

## Introduction

Welcome to Roundheads at the Tower. This audio guide will take you on a walk through one of the secret histories of the Tower of London.

\*\*\*Feel free at any point to pause the guide and enjoy the other attractions the Tower has to offer, it will be clear where you should be, to begin the next track when you are ready to move on.\*\*\*

In the early 1640s London was in turmoil, King Charles I was at great odds with his Parliament over matters of both religion and money. The King's favourites, his favoured courtiers and personal friends, were viewed

with great suspicion for the influence they had over the monarch. And the city itself was fractious, the London Mob turning out in response to the smallest slight.

With factions forming, the parliamentary roundheads and royalist cavaliers began facing off in the halls of power as well as on the streets of the city.

Where did the Tower of London sit in the story of these troubled times? And how, when the conflict came to a head in 1642 starting the First English Civil War, did the Royal Palace and Fortress of the Tower of London, end up in Parliamentary hands?

## ***1. Lord Strafford's confinement, or the beginning of the Tower's troubles***

\*\*\*Our tour begins by Tower Wharf, on the North side of the River Thames by the Middle Draw Bridge. Once there, start the track *Lord Strafford's confinement, or the beginning of the Tower's troubles*, and, keeping the Tower to your right, move at your own pace towards the entrance to the Tower on Tower Hill\*\*\*

In 1632 the great architect Inigo Jones, Surveyor-General of the King's Works, began directing a much needed refurbishment of the Tower. Many of his changes were vanity projects, Jones cleared and redesigned the docks by the Tower,

constructing a new Wharf, and began replacing the stonework of the White Tower with the expensive Portland stone we see today.

Working on the recommendations made by Sir Allen Apsley 10 years earlier, Jones did undertake some more practical projects. He repaired the and replaced the walkways which ran around the outer wall of the Tower, replaced the lead and the cannon on the roof of the White tower and refurbished the interiors of several Towers in the inner ward, something particularly demanded by the King after he had had the misfortune of nearly falling through one of their rotting upper floors in the middle of a ceremony. Jones

also enlarged the gunpowder stores for the Office of the Ordnance though curiously despite years of complaints, he did not follow through on the proposal to move the Jewel Houses from their then home, in temporary sheds right next to those same gunpowder stores.

By 1640 the tower was ready for the final stage of its make-over, the arming and manning its new defences. As the king was ordering the final troops to be trained, cannon installed and defences placed, Thomas Wentworth the Earl of Stafford, and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland arrived in London. A controversial figure in Parliament and a staunch supporter of the king Parliament saw

Strafford's arrival at this moment as suspicious. He had suggested before that Charles use the Tower to bring them to heel. And now with rumours flying of his misconduct in the Scottish Wars and a plan to bring across Catholic, Irish troops to put down the quarrelous parliament they were to say the least, discomfited, the timing of his arrival.

On the 25th of November 1640 Charles I visited the Tower of London. In the company of the Parliamentarian James Hamilton, Earl of Cambridge, he had come to examine the completed works and view his new troops training. That same day, in the king's absence, the Earl of Strafford was

impeached by Parliament. Seized by parliamentary guards, he was imprisoned in the very castle he was accused of trying to turn against them, the Tower of London.

## ***2. Captain Billingsley's Round, or the First Tower Coup***

\*\*\* Head up through the iron gates onto Tower Hill. The Hill has been a traditional site of protest for the people of London for centuries. Pause here overlooking the Tower, and begin the track *Captain Billingsley's Round*. There is seating immediately to your left, and further up tower hill to the right,

tickets for the Tower are available at booths to your left\*\*\*

By May 1641, after a 7 month long trial, the Earl of Strafford's execution at the hands of Parliament was becoming more and more likely. With concerns running high in the court, several of Charles inner circle presented ideas to the king, to save his favourite's head. A plot developed to bring Charles' northern army down to London, and spirit the Earl away to the continent. News of the plot in the north quickly leaked, but the plot had a southern component.

Sir John Suckling had petitioned the king for permission to raise troops in the service of



the king of Portugal and had recruited 100 men to be put under the command of Captain Billingsley. But Sir John had other plans for his regiment.

On May 2nd 1641, Charles I ordered the Lieutenant of the Tower William Balfour to allow 100 reinforcements to enter the Tower under the command of Captain Billingsley, but refused to commit the order to paper.

Billingsley's troops were supposed to assemble that day at the White Horse Tavern on Bread Street, near modern day St Paul's Cathedral, it was hoped that under the cover of the celebrations for the royal wedding of

Princess Mary, the mass gathering of soldiers would go unnoticed.

