Leicestershire’s Royalist Officers and the War Effort in the County, 1642-1646

by Martyn Bennett

Sixty years ago, to write of Henry Hastings and the King’s cause in Leicestershire would have been easier. E.W. Hensman of Loughborough Grammar School had produced two articles, *Henry Hastings, Lord Loughborough and the Great Civil War*, and *Loughborough and the Civil War*, by 1921.¹ The local royalists appeared to be gentlemen on horseback, ill-disciplined and ill-led. Henry Hastings — the Rob Carrier — was little more than a landlocked pirate in command of ‘wicked and debased wretches’ at Ashby-de-la-Zouch castle. From this lair these barbarians would course the county, plundering and committing acts of wanton violence — a seventeenth century version of the feudal barons of King Stephen’s time. And, no doubt to those who saw this later civil war as a ‘puritan revolution’, Hastings’ men were the last vestiges of a feudal age.

Recent work has thrown into doubt many of the long held ideas concerning Hastings, his followers and their activities. It has revealed that these old ideas were based on limited investigation and analysis. It is not proposed to give a narrative of the King’s cause in this brief paper; instead two areas concerning the royalists in Leicestershire will be examined. Firstly, the composition of the activist body who joined Henry Hastings’ army from this county will be studied, and secondly, the image of the plundering cavalier will be considered in the light of new research.

With regard to the composition of the county royalists, Clarendon in his *History of the Great Rebellion*, written following the war, set the scene. Leicestershire was dominated by the struggle for power by the Hastings family and their rivals the Greys ‘between whom the county was passionately divided enough without any other quarrel’.² This division extended into the civil war. The Hastings’ and their supporters thus became royalists, and the Greys and theirs, parliamentarians. This view was accepted sixty years ago by Hensman and even, apparently, by Alan Everitt in 1969.³ They and others who referred to the Leicestershire scene ignored the implications of the espousal of the parliamentarian cause by the heir to the Hastings estates, Henry’s elder brother, Ferdinando, Lord Hastings.

In 1976 at Professor Everitt’s Department of English Local History at Leicester, work by David Fleming, the substantial part of which has now been published in *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, uncovered a contradiction.⁴ Fleming correctly pointed out that there was a growing challenge to the Hastings’ political hegemony of the shire, especially during the 1620s and 1630s. However, he also indicated that the families which had earlier sided with the Greys were not unanimous in their support for parliament. For example, families such as the Dixies and the Faunts, who had been forerunners in attacks upon the political position of the Earl of Huntingdon, head of the Hastings’ family, were to side with the Earl’s second son, Henry, during the war. Fleming also elaborates on Everitt’s assertion that two-thirds of the county gentry were, by inclination, royalists. He points out that the same proportion was also true of the caucus of thirty-six families who had generally provided the local administrators within the county previous to 1640.
With this kind of support it may be expected that Henry Hastings would have been able to call upon a large body of militarily active gentry for his army. However, of the twenty-one chief royalist families, those with experience of local administration, only six provided such activists: the Bales, the Beaumonts, the Dixies, the Pates and both the Hastings families. The Beaumonts, represented initially by Sir John, were one of the chief Catholic families in the county. Sir John raised a regiment in Staffordshire in 1642, presumably amongst Catholic areas in the south of that county, and served in the West Midlands during the war. Likewise, the militarily active Wolstan Dixie (son of Wolstan) served out of the immediate locality. The Bales and the Pates were both represented in Hastings’ army. Sir John Pate raised two regiments himself and William Bale served as a Lieutenant Colonel in Hastings’ Horse Regiment. Before considering the Leicestershire contingent of Hastings’ army or the North-Midlands Army as it should be termed, it will be necessary to examine the nature of this ‘army’.

