

‘Whole Streets Converted to Ashes’: Property Destruction in Exeter during the English Civil War

M.J. STOYLE

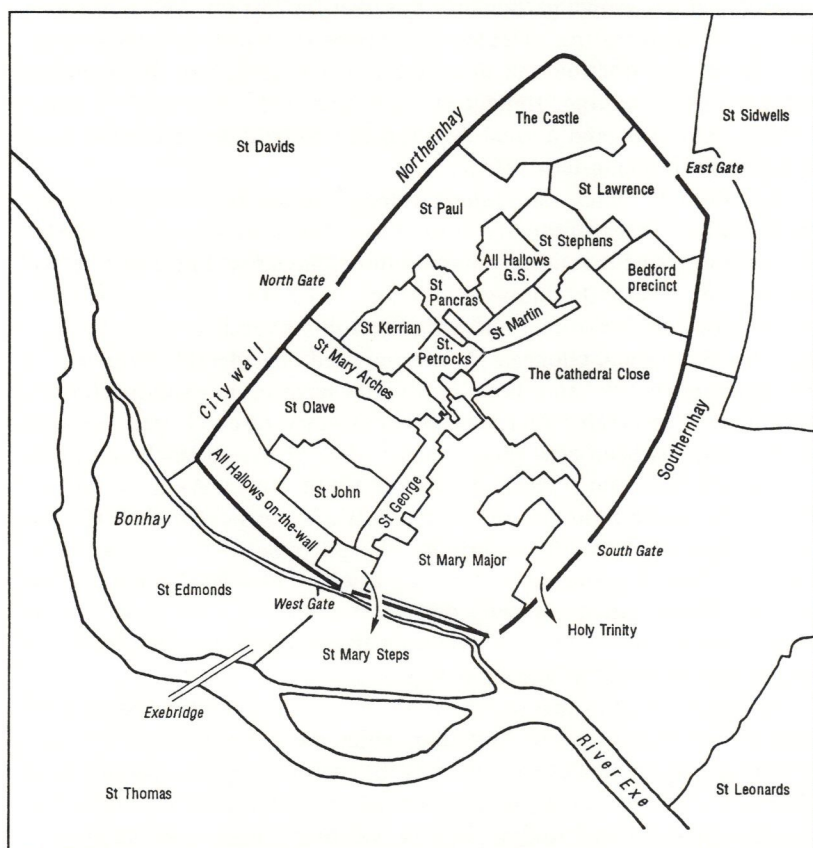
Few historians would now regard the English Civil War as a conflict which was ‘eminently humane’.¹ Ever since the publication of Ian Roy’s seminal article, ‘England Turn’d Germany’, in 1978, awareness of the extent to which the Civil War impinged on the day-to-day life of the civilian population has been steadily growing.² Scholarly interest in this subject has grown particularly fast over the last few years, and as a result the devastating effects of wartime taxation, requisitioning, plundering, destruction and disease are at last receiving the attention which they deserve.³ ‘Impact studies’ are still very much in their infancy, however, and a great deal remains to be discovered, not least about the war’s long-term effects.

One field in which particularly interesting advances have recently been made is that of property destruction. The work of Stephen Porter has demonstrated that urban communities right across England suffered extensive physical damage during 1642–46.⁴ Archaeological excavation has confirmed and amplified this overall picture. Digs at Chester, Exeter and Gloucester have revealed considerable evidence of wartime destruction, and these discoveries have in turn spurred further writing and research.⁵ At Exeter, documentary research into wartime demolition has been now going on for some years, under the auspices of Exeter Museum’s Archaeological Field Unit.⁶ As a result, an unusually detailed picture of the Civil War’s physical impact upon a single English city has emerged. The purpose of this paper is to communicate the Exeter findings to a wider historical audience; to explain where, when and why the worst devastation occurred and to show what happened to the luckless residents of the city suburbs in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War.

Before examining the war’s events in detail, something should be said about the civic community upon which the disasters of the sixteen-forties fell. Early modern Exeter was the regional capital of south-west England, the very ‘centre, heart and head of the West’ according to one proud contemporary.⁷ And as the city was to the region, so the ancient

medieval core of Exeter was to the city itself. Encircled by the old town walls, the fourteen wholly intra-mural parishes of this district housed the majority of the better-off inhabitants, including almost all the civic elite. Outside the city walls lay the sprawling suburbs, inhabited almost exclusively by the poor and the 'middling sort'.⁸ By 1640 these suburban areas had become extremely large and extensive.

To the north of the city lay the parish of St Davids (see Map). Most of the people who lived here worked in the cloth trade, or in husbandry. To the east lay St Sidwells, the largest and most unruly of the suburban parishes. There were over 1,500 people living here in 1642.⁹ Many of them were very poor, and the parish was notorious for riots and popular disturbances. The parishioners had a strong sense of parochial identity and were collectively known as the 'Grecians'.¹⁰ The southernmost of the city suburbs was that of Holy Trinity. Unlike St Davids and St



Sidwells, Trinity contained an intra-mural as well as an extra-mural area. Needless to say, it was in the former district that the most prosperous parishioners tended to dwell. Trinity parish without the walls was as poverty-stricken as St Sidwells.¹¹ The fourth suburban area lay on the western side of Exeter, between the city and the River Exe. Two crowded and populous little parishes stood here, St Edmonds and St Mary Steps. The west quarter was one of Exeter's most heavily industrialised areas; the chief trade being that of cloth-making. During the 1600s, as in later centuries, the west quarter was considered to be a rough, tough and dangerous area. In the mid-sixteen-fifties the inhabitants of St Edmonds and St Mary Steps were described as 'the most ignorant and profane' people in Exeter.¹² Like the people of St Sidwells the residents of the west quarter possessed their own nickname, being popularly referred to as 'the Algerines'.¹³

