Cromwell destroyed them at the Battle of Preston in 1648. Parliament voted to bring Charles I to trial and he was executed in 1649 at Whitehall.

Prince Charles, son of Charles I, felt he then had a moral duty to avenge his father's death and recover the throne, so this started the third civil war. Charles turned to the Scots for help, and threw in his lot with the Presbyterian Church, agreeing to create a Presbyterian Church in England and Scotland and to get rid of the Anglican Church. The Earl of Montrose, a loyal supporter of the previous Charles, was not told of the change of allegiance and so was captured and executed. Riding into Edinburgh, Charles passed the body of his father's most loyal supporter. Charles II was proclaimed King in Scotland in February 1649.

The third and final civil war ran from then until 3 September 1651. In 1650 Cromwell confronted Charles but things didn't go well for him and at the Battle of Dunbar he and his men took the Scots army by surprise at dawn and won. It was a spectacular defeat for the Royalists so after Dunbar it was a matter of just “mopping up” for the Parliamentarians to bring it all to a conclusion. By

1651 the priority of many Royalists was simply to conserve their own fortunes. On 3 September at the Battle of Worcester the result was inevitable. The attack by the Parliamentary army came early in the morning. The Royalists had Charles fighting by their side and, upon defeat, he made his escape and spent nine years in exile on the Continent. Oliver Cromwell became Protector and died in 1658. Charles II was restored to the throne, not by the English Parliament or foreigners but by the Cromwellian army that had defeated his father at Naseby. The Battle of Worcester was a significant point in history as, after this, never again would there be an absolute monarchy. There was religious tolerance, except for Catholicism. The country had suffered badly under the three civil wars, with losses of men equivalent in proportion to those of the First and Second World Wars.

**Denise Preston, Press Officer, Malvern Civic Society
16 February 2015**