

## Colonel Robert Overton

### The First Civil War

Robert Overton was born in 1608 or 1609, the eldest son of John and Joan Overton of Easington in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Among the most powerful influences on Overton in his early years was religion. This was also the case for many of his contemporaries. Easington, even in 1583, had been recognized as a puritan parish. In 1627 Overton attended the puritan St John's college, Cambridge. Interestingly, it was at the same time as Thomas Fairfax attended St John's. At Christ College was the famous John Milton and it was probably from this period that their friendship stems.

After Overton returned to Easington he became involved in local military matters. As Captain Overton, in January 1642, he was with John Hotham when with three companies of the East Riding Trained Bands, he marched on Hull.

Overton's subsequent exploits during the early part of the war seem to be lost to history. It is very likely that he continued with the Hull Garrison raiding into the increasingly royalist remainder of Yorkshire. He was later reported to have been the only officer to have supported the townsmen of Hull when they arrested the Hothams in July 1643. At least two other Overton's were in the Hull garrison at this time; Major John Overton (Overton's father?) and a Lieutenant Overton. Following his defeat of the Fairfaxes at Adwalton Moor in late June 1643, the Earl of Newcastle put Hull, the only parliamentarian town remaining in Yorkshire, under siege from September 1643. The siege was ended in October following a ferocious sally from the defenders which captured most of the besieges batteries! Overton was later described as carrying himself *"...with much honour and gallantry in this action"*. It was probably during 1643 that Easington was raided by royalists, in the course of which the Overtons and the village were said to have lost some £2000. At some point, Overton's father was captured and imprisoned by Sir Hugh Cholmley and Michael Constable.

By June 1644 Fairfax had given Overton command of a foot regiment in the Northern Association. It is likely this regiment was one of those brought from Hull by Lord Ferdinando Fairfax and which took part in the defeat of Lord Belasyse's forces at Selby the previous April. However, Overton and his regiment were certainly at the subsequent siege of York and at the battle of Marston Moor, contemporarily called Hessay Moor. Milton describes their action in the battle *"...when our left wing was put to rout, [you] were beheld with admiration, making head against the enemy with your brave infantry and repelling his attack, amid the thickest carnage"*.

After Marston Moor the war in the North became a protracted mopping up exercise. The number and strength of royalist garrisons such as that of Pontefract, kept the Northern Association in existence when the New Model Army was formed. In fact contemporary Northern documents refer to the New Model Army as the Southern Army! However, the combination of the Self-Denying Ordinance and the formation of the New Model Army caused the removal of both Lord Fernando Fairfax and his son Sir Thomas from command of the Northern Association. They were replaced by Sydenham Poyntz.

By June 1645 Overton was governor of the town of Pontefract and in charge of the siege operations around the castle. Following the defeat of the Kings Army at Naseby and the rapidly

diminishing food reserves within the castle, it surrendered to Overton in July 1645. Two months later, having been defacto governor, Overton was appointed deputy governor of Pontefract; Sir Thomas Fairfax being appointed governor. During this period Overton had been engaged in besieging the nearby Sandal castle which surrendered following a particularly fierce bombardment. Overton spent the remainder of 1645/46 at Pontefract; here he was occupied receiving the surrender of a steady flow of royalists and returning the area to stability.

### The Second Civil War

From March to July 1647 Overton was in London negotiating the amalgamation of the Northern Association into the New Model Army. Also, supported by Cromwell and Fairfax, he was attempting to gain a field command for himself. In her only surviving letter, his wife Anne relates that he was hoping for a command of a horse regiment. However in July he took command of William Herbert's Regiment of Foot. It would appear that Overton's Northern regiment had become a garrison unit, for Anne states that he would have preferred the vacant command of Copely's Northern regiment to that of Herbert's.

During the period Overton was in London, his Northern regiment together with others of the Northern Association became increasingly militant. This culminated with a rendezvous of eight regiments at Pontefract during that summer. One of the consequences was the arrest of Sydenham Poyntz by agitators, including two from Overton's Northern regiment. The charges against Poyntz were later rejected by Fairfax but the incident ended his career. Poyntz later accused Overton, amongst others, of suborning his soldiers on the orders of Cromwell and Fairfax. At the rendezvous Lambert took over command of the Northern forces, much to Anne Overton's chagrin as she felt Overton's claim had gone by default.

Soon after taking command of Herbert's, Overton relinquished the governorship of Pontefract and was with his new regiment at the Putney debates. There he became a member of the General Council appointed to consider "*...how the declaration and interests of the Army were consistent with a paper commonly called The Agreement of the People*". In January 1648 he was appointed deputy governor of Hull to Sir Thomas Fairfax and by February he was resident in the town. Hull also retained a garrison regiment and Overton became commander of this unit as well as his field regiment. Within a month the citizens of Hull wrote to Fairfax complaining about the imposition of free billet and petitioned Overton's removal, which was rejected.

Soon after the second civil war broke out and while their Colonel defended one of the most important ports and fortresses in the north, his field regiment marched under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Reade into the West Country and South Wales. Before the seriousness of the revolt in Wales was apparent, two companies were despatched by ship to Milford Haven where they were driven into Pwllcrochan church. Lenient terms were reached and they were allowed to march away with their arms on condition they did not attempt to land again. The main body of the regiment took part in the defeat of Laugharne's forces at St Fagans in April, after which they continued into Pembrokeshire and were at the storming of Tenby.

Following the fall of Pembroke Castle and the Scottish invasion the regiment marched with Cromwell's forces to intercept the Scots. At Preston, Overton's formed part of the right and in his despatch after the battle, Cromwell wrote "*There came no bands of your foot to fight that day but*

*did it with incredible valour and resolution among which Colonel Bright's, My Lord General's, Lt. Col Reade's and Colonel Ashton's had the greatest work they often coming to push of pike and close firing and always making the enemy recoil".*

In the meantime, following the royalist seizure of Pontefract and Scarborough, Overton was occupied with containing the royalist raiding parties. One of these entered the Isle of Axholme in North Lincolnshire and had to be cleared out by two hundred of Overton's soldiers, presumably the Hull garrison. Following the Scot's defeat, sieges of the remaining royalist garrisons ensued. One of the longest was at Pontefract. Because of his friendship with Governor John Morris and his knowledge of the castle, Overton was summoned to the siege by Cromwell. His field regiment at this time marched to Berwick-on-Tweed and upon its surrender, garrisoned the town with Lt. Col. Reade acting as governor.

[Below is from Encyclopaedia Britannia.com]

## Fifth Monarchy Men

an extreme Puritan sect that came into prominence in England during the Commonwealth and Protectorate. They were so called from their belief that the time of the fifth monarchy was at hand—that is, the monarchy that (according to a traditional interpretation of parts of the Bible) should succeed the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman monarchies and during which Christ should reign on earth with his saints for 1,000 years. After the fall of the monarchy, they at first supported Oliver Cromwell. The Nominated, or Barebones, Parliament of 1653, chosen from nominees of the Independent churches, raised their hopes of speedily accomplishing the rule of the saints. The establishment of the Protectorate, however, dashed these hopes and turned the sect against Cromwell. The violence of their agitation led to the arrest of their leaders—Thomas Harrison, Robert Overton, Christopher Feake, John Rogers, and others. An attempt at an armed uprising, led by [Thomas Venner](#) in April 1657, was easily suppressed. Venner attempted another, equally abortive uprising in January 1661. He and a number of others were executed, and the special doctrines of the sect died out.