

Monmouth in the Civil War – historic references

In the town of Monmouth at this time was a Lieut. Colonel Kyrle. He had taken arms originally for the Parliament, whose commission he held. Upon the loss of Bristol he deserted his cause, and joined the Royalists, and, with an inconstancy which is to say the least discreditable, he now determined to go back to his old friends, and to offer as a peace-offering the betrayal of Monmouth.

So it was arranged between him and Massey that the latter should pretend to go back to England, and Kyrle would follow him as if to fall upon his rear, and that Kyrle would then go back to Monmouth with a body of Massey's men ostensibly as prisoners, who on their entry would seize the sentinels. In furtherance of this plan Massey gave orders for retreat, and marched eastwards, but stopped some three miles on the forest side of Monmouth. Intelligence having come to Monmouth, Kyrle drew out at the head of a small number of soldiers, and under cover of night approached Massey's ambuscade. They were surprised and marched back towards the town. But the plan was nearly frustrated. Kyrle's cornet, not privy to the plot, escaped back into Monmouth and gave the alarm. The town was immediately on the alert, and the drawbridge drawn in. But when Kyrle appeared as victor, with a number of pretended prisoners, the bridge, after some debate, for some suspicion seems to have prevailed, was let down, and Kyrle and his party, with a few of Massey's men, were let in. The bridge was again drawn up. The men who had come in with Kyrle now began to doubt him, but it seems unjustly, for at his instigation they fell upon the guard at the bridge, overpowered them, and so let in the main body. After some struggle the town was mastered —the Governor, Colonel Holtby, and most of the garrison, favoured by the night, which was dark and wet, made their escape. This was on the 26th of September.

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...it became necessary for Massey to extend his outposts and to strengthen them. Many of the neighbouring houses were therefore stocked with soldiers. In one of these, Wonastow House, then the seat of Mr. Milburn, some ten foot soldiers and about sixty horse were stationed. The enemy suddenly came against them and stormed the house. Those within were very short of ammunition and would have fallen into the hands of the enemy had it not been for the alertness of a servant maid, who supplied them with two six-pound bags of powder. This, with lead out of the windows and the pewter pots which they melted, enabled them to keep back their attackers until timely aid came from Monmouth to relieve them.

The Royalists were again worsted: three officers, Major Somerset, Capt. Bacon, and another Major were slain, and Capt. Lewis and some forty soldiers made prisoners. Those who fled were pursued over Winster(?) Bridge. In this conflict a large quantity of arms fell into the victor's hands, "so that muskets were sold at sixpence a piece". The Royalists were commanded by Sir Trevor Williams of Llangiby, whom we shall presently see for the Parliament, and ultimately suspected even by the latter — whom Cromwell characterised as a "blustering blade."

The horse engaged were some of Rupert's own, and the foot "poor forced Welshmen, whom the horse pricked forward with their sword points". In the house Capt. Bailey, a Stroud man, and Lieutenant Page, a Scotchman, were the officers. The maid was rewarded for her valuable service. The Governor of Monmouth not only gave her two pieces of money, and took her into his service, but even kissed her for the good service she did!

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Instantly the Committee in London heard of Gerard's movement they ordered Massey to thwart his design, and to hold himself in readiness to join with the main body of the Parliament forces. This was on the 10th of November. Massey lost no time in obeying superior orders. Quitting Monmouth with only his own regiment of horse, he proceeded to Evesham, but Gerard was there before him, and, moreover, too powerful to be attacked. And what was worse than all, he had the mortification there to learn that Monmouth, which, during his absence, he had entrusted to the care of Major Throgmorton, had been retaken by the Royalists.

The Major, anxious perhaps to win laurels for himself, and blind to the prospect of there being any danger for Monmouth, marched with some 300 men towards Chepstow on Sunday, the 17th of November, with the intention of attacking the castle. In the town of Monmouth were many Royalists, some of whom were tenants of the Raglan family. These sent information of the defenceless state of the town to the Lord Herbert. The latter instantly sent for help to Col. Progers, the Governor of Abergavenny, and to Sir Trevor Williams of Llangiby, whose name we have seen before and shall see again in the course of this history. Lord Charles Somerset, with 150 men, set out from Raglan, and the other forces met not far from the town.

Early on the morning of the 19th they got to the higher side of the town that looks towards Hereford. Surmounting a bank, they approached the gate — Dixton Gate which, by the aid of a crowbar, they forced open. The affrighted sentinel bolted. The body of horse entered, and riding through the town they surprised the main guard, the garrison for the most part being at that unearthly hour in bed. The town was won. Many prisoners were made; among the number were Col. Broughton, Col. Stephens, Mr. Catchling of Trelech, and Mr. Jones of Usk, members of the Committee for South Wales.

A quantity of ammunition and a fair store of arms were also captured. Massey hastened back from Burford, where these bad tidings reached him, to the relief of the party that had gone over to Chepstow. He met them in the Forest of Dean. Thence they marched to Ross to relieve Pembridge, but came too late to be of any service, and all was once more lost to the Parliament in Monmouthshire.

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Charles was deservedly blamed by the aged Marquis of Worcester for letting Sir Trevor Williams out on bail ; and what that nobleman predicted was soon fulfilled. Sir Trevor now became one of the most active partisans for the Parliament in the County of Monmouth. He headed the clubmen (local defence vigilantes) there, and it was his influence that decided their course of action. With that violent zeal which invariably characterizes a renegade he was eager for a conflict. And at the head of some 1,500 men raised out of the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth, he decided suddenly to besiege Monmouth. In this he was joined by Col. Morgan, the Governor of Gloucester. The latter had a strength of about 1,500 horse and foot, and Sir Trevor Williams commanded a body of 1,500 foot and 200 horse. They soon acquired the town, but the castle held out for three days — Henry Lunsford acting as Governor in the absence of his brother Sir Thomas Lunsford. Seeing preparations made for blowing up the fortress, the Governor demanded a parley, and the castle was thereupon surrendered, the officers being allowed to march away with their horses and arms. All the arms therein, comprising seven guns, four sling pieces, 300 muskets, 600 pikes, with the ammunition and provisions, became the property of the victors. This was on the 24th of October. The following Saturday Col. Morgan returned to Gloucester, leaving the Castle in the custody of Capt. Forster with only 100 men, and the town in the charge of Sir Trevor Williams.

The countrymen, which constituted Sir Trevor's forces, did not intend to follow the profession of arms, and they were influenced by some Royalists in the town to return home, which they did that same night, "every man to his own home, leaving the town destitute of strength." Seeing the danger he was in, Williams asked Forster to help him in keeping the town. Failing in that, he sent to the Governor of Gloucester; and to Col. Kyrle, who was in the Forest of Dean. These at once sent the necessary aid, and thereby secured the town. Those who were suspected to be against the Parliament were on the following Monday ordered to depart the town upon pain of death, whereupon divers families were put out.

(Summary compiled for *The Sealed Knot* from John Roland Phillips', *Memoirs of the Civil War in Wales and the Marches*, 1874)