

## Marshall's Elm Skirmish

In 1642, Charles 1 and Parliament began to mobilise their supporters and to raise troops to form armies.

Parliament passed a bill allowing it to take control of local militias and Trained Bands, which were local part-time militias. These generally were unwilling to fight outside of their own region.

This is the story of a skirmish that arose at Marshall's Elm as a result of the struggle to gather support together for both sides, and the clashes that arose.



*1 Marquis of Hertford*

The Marquis of Hertford arrived in Wells, hoping to raise some Royalist supporters, and whilst the local Trained Band was persuaded to muster, they made it clear that they were not prepared to fight anyone. They managed to raise a force of 240 volunteers and formed three troops of horse.



*2 Sir Alexander Popham*

Meanwhile Sir Alexander Popham was having greater success in raising volunteers and Trained Bands on behalf of Parliament. He and Sir John Horner planned to hold a meeting at Shepton Mallet.



*3 Sir Ralph Hopton*

Sir Ralph Hopton, who was at Wells, heard about this and set off to Shepton Mallet to arrive early and prevent this meeting., and leaving his troops at the Town's end, alighted at the High Cross and called the townspeople to discuss the situation.



*4 William Strode*

At this point William Strode arrived with a party of 10 well-armed soldiers and demanded that Hopton leave. However, Strode was outnumbered by the Royalist troops and was arrested, after a short struggle, and handed over to the local constable. A large number of Parliamentary supporters then began to enter the town, and the Royalists withdrew to the edge of the town, where they were reinforced by more soldiers. William Strode and the local constable, who was a Parliament supporter, escaped back to Street. Meanwhile about 1200 Parliament supporters gathered on the other side of the town, where they remained for some hours before the Royalist group received orders to withdraw back to Wells.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August, the marquis was at Wells, where there were about 2000 Parliament supporters, mostly unarmed, horse and foot, assembling in the Mendip hills above Wells. He was in great need of support, and received news that regiments had been assembled in

the West of the County so he sent Lieutenant Colonel Lunsford and some of their troops and volunteers, a force of 80 horse and dragoons, to Burrowbridge to accompany this force to Wells. Only 14 of these were dragoons.

Having ridden through Glastonbury and Street, the group arrived at Marshall's Elm where they saw a body of 600 foot drawn from Taunton and South Petherton, in a field two miles away, making their way towards Wells.

Colonel Lunsford arranged his men amongst the trees on the hill to hide their true numbers. They captured a messenger, who had been sent from William Strode to the advancing band. He had been instructed to tell the Parliamentary group's leader that there was a huge force at Wells that he was to join, and that there was only a small force in front of him, through which he could easily break. An hour later a second messenger was captured carrying the same message.



*5 Sir John Stawell* A parley, to discuss the situation, was held at an elm tree halfway between the two groups between Sir John Stawell and John Pyne, but they could not agree to step back to avoid conflict. The route to the top of the hill at Marshall's Elm was via a deep hollow way. While he was parleying, Stawell had told his commanders to divide his horse into three groups, making his group clearly visible in the middle of the hollow way, with the other two groups on either side, partially concealed to hide their numbers. The 14 dragoons were split into two groups either side of the hollow way, hiding in quarry pits, some 150 paces ahead of the horse.

The Parliament supporters were lead from the front by Joseph Osmond (described in a report as a violent grand jury man), while their leader, Pyne brought up the rear. They advanced, led by Osmond, and when they got within musket range gave a volley.

The Royalists waited until the force was 120 paces from them when the order was given to the dragoons to open fire. At the third volley, Joseph Osmond was shot in the head, and several others were wounded, and the advance faltered.

At that moment, the Royalist cavalry charged and routed the Parliamentarians, capturing their Captains Sands and Preston. Many hid in the cornfields to escape, and some of the Royalists continued the chase as far as Somerton, where they left prisoners and horses before returning to Wells.

Seven Parliamentary supporters were killed during the skirmish, and a further 18 died later from their wounds. John Pyne escaped and 60 horses were captured and taken to Wells.

However, the next day with 2000 Parliamentary supporters gathering outside Wells, the Marquis of Hertford retreated to Sherborne. From Tudor Cottage the sounds of ghostly riders passing at night have been heard. Could these be ghosts from the skirmish?

A fuller description of these events were given in a Presidential address by W S Clark to the Glastonbury Antiquarian Society on January 7<sup>th</sup> 1904.