

Cosin's Library – The Context: Document Investigation Teacher's Notes

The English Civil War: What can we learn from archives? (about 45 mins)

This session is aimed at **KS3 and 4 students** who are studying the English Civil War and its impacts.

In this session, students can engage with primary material from Durham University's Archives and Special Collections. These can help students learn not only about **the impact of the English Civil War**, but also **how to access original historical sources** and to consider **the impact of bias**. This resource was created as part of the Cosin's Library Project at Palace Green Library, Durham University.

For this session, you will need:

- English Civil War: Document Investigation sheets
- English Civil War: Document Investigation – City of Durham Answer Sheet
- Document Investigation – Context to the Documents, found below – this will provide you with the necessary background information to the documents to help support your students' learning.

Begin by explaining that your students will be reading extracts from some original English Civil War documents. Each extract includes some contextual details, although you can find further information in the Document Investigation – Context to the Documents (below). The text from the worksheets is provided in italics, with additional notes below.

Each extract comes with a set of questions designed to encourage your students to engage with the document, primarily through pulling out pieces of information. The sheets also include catalogue information for each source, so you can find them online at discover.durham.ac.uk.

Students can look at one extract in detail, or at multiple extracts in sequence and can work alone or in pairs or groups; this session is flexible to the needs of your class.

After they have answered the questions, students can share their thoughts on the extracts in a discussion.

Some general questions to consider for each source to help facilitate discussion include:

- Who wrote this source?
- Why did they write it?
- What was the author's viewpoint? How do you know?
- What is the single most important piece of information you can pick out from this source?
- Does your source give the full story? Why/why not?
- When was this source made?

One final thing to be aware of is that the new year in the 17th century started on 25th March. This means that contemporary documents can sometimes seem to have the wrong date on them, such as Document 1. It can be confusing, but when reading an original source, you will probably need to add a year on if they are writing about something before the 25th March.

Document Investigation – Context to the Documents

Document 1: Doing of the Scots

W. R. ***Doing of the Scots in the Bishoprick...From February 27 to March 12. 1643.*** [London], 1644, Printed for L. Blairlock (Newcastle : Reprinted by M. A. Richardson ..., 1847). XL 942.8 REP/HIS 2/1

This source is a Victorian reprint of a pamphlet released by the Scottish Covenanter army that had invaded the North East of England (held by the Royalists) in January 1644 to help the Parliamentarians based in London. Pamphlets like this were intended to demonstrate the righteousness of the army's cause, whilst also providing an update of their latest progress.

The North East of England spent much of the Civil War era under occupation by Covenanter armies from Scotland. These were formed in response to Charles I's attempts to force the Scots into having an English-style church. Many Scottish people responded by signing a Covenant, which stated that Charles had to accept their way of worship. Eventually, they formed armies which sided with Parliament during the first part of the Civil War, and occupied the North East in January 1644, only leaving in February 1647. This was the second such occupation the North East had suffered in recent years – the Scots had held the region in 1640-41.

Pamphlets are a key source for historians studying this period, as they were printed in great numbers and distributed far and wide. They would be read out in public and discussed everywhere by people throughout society. Anyone with the money and time to write one could get their opinions, local news or political arguments shared with a large audience. The Scottish Covenanter army was no different, and this pamphlet is one of a series printed by them to advance their political and religious beliefs, alongside updates to their progress.

Collectors at the time would group pamphlets together and have them bound into a book for reference and to protect them, and Bishop Cosin was no different. Sometimes pamphlets were grouped in sequence as they responded to each other in turn, sometimes they were grouped by subject, and sometimes they were just thrown together in a mix.

This extract was written shortly after Newcastle had been captured by the Scottish army. This was excellent news for Parliament, which had seen its supply of coal dry up during the war, although the Scots were not simply going to hand over this resource – like other armies of the period, they needed large quantities of food, drink and other supplies just to exist.

Document 2: Disorder in Durham

Bruce, J. (ed.) ***Calendar of state papers, domestic series, of the reign of Charles I 1625-[1649].*** London : Longman, 1858-97. 941 STA (DOM)

This book is a later printed version of the large collection of letters, reports, petitions, orders and so on put together by government ministers during the reign of Charles I. They offer a glimpse into how the country was run, what sort of decisions were made by those in charge, and what was happening to ordinary people.

This extract is dated August 1641, just as the Scottish Covenanter army was leaving Durham at the end of the Bishop's Wars.

During the Bishop's Wars of 1639-40, a Scottish army easily defeated disorganised English forces in the North East and occupied the area, demanding money from Charles I to pay for their soldiers. However, this extract shows that soldiers' pay was not straightforward, and that although Scotland was one nation at this time, it was riddled with its own divisions.

Highlander troops had a reputation for being particularly vicious in and out of battle, and for coming from a tough, remote part of Scotland ruled over by clan lords subject to their own complex politics. Charles I and his advisors would no doubt have welcomed the news of infighting amongst his enemies, but would also have had to deal with this themselves; soldiers' pay was to be a constant source of tension within Civil War armies.

