

A raid on West Wycombe during the English Civil War June 25th 1643

During the first English Civil War, King Charles had his headquarters in Oxford, while the Parliamentarians' base was London. In 1643 the Parliamentary side held the Chilterns, and as far forward as Thame. In June Colonel John Urry defected from the Parliamentarians and rode into Oxford, giving away the positions of the Parliamentary troops, and told them that there was a supply convoy of waggons coming from London to pay all the Parliament troops, carrying £21,000.

On 17th June the Royalist cavalry commander launched a raid out of Oxford to try to capture this valuable convoy, with 1,500 mounted troops and 500 infantry. They travelled 7 miles south-east to cross the Thame at Chiselhampton at 9pm, then another 13 miles through the night to arrive at Chinnor by 5am. In the fight at Chinnor they killed 50 soldiers and took 150 prisoners, but could not find the wages convoy. They retreated south-west but were held up by their booty and prisoners, and the Parliamentary army including many officers were gathering from various spots, so they made a stand north of Chalgrove. The Royalists won the Battle of Chalgrove, killing a lot of the Parliament officers including John Hampden and taking another 80 prisoners. They made it back to Oxford by 3pm.

<https://www.britishbattles.com/english-civil-war/battle-of-chalgrove/>

<https://astonrowant.wordpress.com/battle-of-chalgrove-1643/>

The Parliament army was obviously shaken up by these losses, so a week later on 25th June the traitor Colonel Urry led a deeper raid into Parliament territory to West Wycombe. (In this century these raids were called "Beating-up"). Some Parliament soldiers had been newly recruited from Kent and Suffolk, 500 of these men and a troop of horse were based in West Wycombe, so Urry thought these raw inexperienced troops would be easily beaten.

Colonel Urry had 240 cavalry; he set out from Abingdon at 7pm and got to West Wycombe at 3am, approx. 26 miles. We don't know the exact way they came, but they probably came down the route of the A40 from Stokenchurch, or maybe even via Turville and Fingest, down the Chipps Hill Road and onto the A40 route right past the site of Piddington.

The Royalist report says they found a gate across the road chained up at the entrance to West Wycombe, "but the sentinel that kept guard was forced to

open it. There were not so many enemy soldiers as expected, just one troop of horsemen and some straggling soldiers who were to recrew other companies. “

“Most of these having the alarm, were slipt out of their beds into the woods and other lurking places. Some naked, others without breeches, doublets, shoes or stockings, as their several fears had hastened them. ‘Tis a terrible thing in the world to have an enemy fall into one’s quarters by night. The men glad to have their own lives left their clothes, money, horses, arms and all their baggage. So that some 80 horses and more with their saddles, carbines and pistols were taken. There were no more than 2 killed, and 20 prisoners were taken although some escaped. The King’s party turned for home, (presumably back up the route of the A40), passed within a mile and half of some enemy units but got back to their own quarters by 2pm.”

From : Colonel Sir John Urries’ expedition to West Wickam, June 25 1643. (spelling updated). This is a supplement to :

His Highness Prince Rupert’s Late Beating Up the Rebel Quarters at Post-combe and Chinnor in Oxfordshire, and his Victory in Chalgrove Field on Sunday morning June 18 1643.