With barely half their number arrived by the time they were to depart, and those present already well in their cups, the sorry company marched on the Tower of London with the intention to overthrow its garrison and free the Earl of Strafford.

Rumour had spread however, of armed men marching on the Tower, eventually reaching the parliament by late that afternoon.

Billingley's company were stopped at the main gate to the castle by William Balfour, who questioned their right to enter, delaying

the invading force long enough for the people of London to step to the Tower's defence.

Hundreds of Londoners turned out to blockade the Tower, by land and by river, buying parliament vital time to send troops to put legitimate reinforcements into the fortress, and to take Billingsley and his men into custody. The Earl of Newport, Constable of the Tower was quickly dispatched to take up residence in the fortress for its protection. The people of London stood vigil over the Tower for several days, until they were assured of its safety.

As the focus of the plot, parliament decided that the Earl of Strafford posed too great a

danger to be allowed to live, he was *homo homini lupus*, the man that is a wolf to other men according to the pamphleteers. The Earl was executed, on Tower Hill by Parliamentary authority on 12th of May 1641, just 10 days after the failed plot.

### ***3. Lieutenant Balfour's Castle, or the peoples' Tower***

\*\*\*When you are ready, begin the track Lieutenant Balfour's castle, and proceed into the tower, passing under the middle tower and into the inner ward of the fortress and past the Bell Tower.\*\*\*

The people of London were very discerning about the security of the castle which controlled their city, supported their trade and dominated their river. It is fair to say then that as Lieutenant of the Tower William Balfour was more than popular, he was trusted.

As part of the May 1641 plot to take the Tower and free the Earl of Strafford, Balfour had received orders from the king to permit entry to 100 troops raised by Sir John Suckling to reinforce the fortress, but with suspicion rife and rumours spreading through the city of armed men lurking by the Tower the people of London intervened and Balfour kept the gates locked against the intruders.

Following the failure of the Plot Balfour was called to account for himself in Parliament.

In his questioning by Parliament Balfour answered plainly that though dubious of the order, true to the King's command he had intended to allow entry to Suckling's troops. The king was after all the king, but following the public protests he kept the council of the crowd and parliament and barred the door to them.

His testimony must have satisfied parliament, for he was shortly returned to the Tower as Lieutenant. And endured in the post for a further 7 months without incident.

When in December 1641, Balfour would leave his post. Either at the King's request or due to pressing concerns over his lands in Ireland, he was obliged to have publish a pamphlet explaining his departure to quell the outcry of the city. The Earl of Newport, constable of Tower and Balfour's superior was once again forced to move into the fortress to reassure London of its safety.

#### ***4. Colonel Lunsford's Ascension, or When the convict ran the prison***

\*\*\*On your right you will see the steps up to the Medieval Palace above Traitors gate, follow the route through the Palace and onto the Inner Curtain wall. To your right you can

overlook the river down which parliament's envoys would have travelled to reach the Tower. Pause here and start the track *Colonel Lunsford's Ascension, or When the convict ran the prison* \*\*\*

Colonel Thomas Lunsford was personally appointed to the role of the Lieutenant of the Tower of London in December 1641, by Charles I, to immediate outcry from the city and parliament.

Lunsford was notorious. In 1632 he was ordered before Charles' personal court the Star Chamber accused of assault, poaching and beating the servants of a neighbouring



landowner, by 1633 he back accused of attempting to murder the same neighbour.

Committed to Newgate for the offence

Lunsford contrived to escape and fled to the continent. Upon his return he quickly took up with the burgeoning cavalier movement in the royal court. Needless to say he did not inspire the confidence of the city.

On the first day of his lieutenancy it was incredulously ordered in the Commons “That the Gentlemen that serve for the City, and Mr. Tomkins, Mr. Martin, and Mr. Peard, shall inquire in what Hands the Tower of London now is: And have Power to send for Parties, Witnesses, Papers, Records.”

The response in the city was immediate, the people of London blockaded the Tower, besieged Whitehall and began a vociferous pamphlet campaign against Lunsford. Some claiming his appointment to be part of a catholic plot to overthrow the city! Others argued he was interfering with trade, as merchants dare not bring their gold into the Tower. Even parliament published a number of declarations against Lunsford labeling him unfit for the role.

Within a day of his appointment the Earl of Newport, Constable of the Tower and Lunsford's direct superior was ordered to again take up residence in the fortress to safeguard it's interests from its new

Lieutenant. The city meanwhile had quickly stationed itself outside. Throughout London precautions had been taken to safeguard the city against attack. Drawing chains across the streets hinder horsemen and boiling water to douse any incoming troops Londoners took up arms against possible invasion.