Document 3: City of Durham

Speed, John. ***The Bishoprick and Citie of Durham***. London, ...1611. Rm5/PFC/25/4/10

This is a map first printed in 1611 by John Speed of the City of Durham. It shows us what Durham would have roughly looked like during the English Civil War.

Can you pick out the details and landmarks of the city?

- *Durham Cathedral*
- *Durham Castle*
- *The River Wear*
- *The Marketplace*
- *Fortifications - the city walls, gatehouses, towers*
- *The bridges over the river*

Compare this map to a modern one of Durham. What differences and similarities can you see?

John Speed is best known for his work in creating maps of Britain and the wider world, allowing people to see places (or at least, an imaginative picture of them) they could never have the chance to see in real life. Although travel was beginning to open up, most people would still stay local to their home area for their whole lives.

This map is very useful for gaining an idea of what Durham looked like during the Civil War period – although much may have changed in the 40 or so years after it was made, the main landmarks and layout would have stayed the same:

- Durham Cathedral:
 - Over 500 years old at this time, this building was not always treated with great care during the English Civil War – Parliamentary rule had no need for grand cathedrals, as many of its supporters were keen Puritans, and preferred smaller, plainer churches. So when Parliamentary forces needed somewhere to house 3,000 or so Scottish prisoners following the Battle of Dunbar, it seemed the obvious choice. Inside, conditions rapidly deteriorated, and large numbers of prisoners died of disease. See [futurelearn.com/courses/battle-of-dunbar-1650](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/battle-of-dunbar-1650) and

durham.ac.uk/archaeology-research-projects/scottish-soldiers/ to find out more.

- Durham Castle:
 - In place since 1072, this building represented the Prince Bishops' secular power, and formed part of the core of administrative activity in the city.
 - The 1640s saw it occupied twice by Scottish invaders, before being sold off in 1649 following the abolishment of the post of Bishop of Durham. The Scottish prisoners mentioned above were taken into the Castle to recover (or not) from the illnesses contracted whilst being held at the Cathedral.
 - By the time Charles II came to the throne and brought the bishops back, Durham Castle was in a poor state, requiring the new Bishop of Durham, John Cosin, to spend large sums of money turning it into a palace.
- The River Wear:
 - This has been a key part of why Durham was built where it was; combined with the hill in the centre, the river forms a natural defence for whoever is based at the top.
 - During the 17th century, it also served as a source of power for watermills, as well as a handy way to dispose of rubbish or anything else unwanted, such as sewage. This would have led to unpleasant smells, especially in summer!
- The Marketplace:
 - A key part of any 17th century town or city, marketplaces served as more than an open space to set up market stalls. As elsewhere, Durham's marketplace acted as a useful meeting or gathering point, a place to carry out public punishments of criminals, and occasionally, as a parade ground.
- Fortifications - the city walls, gatehouses, towers:
 - As Durham is so close to Scotland, it had long been heavily fortified by the time of the English Civil War. All around the city ran stone walls studded with towers, and gatehouses protecting the entrances of the bridges.
 - All of this fortifying worked, as Durham was never directly attacked, although there was a battle close by at Neville's Cross in 1346.
 - Despite this, by the 17th century, Durham fortifications, as elsewhere, were made obsolete by the development of powerful cannons. In any case, when the Scottish army occupied Durham in 1640, they found the city more or less abandoned, with no one to man the walls.
- The bridges over the river:
 - In the 17th century, there were two main fortified bridges over the Wear; Framwellgate Bridge (to the west of the map) and Elvet Bridge (to the east). There was a smaller wooden bridge to the south close to where Prebends Bridge is today, and this also led up to a fortified gatehouse in the city walls.

Document 4: Thornaby Petition

Bruce, J. (ed.) ***Calendar of state papers, domestic series, of the reign of Charles I 1625-[1649]***. London : Longman, 1858-97. 941 STA (DOM)

This book is a later printed version of the large collection of letters, reports, petitions, orders and so on put together by government ministers during the reign of Charles I. They offer a glimpse into how the country was run, what sort of decisions were made by those in charge, and what was happening

to ordinary people.

This extract is dated 18th July 1643.

This second extract from the Calendar of state papers deals with a recurring theme of the English Civil War – poorly paid and supplied soldiers causing trouble by taking food and other supplies from local populations, often by force.

There were a number of options for civilians when attacked in this way. There were some cases of local people forming armed bands known as ‘clubmen’ to defend their property. Otherwise, people could create petitions to take to the authorities to try and gain their support, and this extract is a good example of one.

