

A City Parish in the English Civil War: St Aldate's, Oxford, 1642–6

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SUMMARY

This article examines the impact of the Civil War on the inhabitants of St Aldate's, a wealthy but socially mixed parish at the heart of the Royalist capital. Underlying tensions between town and university were heightened by the presence of two powerful institutions on its borders: the guildhall, centre of city government, and Christ Church, one of the largest and richest of the university's colleges and the king's wartime base. Close examination of surviving documents almost unique to St Aldate's throws new light on how inhabitants responded to difficult wartime conditions, and highlights the limitations of royal power on the very doorstep of the royalist headquarters.

At the outset of the Civil War loyalties were uncertain, divided, and shifting. In Oxford tensions were particularly acute from October 1642, when Charles I entered the city to make it his wartime capital. The whole city became an overcrowded garrison and military headquarters. St Aldate's was at the heart of the resulting changes in civic life (Fig. 1). Two important surviving pieces of evidence give insights into wartime conditions: Edward Heath's 'names of defaulters in St Aldate's' of June 1643, and his 'exact account' of extra people lodging in the parish in January 1644.¹ The city's 'petition comprehending our pressures and grievances' of October 1644 illustrates deteriorating conditions and hardening attitudes, especially in St Aldate's, in the last two difficult years of the war.² The final Royalist defeat in 1646 left a depleted and demoralised city and university, and as Parliamentary forces took over, the fates of four leading inhabitants of St Aldate's (Thomas and John Smith, Abel Parne, and Walter Cave) exemplify both defeat and future revival.

In the following text references to houses or occupants in St Aldate's have figures in brackets after them. These are the numbers shown in Fig. 3, a plan of houses in St Aldate's in the seventeenth century.

THE PARISH OF ST ALDATE'S

St Aldate's was a thriving and busy parish in the commercial centre of Oxford (Figs. 2 and 3). The northern boundary ran close to Carfax, and the long narrow parish stretched down the busy market area of Fish Street (the modern St Aldate's). Market days, held on Wednesdays and Saturdays, filled the whole of central Oxford with activity until the final stages of the war. The parish had expanded to the south since the Middle Ages, and stretched beyond the South Gate to Grandpont and Folly Bridge over the Thames. Behind the west side of Fish Street were the watercourses running from the Thames, most of them not actually in the parish, but closely linked to business carried out there. Their banks were lined with warehouses and wharves where grain, malt, firewood, and other goods were landed and stored, or loaded on carts for onward distribution. Though prosperous, this was not the most salubrious area of Oxford: Sleying Lane opposite the south wall of Christ Church was little more than an open sewer.³

¹ Bodl. MS Add. d. 114, ff. 24–6, 46, 48–9.

² OHC, OCA/C/FC/1/A2/3.

³ I. Roy, 'The City of Oxford, 1640–60', in R.C. Richardson (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 133–5. This article owes much to Ian Roy's seminal work on Civil War Oxford.

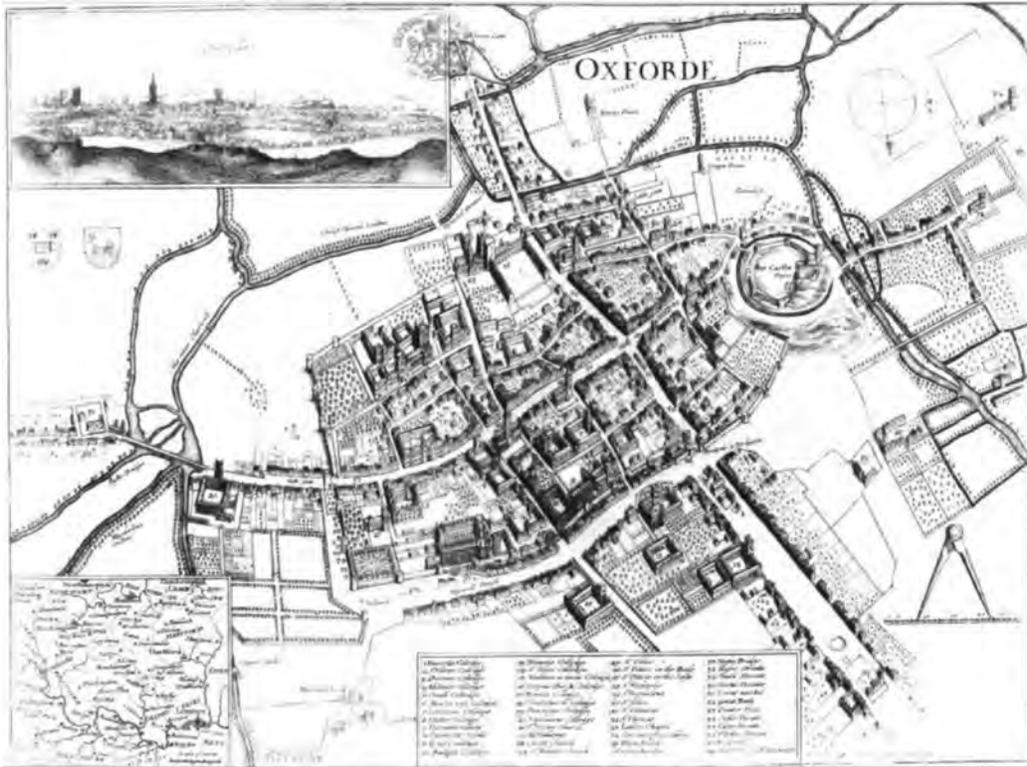


Fig. 1. Oxford in 1643, a panorama (north at bottom) by Wenceslaus Hollar, who may not actually have visited the city. The small city had a population of c.10,000 and was still surrounded by its medieval walls, then in a patchy state of repair. The engraving shows Christ Church's Tom Quad still incomplete. By kind permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford ((E) c. 17:70 Oxford (13)).