Lunsford's lieutenancy lasted 4 days, before Charles relented and removed him from the role.

## ***5. Lord Byron's Responsibility, or keeping the peace***

\*\*\*Start the track *Lord Byron's Responsibility, or keeping the peace* as you head towards

the Lanthorn Tower, and make your way through the Tower to continue on the inner curtain wall.\*\*\*

On the 26 of December 1641 Sir John Byron took up the mantle of Lieutenant of the Tower of London. In the unenviable position of following the despised Colonel Lunsford, a known criminal into the role, Byron entered the Tower with explicit instructions from the king “to give no just cause of offence”.

From the day of his arrival the Tower was blockaded by the people of London, determined to protect themselves from the tumult at the castle. They took great care that

no supplies should reach the fortress, and most certainly that its troops and armaments should not be increased.

Claims continued in popular pamphlets that for want of a Lieutenant they could trust trade in the city was dwindling, and money being kept out of the Royal Mint, which was headquartered in the Tower. Byron they claimed was a “stranger to the city”, having not held office there before, unlike the parliamentary nominee for the role Sir John Conyers, and the city had taken a strong dislike to him.

Byron quickly received a visit from the City Sheriffs, the enforcers for London's Common Council. The Sheriffs insisted that the new warders ordered to take up duties in the castle several months before, be removed, despite the new Lieutenant's protests that they had been recruited on the orders of both Parliament and king in aid of the Towers security. When requested to leave a copy of the order for their removal with him, the Sheriffs refused, and quickly withdrew.

Writing to his friend, Secretary of state Sir Edward Nicholas, Byron lamented 'I desired them to leave a copy of this order with me, but their wisdoms would by no means consent to it. By this, Sir, you may see that

though I carry myself never so fairly, they are resolved to pick quarrels with me’.

Byrons frustration with the position comes into sharp focus in his correspondence with Nicholas where he rails against the blockaders threatening if they were to ‘go about to starve me, or offer any other violence, though I cannot promise to keep this place long in the condition I am in, yet I will sell both it and my life at as dear a rate as I can.’ But he remained determined to respect his directive to give no just cause for offence. So much so that when summoned by parliament in January 1641 Byron remained in the Tower await permission from both the king and the city before attending,

despite threats of being labelled a delinquent.

Byron even joined the city and parliament in their war of words, publishing his own letter to parliament in a pamphlet 'in defence of himself and to satisfy the world' as to his conduct as lieutenant.

## ***6. Captain Skippon's Request, or the politest coup***

\*\*\*Pause here between the Lanthorn and Salt Towers, and start the track *Captain Skippon's Request, or the politest coup*.

Down to your right you can see the Postern or back Gate of the Tower.\*\*\*



On the 12th of January 1642 Sir John Byron, Lieutenant of the Tower of the London, answered a summons to attend Parliament, amid growing concerns for the security of the castle from that quarter, and increasingly regular suggestions that the Trained Bands, London's militia come police force, be assigned to join the populace in encircling the Tower.

Upon news of Byron's departure from the fortress, the parliamentarian Captain, Philip Skippon, marched out with a contingent of 500 men from the parliamentary guard, with the intention of surprising the fortress, and taking it for the parliamentary cause.

Coming by evening to the back of the Tower, they waited while Skippon sent one man into the castle to address the Captain of the Hamleteers, the Tower Hamlets Trained Band, and by acknowledged right the Tower's guards.

Skippon's message requested that the Hamleteers march out of the Tower to meet him and join under his command. But the Sergeant of the Hamleteers would have none of it, answering their regiment had come there upon the command of Lieutenant Byron, and they would not depart without his order.

Skippon replied that Byron would not come again to the Tower as Lieutenant, but that if the Sergeant “scrupled to come out of the Tower, he desired him to draw his men up to the iron gate, and upon the shooting of a musket to be ready to assist him.”

Before the Sergeant could consider the offer, Skippon was proved wrong. At 10 o'clock that night Byron was released by parliament and returned to his charge, secure, if unhappy, in his position. Foiling the supposed plan to usurp the Tower and install a new Lieutenant.

Skippon and his troops quietly withdrew. Though they faced no censure, indeed

Parliament would shortly issue its own ordinance endorsing their attempt.