This time, it is not armies on the move, but rather, a Royalist governor based at Stockton Castle, Captain James Levingstone, who is to blame, and the people of Thornaby have had enough. This petition was presented to the regional commissioners who had the authority to order Levingstone to stop taking supplies from Thornaby over in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

The following list of complaints is made:

1. All of their hay is eaten up by Levingstone’s horses – this was worth 60 pounds, about £6,000 today, and was the petitioners’ main source of income over the winter.
2. Levingstone also lays claim to the meadow grass that would grow there, and seizes it when the inhabitants start to gather it in.
3. He usually takes harvested crops and live farm animals from locals and keeps them until they are desperate enough to pay to get them back.
4. His soldiers slaughter local people’s farm animals for food but do not pay for them.
5. His soldiers have also wrecked a windmill, which would have been vital to local people needing somewhere to convert their harvested crops into flour.
6. Finally, his soldiers also draw their swords and threaten the petitioners should they wish to pass by Stockton Castle.

In the end, both sets of commissioners agreed with the petitioners, and ordered Levingstone to settle any disagreements peacefully and fairly.

Document 5: Eikōn basilikē

Gauden, John. ***Eikōn basilikē***... The Hague, 1649. Cosin.I.4.49.

This image is from Eikōn basilikē [i-con baz-ill-e-kay], a book that appeared shortly after Charles I’s execution on 30th January 1649. Supposedly written by Charles himself, it reflected on his life and opinions, and became hugely popular with his supporters.

Can you find these symbols? What do you think they mean?

· *A rock in the sea*

· *A tree with hanging weights*

· *A beam of light going into Charles I’s head, and another from his eye up to heaven.*

· *Three crowns*

· *A Bible*

Eikōn basilikē is a key part of Royalist propaganda about the English Civil War, seeing as it was supposed to have been written by Charles I himself – though there are a number of other candidates who probably wrote it instead.

In any case, who exactly wrote it didn't matter to readers in 1649; this presented Charles as a just and fair king, trying his hardest to preserve true religion in the face of unreasonable enemies, and becoming a Christian martyr in the process. Despite Parliament's attempts to ban it, 35 editions were printed within the first year alone, and it stayed incredibly popular for many years afterwards. Parliament had books and pamphlets written to try and undermine its message, to no avail.

The frontispiece shown here is packed with pro-Royal symbolism alluding to Charles I and the struggles he faced:

- A rock in the sea:
 - This is labelled '*immota triumphans*', or 'unmoved in triumph', and is being battered by strong winds and waves.
- A tree with hanging weights:
 - This is labelled '*crescit sub pondere virtus*', or 'strength increases under weight'.
- A beam of light going into Charles I's head, and another from his eye up to heaven:
 - The beam into his head is labelled '*clarior é tenebris*' or 'brighter than/through the darkness'.
 - The beam from his eye is labelled '*coeli specto*' or 'I'm watching the heavens'.
- Three crowns:
 - A 'heavenly' crown:
 - Labelled with the words '*Beatam et Æternam*' or 'happy and eternal' and '*Gloria*', or 'Glory'. Charles is looking up at this crown.
 - A crown of thorns:
 - Labelled with the words '*Asperam et Levem*' or 'rough and light' and '*Gratia*', or 'Grace'. Charles is holding onto this crown.
 - An 'earthly' crown:
 - Labelled with the words '*Splendidam et Gravem*' or 'beautiful and impressive', and '*Vanitas*', or 'Vanity'. It lies on the floor, discarded.
- A Bible:
 - This is open on the table, facing Charles, and is labelled '*IN VERBO TUO SPES MEA*' or 'My hope in your word'.
 - A piece of paper lies in front of the Bible and is labelled '*Christi Tracto*', or 'Treat with Christ'.

Document 6: Charles' Last Words

Charles I ***King Charls his speech made upon the scaffold...*** London : printed by Peter Cole 1649.
Routh 47.H.39

Pamphlets like this were printed in great numbers following Charles I's execution - this was how

many people found out about major events. They would read these aloud to others, share them around and talk about their contents at church, down at the market or in the pub.

People about to be executed were usually allowed to make a speech defending themselves, so Charles I took the chance to present himself as a good Christian king and 'Martyr of the People', giving up his life so the true type of Christian worship could continue. This pamphlet gives his speech in full, as well as the details of his execution.

This pamphlet goes into great detail about Charles I's execution, printing out his speech in full and detailing what happened afterwards. He instructed the executioner how exactly to proceed, mainly to allow Charles to silently pray before giving a signal for his head to be removed.

This served Charles I's interests perfectly. He specifically prepared a speech to be delivered to an assembled crowd, but found the scaffold surrounded by so many soldiers that people wouldn't have been able to hear him. Usefully however, there was a small group of scribes to hand to scribble down what he said and how he acted.

This extract is quite well known, as it sums up Charles I's world view when it came to democracy. As far as he was concerned, the king was chosen by God to run the country. To do this, he would choose his ministers and run the government in a way that was supposed to benefit everyone. Ordinary people had a simple job – pay their taxes when asked, follow the rules and be quiet.