A worm's eye view of this parish provides evidence of a variety of people's experiences in Oxford during the English Civil War.⁴ St Aldate's was one of the most populous parishes in the city,⁵ and its inhabitants were engaged in a variety of occupations. As elsewhere in Oxford, most of the wealthier householders were brewers, bakers, and innholders. There were two big inns, on either side of New Lane, now Blue Boar Lane (Fig. 3). The Unicorn (72) is a fine house little changed from the seventeenth century, and still in commercial use. On the northern side of the lane was the Blue Boar (74), replaced in the nineteenth century by the building which now houses the Museum of Oxford. Among the professional class were lawyers, clergy, and surgeons. Thomas Clayton, a physician and the Master of Pembroke College (6), lived in Fish Street rather than in his college. Tradesmen were represented by butchers, tailors, a blacksmith, and a parchment maker. The poor, who lived in small two-roomed houses mostly south of Christ Church, included boatmen, a basket maker, a poulturer, and a carrier.⁶

St Aldate's had on its borders two important and contrasting institutions. On the northern boundary was the guildhall, the focus of city government. The city council and the trade guilds

⁴ For the broader picture see *VCH Oxon.* 4, pp. 78–85.

⁵ M.G. Hobson and H.E. Salter (eds.), *Oxford Council Acts, 1626–1665*, OHS, 95 (1933), p. 355.

⁶ M. Toynbee and P. Young, *Strangers in Oxford. A Sidelight on the First Civil War, 1642–1646* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 12–13. This study is a mine of information, but also has some unexpected gaps in its source analysis.



Fig. 2. A detail covering the parish of St Aldate's from the finely drawn map by David Loggan in 1675 (north at bottom). Unlike Hollar, Loggan made his map from close observation. Tom Quad was by then completed, and the nearby river and wharves are clearly shown. By kind permission of the Bodleian Library ((E) c. 17:70 Oxford (12)).