Across the River Exe lay St Thomas. Although outside the city boundaries and therefore not an Exeter parish in the strictest sense, St Thomas was integral to the local economy. Many of its houses were owned by rich Exeter citizens and the links between the city and the parish were extremely strong. For all practical purposes, then, St Thomas can be classed as a suburb of Exeter. This parish too was a large one. During the sixteen-fifties, it was claimed that some 2,000 people dwelt here.¹⁴ This was almost certainly an exaggeration, but we need not doubt that the population of St Thomas was very considerable. All in all, there were probably around half as many people living in the suburbs of Exeter in 1642 as dwelt within the city proper, that is to say as dwelt within the city walls.¹⁵

So much for the physical setting. What of the political background? On the eve of the Civil War, Exeter was a deeply divided city. That this was so was chiefly because of religious differences. From around 1610 onwards, the city's governing body, the Chamber or 'Council of Twenty Four', had been dominated by a powerful puritan faction. This group was led by Ignatius Jurdain, the 'arch puritan of the west'.¹⁶ Jurdain's religious beliefs can only be described as extreme. Whilst representing Exeter in Parliament, he introduced a bill demanding that adultery should be made punishable by death – and was angered when other MPs declined to support the motion.¹⁷ On this particular occasion Jurdain's desire to regulate the moral behaviour of his fellow men and women was thwarted. But in his attempts to push through a far-reaching moral reformation at the local level, Jurdain achieved much more success. During the sixteen-twenties and thirties he and his followers strove to turn Exeter into a 'godly city upon a hill', a new Jerusalem, free from drunkards, swearers, revellers, fornicators, and profaners of the sabbath.¹⁸ Those who were found guilty of such

offences were strictly punished, and there can be little doubt that, under Jurdain, Exeter became a quieter, less turbulent and more strictly regulated place than ever before. Whether it became a more pleasant place to live in is another matter.

There were undoubtedly many local people who sympathised with Jurdain. Had this not been so, his campaign for moral reformation could hardly have achieved the success which it did. Yet there were also many who hated the puritans and resented the loss of their accustomed sports and pastimes. There were many to echo the words of the Exeter man who spat out that 'all such puritant rogues that come to sermons be as bad as the divell . . . and that the devill might as well come out of hell and be saved . . . as some of them'.¹⁹ Resistance to the puritans was strongest amongst the city's religious conservatives – and the cathedral was the centre of opposition to the puritan regime.

Important though the conservative and anti-puritan elements were in Exeter, it was the puritans who held the upper hand, and it was they who decided which way the city would go when England began to divide in 1642. The terms 'Puritan' and 'Roundhead' were regarded as virtually interchangeable during the Great Civil War, and it comes as little surprise to find that the puritan faction on the city Chamber was determined to secure Exeter for Parliament.²⁰ By August 1642 they had effectively achieved this goal.²¹ At the time the councillors undoubtedly felt themselves to have won a great victory. Exeter, they thought, was on the verge of a glorious era of godly rule. Could they have foreseen what the city would look like in four years time, their feelings might well have been rather different.

During August–December 1642, the Chamber took stock of Exeter's defences. The city walls were repaired, companies of soldiers raised and cannon bought and mounted.²² Despite such activity, there is no sign that any demolition of property occurred in 1642. All this was to change at the beginning of the next year. On New Year's Day 1643 Exeter was menaced by a large force of Royalist soldiers, who made a violent attack upon Cowley Bridge, to the north of the city. Fortunately for Exeter's defenders the Royalists were repulsed, and four days later a powerful force of Parliamentary soldiers marched into the city under the command of the Earl of Stamford.²³ The events of 1–5 January led to major changes taking place at Exeter. To begin with, the Royalist attack had shown that the city's defences were woefully inadequate and would have to be improved. More importantly, the arrival of Stamford's soldiers and the Earl's appointment as governor of Exeter meant that the citizens were no longer in control of their own destinies. Henceforth, the civic dignitaries were to have less and less say in local

affairs, as a succession of military commanders took ever more ruthless decisions concerning the upkeep and extension of the city defences.

The first signs of this new order were not long in coming. On 23 January a detailed set of instructions was issued, setting forth how the city defences were to be improved. Included amongst these directives was the order that 'the dikes about the city be made deeper and more falling . . . and the walls and houses removed'.²⁴ The 'dikes' referred to were the ancient medieval ditches which had once served to protect the city. Over the years, these had become silted up and house and gardens had been built upon them. Now the dwellings would have to come down. Within weeks, both houses and gardens had been swept away. As 1643 went on, more destruction occurred. The public gardens which had been laid out in Northernhay just a few years before the war were dug up and destroyed, and fortifications built in their place.²⁵ In addition a systematic assault was launched upon Exeter's trees. Not only was wood needed for the fortifications but it was also feared that the trees might provide cover for future attackers. Accordingly, all the trees in Southernhay and many of those in the Bonhay were felled and brought into the city. The ancient elms in Northernhay suffered a similar fate. A wood belonging to the Dean and Chapter in St Sidwells was completely destroyed, as was a stand of 500 trees in St Leonard's parish. Orchards, both within and without the city walls, were savagely cut back.²⁶

By early 1643 Exeter was already beginning to assume an aspect very different from that of its pre-war self – and worse was to come following the defeat of the Parliamentary army at Stratton in Cornwall. As the victorious Royalist forces advanced across Devon during May, the Exeter Roundheads launched themselves into a new and ambitious defensive project. Simply put, this involved the construction of a deep trench around the entire southern and eastern side of the city, the area which was most vulnerable to attack. This trench would act as the defenders' front line, as a forward position in advance of the already deepened city ditch. Needless to say, the construction of the trench caused a great deal of destruction in the city suburbs. St Sidwells suffered particularly badly. Here, Mr Hurst's Almshouses, the White Swan Inn and many houses outside Eastgate were laid waste. Properties belonging to the Dean and Chapter, said to be worth over £110 per annum in rents alone, were also pulled down, as was St Sidwells Guildhall.²⁷ In Holy Trinity parish the damage was much less great. Most of the houses here were included within the defensive line and thus preserved from destruction.