The impression given by Hensman and those who followed his line is that the army of Henry Hastings was a small guerilla band concentrated upon Ashby. This, however, is not the case. Hastings had under his command twenty-three colonels at various times during the war. These men had raised or taken over: seventeen regiments of Foot, eighteen of Horse and five of Dragoons. Not all of these regiments served in the North Midlands Army at the same time; several of the Derbyshire regiments came into it in late 1643 after the Marquis of Newcastle cleared the enemy out of the north of that county. Other regiments like the younger Francis Whortley’s were sent out of the region to serve elsewhere, individual colonels such as Thomas Leveson, Governor of Dudley Castle, tried to retain some independence of action. Even so, many of the regiments remained under Hastings until he surrendered Ashby in 1646. These regiments varied greatly in size. Some of the Horse would consist of only around one hundred and fifty men, often as in the case of Colonel Lane’s Horse, much less. Foot regiments too were, it appears, only around two hundred strong. However there were exceptions, Hastings’ Horse was possibly around three or four hundred strong at one time, and both he and Colonel Richard Bagot, Governor of Lichfield, had three or four hundred men in their respective regiments of Foot. The North Midlands Army was a ‘flying army’, one which formed a single body when it was needed to perform a major action such as the relief of Newark in 1644, when Hastings fielded three thousand men. Hastings estimated that the garrisons under his command required one thousand troops to man them, this gives the North Midlands Army a total of four thousand — quite a large guerilla band! For the greater part of the war the army was dispersed amongst the various garrisons of the area. Hastings was the Lieutenant General of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire and the regiments and garrisons were from, and in, these four counties.

Three hundred and fifty men served as officers in this army during the period 1642-6. Not all were present at the same time, some being dispatched or incorporated with their regiments, others dying in battles or skirmishes and being replaced by men from within the army or from elsewhere. Hastings’ Horse alone had thirty captains during the period and it is unlikely that more than ten would be serving at the same time. Within this three hundred and fifty are twelve whose presence at Ashby at the surrender is not explained by their military service — they appear to have no direct connection with the North Midlands Army.

The lack of enthusiasm for the military aspect of the King’s cause, evidenced by Leicestershire’s ‘caucus families’ response, is mirrored by the county gentry as a whole. Of the three hundred and fifty only thirty seven (10.57%) were from Leicestershire. That is: eight field officers (majors and above) and twenty-nine officers of lower rank. The eight
field officers include Henry Hastings, the commander of the North Midlands Army. He was born in 1608 at Loughborough and was educated at Cambridge. As early as 1626 he appears to have sampled court life. In the 1630s he had served in the county as a deputy lieutenant and in the Scottish wars had been a captain in the trained bands. By March 1642 he had joined Charles I at York and in June carried the Commission of Array proclamation to Leicestershire. Hastings raised a troop and fought at Edgehill and by February 1643 had become so indispensable to the King that he was appointed Colonel General of the East Midlands. In October that same year he became not only a Lieutenant General but was enobled with the title Lord Loughborough. Another colonel, William Nevill, was a county man by birth though his estates were in Middlesex. He only returned to Leicestershire after Lord Grey had attacked his father’s house at Holt and taken the old man prisoner. Upon William’s return he took command of the regiments his father had raised and in which his younger brother, Thomas served as Lieutenant Colonel. John Pate of Sysonby, an experienced local administrator, had been involved in the implementation of the Commission of Array and had raised regiments of horse and foot by early 1643. These served at Belvoir Castle during the war. Colonel Christopher Roper was a Leicestershire man who had fought against the Irish rebels before returning to his county in 1643. At first he served as major in Hastings’ Foot but later became a full colonel; in one instance he appears to have led a detachment of Horse. William Bale of Carlton Curlieu was Lieutenant Colonel to Hastings’ Horse before being seconded to Gervaise Lucas the Governor of Belvoir. His presence there was not welcome, as Lucas was not happy under Hastings’ command. Bale was considered to be a spy — there was probably some truth in this. The other two field officers were both majors. Thomas Brudenell of Stanton Wyvill appears to have served in a horse regiment based at Ashby but which one is not known. Major Thomas Roberts of Sutton served in Wolesley’s Foot.