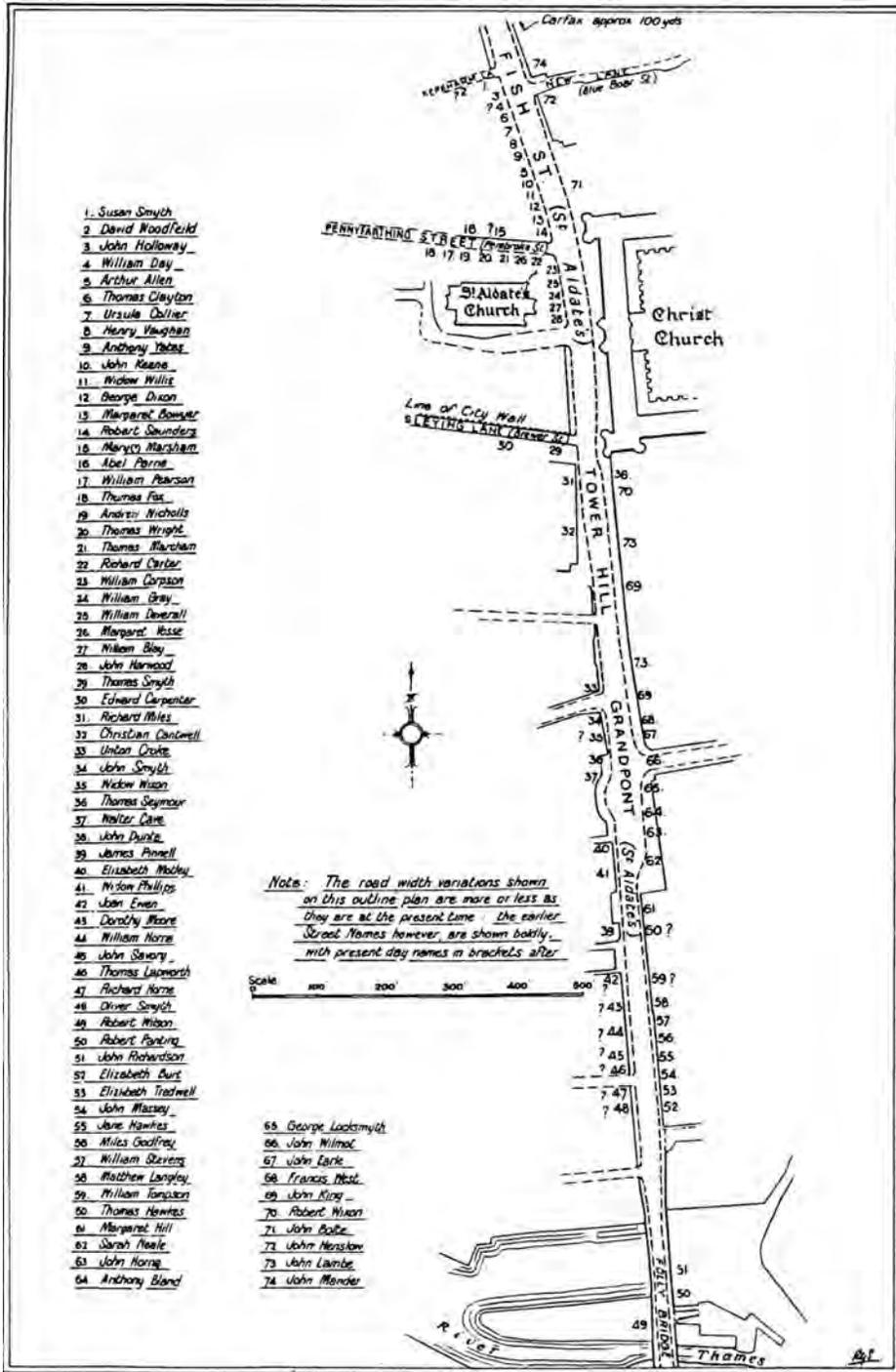


Fig. 3. A plan showing the houses in seventeenth-century St Aldate's, from Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 20. The numbering is for convenient reference; modern methods of house numbering did not exist at the time.

met there, as well as the shire court and assizes, and it was used for polling during elections, registration of deeds, and storage of fire-fighting equipment. The other institution, Christ Church, lay further south on the same side of Fish Street (Fig. 1). As one of Oxford's largest and most impressive colleges, Charles I chose it as his residence and the centre of his wartime government. In the heart of St Aldate's, it came to dominate life in the parish during the war.

The presence of these two buildings within a few hundred yards of each other underlines the often difficult relations between city and university, in peace and in war – a tension which underscored life in St Aldate's. Rather than a wealthy university grinding down the poor townsfolk, this was a relationship between two powerful oligarchies. Though the university often seemed to get the better of the city, particularly when Archbishop Laud was Chancellor in the 1630s, each side needed the other, and many townspeople made their livings from the university, including the wealthy brewers and bakers in St Aldate's. Several of the 200 'privileged persons' employed by the university lived in the parish, notably John Massey, a parchment maker (54), Thomas Seymour (36), manciple of Corpus Christi (the seventeenth-century equivalent of a college bursar), and George Locksmith (65), manciple of Christ Church. Their exemption from city taxes and other civic responsibilities was much resented by the city council. There were also twenty-four college tenants: four of Christ Church, fifteen of Magdalen, two each of Oriel and New College, and one each of Merton, Balliol, and All Souls.⁷

DIVIDED LOYALTIES

The division of loyalties in Oxford became much sharper once Charles I lost control of London in January 1642 and went north to raise troops. In June the university demonstrated its loyalty by producing the large sum of £10,000 to send to the king in the north. However, Puritan New Inn Hall, a few hundred yards north-west of St Aldate's, would soon empty and be used as the Royal Mint after the king's arrival, and at Merton College, also close by, Warden Nathaniel Brent left for Parliamentary London and spent the war years there. Tensions also existed within leading families in St Aldate's. The Smith (or Smyth) family was one of the most important, prominent in city affairs for two generations. Thomas Smith was mayor in 1638 and 1643, and his brother John in 1639. They were brewers and lived close to the warehouses they kept for the fuel, malt, and grain supplies needed for their trade. They held the leases of several inns, and freeholds in the nearby countryside. Thomas had built the fine house known as the Old Palace (34) in the 1620s. On the death of his father before the war he moved back into the family home further up the street (29), and John lived in part of the Old Palace during the war. John was a member of the Long Parliament, and supported Parliament in 1642. The brothers seem to have been divided at this point since Thomas co-operated with the Royalists at first, particularly when he became mayor in 1643.

The lawyer Unton Croke, who owned the rest of the Old Palace by 1642, was Parliamentary, and absent during the war, living instead in his manor house in nearby Marston. Walter Cave (37) was a brewer who supported Parliament at the beginning of the war, but he also had close links to the university through his Royalist brother, Sir Richard Cave. Abel Parne (16), living in Pennyfarthing Street (now Pembroke Street), was a firm Royalist. He was a churchwarden in 1638-9, and chamberlain on the city council throughout the war. A baker by trade, he produced luxury white bread for wealthier customers. A surviving inventory shows that his house was large and well appointed.⁸

Alderman John Nixon, a wealthy merchant dealing in luxury textiles, lived round the corner in the High Street, and he too was an important influence in the city council, and leader of the

⁷ Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, pp. 13, 16, 17; Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 133-6.

⁸ Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 87.

opposition to royal policies. He would become the most powerful Oxford citizen and benefactor in the 1650s. He had been mayor in 1636 and was already providing loans for the city in the 1630s; he seems to have been at the centre of an influential group of Puritan businessmen both in the city and the surrounding countryside, and was firmly on the side of Parliament.⁹ There had been opposition in the city both to Laud's policies as chancellor of the university, and to royal demands in the 1630s such as Ship Money, though this was grudgingly paid both by John Nixon and Thomas Smith in their mayoralties.