The very different treatment accorded the two suburbs partly reflected the fact that it was the eastern side of the city which was most

vulnerable to attack. Yet the pre-war rivalry between the city and the cathedral may also have been significant. Much of St Sidwells belonged to the Dean and Chapter and therefore lay outside the city's jurisdiction. As a result the puritan group which had dominated Exeter before the war had been unable to impose godly discipline upon the inhabitants. In 1624 a city constable exclaimed that 'everyone about Eastgate are rogues, knaves and whores', whilst a few years earlier it was claimed that there was 'not one honest woman in all Paris Street'.²⁸ It is easy to appreciate why the puritan/Parliamentarians who ruled Exeter in 1643 should have seen the poor, unregenerate and Chapter-dominated parish of St Sidwells as much more expendable than the relatively well-governed suburb of Trinity.

The new defences were constructed only just in time. By early June Royalist forces had begun to move in close to the city, and a few days later they launched a major assault, capturing St Anne's Chapel at the far end of Sidwell Street and part of the 'south suburbs'.²⁹ After this promising start, the Royalists found they could make no further headway, so, around the beginning of July, they abandoned their initial positions and occupied St Thomas instead. From here the King's men directed a galling fire upon the city, damaging many houses in the western suburbs. Mr John Reed's house near West Gate was later noted to have suffered greatly 'by reason of the battering thereof by shooting etc'.³⁰ Some buildings had to be completely destroyed as a result of the bombardment. On 15 July a resident of St Mary Steps parish was paid for his services in 'drawing downe of thetcht houses that endangered ye cittie'. More thatched houses were demolished in the following week.³¹ Presumably the defenders feared that the Royalists might try to set the roofs of these buildings alight with red-hot shot or fire arrows, in the hope of starting a general conflagration within the city.³² Eventually the Royalist bombardment became too much for the defenders to bear and on 31 July an 'extraordinary sally' was launched over Exe Bridge by the Parliamentarians. The aim of this operation was to destroy the buildings which the Royalists were occupying in St Thomas and from which they were directing such a punishing fire upon the city. All the evidence suggests that the Parliamentary sortie was successful. The West Indies Inn, many houses in Cowick Street and the mansion house at Hays Barton all seem to have been burnt down and destroyed on this occasion.³³

As time went on, the besiegers were reinforced and pressure on Exeter built up. Still further destruction of property occurred as a result. In July the Parliamentarians were forced to abandon the Magdalen Hospital which they had been holding as a forward position. During the course of this evacuation, the buildings themselves were

burnt down. By mid-August increasing Royalist pressure from St Thomas had compelled the defenders to demolish the central spans of Exe Bridge, in order to prevent the structure from being captured.³⁴ In St David's, meanwhile, hedge banks were levelled for fear that they would provide the advancing Royalists with cover.³⁵

Towards the end of August a second Royalist army arrived to join the besiegers, under the command of Prince Maurice, Prince Rupert's younger brother. A few days later the final attack was launched upon the city. Maurice had quickly perceived that the weakest point of the defences lay to the south of Exeter, where the line of the fortifications had been extended to include the suburb of Trinity, and it was here that he decided to strike. Early on 4 September, 1,000 Royalist soldiers launched themselves upon the 'line of communication' which connected the Parliamentary outworks to the south of the city with Exeter's inner defences. The assault was successful and the line taken. As a result, 400 Parliamentary soldiers were cut off and captured. The Royalists soon improved their position still further, by turning the captured cannon in the outworks upon the city itself.³⁶ During this attack the Royalists also showered Exeter with 'granadoes' or mortar shells, setting light to 'a good part of the suburbs' and shaking the town walls in several places.³⁷

The Parliamentarians' position was now quite hopeless. They had no hope of relief, their supplies were running out, and many of their best men had been captured. Not only this, the Royalists had now lodged themselves so close to the city walls that any further assault was bound to succeed. Accordingly negotiations for a surrender were entered into, and on 6 September the Parliamentarians marched out, leaving the inhabitants to face two and half years of Royalist occupation under Sir John Berkeley, the new Governor.³⁸ By the end of this first siege a great deal of damage had already been inflicted upon Exeter. The worst destruction had occurred in St Sidwells and St Thomas, where the buildings nearest to the city had been completely razed to the ground. In Trinity and St David's, however, the damage had been much less great. The western suburbs, too, had so far escaped relatively unscathed, apart from those houses which had been damaged by Royalist bombardment from St Thomas.

Following their capture of the city the Royalists carried out some vital repairs. In September 1643 Exebridge was ordered to be 'forthwith repaired in the defects thereof, especiallye in that parte which was of late pulled downe for the supposed safetie of this cittie in the tyme of the late siege'.³⁹ In addition, the 'waterpipes without Eastgate', which had once carried the city's water supply, but had been 'of late broken up and wasted by his Majesties forces lying

thereabouts' were ordered to be repaired.⁴⁰ The most important project undertaken during the Royalist occupation was the repair of the shattered town defences. During 1643/44 almost £400 – an enormous sum – was spent on repairing the city walls in Southernhay, whilst during 1644/45, over £200 was laid out on the walls to the west of the city, which had presumably been damaged by Royalist artillery fire from St Thomas during the previous siege.⁴¹

With Exeter safely in Royalist hands, the pace of destruction slowed down. No houses were destroyed between September 1643 and June 1645, the period during which the Royalists were generally dominant in the west of England.⁴² Yet by mid-1645, the King's armies had been forced onto the defensive. Following his defeat at Naseby, Charles I had fled to Wales, leaving Parliament's New Model Army free to advance into the West Country. It was clear that the King's local strongholds were about to come under fierce attack, and Exeter's Royalist garrison made feverish efforts to strengthen their defences. Large earthen mounds or 'mounts' were built at various points along the city wall. These structures were intended to act as artillery platforms and were therefore constructed on a large scale. It is possible that some houses adjoining the walls were knocked down as a result of this work. The city's 'places of easement', or public latrines, hitherto situated at Snayle Tower, were certainly demolished during the construction of a defensive work there known as 'Mount Truck'.⁴³ Yet once again it was in the extra-mural parishes, rather than within the walls, that the greatest devastation occurred.

