



THE GROUNDPLAT OF  
KINGS LYNN

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- 1 S. Margarets Church
- 2 S. Nicholas Church
- 3 All Saints Church
- 4 White Friars
- 5 S. Anne
- 6 South Lynn Church
- 7 S. James Church
- 8 S. Georges Church
- 9 The Town Hall
- 10 East Gate
- 11 South Gate
- 12 Luders Mount
- 13 Almes House
- 14 The Green
- 15 Twaunders Market place
- 16 S. Shambles
- 17 The Glass house
- 18 Corn mill
- 19 An Dyle mill
- 20 Birkle end
- 21 Fish ponds
- 22 Kings Shambles
- 23 Coblyn Shambles
- 24 Pavment Bridge
- 25 S. New street
- 26 Gray Friars
- 27 Augustines Friars
- 28 Black Friars
- 29 North Ferry
- 30 South Ferry



PICTURE. © KINGS LYNN MUSEUM



**ABOVE:** (from left to right) Andrew Flindall, David Flintham, Nick Coneybear and Peter Jackson are members of King's Lynn under Siege, who are researching the fortifications constructed in the town during the English Civil War.

# The conflict that forever changed King's Lynn

*Seized by Royalists, recaptured by Parliamentarians and transformed into East Anglia's strongest fortress – the fascinating story of the siege of King's Lynn*

**A**ugust this year marked the 380th anniversary of the siege of King's Lynn, a significant yet often overlooked event in the English Civil War. This extraordinary chapter in Norfolk history not only saw the town become one of national importance, it also shaped its future and influenced the wider conflict itself.

"Whilst British battles tended to be short affairs that usually lasted for just a few hours, sieges could go on for days, weeks and even months," says military historian David Flintham, a co-founder of the archeological research project

King's Lynn under Siege (KLuS). "They were the most prominent type of action during the so called 'English' Civil Wars, (a series of intertwined conflicts which started in Scotland in 1639 and ended in Ireland some 14 years later). There were eight sieges for every major battle in England and, as a result of our research, I can confidently say the siege of King's Lynn was one of the most significant of all."

When fighting commenced between the Royalists and Parliamentarians in 1642, King's Lynn's strategic value was recognised by both sides. The town was still a significant port and munitions

could be dispersed to nine different counties via its vast river network. It was also crucial for the transportation of goods to and from London, as well as Europe.

Contrary to popular belief, East Anglia was not solely behind Parliament following the outbreak of the war. Rising concerns about King's Lynn's loyalties meant that Oliver Cromwell was sent there in March 1643 to investigate rumours of a Royalist conspiracy. Just five months later, on 13th August, Sir Hamon L'Estrange of Hunstanton seized control of the town for Charles I. Local MPs were arrested



**ABOVE:** Excavations exploring the remains of Lynn's Civil War defences took place in July 2022, with enthusiasm undimmed by the 40°C heatwave (left) Soil samples being examined at a dig in July 2023 (right) David Flintham with the presenters of the Great British Dig during their excavation in September 2021



(although they subsequently escaped by boat) and King's Lynn became the only openly Royalist town in East Anglia.

Due to its significance as a logistical hub, Parliament's efforts to recapture the town were unsurprisingly swift. The Earl of Manchester (a major-general of the Parliamentary forces in the Eastern Counties) soon arrived and assembled an army, probably numbering an eventual 8,000 men, outside King's Lynn. He established a headquarters in the nearby village of Setchey, set up a battery on the other side of the Great Ouse in West Lynn and laid siege to the town on 28th August 1643. King's Lynn was bombarded and blockaded from both land and sea during an intense three-week attack, with the boom of cannons terrifying townsfolk. Records reveal that a cannon ball fired from across the river smashed through the west window of St Margaret's Church (now King's Lynn Minster) during a service on 3rd September, causing the congregation to flee in panic.

The Parliamentarians closed in on the town as tensions escalated, blocking off its eastern and southern approaches and cutting off its fresh water supply. Residents were ordered to admit defeat or face the forcible entry of Manchester's merciless army and King's Lynn eventually surrendered on 15th September 1643.

With control re-established, Parliamentarians were determined not

to lose their prize and immediately set to work updating the town's defences. Local physician and mathematician Richard Clampe was tasked with designing the new fortifications, drawing inspiration from the latest continental methods and techniques.

"A traditional Civil War fortification was no more advanced than a simple earth rampart fronted by a ditch, but Clampe planned something very different for King's Lynn," says David. "His state-of-the-art design utilised the principle of defence in depth, employing multiple layers of

moats, ditches, ramparts and bastions. These defences surpassed those of all other British towns in the period, transforming Lynn into the strongest fortress in East Anglia and quite possibly the most sophisticated fortified place in England."

Due to the town's strategic value and the elaborate constructions that resulted from its capture, the siege of King's Lynn is crucial to the study of 17th century fortress warfare. Set up as a long-term archaeological research project involving professionals, academics, students and the local community, King's Lynn Under Siege aims to unlock the town's fascinating Civil War past. Since its formation in January 2018, the project has raised the profile of Lynn's importance during the conflict by uncovering details of the siege itself and the revolutionary refortification that followed.

"King's Lynn holds a wonderful history and I'm glad we've taken the opportunity to explore this astounding part of its past," says David. "KLuS has made excellent progress so far, having investigated various sites around the town, published detailed research, and organised several excavations. The first of these was filmed by Channel 4's The Great British Dig in 2021 and unearthed finds of 'national importance'. We plan to have another full season of digging in summer 2024 and look forward to discovering more."

For updates on the King's Lynn defences and further details on the siege itself, please visit the project website [www.vauban.co.uk/kings-lynn-under-siege](http://www.vauban.co.uk/kings-lynn-under-siege). For more fascinating features on local history please visit [www.klmagazine.co.uk](http://www.klmagazine.co.uk)



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