## ***7. Lord Byron's relief, or the King flees the Castle***

\*\*\*Make your way through the Salt Tower and start the track *Lord Byron's relief, or the King flees the Castle*, when you arrive back on the Inner Curtain wall.\*\*\*

Having survived Skippon's attempted coup, Byron redoubled his efforts petitioning the king to be removed from the post of Lieutenant of the Tower. With pressure coming from parliament to the same end, and extreme rumblings of discontent in the

city Charles I had little choice but to grant Byron's request.

Byron gratefully withdrew from the post in February 1642.

Ceding to pressure from parliament the king finally appointed their favoured nominee Sir John Conyers to the Lieutenancy on February 11th 1642, it was his third nomination for the post. This was one of Charles final acts in London.

The king, had already withdrawn to Hampton Court for safety in January, with the Tower now well and truly out of his control he fled north to begin raising support in the counties.

On the 22nd of August 1642 in Nottingham he raised his Standard a gesture which officially marked the start of the Civil War which had been brewing since 1639.

From Conyers the Lieutenancy passed, without the kings intervention to Alderman Pennington, of the city of London's Common Council, cementing the Tower as not only the heart of the city, but within the parliamentary gift, and as such well beyond the kings reach.

## ***8. Sir Kenelm Digby, Spy, or the Building of the Lines of Communication***

\*\*\*Pass through the Broad Arrow Tower and begin the track *Sir Kenelm Digby, Spy, or the Building of the Lines of Communication* as you pass along the refortified wall between the Broad Arrow and Constable Towers.\*\*\*

In 1642 works began on a massive defensive emplacement which would encircle London - the lines of communication. Sheriff's cleared the area around London's city boundaries, striking and burning great swathes of temporary buildings, sheds and even homes constructed illegally outside of the city. Their purpose was to prevent anyone from surprising the city from the cover of the ramshackle maze of lean-tos and sheds, or of course spies sneaking in, and to provide a

clean shot for the cannon should any arm try to march on London.

Parliament ordered that a great ring of earthwork bastions and gates, connected by deep ditches and earth walls, be constructed surrounding the city. This was a major undertaking, but the people of London proved equal to it. Organised by their parishes and guilds Londoners turned out, whole families in tow in the height of the summer to dig and pile earth in front of the city to protect their homes. Lithgow related how good matrons would bring out food and drink for their families, picnicking at the top of the earthworks during their breaks, and how gaggles of women would form to dig and



gossip together as they built the cities defences.

Kenelm Digby, an infamous royalist spy was caught overlooking the Lines on one of his frequent trips between London and Oxford. Meanwhile John Webb, a surveyor reported the particulars of the Lines, their length and construction back to the king. Like many modern scholars, Webb probably had his doubts about the efficacy of the lines. The works between the bastions were too long to be defended efficiently, they claim, and would require too much manpower to patrol, let alone to hold against invaders.

But with the heavily armed tower at the heart of this new emplacement, and the Trained Bands of London defending it, the trouble of over long walkways was a minor one. The tower's guns could reach, at a minimum, well across Southwark and north up beyond Whitechapel.

The king would have to think twice before approaching the city.

## ***9. Lord Lyttleton's Larceny, or the theft of the Great Seal***

\*\*\*As you exit the Constable Tower make your way down the steps off the Inner Curtain Wall and begin the track *Lord Lyttleton's Larceny, or the theft of the Great*

*Seal.* Keeping the Jewel House to your right and the White Tower to your left, make your way toward Tower Green.\*\*\*

With the king gone to York, where he was attempting to set up his own government, the real business of running the country was still continuing in London - thanks to parliament's possession of the Great Seal.

The Great Seal conferred the authority for Parliament to make proclamations and sue out writs - in the king's absence the smooth running of the country quite literally rested on parliament's possession of a mere 2 lb of metal. Without the seal, amongst other things

parliament could not bring judgement in criminal cases, or even elect new members to replace those who followed the king to the North.

The Seal was entrusted to the Lord Keeper, Lord Thomas Lyttleton. Who in quick order abandoned Parliament, making his way by stealth out of London with the Great Seal in his possession. Lyttleton ran straight for the kings new court giving over the seal to his majesty's rightful possession.

This dramatic turn of events could have spelled the end for Parliament and curtailed the civil war in a matter of months. It was

here however that ownership of the Tower truly came into its own for parliament. For, the Tower was one of only two officially recognised royal mints in the country and by far the largest. Royal mints had two primary functions - producing coin, and producing medals, but those were not the limits of its scope, if called upon, among those other things, it could produce a new the Great Seal.

After two days of discussion Parliament gave the order and a new Seal was cast.

The Tower mint was one of the only places in the world that could produce a legitimate seal. And it was only with a legitimate seal

that parliament could resume the business of government, rather than fading away awaiting the king's forgiveness.