During 1642 religious tensions rose in the city as in the rest of country, especially around St Aldate's. The Catholic innkeeper of the Mitre in the High Street was the centre of an anti-popery panic. St Peter-le-Bailey was firmly Puritan, but the vicar of St Martin's (at Carfax), Giles Widdowes, was an eccentric high church Arminian and a lecturer (preacher) for the city – an office often held by more Puritan clergy.¹⁰ Little is known about John Bowles, the rector of St Aldate's from 1641–6, though the fact that he lost his post at the Royalist surrender may well indicate where his loyalty lay. The churchwardens' accounts for 1644 show that holly and ivy was provided to decorate the church at Christmas, which makes it unlikely that he shared Puritan disapproval of such decorations.¹¹

WAR APPROACHES

By the time the king was approaching the midlands with a sizeable army in the late summer of 1642, opinion amongst some townspeople was beginning to swing in his favour, perhaps out of sheer self-interest. On 28 August, the Royalist Sir John Byron entered the city at midnight with a detachment of about 150 troops 'and their so sudden coming, at that time of night, put both university and town into a great fright until it was known on whose part they came...' This Royalist view, reported later by the antiquary Anthony Wood,¹² was not shared by all of the townspeople, including Alderman Nixon, who decided to leave the city. A picture of the uncertainty in St Aldate's is provided by the Parliamentarian George Heron, a bailiff of the city council. He reported to Parliament in London the names of those he condemned as Royalist, especially Thomas Smith and David Woodfield (2). The latter had drilled the trainbands in 1638, and was paid £5 for services to Byron. Heron complained that John Smith 'hath received some blows for no other reason but because he is of the Parliament', and that the vice-chancellor and mayor searched Walter Cave's house.¹³

When Byron left, the situation reversed, and a Parliamentarian troop under Lord Saye and Sele came into the city. Saye was an important member of the parliamentary opposition, and his power base at Broughton Castle made him a leading influence in north Oxfordshire.¹⁴ His troops searched both Thomas Smith's house and Christ Church, and Wood says he took some college plate. Nixon considered it safe to return, but Oxford citizens were no more enthusiastic about these incoming parliamentary troops than they had been about Byron's soldiers, especially when they rioted at Carfax. According to Wood, even Nixon stepped in when the new porch of St Mary's in the High Street, erected by Archbishop Laud's chaplain in the 1630s, was damaged by soldiers' shots at its popish Virgin and attendant angels. Despite Lord Saye and Sele's influence, the

⁹ Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 134–5.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 138–9; Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, pp. 138, 150–1.

¹¹ Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 14.

¹² A. Clark (ed.), *Wood's Life and Times*, vol. 1, OHS, 19 (1891), p. 56. For this period Wood relied on a manuscript by the university historian Brian Twyne, resident at Abel Parne's house in St Aldate's: Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 87.

¹³ Roy, 'City of Oxford', p. 140.

¹⁴ K. Tiller, 'Civil War 1642–1649', in K. Tiller and G. Darkes (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire*, ORS, 67 (2010), pp. 94–5.

diplomatic Alderman Dennis was elected by the council rather than Nixon, because 'they would have a mayor who would not fly out of town if the occasion served'. As Royalist forces approached, Nixon left again, first for Abingdon, and then London, and was expelled from the city council along with Heron and eleven others soon after the king arrived in the city.¹⁵

The shifting loyalties in the city before the king's arrival, and the general distrust and fear of soldiers of either side, reflect the widespread confusion. The city's council acts often refer to 'these troublous times' or 'these distracted times'. People had a living to earn as much in war as in peace, and for most citizens the overwhelming aim was to keep their heads down, and stay out of the way of soldiers if possible – something which was not easy in St Aldate's.

ROYALIST CAPITAL

On 29th October 1642, Charles I arrived in Oxford, six days after the inconclusive battle at Edgehill, his troops flying the colours captured from the parliamentary forces. The king was formally welcomed at Carfax by the mayor and aldermen, who presented the city's gift of £250, modest compared with the university's £10,000. Then Charles rode down Fish Street, where 'at Christ Church, the university stood to welcome his majesty'. The king took up residence in the Deanery in Tom Quad, and Christ Church filled with courtiers (many of whom were also government servants or high-ranking officers). Lords Commissioners and a military governor were appointed to form a council of war.¹⁶ Though many important Royalists were resident in other parishes, some were in the best houses in St Aldate's, close by Christ Church. In July 1643, Queen Henrietta Maria arrived from Holland and brought the considerable number of troops, heavy cannon, and arms which she had raised. Councillors agreed that 'the whole house shall repair to the Penniless Bench [at Carfax] in their best array and there stand ready at her Majesty's coming'. The streets were strewn with flowers, and after the ceremony the king conducted her to her own lodgings in Merton.¹⁷

Oxford had become a garrison city. Buildings changed function and academic life ground to a halt. The Royalist ordnance office, which controlled the movement of military equipment in and out of the city, was based at New College, and small arms and powder were stored there. The Bodleian Library – one of the university's newest and most prestigious buildings – became a warehouse and repair depot. Heavy ordnance and repair sheds filled Magdalen grove beyond the Eastgate, and mills on the outskirts of town were used to grind sword blades and manufacture gunpowder. By royal proclamation, arms were forcibly collected from citizens, including in St Aldate's, and stored in the Tower of the Five Orders in the Bodleian. A musket was collected from Unton Croke's house (he was probably by then in Marston). Brian Twyne gave up 'one birding piece ... and a very good bill, lately trimmed for mine own defence'. Collections of pots, kettles, and other domestic items for arms production did not apparently meet with much co-operation from citizens – only forty names from the whole city are recorded by the city council, and Thomas Smith's contribution (weighing 83 lb) was much bigger than anyone else's.¹⁸

The decision was soon taken to strengthen Oxford's defences by building up-to-date earthwork fortifications beyond the old city walls. There are still some visible remains of the ditches cut to allow defence by flooding in Christ Church Meadow, very close to St Aldate's. Work began with a royal proclamation late in 1642 ordering all adult males from the city parishes, the university, and all incoming 'strangers' to work on one appointed day each week (Friday for St Aldate's) on a designated section of the 'works'. Failure to work incurred a 1s. fine (perhaps two days' wages

¹⁵ Hobson and Salter, *Oxford Council Acts*, p. 115; Clark, *Wood's Life and Times*, p. 63.