The twenty-nine lower ranking officers were chiefly in the regiments of Hastings and Pate. Hastings’ Horse had eleven officers and his Foot had five. Pate’s Horse had five also. As one descends through the ranks the amount of information available for each officer decreases and of these twenty-nine few have left much to posterity; this is true amongst the officers from other counties too. Only five have left evidence of compounding for estates or paying any fine after the war. Indeed some show positive evidence of a lack of social standing, for a butcher, a shoemaker, a vintner, a yeoman and a servant are to be found in the Leicestershire contingent of the North Midlands Army officer cadre.

As a whole the Leicestershire group do not display the attributes of high social standing. Only three of the thirty-seven had attended university and only four belonged to families of administrative experience at county level. This is a trend exhibited throughout the North Midlands Army and, it appears, throughout other armies too. The idea that the royalist officer cadre was composed of gentry with a stake in the establishment needs reconsideration; it is possible that the royalist army was and much a vehicle for social advancement as was parliament’s. The Leicestershire contingent itself, containing as it does, men of little social consequence, goes some way to suggesting that this may be possible.

Of the remaining three hundred and thirteen officers in Hastings’ army, sixty cannot be allocated to a particular county, due to the lack of evidence available. For those who can be so allocated it appears that regional ties played a significant part in determining their choice of military career. Derbyshire, which provided the largest number of regiments for this army also provided seventy-nine officers for it; the largest number of any county. Staffordshire provided forty-eight officers despite the recruiting drives held there by Lord Paget and Sir John Beaumont, before Hastings took over. Nottinghamshire contributed
twenty-one men to the North Midlands army officer cadre. This low total is explained by the fact that large numbers of the indigenous royalists served in the Newark garrison. The other officers came from a total of twenty-three different counties with one man coming from Brussels. Though this point is interesting with thirty-six per cent coming from areas outside that controlled by Hastings, once we have eliminated those coming from nearby Midland shires, the figure is reduced to twenty per cent. A proportion this size can, perhaps, be explained by the influx of reformando officers from regions which fell to parliament as the war progressed. Nevertheless, in the case of Leicestershire, it appears that the royalist cause did not inspire many into positive activity, despite two-thirds of the county gentry having, according to parliamentarian sequestrators, royalist sympathies. Nor does it appear that many Leicestershire men served elsewhere as there only seem to be another eight royalist field officers from this county serving in the other armies during the war.

It seems appropriate at this point to explode one myth which had developed due to the very effective parliamentarian propaganda. When Hastings strengthened the defences of Ashby Castle he built a stone triangular fort which he surrounded with earthworks. This structure was labelled the Irish Fort by the enemy, and was supposedly built to house Irish Roman Catholic soldiers and keep them separate from the Protestants. From the examination of the officers in this army it appears that only Christopher Roper had served in Ireland and he had fought against the Catholics. There does not appear to be any evidence to suggest that Hastings received any troops from Ireland though he and Roper requested that Roper’s company of Foot be brought over. Even if this request was fulfilled it is highly unlikely that they would have been Catholics. The real reason for the stone fort was to protect the eastern side of the castle; the only side without any preliminary line of defence.

To turn now to the second aspect of this paper, a consideration of the image of the ‘plundering cavalier’ in the North Midlands shires. Hastings as a ‘robcarrier’ remains largely the creation of the parliamentarian propaganda machine. The name was derived from his supposed habit of interrupting the carrier trade which plied across the Midlands. But this was just a part of the image which he was given, in short, he and his men were plundering cut-throats. He was an archetypal cavalier, a dashing figure — ‘wrong but wromantic’. The truth is less ‘wromatic’, even without the need to dispel the myth of the visual image — the felt hats and the long flowing hair. The parliamentarian war administration has received good coverage in the works by Clive Holmes and Alan Everitt. Counties were formed into associations in which they were supposed to co-operate, and each county was run by a collection of committees centred upon the General Committee. Royalist administration was basically very similar. After a pause of two months to allow parliament to appear the illegal innovator, Charles followed the example of associating the counties in his power in February 1643. Leicestershire was grouped with Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Rutland and Lincolnshire and placed under the command of the command of the Colonel General Henry Hastings, who was himself under the command of the Earl of Newcastle. This grouping was not to be a permanent creation. Within one month Hastings was instructed to leave Lincolnshire to Lord Cavendish, and by June, Rutland was under Lord Widdrington. However, Hastings had been authorised to take command of all the forces in Staffordshire. This effectively gave him his power base of the four counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire. For a short time at the end of 1643, the northern parts of the counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were administered directly by the now Marquis of Newcastle. It is important to remember that Hastings never totally cleared his area of the enemy and indeed it was they
who, after the fall of Stafford in May 1643, controlled the four county towns.