This new destruction was occasioned partly by the Royalists' construction of bigger and better defensive outworks. Not only was the system of ditches and trenches which surrounded the city extended at this time, but four completely new forts were also built. Unfortunately, little is known about these structures. The most important was built to the south of the city at Mount Radford. The second was constructed on St David's Down, near the church. The third fort stood in Cowick Street, St Thomas, and was built around the prison or 'Sheriff's Ward' there.⁴⁴ (This work was referred to as 'Hunks Fort' and was probably named after Sir Fulk Hunks, an officer in the Royalist garrison).⁴⁵ The fourth major fort was situated on the eastern side of the city; perhaps at St Anne's chapel, more likely near St Sidwell's church. Other minor outworks are also known to have been built around the city at this time. One was erected in the Bonhay, for example.⁴⁶

The damage caused by the construction of these works was not nearly as limited as one might think. Not only was everything standing on the actual site of the forts demolished, but extensive fields of fire had to be cleared as well. It should be remembered that the works were

built of earth, which had to be bonded together with quantities of turf. Wherever a fort or defensive line was built, therefore, the ground for some distance round about had to be stripped of its turf and topsoil. This process could be extremely damaging. After the war, one man complained that some 20 acres of his land had been 'spended up upon the very gravill' by these means. As a result, the land had fallen in value 'in judgement of most men, att least £100'.⁴⁷

Throughout the summer of 1645 the Royalists continued to labour away at Exeter's defences. During this period they concentrated on the construction of works, rather than the demolition of houses, presumably because they were keen to hold off the evil day of destruction for as long as possible. Yet by September 1645 newspapers were reporting that 'they burn down houses neer Exeter', and once the Parliamentary army had marched into Devon, full-scale demolition began to occur.⁴⁸ On 21 October the Royalist general Goring oversaw the destruction of a large part of St Sidwells and St Thomas, 'pulling downe and burning both the townes'.⁴⁹ Soon afterwards, the Royalists reportedly 'burnt downe the greatest part of four parishes', by which St Sidwells, St Thomas, St Davids and St Edmunds were probably meant.⁵⁰

Trinity's turn came soon afterwards. On 26 October the New Model Army marched to Topsham, just south of Exeter. According to the Parliamentarian chaplain Joshua Sprigg this move prompted the Royalists to fire 'the houses in the suburbs of Excester, to the number of about 80, which sent many out of the city, complaining of the cruelty of the enemy'.⁵¹ Sprigg's claim is backed by the London pamphleteers. One diurnalist commented that 'the Governor [of Exeter] continues his cruelty. He hath anew caused 80 houses to be burnt down in the suburbs, which were left, and would not suffer the inhabitants to come into the city, but forced them to seek harbour abroad'.⁵² Another lamented that 'Jack Berkley . . . makes fuell of the inhabitant's houses, converting whole streets into ashes . . . [and] turning out the people to the mercy of the besiegers'.⁵³ Recent archaeological excavations have confirmed the truth of these reports, revealing Civil War destruction-layers in St Sidwells, St Thomas, St Davids and Holy Trinity parishes.⁵⁴

By November 1645 the demolition seems to have stopped. But this was only because there was nothing left to destroy. The destruction had been immense and that the four extra-mural areas were now quite simply devastated. St Sidwells and St Davids had been flattened. There is no evidence that any houses close to the city in these two parishes had survived. Every dwelling house in St Sidwells, from Eastgate to St Anne's Chapel (a distance of over a third of a mile) had been razed to

the ground.⁵⁵ In St Thomas, too, all the houses between Exebridge and the hospital had been 'utterly ruined by fire to the undoing of many of the parishioners'.⁵⁶ Trinity parish 'without the South Gate' was 'totally demollished by fyreing & pulling down the howses'.⁵⁷ Things may have been a little better in St Edmunds and St Mary Steps. These parishes were sheltered by the river, and did not need to be secured quite so brutally. Yet even here, a great deal of damage occurred. George Leach, a brewer of St Edmonds, later deposed that his brewhouse was demolished 'and my outhouses were also puld downe, and the trees of my orchard cut up, and all the walls and mounds puld downe, being worth at least £100'.⁵⁸

By November 1645 'Fortress Exeter' squatted, bleak and forbidding, amidst a vast circle of ashes. Berkeley's measures could hardly have been more ruthless – and they succeeded in halting the Parliamentary advance. During the winter of 1645 the New Model Army – too weak either to storm the city defences or to advance further into the west (where a large Royalist army was quartered) – settled down for a long siege of Exeter. Nearby houses were occupied and a system of counter-works erected to offset those of the Royalists. Local people were forced to provide the Parliamentarians with all sorts of supplies at this time – and were sometimes punished by marauding Royalist bands for doing so. Robert Babb, an Exminster farmer, later recalled that he had been awoken at dawn and arrested by a party of Royalist soldiers merely for 'selling of cider to the enemy'.⁵⁹ Local people also had to help the Parliamentarians to build their siege-works. Little information survives about the precise nature of these fortifications, but it is clear that they were very extensive, and that the damage which they caused to the surrounding countryside was correspondingly great. This is well illustrated by the petition of John Cupper, an Exeter merchant who owned a mansion in St Thomas. In early 1646, Cupper later recalled, 'his Excellencie Sir Thomas Fairfax . . . haveing made the dwelling house a garrison, the barnes, stables and other outhouses there were burnt by his forces, and much of the land turft for the making of fortificacons, and the orchards, gardens, hedges and inclosures in manie severall places pulled and cut downe to make avenues and fierwood, and the dwelling house much spoyled and ruined'. Cupper later estimated that the value of his property had been halved as a result of the Parliamentary visitation.⁶⁰