¹⁶ Clark, *Wood's Life and Times*, p. 68; Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 141–2.

¹⁷ I. Roy (ed.), *The Royalist Ordnance Papers*, vol. 1, ORS, 43 (Oxford, 1964), p. 107.

¹⁸ Roy, *Royalist Ordnance Papers*, pp. 76, 82, 437; Hobson and Salter, *Oxford Council Acts*, p. 372.

for the poorest) and women were supposed to pay the same sum if they were not prepared to dig.¹⁹ The aim was to have 800 working each day, but this was not achieved. On one day when the king came to inspect progress, Wood reports that a great many university and college employees were present, but 'at the town work there were but twelve persons only then at work'. Londoners behaved very differently in defence of their city when the Royalist army briefly approached the capital in November 1642. The Venetian ambassador noted that 20,000 citizens, including women and children, went out to dig defences beyond the old walls, even on Sundays.²⁰ Despite being often in St Aldate's and elsewhere in central Oxford,²¹ the king had much less co-operation, as a unique piece of evidence from St Aldate's shows.

EDWARD HEATH AND THE DEFAULTERS IN ST ALDATE'S

'The names of the defaulters in St Aldate's parish' is a list of fines to be collected from those who had failed to dig on their appointed day (Fig. 4).²² It was made by Edward Heath, a London lawyer and meticulous Royalist official and city commissioner for St Aldate's, whose papers survive in the Bodleian. Similar records are lacking for other city parishes, though it is reasonable to assume that other officials made them. Many Royalist papers were burnt on the orders of the Privy Council just before the surrender, and this may account for their disappearance.²³

Heath set out on 23 June 1643 to collect the defaulters' fines. He was accompanied by Thomas Smith (who would be chosen mayor at Michaelmas) and probably the churchwardens and constables. He called at the fifty-six houses where he expected to find defaulters (out of the seventy-four in the parish). In the margin he wrote the number of defaulters he hoped to find in each house, with totals at the bottom of each page. His complicated calculations at the end of the list show that he spoke to 394 occupants, though how much money he collected is very unclear. Most valuably, he records the many different reasons people gave for refusing to pay.

At the very first house, belonging to widow Smith, 'the officers would not speak with him'. There are a considerable number of houses where he got no answer, or has recorded 'gone out of town'. Some Parliamentary supporters, such as Unton Croke's son, had gone to London, but others perhaps hastily departed when they saw Heath approaching. Further down the street, William Patrickson, curate of St Ebbe's, said that 'he must attend the buryings and christenings'. Thomas Clutterbuck was not at his house, and 'his wife answered that when the king paid her husband, he should pay'. At Abel Parne's house, his lodger Lieutenant Godwin said that 'when colonels and others of his rank paid he would also'. The antiquary Brian Twyne also lodged there, but was over sixty and so not liable. At Thomas Smith's commodious house, where the Lord General, the earl of Forth was lodging with other high-ranking Royalist officers, Heath received an answer similar to Godwin's, and wrote 'no answer but that they ought not to pay'. This was a reason commonly given by Royalist officers, including Lord Spencer (33) who 'thought not that noblemen should pay'.

There was also a considerable number of people working at the court, of varying rank, who gave the same reason for refusing. Among them was the king's physician. Others included John Jones, 'who belongs to the court'; 'servants about the wax lights'; Mr Del Hoy of the pastry to the king '[who] answers that he serves the king there'; the king's farriers and boatmen; and Samuel Nurse 'belonging to the king's kitchen and poor'. Mr Locksmith, manciple of Christ Church and

¹⁹ Bodl. MS Add. d. 114, ff. 14, 22.

²⁰ Clark, *Wood's Life and Times*, p. 73; V.T.C. Smith and P. Kelsey, 'The Lines of Communication: The Civil War Defences of London', in S. Porter (ed.), *London and the Civil War* (London, 1996), p. 142.

²¹ R. Ollard, *This War Without an Enemy* (London, 1976), p. 151.

²² Bodl. MS Add. d. 14, ff. 15, 17, 24–6.

²³ Toynebee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 2 (Edward Heath). Plates 4–7 show the manuscript, but there is little comment on it because of the authors' focus on the later 'exact account'.

a privileged servant of the university, said 'he must speak with the vice-chancellor, being beadle of the cathedral'. One defaulter said 'he will work double next week', and another pleaded that 'he hath no money.' It is notable that there were three people recorded as 'sick in his bed'. The serious epidemic of the summer and autumn of 1643, 'morbus campestris', probably a form of typhus though often also called 'the plague', was already taking hold in the city.

The value of this list of defaulters is considerable. It presents the actual voices of a wide social mix of people living in St Aldate's in the summer of 1643, including servants, housewives, professionals, and high-ranking Royalist officers. They were not afraid to speak out, whatever their rank, to a Royalist official, and very near Christ Church, despite the fact that many of them depended on the Royalists for their livelihood. It is also clear that the parish was already in this first summer of the war very overcrowded and vulnerable to disease.

