

## = Battle of Rowton Heath =

The Battle of Rowton Heath , also known as the Battle of Rowton Moor , occurred on 24 September 1645 during the English Civil War . Fought by the Parliamentarians , commanded by Sydnam Poyntz , and the Royalists under the personal command of King Charles I , it was a significant defeat for the Royalists , with heavy losses and Charles prevented from relieving the Siege of Chester .

Prior to the battle , Charles had been attempting to link up with the Marquess of Montrose in Scotland following the Royalist defeat in the Battle of Naseby . Although his attempts to do so were unsuccessful , they were disruptive enough that the Committee of Both Kingdoms ordered Sydnam Poyntz to pursue the King with approximately 3 @, @ 000 horse . After Charles was informed that Chester , his only remaining port , was under siege , he marched there with the intent of relieving the defenders , ordering 3 @, @ 000 horse under the command of Marmaduke Langdale to camp outside the city while he and 600 others travelled into Chester itself on 23 September 1645 . The intent was to attack the besieging Parliamentarians from both sides , Charles mistakenly believing that Poyntz had failed to follow them . In fact he was barely 15 miles ( 24 km ) behind , and moved to attack Langdale 's force in the early hours of 24 September . Although Langdale drove Poyntz off , the Parliamentarians besieging Chester sent reinforcements , and Langdale was forced to retreat to Rowton Heath , closer to Chester , and wait for his own reinforcements . This force , under Charles Gerard and Lord Bernard Stewart , was prevented from joining them , and Langdale was instead attacked by both Poyntz 's force and the reinforcement . After being driven off the field and failing in an attempt to regroup at Chester itself , the Royalists retreated as dusk fell .

Royalist casualties were high , with 600 killed , including Stewart , and 900 taken prisoner . This defeat prevented Charles from relieving the defenders in Chester , which fell to the Parliamentarians on 3 February 1646 . Charles instead withdrew with approximately 2 @, @ 400 remaining cavalry , most of whom were destroyed by Poyntz 's ambush at Sherburn @-@ in @-@ Elmet on 15 October 1645 .

## = = Background = =

Following the destruction of King Charles I 's main army at the Battle of Naseby on 14 June 1645 , the First English Civil War tilted decisively in favour of the Parliamentarians . Charles withdrew with his remaining forces to Raglan Castle in Wales , hoping to recruit new soldiers there and travel across the Bristol Channel to link up with George Goring , the only remaining Royalist commander of a significant force . The defeat of Goring at the Battle of Langport on 10 July , along with the subsequent " disintegration " of the new troops in South Wales , led to Charles abandoning this plan . Despite this and the loss of much of Northern England following the Battle of Marston Moor , Charles still had large numbers of soldiers in the West of England , and one of his supporters , the Marquess of Montrose , was winning a string of victories across Scotland .

The Royalist force attempted to join up with Montrose in Scotland . In early August , Charles took 2 @, @ 500 soldiers and marched north , being forced to turn back at Doncaster due to the advance of David Leslie and 4 @, @ 000 cavalry . Charles 's troops then made a raid into the Eastern Association , getting as far as Huntington and forcing the Parliamentarians besieging Hereford to withdraw . In response , the Committee of Both Kingdoms ordered Sydnam Poyntz to pursue the King . Evading Poyntz 's forces , Charles again marched north on 18 September , taking 3 @, @ 500 cavalry under William Vaughan and Lord Charles Gerrard as far as the River Wye at Presteigne . At this point , a messenger arrived to inform Charles that " part of the outworks of Chester were betrayed to the enemy " , forcing him to change his plans and march towards Chester .

Chester had come under siege during December 1644 , with a loose blockade or " leager " formed around the town . With Bristol now fallen to the Parliamentarians , Chester was the last port under Royalist control , and crucial due to its links with recruiting efforts in Ireland and North Wales . On 20 September 1645 , a force of 500 horse , 200 dragoons and 700 foot under the command of Michael Jones attacked the Royalist barricades , and with the defenders completely taken by surprise , they

fell back to the inner city . On 22 September , Parliamentary artillery began bombarding the city , and after breaching the walls ( and having a summons to surrender refused by the defenders ) , the Parliamentarians attacked in two places . Both were repulsed , in one case due to the defenders counter @-@ attacking on foot , and in the other due to the inadequate length of the attacker 's scaling ladders preventing them from climbing the wall . Despite this success , the attacking Parliamentary forces grew in strength while the defenders were weary ; as such , the arrival of Charles and his force on 23 September was met with delight .

= = Battle = =

Charles 's force consisted of 3 @,@ 500 horse , organised into four brigades , the largest grouping being the 1 @,@ 200 soldiers of the Northern Horse under Sir Marmaduke Langdale . In addition , there was Gerard 's brigade , consisting of 800 men who had served under him in South Wales , Sir William Vaughan 's 1 @,@ 000 @-@ strong brigade , and the 200 members of the Life Guards , Charles 's personal bodyguard , under Lord Bernard Stewart . Although experienced , the troops were depleted in number , and had low morale due to the recent string of defeats . Charles and Gerard evaded the loose Parliamentary siege around the city , taking 600 men into Chester , while the approximately 3 @,@ 000 remaining cavalry under Langdale crossed the River Dee at Holt and bivouacked at Hatton Heath , five miles to the south of Chester itself . The plan was to trap the besiegers between the two forces , destroying them or forcing them to retreat ; as they numbered only 500 cavalry and 1 @,@ 500 foot , this was considered to be relatively simple .