The occupation of Cupper's house marked the beginning of bitter fighting in St Thomas. On 29 January Fairfax summoned Berkeley to surrender, urging him to consider the condition of Exeter's inhabitants, made 'poor and miserable . . . by [the] firing of so many of their habitations'.⁶¹ Berkeley, who had high hopes of relief from the Royalist

forces to the west, refused to listen, prompting Fairfax to step up the pressure on the western side of the city defences. As the Roundhead troops moved closer, Berkeley decided to destroy the few buildings left in St Thomas that might provide them with cover. Accordingly a party of Royalist soldiers 'sallied out and fired St Thomas Church and the Lady Carewes house'.⁶² (This affair can be precisely dated, for it is noted in a contemporary hand on the fly-leaf of St Thomas parish register that 'the 30 of Januari 1646 was the parish church of St Thomas burned'.⁶³) The destruction of the church did not prevent Fairfax's advance. Soon afterwards Roundhead troops occupied the burnt-out shell of the building and the remains of the hospital nearby, promptly fortifying these positions with trenches and redoubts.⁶⁴ For some time after this, fighting raged back and forth between the Parliamentarians dug in around the church and the Royalists entrenched at Hunks's Fort.

Preparations for a full-scale storm of Exeter now began, but before matters could proceed to a conclusion, news arrived that the King's Western Army was advancing from Cornwall to the city's relief. Anxious to counter this threat, Fairfax marched away from Exeter with the bulk of his men. The ensuing campaign sealed the city's fate. Towards the end of March 1646, the Western Army – the King's last major field force in England – surrendered to the Parliamentarians at Truro. Exeter's defenders were now without hope of relief and during the last days of March, Parliamentary forces advanced very close to the city defences. On 31 March Berkeley was again summoned to surrender.⁶⁵ Even now, some of the most ardent Royalists felt that the city should hold out to the last. A certain Mary Cholwill asserted 'that she had rather the Turks should come into the cittie than . . . the Parliament's forces, and that rather then they should have the said cittie, the castle and cittie should be sett on fyre'.⁶⁶ The majority of the citizens were desperate for the fighting to end, however, and the garrison had little choice but to come to terms. On 3 April Berkeley entered into negotiations and ten days later Exeter was finally surrendered to Parliament; Oliver Cromwell himself leading the first Roundhead troops to enter the city.⁶⁷ The war in the west was over.

Exeter was at peace at last. But the war's events had crippled the city, rendering between a third and half of the inhabitants homeless. What happened to these unfortunate people? How did they survive in the immediate aftermath of the war? Where did they go to find shelter? The city itself tried to house a few. In December 1645 'an almeswoman of Palmer's Almeshouses without the South Gate was elected into one of the houses in Billiter Lane . . . her owne house being of late burnt or demolished'.⁶⁸ Few were as fortunate as this woman. Many of the civic

almshouses had been destroyed, so other places had to be found to house the majority of the homeless.⁶⁹ Eventually, the main places utilised for this purpose seem to have been the old ecclesiastical properties in the Cathedral Close, and Bedford House, the town house of the Earls of Bedford.⁷⁰ Some of the homeless found other places of refuge. Soon after the war's end it was deposed that the guard-house at East Gate 'is now inhabited by such poore people as were burnte out of theire houses in the suburbs . . . by the king's army'.⁷¹ The poor of St Thomas, meanwhile, had congregated in the remains of the Sheriff's Ward, which had survived destruction by virtue of its having been incorporated within a Royalist fort.⁷²

For those unfortunates who could find no shelter within the city, there was no recourse but to make their way to the surrounding villages.⁷³ Some refugees from Exeter are known to have arrived in Heavitree, two miles to the east of the city, whilst others went to Upton Pyne, three miles to the north.⁷⁴ Some travelled even further afield. John Chubb, a fuller, later recalled that 'he did dwell in a house' in St Sidwells 'till that house and many others were burnt to the ground by the king's partye during the late warres', forcing Chubb and his family to seek lodgings five miles away, in Broadclyst.⁷⁵ This sudden influx of displaced persons put a great strain on the inhabitants of the villages around Exeter. The refugees had to be supported in some way, and local finances must have been stretched to the limit. The county bench was anxious to ensure that Devon would not have to continue footing the bill for the Exeter refugees, and in the immediate aftermath of the war it was ordered that those refugees 'that belong to Exeter' should be sent back to the city 'according to the law, or if they be settled for the present in any adjacent parishes . . . that it may be so done as that the . . . city shall at all times receave them agayne when they shall be sent unto them'. The point was reiterated at the Michaelmas sessions of 1646, when the bench declared that 'the poore people lately inhabiting in the city . . . of Exeter and now residing in any parish of this county are to be returned home to the said citty and by them [i.e. the city authorities] provided for, and Devon to be spared of all charges'.⁷⁶