The Commissions of Array continued to exist, and it was they who administered the war-effort in conjunction with the local military commanders — relations were often strained. Some of the commissions were replaced by Commissioners of the Peace. Leicestershire’s new body was led by Henry Hastings’ brother, the former parliamentarian, now sixth Earl of Huntingdon. The financial organisation was of immense importance, for, as Charles recognised, ‘money is the sinews of war’. In this light it can easily be seen that any army which plundered and ruined the country in the manner attributed to Hastings’ crew would not survive very long. An area that has to provide food and other supplies for an indefinite period cannot be arbitrarily stripped bare by those who hope to live in it. The royalists aimed to maintain, within their local administration, some sense of tradition. This attempt to run the county on a basis familiar to the inhabitants involved the use of traditional county officials. As Hastings himself had been appointed as the High Sheriff of Leicestershire by the King in June 1642, the leading position was thus secure; warrants for financial levies could be sent out in his name. The Commissioners and the High Sheriffs called the counties constables together in early 1643; at Lichfield, in Staffordshire and Newark in Nottinghamshire this occurred in February. The same would be done in Leicestershire at Ashby or perhaps at Loughborough. The Commissioners had decided on the amount necessary to finance the garrisons within the county and the purpose of these meetings was to divide this amount amongst the constablewicks. The constables then, as previously, assessed the levy in their own parishes and were responsible for the collection thereof. The assessment was usually done at a gathering of the property holders of the village. It is possible that the assessments were made four times during the year and perhaps collected in lump sums by the constable. They were collected at weekly or fortnightly intervals from the constables and known as the ‘contribution’. It looks as if the system differed, on occasion, to that operated by the Parliamentary Committees who sometimes expected the constable to make his way to them, whereas the royalist collector, often a quartermaster, would tour the villages making collections. Not all the contribution was handed over as cash, villagers were also expected to provide food and other necessaries to the garrisons. There are indications that the type of non-money provision was dependant upon the village’s specialities. Branston regularly sent hay and oats to Belvoir, whilst peas were sent there from Stathern. The goods thus given were receipted and the equivalent then deducted from the next contribution payment. Irregular levies and payments were made from time to time. Beds and bedding were levied on villages at several times during the war and special collections of provisions were made when the King’s or Prince Rupert’s army passed through the area. Again these levies were receipted and deducted from normal payments. Other demands made upon Leicestershire’s inhabitants included levies for horses, and warrants were sent out for labourers to work on the garrison’s defences.

The burden of financing the civil war which fell upon the people of Leicestershire must have been a hard one to bear. The levy made by the constable to cover his own expenses alone increased as did his workload. To use Belton as an example: in 1638 the constable levied £9 7s 1d upon the village for his expenses. In 1639 during the first Scottish war his expenses rose dramatically to £17 3s 3d, though he ended up paying around £3 back; by 1641 the figure was down to that of 1638. However, the constable in 1644 had to charge £32 16s 7d and even the expenditure exceeded this by over £2. By 1646 the levy was down to £14 9s 4d. This of course was only the handling charge. Waltham on the Wolds paid a total of £99 16s 4d to Belvoir in 1645. Branston paid £50 in the same year to the same place but was also faced with paying £90 to the committee at Leicester. However
successful the royalists were in applying traditional methods to the war-effort, the fact remains that the sheer size of the amounts charged upon the villages shattered any sense of normality.

