

History of siege of lathom house

[Countries](#), [England](#)



As one of England's largest and most strategically important counties Lancashire was the scene of much conflict during the English Civil War. The Royalist stronghold of Lathom House at Lathom close to Ormskirk endured a torrid siege from February to May 1644, but was stoutly defended by its small garrison under the determined leadership of its mistress, Lady Charlotte de Tremouille. The siege occurred during the latter stages of the war, when the Royalists were on the cusp of defeat and Lathom House was their last remaining stronghold in Lancashire.

Seat of the Stanley Family

Lathom was the seat of the powerful Stanley family, who were ardent royalists. The siege occurred after James Stanley, Lady Charlotte's husband and Earl of Derby, was sent to the Isle of Man by Charles I to fortify against a potential Scottish invasion. The house was left in the care of Lady Charlotte, who for the sake of her absent husband's honour was determined to hold Lathom and refused Parliament's demands that she surrender the place. Parliament lost patience and dispatched Sir Thomas Fairfax, one of the principal and best Roundhead generals, to take or destroy Lathom House.

Demands that the Countess surrender

When Fairfax arrived in February he demanded that the Countess surrender. Lady Charlotte asked for a week to consider it and invited him as a guest to conduct negotiations. This was all a ruse to buy time to improve Lathom House's defences, for the Countess and her household scornfully rejected Fairfax's terms and refused to listen to the emissary he sent to try and re-open negotiations.

Lady Charlotte sent a message to Fairfax boldly stating that though ' a woman and a stranger, divorced from her friends and robbed of her estate, she was ready to receive their utmost violence, trusting in God for protection and deliverance'. Faced with such defiance, Fairfax had no choice but to order the siege to begin, and was confident enough of the outcome to leave the conduct of it to his brother, William.

The Fortifications of Lathom House

Lathom was encircled by a wide moat and stout palisade and within these stood a thick curtain wall with nine towers. Each tower was mounted with six cannons and there was a strongly fortified gatehouse, all providing the garrison with excellent views of the enemy positions. To make best advantage of this Lady Charlotte placed her absent husband's finest huntsmen on the towers with orders to pick off Roundhead officers with their fowling-pieces.

Failure of Roundhead Artillery

Soon the Roundhead artillery began to pound the walls, but they stood up remarkably well and the garrison managed to disrupt the barrage by sallying out from the castle to attack Roundhead firing positions. One particularly destructive sally occurred on Tuesday March 10 when a troop of Royalists slew thirty Roundheads and captured forty arms, one drum and six prisoners that they dragged back with them. Many more Roundhead artillery pieces were captured or spiked in further sallies and the besiegers suffered more torment as Lady Charlotte's snipers wreaked havoc among them.

Despite his lack of success William Fairfax remained firm in insisting that Lady Charlotte should surrender the house, sending messengers to this effect that were turned away with her disdainful words ringing in their ears. By the end of March Fairfax had had enough of Lathom House and its formidable mistress and departed, leaving the siege to Colonel Rigby. Rigby sent a messenger offering honourable terms of surrender to Lady Charlotte, who as usual refused and ordered the messenger to depart or be hanged at the gate as a rebel.

Rigby redoubled the attempt to reduce the walls, pounding them with a barrage of six cannon loaded with chain-shot and a heavy mortar loaded with stones thirteen inches in diameter and weighing eighty pounds, but to little effect. By late April the colonel's patience had worn thin, and after yet another Royalist sortie had caused great damage and slaughter he decided to rally his men by holding a day of fasting and prayer.

The Relief of Lathom House

On the night of May 27th word came of the approach of a Royalist relief force led by Prince Rupert, with thousands of infantry and cavalry. The outnumbered Roundheads were forced to lift the siege and withdraw, having lost five hundred men and suffered another one hundred and forty wounded. In contrast the Royalist garrison had lost only six men. Rigby retreated to Bolton and Lady Charlotte departed Lathom House to join her husband on the Isle of Man.

The relief of Lathom House was one of the last Royalist successes of the war, and over a year later in June 1645 the Royalist cause was effectively crushed

at the Battle of Naseby. In December of that year Lathom House was attacked again by Parliamentary forces, and this time the ancient seat of the Stanleys was stormed and destroyed.