The process of resettlement was slow, however. In 1647 the parishioners of Heavitree were forced to present a petition at the sessions 'for the removal of the poore of the cittie out of the parish'.⁷⁷ As late as July 1649, a considerable number of refugees were still camped out at Alphington, two miles south-west of Exeter. The parishioners informed the county bench of this sad fact, commenting that 'since the beginning of these later warrs in these western parts, many tradesmen, labourers, and other poore people to the number of sixty nine poor persons have by reason of fire and other mischiefe

attending the war been inforced to forsake their own habitacions and take up their dwellings in Alphington'.⁷⁸ The sufferings inflicted on the Exeter poor as a result of the demolition were still causing concern in 1652, when the Chamber agreed that a petition should be sent to Parliament, asking 'for some relief to and for the poore of this cittye . . . [impoverished] by fyreing and other sad accidents in the time of the late warrs'.⁷⁹

Some idea of the human suffering caused by the demolition is provided by a clutch of petitions to the city Chamber, in which those who had lost their houses begged for relief. Perhaps the most poignant of these documents is the petition of Richard Lowman of St Sidwells, husbandman, who, 'haveing formerly lost an estate in 4 severall houses in the same parish, burnt with fyre [in] the late unhappy warr', complained that he 'hath [now] beene necessitated to sell his goods to maintaine him and his sick wife who, haveing nothing left to subsist, are like to perish in want'. Other sufferers were Richard Pasmore, whose house and garden in Southernhay 'were pulled downe and spoyled', Edith Blake, whose house outside East Gate was 'consumed by fire in those unnaturall warrs' and Valentine Bishopp of Trinity, 'hee having two howses burn[t] in the first seige, neere the Mawdlyne, which was his utter undoing'.⁸⁰ For all these poor, distressed people the Civil War had proved an unmitigated disaster.

How long did it take for the damage to be repaired? The answer, it seems, is a great many years. Fortunately, a good deal of information survives about the efforts which the Chamber made to repair its property during the post-war period. The Chamber had three main priorities in its campaign of reconstruction. The first of these was to repair the public utilities; the bridges, waterpipes, almshouses and other communal buildings. Work on such tasks began relatively quickly. In April 1647, for example, the windows and woodwork of the Guildhall 'broken upp and spoyled by ill-affected souldiers' were replaced.⁸¹ Later that year, the major task of repairing the Magdalen Hospital began, with an order that the chapel there should be re-edified.⁸² By the end of the sixteen-forties the warehouses on the Quay, previously in sad decay, had also been patched up.⁸³

During the next decade a concerted effort was made to restore the city's almshouses to their former condition. In December 1641 Palmer's Almshouses were ordered to be rebuilt, whilst in 1653 the Chamber began badgering a certain Mr Speke to repair the Wynard's Hospital.⁸⁴ This work was well advanced by 1655, during which year the Chamber also directed that the task of building houses to replace those which had formerly stood at the Magdalen should begin.⁸⁵ The lead pipes which had once brought water into the city, but 'had byn in

the late troubles cutt and stolne awaye' were ordered to be replaced in 1656.⁸⁶ By 1660 a great deal of damage had been repaired, but much still remained to be done. Neither Wynards nor the Magdalen were completed as late as 1665, whilst one or two public utilities had to wait even longer to be restored to their pre-war condition. The 'houses of office' at Snayle Tower were not rebuilt until 1693.⁸⁷

The Chamber's most pressing concern during 1646–50 was undoubtedly to ensure that the many demolished houses belonging to the city were rebuilt. These dwellings were vital because of the revenue which they brought in in the shape of rent. In 1647 the Council ordered that five civic dignitaries should carry out a survey of 'the severall lands and tenements' belonging to the Chamber 'lying in the suburbs, which have been of late burnt, wasted, or otherwise demolished'.⁸⁸ The bounds of these ruined tenements were to be carefully set out, so that they might be leased again in the future. Around the same time, leases of the wasted city lands began to be made to various persons, with the proviso that the new tenants should build new dwelling houses upon the site of the old, demolished, buildings. At first there was a mere trickle of applicants for such leases. Yet during the early sixteen-fifties the number of applications swelled. Between 1650 and 1660 the Chamber issued no fewer than 63 separate leases specifying that property should be rebuilt.⁸⁹ Presumably the rebuilding of privately-owned houses followed a broadly similar pattern. Preliminary research has revealed only one privately owned house which was rebuilt during the sixteen-forties, so it seems fair to assume that it was not until after 1650 that reconstruction of such properties got properly underway.⁹⁰

Rebuilding of private houses, like civic properties, may well have peaked during the sixteen-fifties. Even so, scattered references make it clear that many dwellings continued to lie in ruins long after 1660. A glebe terrier for St Thomas noted in 1680 that 'here hath been no house . . . that can be rightfully claimed by the incumbent . . . ever since the last unhappy warrs, by the callamity of which the minister's house was utterly destroyed'.⁹¹ During the sixteen-eighties and nineties many properties were erected on Exebridge, presumably to replace those which had been demolished when the bridge was pulled down in 1643.⁹² And rebuilding continued until well into the eighteenth century. As late as 1713 a tenement was being built in Cowick Street, St Thomas, to replace premises 'burnt and demolished by the late civill war'.⁹³ It may well be that Exeter did not return to its pre-war extent for some 60 years after the disastrous firings of the sixteen-forties, therefore. The scars left by the Civil War were enduring ones indeed.

Notes

¹ The quotation is taken from G.M. Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts* (1904), p. 230.

² I. Roy, 'England Turned Germany? The Aftermath of the English Civil War in its European Context', *TRHS*, 5th Series, 28 (1978), pp. 127–44. For subsequent important studies, see D. Pennington, 'The War and the People', in J. Morrill (ed), *Reactions to the English Civil War, 1642–49* (1982), pp. 115–35; and A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War: Warwickshire 1620–60* (Cambridge, 1987).