## ***10. Mrs Sherbourne's Eviction, or fortifying the Tower***

\*\*\*As you arrive at Tower Green you will see benches to your right and left and behind you by the steps at the corner of the White Tower, take a seat with a view of the Queen's House and begin the track *Mrs. Sherbourne's Eviction, or fortifying the Tower*. Please do be aware if you prefer to stand that the Guardsmen stationed in front of the Jewel House frequently march through this walkway.\*\*\*

With the King's withdrawal from the city in February 1642, and war looking imminent Parliament went to work securing the Tower from royalist influence and preparing for the conflict to come.

Their first order of business was to request that the supplies of arms and powder, which had sat in the armouries at Hull since the Bishop's Wars were returned to restock the Tower (and to remove them from the king's grasp - he tried in April 1642 to take Hull). And to bring in the Trained bands about the city, to begin training.

With the arms from Hull safely ensconced in the Tower by July 1642, parliament ordered that several of its members be “appointed to confer with the Lieutenant of the Tower, and to consider of some Means for the Safety of that Place”, by the 11th it was ordered that the Hamletteers, the Tower Hamlets Trained Band, take up a strict watch in the castle, and of the surrounding area.

In August the Lieutenant of the Tower was ordered to put the prisoners in the Tower into strict confinement. Prisoners would often have the freedom of the precinct and would frequently employ their own retinue of servants who could move freely in and out of the Tower about their duties. With the official



outbreak of war prisoners were quickly confined to their rooms to prevent their association with one-another, and their servants forbidden from talking to anyone in the Tower or leaving the castle, lest they reveal information on its defences.

The staff of the Tower meanwhile, found their loyalties divided, those who were for the King applied for leave to attend him at his new courts in York then Oxford, or simply fled. Positions were filled where they could be, and troops and guns began to flood into the castle. Emplacements were armed and guarded. The offices of Armouries and the Ordnance began working overtime to

prepare for war and to support the cities defences.

Paranoia was high and pamphleteers saw royalists everywhere. One pamphlet claimed that some enterprising Cavaliers had stolen cannon from the Tower Wharf and were planning to ensconce it on the steeple of the church of St Mary Overie now Southwark Cathedral in an attempt to take command of the city.

In November one Mrs. Sherbourne and her family, fell afoul of the rising tensions, when by order of the House of Commons itself, they were evicted from their home in the Tower. Her two sons having left to fight for

the king, parliament declared the whole family “all Persons very ill-affected to the Peace of the Kingdom” and demanded they be removed and their home reallocated to one of the many officers brought in to support the war effort.

## ***11. Carew Hervey Mildmay’s key, or stand-off in the Jewel House***

\*\*\*Make your way back across the courtyard with Jewel House to your left and turn down the slope to the far side of the White Tower, by the demolished Wardrobe Tower by the entrance to the modern day royal armouries. There are benches to your right if you wish to sit. Pause here and start the track *Carew*

*Hervey Mildmay's key, or stand-off in the Jewel House\*\*\**

In the 1640s the Royal Jewel houses, both upper the home of the crown jewels and lower the home to the kings plate, had the dubious pleasure of being housed in a small addition to the White Tower, next to the powder stores. Though comment was made many times on the wisdom of this decision it was not to be changed until well after the wars were over.

Despite their rather explosive location however the jewel houses were eminently secure even, occasionally from the king

himself. As parliamentary control over the Tower had grown and the king's departure began to look imminent, strict controls were placed upon his household's access to the Jewel Houses, so much so that Charles had to apply to parliament to be allowed to procure the best plate for use at a royal banquet. The fear was that once in possession of such valuable items the king might pawn them in order to fund his conflict with parliament.

In many ways they were right, one of Charles first acts upon coming to war with his parliament was to send his wife, Henrietta Maria, and their children to the continent for safety. The queens task once away was to

pawn those crown jewels they were able to smuggle out.

Parliament itself wasted no time in converting the kings plate into coin to support the war effort, a practice that continued for the duration of the conflict.

In 1649 following the execution of the king, it was ordered that an inventory be taken of the Jewel House for the purpose of their being sold off. The task fell to the Clerk of the Jewel House Carew Henry Mildmay. Given the key by the Master of the Jewel House, Mildmay began the inventory, before locking himself in the Jewel House, and refusing all entreaties to come out. The warders were

summoned, and the door broken in. Mildmay was carried off to the Fleet prison for refusing to give up the key.

Regardless, the business of selling off the king's jewels and wardrobe was mostly completed by 1650.