One interesting side effect was that both sides were collecting similar amounts from the villages, usually on consecutive days. The regularity with which these collections took place seems to imply that some sort of agreement, perhaps unspoken, was made by both sides not to impede the routine collections made by their respective enemies. Indeed, in the Vale of Belvoir an apparently abortive attempt was made to set up a bilateral agreement on levies made in that area, whilst in Derbyshire the arrears due to the royalist garrison of Welbeck, from Scarsdale Hundred, were collected and paid over by the parliamentarians as part of that garrison's terms of surrender.

This apparently highly organised system was destroyed not only by the eventual military superiority of parliament, resulting from the collapse of the royalist north in 1644, but also because of internecine struggles. By early 1645 the parliamentary domination of Lincolnshire seriously affected Belvoir's monetary situation. As a result the Governor, Gervaise Lucas, asked the King for permission to annex Leicestershire's Framland Hundred, for the sole use of his garrison. The King agreed in principle but informed Lucas that he should consult his immediate superior, Hastings, as his permission was needed. Hastings did not approve. Over the previous six months Lucas had refused to attend Hastings' councils of war, and had refrained from sending any military support when Hastings vainly attempted to relieve Wingfield Manor in late summer 1644. The reason for Lucas's behaviour was that he no longer considered Hastings his commander. His argument being that Hastings was an appointee of the Marquis of Newcastle and, as the latter had given up his command and left the country, Hastings' commission was no longer valid. Hastings was further infuriated by the fact that, as well as Framland, Lucas' men were extracting money from Gartree and East Goscote Hundreds. Along with this the wayward governor had commandeered four hundred muskets that Lieutenant Colonel Bale had collected for Hastings' own regiments and deposited temporarily, as he thought, at Belvoir. The argument was settled with Rupert's subsequent intervention, but harmony was never fully restored and Framland remained the private domain of Lucas' men.

This dispute was only one of those which destroyed the effectiveness of the North Midlands Army. Thomas Leveson, Governor of Dudley was, at best, lukewarm in his regard for Hastings' authority. At Lichfield, Hastings argued with Richard Bagot's brother Harvey who had succeeded to the governorship after Richard's death. This latter argument ended with Hastings being thrown out of the garrison there.

It must be pointed out that this article does not intend to make the cavaliers into paragons of excellence. There is no doubt that in areas where they would not be dependent upon local resources for long periods their demands would be arbitrary. There may also have been instances of the activities more often associated with the popular image of cavaliers once their normal routine was curtailed after mid-1645. Yet the point must be made that in an area where the royalists had to depend on the indigenous resources for an unknown period those resources would have to have been used methodically, in the manner indicated above.

Returning briefly to the name 'rob-carrier'. As carriers could convey supplies to garrison in the hands of the enemy, both sides used to stop such traders in order to ascertain their destination. Often a carrier's goods were held until he could provide proof of his destination, usually by obtaining a letter from the authorities in that town. Goods undoubtedly destined for the enemy were fair game for either side. Perhaps the longevity of this nickname is evidence, not of Hastings having a unique talent, but of the effectiveness
of parliamentarian propaganda.

The main point of this paper has been to indicate the nature of the King's cause in this county, both by examining the numbers of militarily active royalists and by looking at the way in which they and those involved with them managed a war-effort in an area which they had to share with the enemy. The small number of Leicestershire officers in the North Midlands Army is perhaps indicative of the unwillingness of the county gentry to commit themselves to a struggle about which they had expressed grave doubts in 1642. The large proportion of officers who appear to have little social standing before or after the war is perhaps indicative of a certain element of 'men on-the-make', men who did not espouse the King's cause out of a sole desire to uphold Charles' honour and position, being amongst the officer cadre. This body of men have, in the second part of this paper, been shown to have been as organised in their war-effort as parliament was in its. In the light of these two considerations they have perhaps lost the saving grace of being romantic.