THE 'EXACT ACCOUNT'

The second piece of evidence from St Aldate's tells us more about the increasing overcrowding. It is a census of all the houses in the parish, compiled by Heath some six months later on 23 January 1644. In December 1643, the king issued a summons to Parliament to meet in Oxford – directed at those members of the Long Parliament prepared to declare their allegiance to him by coming to the Royalist capital. In order to find out where the incoming MPs could be lodged, the orders were to 'make a strict and exact account of all lodgers and inmates with their children and servants ... of all colleges, halls, and private houses.'²⁴ Once again, and for perhaps the same reasons, almost all lists of extra people in other parishes and many colleges are either lacking or incomplete.

The title makes clear who is to be included: '... all the persons being strangers resident within the parish of St Aldate's, Oxon'. Each entry starts by identifying the landlord of the house, but it does not include any family or other locals who may be there. This time the census was mainly written up by an assistant, though it looks as if Heath himself wrote the detailed totals at the end. He went on the same route as he used when he made his defaulters' list, but this time he had to call at all seventy-four houses in the parish.

As might be expected, the strangers were not all the same as those recorded six months earlier. For example, the defaulter Lord Spenser, in John Smith's Old Palace (33), was killed at the Battle of Newbury in September 1643. In his place Smith had in his house the Lord Chamberlain and his five servants, plus Lady Lake, her daughter, and two maidservants. In Abel Parne's house, Lieutenant Godwin was no longer present. Instead the household included a Scots cleric, Mr Henderson, and his wife, Lieutenant Hull and one man, Mr Morrison, the king's tailor, Mr Ball and Mr Wilde, bakers at the royal bakehouse, Mr Napper, the prince's barber, Mr Wood, a servant of the queen, and two yeomen of the guard. Although not as socially elevated as Smith's lodgers, Parne's eleven strangers were all working at court, with the possible exception of Henderson. Elsewhere some had not moved. The Lord General, the earl of Forth, was still in his comfortable billet in Thomas Smith's house (29) with his wife, daughter, and five servants, along with his son-in-law, Sir Thomas Ogilvy, and others.

The Parliamentarian Walter Cave (37) had his Royalist brother Sir Richard Cave, his wife, and two maids and one man staying with him, suggesting that family connections were stronger than political differences. It seems Walter had decided to co-operate: he had contributed £5 to the city's £250 gift to the king when he arrived in Oxford, and was a commissioner supervising work on the fortifications, so was not amongst the defaulters six months earlier. Also lodging with Cave were Sir George Benyon, his wife and daughter, and two maids and one man – ten extra people in all. There were sixteen widows in the census. Jane Hawkes at 55 was probably running

²⁴ Bodl. MS Add. d. 14, f. 45.

her husband's thriving butcher's business, as many widows did. She had a Scots colonel, his wife, and three servants in her house. Widow Tredwell (53), on the other side of Grandpont, had one sergeant and two soldiers in her small two-roomed house.²⁵ As well as several Scots, there were at least four Frenchmen, and 'Mr Rumley' from Augsburg, the king's apothecary, who was also in the list of defaulters.

Much can be teased out from this document, but the main conclusion must be that there was serious overcrowding, which seems to have increased considerably since June 1643. For example, the large Blue Boar Inn had twenty-three strangers, compared to seventeen in 1643. Heath's meticulous totals are this time clear, and in his own hand. His final count is:

Of gents and their menservants – 267;
 Women – 66;
 Children under sixteen – 13;
 Soldiers of the lifeguards – 62
 Total of this parish – 408
 Note in this number of 62 of the soldiers are included all common soldiers, sergeants, and corporals, but quartermasters, ancients [archaic form of ensign or standard bearer], lieutenants and captains are included in the number 267.

In other words, there were 408 'strangers' in the seventy-four houses in St Aldate's, as well as the landlords and their unrecorded families, and any other dependants the war had brought to them. It is very unlikely that any of the locals were paid for their enlarged households. Promissory notes in lieu of rent were hardly ever honoured. We do not know how many of the visiting MPs were crammed in as well when they arrived.

THE PRESSURES OF WAR

The presence of so many strangers of high rank with lifestyles to match must have brought some advantage to Oxford citizens, at least at first. The profitable river trade from London was disrupted, but some luxury goods such as wine continued to arrive by road. Thomas Smith and the other brewers were able to maintain their essential supplies. The war years happened to be years of good harvests, and the regular twice-weekly markets continued. Stocks of wheat and maslin were on the whole kept up by the city council until the last difficult year.²⁶

However, war brought many sombre occasions to Fish Street. Anthony Wood describes the funeral cortege of the king's young cousin, Lord George Stuart, who was killed at Edgehill, as it proceeded through St Aldate's on 13 January 1643:

The body was brought up from Magdalen College and so brought and attended all the way through the street to Christ Church.... The footmen soldiers came first with their muskets under their arms, the noses of the muskets being behind them; the pikemen drayled their pikes on the ground; the horsemen followed with their pistols in their hands, the handles being upwards; the tops of the ancients [standards] was also borne behind; a chariot covered with black velvet where the body was, drawn by six horses. The man that drove the chariot strewed money about the streets as he passed. Three great volleys of shot at the interring of the body, and lastly a herald proclaimed his titles.²⁷

This was one of several impressive military funerals, but there were many more humble and often anonymous deaths, of both soldiers and civilians. As has been suggested, overcrowding and

²⁵ Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 188.

