

A GANG OF FIVE

A talk on the Civil War by Peter Garner

The East Meon History Group would like to thank Peter Garner for giving a fascinating talk in the Village Hall on 17th February. The talk centred on the roles played by a so called 'gang' of five individuals in the English Civil War . John Hampden, William Lenthall , Arthur Goodwin, Simon Mayne and Sir Richard Ingoldsby had two things in common from which Peter's description of them as a 'gang' derives. They supported and mostly bore arms for Parliament against their King and were pupils at the same school. Interestingly they were also lawyers.

The school was Lord William's Grammar School in Thame, Oxfordshire. Peter is also a former pupil at the School , named after Baron John Williams of Thame, who left a sizeable bequest for its foundation in the sixteenth century. The Baron lived in turbulent times and was a veritable political and religious survivor . A kinsman of Thomas Cromwell, he financially benefitted from the dissolution of the Monasteries and prospered and held senior positions under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I and briefly Elizabeth I . He was a social conservative and , notwithstanding his support for the Reformation, during bloody Mary's reign he was charged with arresting Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley ('*the Oxford Martyrs*') and also attended their execution by burning. His bequest for the School stipulated that pupils should "*pray his sinful soul through purgatory* ". Peter informs us that this practice had lapsed by the time he attended the school.

Unlike the Baron, the 'gang of five' had more settled political allegiances. John Hampden and William Lenthall played important roles in the political conflict between Parliament and Charles I in the 1640's which led to the outbreak of Civil War in 1642. John Hampden is considered by historians to be one of the key political and intellectual figures who led Parliamentary opposition to the King's policies prior to the outbreak of the Civil War . He died of his wounds fighting for Parliament in 1643 . He is commemorated by a statue in the Houses of Parliament and his name lives on in many public buildings including the home of Scottish Football, Hampden Park.

William Lenthall was Speaker of the House of Commons . When Charles I entered the Chamber of the House of Commons with armed support in 1642 in an attempt to seize five members he accused of treason, including John Hampden , Lenthall famously refused the King's command to identify them:

"I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak but as this House is pleased to direct me whose servant I am here ..."

Charles I sought to identify them himself instead and lamenting : "*I see my birds have flown*" , stormed out of the Chamber . The event is commemorated at the

State opening of Parliament each year when the doors of the Commons Chamber are slammed in the face of Black Rod, the Monarch's messenger, symbolising the rights of Parliament and its independence from the Monarch. Lenthall survived the Civil War and remained as Speaker until the restoration of Charles II.

The third of the five, Arthur Goodwin, served as a distinguished Parliamentary soldier in the early part of the war and died of 'camp fever', possibly cholera, in 1643. The final two members of the gang, Simon Mayne and Sir Richard Ingoldsby, served in the Parliamentary forces but are best remembered for being two of the 59 commissioners (judges) appointed to try the King and who as Regicides signed the King's death warrant. Following the death of Cromwell and the restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II, their fates were very different. Mayne was sentenced to death but died before the sentence could be carried out. Sir Richard, who had somehow managed to avoid attending the King's trial, escaped execution as a Regicide by arguing he had been forced to sign the King's death warrant by Cromwell. Peter reflected that Sir Richard's prowess for survival was very like that of the founder of his former School, Baron Williams. But perhaps the same and more could be said of William Lenthall - who deftly avoided a king's command and was not party to signing any death warrant.

Peter's compelling footnote to his talk is that the political and religious conflicts of the Civil War ultimately resulted in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Bill of Rights which are the basis of our current Constitutional settlement. It is hard to disagree with him.