Notes

8. This figure is gained from various sources, in particular: Public Records Office (Chancery Lane), (henceforth PRO), SP.29/68, *A List of Officers Claiming to the Sixty Thousand Pounds, etc. Granted by His Sacred Majesty for the relief of His Truly Loyal and Indigent Party*, 1663, BL Harl Ms 986, *Notebook...*; BL Thomason Tracts, E83/9, *A Catalogue of the Dukes, Marquises, Earls and Lords that have absented themselves from Parliament and are now with his Majesty...and of all the cavaliers that are with his Majesty's marching army...*; Newman, P., *Royalist Officers in England and Wales 1642-1660* (New York, 1981); Brighton, J.T., *Royalists and Roundheads in Derbyshire*, (Bakewell and District Historical Society, 1981)
9. They only appear in the list of those who surrendered at Ashby, Fosbrooke, T.H., *Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire*, pp.22-3, a copy of which there is at the Leicestershire County Records Office, (henceforth, LRO)
10. BL Thomason Tracts, E325/22, *Perfect Passages*, no.28
11. See in particular, PRO SP.29/68 *A List...*
14. *As above*
17. *BL Harl Ms 986, Notebook...*; Newman *op. cit.*
18. *Same as above* and *PRO SP.29/68, A List...*
22. Brighton, J.T., *op. cit.* is most useful
23. PRO, SP.29/68, A List…; BL Harl Mss 986, Notebook...
24. Ibid.
25. John Jammot of Freshville’s Horse
26. Royalist sympathies can be evidenced by as little as paying money to a collector, see Everitt-Green, M., Calendar of the Committee for Compounding (Kraus, Lichtenstein, 1967)
28. See the letter cited by Hextall, W., Ashby-de-la-Zouch, (London, 1974), pp.35-6
29. See various newsbooks, for example, BL Thomason Tracts, E7/8 True Informer, 44, 1645; E85/45, Certain Informations, 1, 1643; E250/11, Weekly Account, 6th-13th September, 1643
31. Everitt terms it thus
32. HMC, Hastings, Vol.2, p.94
33. Ibid., p.98
34. Newman, Royalist Officers…, see under Lord Widdrington
35. HMC, Hastings, Vol.2, p.94
36. This was so after his move south in late 1643. Newark appears to have remained independent of Hastings’ control though it frequently co-operated with him
37. That for Leicestershire was originally created 12 June 1642
38. BL Harl Mss, 3881, p.66
39. HMC, Hastings, Vol.2, has letters addressed to him as such after 27 June 1642
40. Staffordshire County Records Office (henceforth SRO), D3712/4/1, Mavysn Ridgware Parish Book
41. Nottinghamshire County Record Office, (henceforth NRO) PR1710, Upton Constables Accounts
42. LRO DE720/30, Branston Constables’ Accounts
43. Ibid., p.60
44. This seems to vary see Ibid and LRO DE25/60, Waltham on the Wolds Constables Accounts
45. Branston, p.58
46. Waltham on the Wolds…p.68
47. Ibid., loc. cit.
48. Branston, p.58
50. The best examples of this are to be found in Staffordshire, see the previously cited Mavysn Ridgware Parish Book
51. For instance see Branston…, p.58
52. For instance see Waltham on the Wolds…, p.70
53. For instance see Branston loc. cit.
54. LRO DE1965/41, Belton Constables, Churchwardens and Overseers Accounts
55. Waltham on the Wolds… p.68
56. Branston…., p.62
57. See Waltham on the Wolds…; Branston…; Guilford, E.L., op. cit.
58. NRO DD294/1, Petition of the Vale of Belvoir, (Xerox)
59. Derbyshire County Records Office, Gell Mss, Box 30/5/N
60. BL Additional Mss, 18982, P.42, Articles Concerning Sir Gervaise Lucas
61. BL Thomason Tracts, E314/25, Kingdoms Weekly Intelligencer, 133.
62. For examples of Hastings’ enemies doing this sort of thing see William Salt Library, Stafford, William Salt Mss, 48/49, The Minute Book of the Committee of Stafford, p.34