

WINCHESTER IN THE CIVIL WAR



A detail of Arnald's painting, c1810, showing Cromwell's artillery train approaching Winchester

As in most places in Britain, the loyalties of the people of Winchester were divided. Of the city's two MPs, one supported parliament and the other the king. The city sat in a major strategic position, controlling the road from Southampton to the north, and the western road from Portsmouth. As a result, the city was to pay a heavy price. In December 1642 the Royalists entered Winchester Castle, closely pursued by Parliamentarians who captured and ransacked the city. The next day the ill-prepared Royalists surrendered the castle. In 1643 the city and castle were retaken by the Royalists and the defences of both were strengthened. In 1644, after the Battle of Cheriton, the Parliamentarians under Waller once again captured and sacked the city, although the castle remained in Royalist hands. The castle was taken by Oliver Cromwell on 5 October 1645 and soon after was blown up and made unusable.

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Winchester's Official tourist guides run tours on some of these fascinating themes. See winchestertouristguides.com



How to get there

The walk starts from the car park of the Hinton Arms, grid reference SU 5906 2785, 10 kms east of Winchester on the A272. You can leave your car at the pub but please park considerably.

Buses: Stagecoach service 67 Winchester to Petersfield. Nearest stop New Cheriton Crossroads.

The full walk is 8¾ kms long, taking 3 – 3½ hours but you can create shorter circular routes using the map overleaf. There are some gentle inclines with surfaces ranging from dirt tracks to tarmac road. Remember to wear appropriate footwear and always follow the Countryside Code.



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Originally produced by the Battle of Cheriton Project Ltd as part of a programme of activities explaining the importance of this battlefield and of the events that unfolded across Hampshire during the English Civil War in 1644.

For further information log onto www.battlefieldstrust.com



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CHERITON BATTLE FIELD WALK

The Battle of Cheriton was a major turning point in the English Civil War and resulted in an important Parliamentary victory that helped shape the future of England. Follow this trail that sets out from the Parliamentary camp at Hinton Ampner and embark on the walk taken by the troops on 29 March 1644 to the Cheriton Battlefield, tracing the movements of the soldiers who shaped our nation.



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THE BATTLE OF CHERITON

Between 1642 and 1649 Britain was divided by bloody civil war. On one side stood King Charles I, a believer in the Divine Right of Kings, and his supporters called Royalists. On the other were those who supported the rights of the House of Commons, called Parliamentarians. The country was divided – son fought father and brother fought brother. On 29 March 1644 the Battle of Cheriton was fought, and it proved to be a turning point in the war. Within five years King Charles I was to lose his head and the country entered a period of republican rule known as the Commonwealth.



King Charles I

THE ROAD TO CHERITON

The campaign season of 1643 started in the south-west, where Hopton, the commander of the Royalist forces, drove Waller and his Parliamentarians out of Somerset, Dorset, and Wiltshire. Hampshire was now in the front line.

Early March 1644 saw the Royalist and Parliamentarian armies marching and countermarching to gain control of the eastern approach roads to Winchester. On 25 March the two armies were within two miles of each other and skirmished throughout the next two days. The Royalist army gained Alresford and set up camp on the high ground of Tichborne Down. The Parliamentarians camped across the valley on a lower ridge at Hinton Ampner. The scene was set for an epic showdown, the result of which was to influence the character of the Civil War south of the Thames.

THE OPPOSING COMMANDERS

In the 1620s two young men, William Waller and Ralph Hopton, served together on the continent in a conflict known as The Thirty Years' War. They became close friends and together rescued King Charles I's sister from the besieged city of Prague. On their return to England, Hopton went home to Somerset and Waller moved to his residence in Winchester Castle. Both became Members of Parliament, but Waller became increasingly unhappy with Charles I's unconstitutional rule, while Hopton's support for the king grew. Although they were to retain good relations, the subsequent Civil War shattered their friendship.



Ralph Hopton
1st Baron Hopton of Stratton
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Sir William Waller
© National Portrait Gallery, London

WEAPONS AND WAR

Civil War foot regiments consisted of pikemen and musketeers formed of companies of 100 to 140 men each. The pikemen, whose main weapon was a 16 foot ash pike tipped with steel, stood in blocks eight ranks deep with the pikes of the front three ranks levelled at the enemy. When two blocks of pike met, the rear ranks pushed those in front forward driving through the opposition.

Musketeers could either be used en masse to deliver a devastating volley or, as in Cheriton Wood, tactically in small groups. They wore the distinctive bandolier, a leather belt slung across the chest, from which hung containers with a measured charge of powder. The front-loading matchlock musket was fired by a slow-burning taper setting off the main charge, firing a lead ball the size of a marble with a range of 100m. It took an experienced musketeer 30–60 seconds to reload, but with the gun weighing up to 6kg, it could also be used as a club in hand-to-hand combat.

