

= Siege of Lyme Regis =

The siege of Lyme Regis was an eight @-@ week blockade during the First English Civil War . The port of Lyme Regis , in Dorset , was considered to be of strategic importance because it controlled the main shipping route between Bristol and the English Channel . Thomas Ceeley and Robert Blake commanded the town 's Parliamentary defences during the siege , which was laid by Prince Maurice between 20 April and 16 June 1644 .

At the start of the war , Lyme Regis was claimed by a pair of local members of parliament , and garrisoned for the Parliamentarians . King Charles I ordered the capture of the town in early 1644 , and sent his nephew , Maurice , with 5 @,@ 000 troops . The siege was laid on 20 April , but despite a steady bombardment , and three attempts to storm the town by ground , the earthen defences of the town that had been established by Blake held fast . Lyme Regis was regularly re @-@ provisioned and reinforced by sea , weakening the effectiveness of the siege , and on 14 June , Maurice withdrew from the siege in the face of a relieving army led by Robert Devereux , 3rd Earl of Essex .

= = Background = =

In the late 16th century , Lyme Regis was an important port , busier than Liverpool and one of the main links between England and mainland Europe . The combination of strong Puritan beliefs , and demands from King Charles I for ship money meant that upon the outbreak of the First English Civil War , the town was sympathetic to the Parliamentary cause . Two local members of parliament (MP) , Thomas Trenchard and Walter Erle claimed Lyme Regis for the Parliamentarians in 1642 , and set about fortifying the town . Thomas Ceeley , another local MP , was assigned as governor of the town and its forces . He immediately set about removing those with Royalist loyalties from the area , and sent harrying forces around the region , as far as Exeter and Somerset . Lyme Regis had no permanent fortifications , and so Robert Blake established a set of earthen walls , ditches and forts around the perimeter of the town .

By the end of 1643 , most of the south @-@ west was under Royalist control ; only Plymouth , Poole and Lyme Regis held out against them . The Parliamentarians controlled the navy , and Lyme Regis was strategically important , due to its location between Bristol and the English Channel . In early 1644 , Charles I ordered Lyme Regis to be captured , and sent a large force under the command of his nephew , Prince Maurice .

= = Siege = =

Maurice marched towards Lyme Regis in March 1644 , and initially set up a garrison in the town of Beaminster . From there a detachment of troops captured and then razed Stedcombe House , a property of Erle 's that he had garrisoned . On 19 April , a fire devastated Beaminster and forced the Royalist troops to move , establishing their new quarters at Axminster . The following day , Maurice marched his army of around 4 @,@ 000 men to around 0 @.@ 75 miles (1 @.@ 21 km) of Lyme Regis , and then after some posturing between the opposing forces , the Royalists captured Hays House , roughly 0 @.@ 25 miles (400 m) from the town , which had been garrisoned with around thirty defenders . On the third day of the siege , the attackers set up their artillery on the west side of town , and began a bombardment , but the next day Ceeley sent a force of 190 men to attack the battery , and forced the Royalists from their position . New batteries were set up around the town , and the besieging forces continued to attack the town with their ordnance . On 28 April , Maurice ordered an advance on the town , but the attack got little further than the range of musket @-@ shot . The next day , the town was restocked with ammunition and food , and reinforced with just over a hundred men from two Parliamentary ships , the Mary Rose and the Ann Joyce .

Throughout the war , the garrisoned army was supported by the women of the town ; they aided in the building of the earthen fortifications , and then later disguised themselves as men during the siege to make it appear that the town was held by more troops than it really was . They also ran

ammunition around the town and helped to reload the weapons . Their efforts drew comparisons to Joan of Arc , and an essay was written by James Strong detailing their achievements , entitled " Joanereidos , or Feminine Valour emimently discovered in West County Women , at the Siege of Lyme , 1644 . "

Over the following week , the Royalist forces held the siege , but did not engage with the town again until 6 May , when they attacked the town in three places during a thick fog . The defenders were caught out slightly , as many of their soldiers were eating their evening supper . The Parliamentarians rallied quickly , and within an hour had repelled the attack . An account kept by the Lyme Regis garrison records that around one hundred of the besieging army had been killed , while the garrison had only lost one man . The following day , Maurice requested a parley so that the dead could be buried . That request was granted , in exchange for the town 's defenders being able to claim any weaponry on the battleground . Over the next week , there was little fighting between the armies , and a further seven ships arrived to aid the town , including 240 soldiers from Sir William Waller 's army , and on 15 May a further 120 men were sent by the Earl of Warwick .

The Royalists turned their attention to the harbour over the next week , placing artillery units on the cliff @-@ tops above it , and bombarding any ships within . On the morning of 22 May , such an attack sunk a barge laden with malt and peas , and was followed by a raiding party of around 50 men that evening , who attacked the harbour , setting fire to the barges that remained . During the fighting to drive them back , Captain Thomas Pyne , who had commanded the town 's cavalry , was mortally wounded . Pyne died of fever four days later , despite the attentions of a surgeon . The Earl of Warwick arrived on 23 May with eight ships and the promise of as much help as he could provide , including 400 of his seamen to help garrison the town . Pyne 's funeral was held on 27 May , and upon the firing volley from the town 's ordnance and musketeers , the besieging army signalled a second attempt to storm the town . The town came under barrage from the enemy batteries , and scaling ladders were brought against the earthen fortifications . Once again the attack was repelled by the town 's defenders , and a parley request from Maurice in the immediate aftermath was turned down for fear of treachery .

The town was further reinforced with 300 sailors the next day , before another attack on the town was launched on 29 May . A few ships had been sent as a decoy to split the Royalist forces , but only succeeded in sending a small detachment of cavalry and foot away , though they quickly returned when it was clear that the ships were not going to land . Around midday , the batteries began to heavily bombard the town , followed by a ground attack which managed to breach the fortifications . After eight hours of fighting , the Parliamentarians rebuffed the attack . Fourteen more ships arrived two days later , bringing further provisions and ammunition , and news that a relieving force would be sent to aid the town . By this stage , Maurice realised that he was unlikely to be able to capture the town , and so was determined to destroy it instead ; fires were set on 1 June and then no attacks other than light bombardments were made until 11 June , when heavier , red @-@ hot shot was fired to try and set more fires in the town .

Despite orders to lay siege to the King 's headquarters at Oxford , Robert Devereux , 3rd Earl of Essex opted to attempt to reclaim the south @-@ west for the Parliamentarians , first retaking Weymouth , and then marching towards Lyme Regis . Hearing of the fall of Weymouth , and the impending arrival of the Earl of Essex 's relieving army , Maurice abandoned his siege during the night of 14 June . The 17th @-@ century historian Edward Hyde suggested that Maurice had suffered " some loss of reputation , for having lain so long with such a strength before so vile and untenable a place , without reducing it . "

= = Aftermath = =

Maurice retreated to Exeter , while the Earl of Essex continued down into Devon and Cornwall , after sending Blake to capture Taunton . Essex 's campaign failed , suffering a total defeat at the Battle of Lostwithiel in early September 1644 . His remaining forces retreated back to Dorset , leaving only Plymouth , Lyme Regis and Taunton under Parliamentary control in the south @-@ west . The Earl of Warwick sent a letter to Parliament , detailing the hardships endured by the town

during the siege , and requesting " some speedy course will be taken for their relief " . Parliament voted to grant the town £ 1 @, @ 000 a year and that unconditional compensation should be paid to residents who had suffered losses in the siege . Lyme maintained a garrison through the war , finally disbanding in July 1647 .