³ In, for example, C. Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638–51*, (1992); J.A. Dills, 'Epidemics, Mortality and the Civil War in Berkshire, 1642–46', *Southern History*, 11 (1989); J. Morrill (ed), *The Impact of the English Civil War* (1991); P. Tennant, *Edgehill and Beyond: The Peoples' War in the South Midlands, 1642–45* (Stroud, 1992); J. Wroughton, *A Community at War: The Civil War in Bath and North Somerset, 1642–50* (Bath, 1992).

⁴ S. Porter, 'The destruction of Urban Property in the English Civil Wars, 1642–51' (unpub. Ph.D thesis, London, 1983). See also, S. Porter, 'Property Destruction in the English Civil War', *History Today*, 36 (August 1986). I am most grateful to Stephen Porter, George Bernard and Ian Roy for their comments on a preliminary version of this paper, which was given at the Institute of Historical Research in 1991.

⁵ See S. Ward, *Excavations at Chester: The Civil War Siege Works, 1642–46* (Chester Museum, 1987), p. 37; M.J. Stoye, 'St Thomas, near Exeter, during the Civil War', (Exeter Museum, Green Report 87.08, 1987), p. 2; and M. Atkin, *Gloucester and the Civil War: A City Under Siege* (Stroud, 1992), *passim*. For a summary of recent developments in Civil War Archaeology, see P. Harrington, *Archaeology of the English Civil War* (Princes Risborough, 1992).

⁶ I am most grateful to Mr C.G. Henderson, the Director of Exeter Archeological Field Unit, for his assistance and advice.

⁷ J. Bond. *A Doore of Hope* (1641), p. 49.

⁸ For a discussion of Exeter's social geography in the post-Civil War period, see W.G. Hoskins, *Industry, Trade and People in Exeter, 1688–1800* (Manchester, 1935), pp. 120–3.

⁹ S. Lawrence, 'A Population Study of St Sidwells Parish, Exeter, During and After the Civil War of 1642–46' (Certificate course dissertation, Exeter University, 1993) p. 3.

¹⁰ D(evon) R(ecord) O(ffice), Exeter, Book 73/15 (James White's Chronicle), p. 134. The name still lives on in the popular nickname for Exeter City Football Club, whose home ground lies in St Sidwells.

¹¹ See Hoskins, *Industry, Trade and People*, p. 21, for evidence that this continued to be so after the Restoration.

¹² S. Palmer (ed), *The Non-Conformists' Memorial*, by E. Calamy (3 vols, 1802), II, p. 37.

¹³ D.R.O., Book 73/15, p. 134.

¹⁴ Bod(leian Library), Oxford, J. Walker MSS, 5, f. 352.

¹⁵ In 1646 a Parliamentarian observer commented, admittedly with some exaggeration, that the pre-war suburbs had been 'as populous as the citie, and for buildings not much inferior'. See E.332 (23) (*Sir Thomas Fairfax's Further Proceedings in the West*, 22 Apr. 1646).

¹⁶ P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice), London, STAC 8, 161/10. I am currently preparing a paper on Jurdain's life and career.

¹⁷ The incident is described in C. Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621–29* (Oxford, 1979), p. 29.

¹⁸ See D.R.O., Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Books, 61 (1618–21); 62, (1621–30) and 63 (1630–42), *passim*.

¹⁹ Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Book, 62, f.152r.

²⁰ See M.J. Stoyle, 'Divisions within the Devonshire "County Community", circa 1600–1646', (unpub. Oxford D.Phil thesis, 1992), p. 276.

²¹ I hope to explore the outbreak of the Civil War in Exeter in a future paper.

²² For a full account of work on the city defences during 1642–46, see M.J. Stoyle, *Documentary Evidence of the Civil War Defences of Exeter, 1642–43* (Exeter Museum, 1992) and M.J. Stoyle, *The Civil War Defences of Exeter and the Great Parliamentary Siege of 1645–46* (Exeter Museum, 1990).

²³ Stoyle, *Documentary Evidence*, pp. v–vii.

²⁴ D.R.O., DD.36995.

²⁵ S. Woolmer, *A Concise Account of the City of Exeter* (Exeter, 1811), p. 11.

²⁶ D.R.O., DD.36995; Woolmer, *Concise Account*, p. 11; Bod., Hope Adds, 1133 (*Mercurius Rusticus*, 16 Mar. 1643); P.R.O., S(tate) P(apers) Domestic, 23/185/603; D.R.O., Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/8 (1634–47), f. 143.

²⁷ Bod., Hope Adds, 1133, (*Mercurius Rusticus*, 16 Mar. 1643). The value of the destroyed Chapter properties may well have been exaggerated, see Lawrence, dissertation, p. 3.

²⁸ Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Book, 62, f. 218r; and Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Book, 61, f. 197.

²⁹ J. Bamfield, *Colonel Joseph Bamfield's Apologie* (The Hague, 1685).

³⁰ Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/8, f. 165.

³¹ D.R.O., Letter Book 60F ('Exeter Siege Accounts'), f. 41r.

³² Fire arrows are known to have been employed for this purpose at Lyme in 1644, see G. Chapman, *The Siege of Lyme Regis* (Lyme Regis, 1982), pp. 37–8.

³³ See Stoyle, *Documentary Evidence*, pp. xi–xii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. xii–xiii.

³⁵ D.R.O., Letter Book 60F, f. 43.

³⁶ Bamfield, *Apologie*.

³⁷ Bod., 4.M.68.Art (*Mercurius Aulicus*, 3–10 Sept. 1643).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/8, f.149r.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* See also Porter, thesis, p. 165.

⁴¹ See D.R.O., Exeter Receivers' Books, 1643/44 and 1644/45.

⁴² The temporary alarm caused by Essex's expedition to the West in the summer of 1644 did not result in the demolition of any houses at Exeter.