The basic unit of cavalry was a troop of between 25 and 80 men under the command of a captain. A regiment could consist of three to ten troops. There were two types of cavalry. The cuirassiers were heavily armoured and carried pistols, carbine and sword. The harquebusiers, who formed the bulk of the cavalry at Cheriton, used similar weapons, but were less heavily armoured and therefore more manoeuvrable.

Artillery consisted of a range of guns of different sizes and design. The pieces at Cheriton had a range of 650m with ball and up to 200m with canister-style shot.



Image ©Rusty Aldwinckle





1 This walk begins in the car park of The Hinton Arms public house. The landscape of hedgerows, lanes, and woods has hardly changed since the day of the battle. As you leave the car park turn right, taking care as you follow the path along the side of the A272. It is barely light on the morning of 29 March 1644, the eve of battle. A thick mist lingers in the valley and clings to the slopes of the ridge of high ground on your right. Leaving Cheriton to its fate, you walk on.

2 At this point on the road, as the light improves, you are greeted by an awesome sight. Looming out of the mist, in the fields on your right, is the Parliamentary force, 10,000 strong. It is so close you can smell the horses and hear the shouts of command. To the rear are the cannon, in the centre the main body of troops, pikemen and musketeers, flanked to left and right by cavalry. Just past the bus

stop on your left turn north away from the main road and continue up the gentle incline on the north side of the shallow valley.

3 You have attempted to clear the Parliamentary lines but through the morning mist you begin to make out the distinctive sounds of troops and cavalry preparing for battle. This is the Royalist force of 7,000 and they are directly ahead of you, although it is impossible to say how far. It is time to try and exit the battlefield, but it may already be too late. At the crossroads turn right, along Cheriton Lane.

4 As you reach the end of the lane you hear the sound of musket shots, mingled with shouts and cries, some distance away on your left. The battle has begun. Now curiosity gets the better of you, you must have a closer look. This is your chance to see history in the making. Turn north off

of Cheriton Lane along a short stretch of track joining Alresford Lane. Follow this route to the edge of Cheriton Wood.

5 During the night the Parliamentary commander, William Waller, positioned a mixed force of cannon, cavalry and musket in the wood in an attempt to outflank the Royalist line. Ralph Hopton, the Royalist commander, quickly moved to counter the threat, sending a force of 1,000 musketeers to take the wood. The sound of fighting is getting closer. Several riderless horses come careering out of the trees, with the remaining Parliamentary troops close behind. Hopton's musketeers, now using their muskets as clubs, have routed Waller's inexperienced London Brigade who are now in full retreat back to the safety of their own lines, and you are in their way! You continue towards the relative safety of the Royalist position, after all, they do appear to be winning... Continue along Alresford Lane.

6 After you reach the end of the lane, continue on a short distance along the road which will then bear right taking you to a T junction and the site of a memorial commemorating the troops from both sides who lost their lives during the battle. This high ground, occupied by the Royalist force, offers the best view of the battlefield. Cheriton Wood, now in Royalist hands, can be seen on the left although the main Parliamentary army is obscured by East Down in the middle distance. Hopton now takes the decision to move his troops forward onto this ridge. You decide to follow. Re-trace your steps along the road to the junction with Alresford Lane, and continue along the road as it bears right onto Badshear Lane.

7 At this point turn left, off the road, along the footpath. You can clearly hear the sound of battle as you approach the ridge, a position the Royalist

commanders were content to hold. But one of their officers, Sir Henry Bard, has rashly led his infantry in an attack. Surprised by Parliamentary cavalry, his men are being cut to pieces.

8 As you reach the ridge turn right, along the rear of the Royalist lines. Bard's action has resulted in increasing numbers of Royalist troops being committed to the attack. Losing the advantage of the high ground, they engage with the advancing Parliamentary musketeers. Fierce fighting has broken out all along the line. With one last roll of the die the Royalists send in their cavalry.

9 Turn left down the lane towards Cheriton. The terrain only allows the cavalry to advance in small groups down two lanes and you follow one towards Cheriton. Parliamentary troopers are deployed and waiting for them. Outnumbered and hemmed in by the deep sunken lanes, they

are beaten back. Now Waller makes his move. Looping round both flanks of the Royalist force, his infantry advance, every ditch and hedgerow is contested as the Royalists begin to give ground.

10 Turn right down the sunken hollow of Cheriton lane. Battle rages in the fields above and the wreckage litters the fields. As many as 500 may have died with many more wounded. The Royalists have been forced back to their original position from where Hopton will make an ordered retreat to Basing House, sacking Alresford on his way. Our story of the battle is now over and your journey through it almost at an end. Walk back along the lane and turn right towards the road. Returning to the A272, turn left back to the Hinton Arms.