²⁶ Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 147-8.

²⁷ Clark, *Wood's Life and Times*, p. 82.

the movement of armies were probably largely responsible for epidemics – in 1643 and 1644 – and brought death to locals and strangers alike. There are clues to mortality in St Aldate's despite the lack of a full burial register from this period: soon after Edgehill, thirty shrouds were ordered for Wolsey's almshouses opposite Christ Church, which seems to have been used as a hospital. In 1643/4, the churchwardens of St Aldate's paid John Massey, the parchment maker, 5s. 'for a soldier that died in the house of John Macie and burying of him', and later 4s. for 'a shroud and grave making' for another soldier. Like many other Oxford citizens, he must have looked after sick or wounded soldiers in his small house (54).²⁸ Other city burial registers often mention anonymous soldiers, though seldom the house where they died. In St Mary's parish six unnamed soldiers died in November 1642, possibly casualties from the Battle of Edgehill, brought into the city when the Royalists arrived.²⁹

Population pressure increased everyday problems as well. Both Royalist officials and the city council continued to fight a losing battle against the dirt in the streets, certainly not a new problem, but seen even at the time as a health hazard, and a gibbet at Carfax testified to the rising crime rate.³⁰ In the autumn of 1644, conditions in central Oxford became much more difficult thanks to a disastrous fire. This occurred on 8 October, only a week after Thomas Smith's mayoralty came to an end at Michaelmas, and was said by Wood to have started 'in a little poor house [near the Northgate] occasioned by a soldier roasting a pig which he had stolen'. Whipped up by a high wind, it swept towards the south of the city, destroying many houses in the parish of St Ebbe's, uncomfortably close to St Aldate's eastern boundary. Abel Parne's house in Pennyfarthing Street (16) was burnt down, and other houses in that vicinity must have been damaged.³¹

'A PETITION COMPREHENDING OUR PRESSURES AND GRIEVANCES'

A fortnight after the fire, the situation was so bad that the city council drew up a strongly worded 'petition comprehending our pressures and grievances' to the Lords Commissioners.³² It is clear evidence of the growing disillusionment of Oxford citizens, and from Thomas Smith downwards, it involved parishioners of St Aldate's.

The council's deepening resentment concentrated on the unpopular and aggressively tactless colonel of the city regiment, Sir Nicholas Selwyn, 'a stranger to the petitioners and was never nominated by them to His Majesty, nor approved'. They might well have preferred the local David Woodfield (2), who had raised the trainband before the war. The city had resented the royal orders to raise a regiment from the start. They continually dragged their feet because of the expense, the king's failure to contribute to it, and probably because of their somewhat lukewarm loyalty. Thomas Smith had just completed his year as mayor, and was still an alderman and a power in the city, as well as holding the thankless post of lieutenant colonel of the regiment. Council records show that he confronted Selwyn in an angry exchange when the latter demanded extra pay. Selwyn allegedly 'affronted [Smith] by assaulting him and striking him in his ... seat in the city office, a thing not to be forgotten in this house'.

The petition began by stating that since the city raised a regiment, it should not have had to meet other demands. It then listed the further 'pressures, burdens, taxes and impositions'.³³ These included over £2,000 paid for fortifications and 'relief of common soldiers'. There was also the 'billeting of officers and soldiers with their wives and children'. Payments for 'paving and cleansing

²⁸ Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 188.

²⁹ OHC, St Mary's burial register.

³⁰ Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 149–50; Hobson and Salter, *Oxford Council Acts*, p. 425.

³¹ Clark, *Wood's Life and Times*, p. 111; Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, p. 87; S. Porter, 'The Oxford Fire of 1644', *Oxoniensia*, 44 (1984), pp. 294.

³² Hobson and Salter, *Oxford Council Acts*, p. 123.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 123–7.

of the streets' had increased 'ten times the value.' The epidemics of 1643 and 1644 were mentioned too: 'the charge for the infected being very great and many families shut up who were formerly able to pay taxes.' The petitioners gave many further reasons why they were impoverished and could not raise the money needed. Some of the 'better sort of inhabitants' were dead (probably another reference to the epidemics). Others had 'gone into the country to avoid taxes, and strangers and soldiers are possessed of their houses who pay little or no taxes'. Trade was reduced and the city's charters and privileges were ignored so that strangers could trade, and wealthy citizens, including Thomas Smith, had had to make large loans. Finally the petitioners describe how

by the late lamentable fire very many inhabitants whose estates consisted of houses, household stuff, wares and goods are utterly ruined, amongst which eight common brewhouses and ten bakehouses were burnt besides many malthouses, malt, wheat, wood and other provisions, who must all be relieved by the other inhabitants, especially those who are allied and friends unto them.

Despite this vivid picture of hardship and destruction, and the resentment it aroused, the petition brought no sympathy from the Lords Commissioners. Within a week, total and humiliating submission was forced on the city council, presumably on the king's orders. The commissioners ordered the petition to be erased from the minute book, the record always made first before anything was entered in the official council acts (Fig. 5, below). Three aldermen (none from St Aldate's) were imprisoned until two other outstanding taxes were paid.