The Royalist plan failed to take into account Poyntz and his 3 @,@ 000 cavalry ; evidently , they assumed he had lost track of them . This assumption was mistaken , and as Charles entered Chester , Poyntz 's soldiers arrived in Whitchurch , approximately 15 miles from Chester . After hearing about the situation , Poyntz promised to advance in the morning " with a considerable body of horse " , which encouraged the Parliamentarians around Chester to continue resisting . One of his messengers was intercepted by Sir Richard Lloyd , however , who immediately sent a message to Charles and Langdale . After a brief Council of War , they resolved that Gerard 's force and the Lifeguards , along with 500 foot , would advance to either join with Langdale or prevent Colonel Jones 's forces linking up with Poyntz . Charles would remain in Chester , and watch the ensuing battle from a tower in Chester 's defences , later known as King Charles ' Tower .

= = = Hatton Heath = = =

Langdale advanced northwards with 3 @,@ 000 cavalry , and at Miller 's Heath on the morning of 24 September he became aware of Poyntz 's force of 3 @,@ 000 also moving north . Miller 's Heath was mainly made up of unenclosed heath , traversed by the Whitchurch @-@ Chester Road , which was surrounded by hedges . Langdale lined the hedgerows with dragoons and dismounted troopers with carbines , and due to the inaccuracy of Parliamentary reconnaissance , Poyntz was unaware of Langdale 's presence until the dragoons opened fire on his vanguard at approximately 7 : 00 am .

As a result of Poyntz 's lack of preparation , his force was strung out in a column ; because of the boggy ground , they could not easily dismount . In addition , Poyntz had underestimated the strength of the Royalists and tried attacking with those troops immediately available , assuming they would be sufficient to charge and destroy the enemy . In this Poyntz was mistaken . Due to the entanglement of the vanguard with Royalist troops , it was unable to make any significant progress , and it took approximately half an hour of close @-@ quarters fighting in the mouth of the Whitchurch @-@ Chester Road to force the Royalists back . As the Parliamentarians deployed onto the open ground to pursue the Royalists , they were set on by a fresh group of troops and forced to repeat , and with no reinforcements available , Poyntz retreated . On the Parliamentary side , this skirmish led to the deaths of 20 soldiers , with a number of wounded and between 50 and 60 prisoners .

The Royalists , while losing fewer soldiers , were now in a precarious position , since reinforcements from Chester were needed to follow up on the success and defeat Poyntz 's force . As such , Langdale sent Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Shakerley to report to Charles , requesting

reinforcements . Shakerley arrived in Chester and delivered his message after 15 minutes , but no orders were issued for a further six hours after that . Barratt speculates that one reason could have been the fatigue of the Royalist troops , and another the rivalries amongst the Royalist commanders : Gerard and Digby opposed each other , with other commanders disliking Langdale ; and Charles not being strong enough to stop the disputes . The Parliamentarians , however , did send support : at approximately 2 : 00 pm , the Chester forces dispatched 350 horse and 400 musketeers under Colonels Michael Jones and John Booth to reinforce Poyntz .

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The Royalists in Chester saw the Parliamentary reinforcements under Jones and Booth advance , and sent Shakerley to warn Langdale 's force . After receiving the message , Langdale withdrew nearer to Chester , reforming at Rowton Heath , an entirely open space . At the same time the Royalists in Chester began to move , with Gerard advancing with 500 foot and 500 cavalry . Gerard hoped to attack Jones 's force from the rear , but the Parliamentarians responded by dispatching 200 cavalry and 200 infantry to prevent this . With a shorter distance to travel , this force met Gerard on Hoole Heath , and after a confused engagement in which Lord Bernard Stewart was slain , Gerard 's force was prevented from marching to Langdale 's aid . Instead , Jones and Booth linked up with Poyntz , giving a combined Parliamentary force of 3 @, @ 000 horse and 500 musketeers against a tired Royalist army of approximately 2 @, @ 500 horse . At approximately 4 : 00 pm Poyntz advanced , covered by the musketeers firing a full volley .

Despite Langdale 's attempt to counter @-@ charge , the Royalists were soon outflanked . With the Parliamentary musketeers firing into the rear of Langdale 's force , the Royalists broke , some escaping via Holt Bridge and others running towards Chester . On Hoole Heath these retreating soldiers met with part of Gerard 's force and made an initially successful counter @-@ attack before being forced back to the walls of Chester . There the retreating cavalry choked up the streets , allowing the Parliamentary musketeers to fire into the confused mass of horsemen and leading to a rout .

= = Aftermath = =

Rowton Heath has been called " a major disaster " for Charles , with casualties estimated at 600 dead and 900 injured , including 50 members of the Life Guard and Lord Bernard . Parliamentary losses were also heavy , although unknown , and the battle did give Chester some respite . Despite this , Charles withdrew the next day with the remaining 2 @, @ 400 horse , heading to Denbigh Castle before moving on to Newark @-@ on @-@ Trent . With this retreat , Chester was left without additional support , and surrendered to the Parliamentarians on 3 February 1646 . The remaining Royalist cavalry were eventually destroyed in their entirety when Poyntz ambushed them at Sherburn @-@ in @-@ Elmet on 15 October 1645 .