⁴³ For the destruction of the 'houses of office', see D.R.O., D1/24/120A.

⁴⁴ For the surrender of 'the ward in St Thomas parish', see W(est) C(ountry) S(tudies) L(ibrary), Exeter, SB/Exe/1646/Art.

⁴⁵ For Hunks, see E.327 (25) (*The Moderate Intelligencer*, 5–12 Mar. 1646). His career is summarised in P. Newman, *Royalist Officers in England and Wales: A Biographical Dictionary* (1981), p. 205.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/8, f. 166.

⁴⁷ P.R.O., S.P. 23/184/905.

⁴⁸ E.262 (42) (*Perfect Occurrences of Parliament*, 8–15 Aug. 1645); and B(ritish) L(ibrary), Burney Collection, *The Moderate Intelligencer*, 4–11 Sept 1645.

⁴⁹ E.266 (10) (*Perfect Occurrences of Parliament*, 24–31 Oct. 1645).

⁵⁰ B.L., Burney, *A Perfect Diurnal*, 27 Oct. to 3 Nov. 1645.

⁵¹ J. Sprigg, *Anglia Rediviva: England's Recovery* (1647, reprinted Oxford, 1854), p. 161.

⁵² B.L., Burney, *The Moderate Intelligencer*, 30 Oct. to 6 Nov. 1645. See also E.308

(25), (*The True Informer*, 1–8 Nov. 1645); and E.309 (2) (*The City Scout*, 4–11 Nov. 1645).

⁵³ B.L., Burney, *Mercurius Britannicus*, 3–10 Nov 1645.

⁵⁴ For example, during the excavations at Exe Street (1985/86) and South Gate (1988).

⁵⁵ E.266 (10) (*Perfect Occurrences of Parliament*, 24–31 Oct. 1645).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; and J. Walker MSS, 5, f. 352.

⁵⁷ J. Walker MSS, 4, f. 300.

⁵⁸ P.R.O., S.P. 23/183/285.

⁵⁹ P.R.O., S.P. 19/157/89.

⁶⁰ P.R.O., S.P. 23/184/409.

⁶¹ E.320 (22) (*Mercurius Veridicus*, 25 Jan. to 1 Feb. 1646).

⁶² E.322 (8) (*The Kingdom's Weekly Intelligencer*, 3–12 Feb. 1646); see also E.322 (7), (*The Moderate Messenger*, 3–10 Feb. 1646); and Porter, thesis, p. 105.

⁶³ W.C.S.L.; T.L. Ormiston (ed), 'St Thomas Parish Registers, 1, 1541–1691' (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1933), p. 185.

⁶⁴ See Sprigg, *Anglia Rediviva*, pp. 313–14; B.L., Burney, *Speciall and Remarkable Passages*, 6–13 Feb. 1645; E.322 (8) (*The Kingdom's Weekly Intelligencer*, 3–12 Feb. 1645).

⁶⁵ Sprigg, *Anglia Rediviva*, p. 241.

⁶⁶ D.R.O., Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Book, 64 (1642–60), f.102.

⁶⁷ E.332 (23) (*Sir Thomas Fairfax's . . . Proceedings*, 22 Apr. 1645).

⁶⁸ Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/8, f.170r.

⁶⁹ For the destruction of the civic almshouses, see Porter, thesis, p. 106.

⁷⁰ For the homeless in the ecclesiastical properties, see Porter, thesis, p. 201.

⁷¹ P.R.O., S.P. 23/85/173.

⁷² D.R.O., Devon Sessions Order Book, 8 (1640–51) (unpaginated), entry of Bapt 1646.

⁷³ A similar flight to the country occurred during the Exeter Blitz of 1942. I owe this point to Mr D. Langdon.

⁷⁴ D.R.O., St Loyes Wardens' Account Book, 1589–1651, f.217; and Devon Sessions Order Book, 8, entry of Bapt 1647.

⁷⁵ Devon Sessions Order Book, 8, entry of July 1649.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, entries of Bapt and Mich. 1646. For comparable cases near Bridgewater, see Porter, thesis, p. 197.

⁷⁷ St Loyes Wardens' Account Book, 1589–1651, f. 217.

⁷⁸ Devon Sessions Order Book, 8, entry of July 1649.

⁷⁹ D.R.O., Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/9 (1647–52), f.87.

⁸⁰ D.R.O., Y5, 'Miscellaneous petitions to the Chamber for Relief', (uncalendared and unnumbered).

⁸¹ D.R.O., Exeter Receivers' Vouchers, Box 2.

⁸² Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/9, f.3.

⁸³ Exeter Receivers' Vouchers, Box 2; and D.R.O., Exeter Receivers' Accounts, 1646–50, *passim*.

⁸⁴ Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/9, f.85r; and D.R.O., Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/10 (1652–63), f.16.

⁸⁵ Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/10, f.61r.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, f.73r.

⁸⁷ D.R.O., D1/24/120A.

⁸⁸ Exeter Chamber Act Book, 1/8, entry of 23 September 1647.

⁸⁹ A total of 64 leases specifying rebuilding work are referred to in the Chamber Act Books for 1646–60, see Porter, thesis, p. 207. Three more stray leases are contained amongst the city deeds: D1/5/136 [1648], D1/5/4 [1655] and D1/26/11 [1655].

⁹⁰ The one privately-owned house known to have been rebuilt during the 1640s belonged to Mrs Elizabeth Flay, and lay in St Sidwells. 'Burnt and utterly wasted' during the Civil War, the house had been 'built of new' by June 1649. See D.R.O., ED/FC/83.

⁹¹ D.R.O., Exeter Glebe Terriers, 1601–1745, no. 123.

⁹² See, for example, D.R.O., D1/25/8; D1/25/21 and D1/7/47.

⁹³ D.R.O., D7/946/36B.