ROYALIST SURRENDER

Attitudes hardened as the Royalist cause collapsed in the winter of 1645/6, and Fairfax and Cromwell's troops surrounded the city. The king secretly left Christ Church disguised as a servant in the early hours of 27 April and gave himself up to the Scots in Newark. In Oxford, the Lords Commissioners negotiated a peaceful surrender, and on 24 June the remaining Royalist troops marched out of the city along Fish Street, High Street and over Magdalen Bridge, in the traditional way for an honourable surrender, 'colours flying, trumpets sounding, drums beating'.³⁴

St Aldate's, like the rest of the city, saw detachments of the New Model Army under Fairfax take over peacefully, though probably never in the numbers that they had experienced under the Royalists. Nixon returned and very soon became mayor of a city ravaged by the war. A fifth of Oxford's population had died, the resources of the city were exhausted, and its privileges undermined. The university chest was empty and academic life virtually non-existent. However, revival came reasonably quickly to both city and university, and the 1650s saw a steady recovery of prosperity.³⁵

CONCLUSION

The fates of the four parishioners of St Aldate's whose stories have been described in detail above give clues to wider experiences in the city. The powerful Smith family was ruined by the war. Thomas Smith's attempt to stand up to royal authority achieved nothing, and he suffered considerably after the failure of the petition in which he played such an important part. He had made considerable loans to the city, and was at least £2,000 in debt. His brewing profits were drastically reduced by the king's action in waiving the normal trade protection of freemen of the city. It is highly likely that he owned a number of the brewhouses and malthouses destroyed in

³⁴ Bodl. MS Add. d. 114, ff. 109, 119.

³⁵ Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 153–5.

Trinity Quarter cancelled with Edmund, the Master's certificate
 signed here in English under our seal and date
 20th of the month of June the 16th of 1648

At this Council the order lately given by Sir Nicholas Bagenhall
 the Lord for another month's pay for him of the City & Regim^t being read
 at this house understanding that in obedience to their L^ops order the said Sir
 Nicholas was from the City & in the way for himselfe aboute 14
 fortnight since this house for the reasons take into consideration that the
 said Sir Nicholas is a stranger to the City and was not the common
 by them to his ma^{ty} nor approved of to be that City's soldier though his
 ma^{ty} gave them their free cheere Neither doth this house contract
 him to be a man that hath either will or power to do this City any
 good office but only against at his own sight and service himselfe by
 this City's due not taking into his consideration the pretence which
 this City is fallen into not the late lamentable accident of the 16th
 might be a sufficient reason to cause a charitable forbearance
 at the least besides he hath affronted the late may by assaulting &
 straying him in his place of state in the City's office it being not to be
 forgotten by this house!

It is therefore unanimously agreed by the whole Council that in
 regard of the promises and the great sum of money already by him received
 and of the said Ordinance which this City was in a manner of this house
 being dead & under others hands and the Country to attend the great charge
 of heavy expenses which by reason the place of the great sum of the
 hundred of the Regim^t providing the same that being that L^ops
 unwilling or cannot approve him that he will not support his ma^{ty} grace
 of fabric for his pay as he is to come his ma^{ty} shall be satisfied by this house
 to that purpose of the same house other order taken for his ma^{ty} shall be
 sufficient to take of his pay yet this house being compelled by their
 necessities of the Ordinance for answer to the ordered pay do conclude
 & agree that they cannot any longer make payment unto him neither
 will this house give the content that any further charge shall be made
 for him but for the other officers of the Regim^t according to the late
 petition to their L^ops

Fig. 5. The page from the minute book of the city council with the 'petition concerning our pressures and grievances' scored out on Royalist orders to prevent it being entered in the council acts. The record of the petition has only survived because the erasures left the manuscript legible. By kind permission of the Oxfordshire History Centre (OCA/C/FC/1/A2/3).

the fire. He died more or less bankrupt just before the surrender in April 1646, and his wife and son were forced to sell the family property in St Aldate's.

John Smith's former support of Parliament did not help him. He had been briefly imprisoned by the Royalists early in the war, and thereafter had probably found it easier to co-operate. He sat in the Oxford Parliament, and was registered as a delinquent after the surrender. Now seen as a supporter of the Royalist cause, he had to pay the highest sequestration fine in the city (£216). The Smith family never regained their high position in city affairs.

Abel Parne the baker suffered as well. He had lost his house in the fire, and probably his bakehouse too. His name disappears from the list of those holding office on the city council in 1647, and it is likely he was purged as a delinquent. He died in 1650.

Walter Cave, the brewer and supporter of Parliament in 1642, had co-operated once the Royalists arrived. His Royalist brother, the baronet Sir Richard Cave, who was living in his house when the 'exact account' was made, was killed at Naseby. Walter played his cards carefully after the surrender. In 1647, he was one of twenty-eight petitioners who asked that delinquents should not be eligible for election as mayor or bailiffs, which cleared the way for the re-election of Nixon and his supporters although it was technically unconstitutional. He was elected to the mayor's council of thirteen, and in 1650 became mayor himself.³⁶ Walter Cave had too much to lose not to fall in with the new regime, like many St Aldate's parishioners and townspeople of lesser standing. Many in Oxford acted as he did, contributing to the city's revival after the hardships of war.

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³⁶ Roy, 'City of Oxford', pp. 154-7; Hobson and Salter, *Oxford Council Acts*, pp. 134, 135, 137; Toynbee and Young, *Strangers in Oxford*, pp. 150-1.

