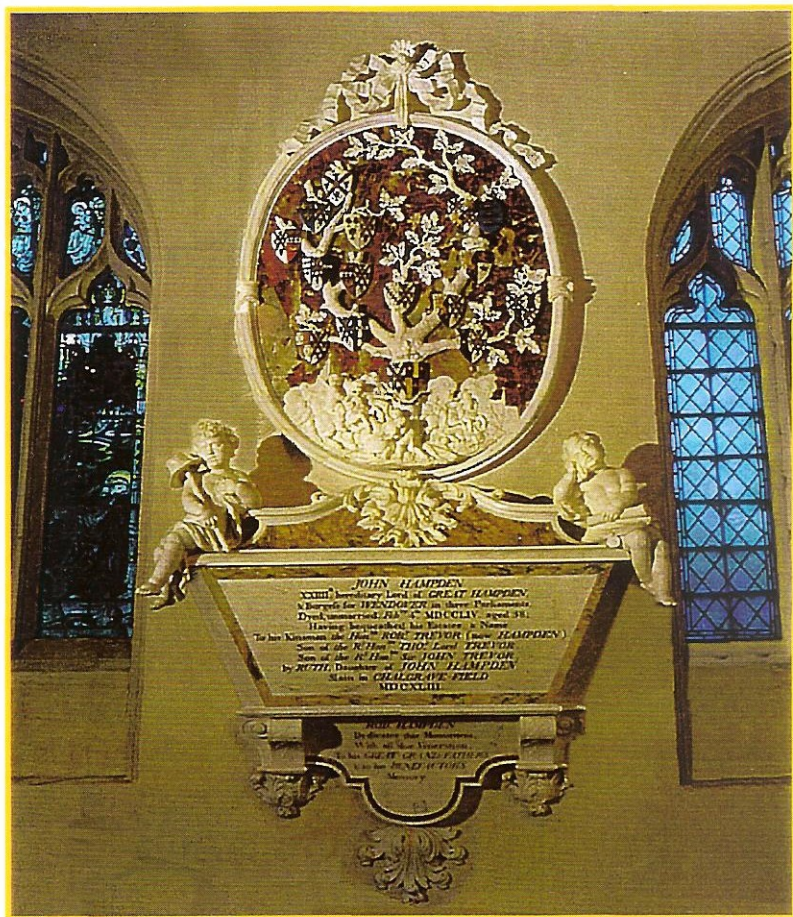


THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH



BY
DEREK LESTER & GILL BLACKSHAW

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

PUBLISHED IN 2000 BY
CHALGROVE BATTLE GROUP,
OXFORDSHIRE.

© 2000 DEREK LESTER & GILL BLACKSHAW

FIRST PRINTED IN 2000 BY
PARCHMENT (OXFORD) LTD.
CRESCENT ROAD, COWLEY,
OXFORD. OX4 2PB.

ISBN 0-9538034-0-6

COVER

MONUMENT TO THE HAMPDEN FAMILY IN THE
CHANCEL OF GREAT HAMPDEN CHURCH.

**THE
CONTROVERSY
OF
JOHN
HAMPDEN'S
DEATH**

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the 19th Century there has been a furious debate as to how John Hampden received his fatal wound at Chalgrove Field in 1643. Did he suffer a shoulder wound inflicted by a Cavalier's pistol in the heat of battle, or did his weapon explode and shatter his hand? This book sets forth the evidence for both scenarios and a conclusion has been drawn from the wide research undertaken.

17th CENTURY EVIDENCE

John Hampden received his fatal wound at the Battle of Chalgrove Field on the 18th June 1643 at around 9.30 in the morning,¹ but the way in which he met his death has, since 1720, been in dispute. It is related from contemporary accounts that Hampden with help from friends, and in great pain, made his way back to Thame after the fateful wounding. Those people in the hamlets and villages on the route back to his quarters were witness to this terrible tragedy. So were those that bowed their head at the sad sight of the famous John Hampden draped over his horse, coming slowly up what is now Southern Road and into the bustling main street of Thame. In great pain he struggled to make the last few yards to the Greyhound Inn.

The witnesses to this desperate journey were numbered in their hundreds, far too many to conceal the extent of Hampden's wounds from the local populace. The terrible news spread like a highly contagious plague through all the out quarters and beyond. The Lord General, the Earl of Essex, from his headquarters in Thame, although it is not recorded, would surely have visited his injured second in command. So too would a number of his close friends and of course the physicians. They would all have seen Hampden's injuries and been able to learn from the great man himself the details of the tragedy. John Hampden was perhaps the most notable gentleman in Thame, even ranking above the Earl in their eyes. It was this man who risked everything in his court battle against the King over the Ship Money Tax that saved the local population from the King's excesses. This and many other deeds earned their local hero the title 'Patriae Pater'.

That night the Earl had the unenviable task of writing to the House of Commons, explaining the calamity of this infamous day. In this letter he is economical with truth, never once mentioning Chalgrove by name, but neither does he tell any lies of the action that occurred before or after the battle. The letter read to the assembled gathering in the House of Commons stated that,

'Colonell Hampden put himself in Captaine Crosse his Troop, where he charged with much courage, and was unfortunately shot through the shoulder'.² By writing that Hampden had been shot in the shoulder when, if as alleged in the paper found by Lord Nugent,³ his injuries were caused by his pistol exploding and shattering his hand, Essex would have been deafened by the accusing cries of the witnesses. Although many common people in 1643 could not read or write themselves, sufficient numbers were able to read newspapers and pamphlets to them. The report of Hampden's injuries were, even before his death, carried in a pamphlet called the 'True Relation of a Gret Fight'⁴ and also in a Royalist newspaper 'Mercurius Aulicus'.⁵ The 'Parliament Scout',⁶ with an avid readership throughout the Lord General's army, later reiterated the facts printed in the 'True Relation',⁴ with the addition that Hampden had now died.

Sir Robert Pye, a captain of a troop of horse in the Earl's army and son-in-law to Hampden, is said to have presented a brace of pistols to him. It is one of these guns, that his servant is purported to have overloaded with supernumerary charges, which is reputed to have exploded at the start of the battle. If the Earl had knowledge of this and for whatever reason had wanted to protect Sir Robert's honour above that of Hampden's, it would have meant that the Lord General of the Parliament Army had to deliberately lie to the House of Commons in his despatches. If he had written this fabrication, he had to bear in mind that Hampden was still very much alive and expected to live. This deception, had it been written and later discovered, would have endangered Essex's own standing with Parliament. All contemporary evidence concurs that the wound was in the shoulder. The chances of the Earl of Essex concealing a lie from Hampden's Regiment, the soldiers who helped him back from the battlefield, the witnesses to his sorry plight on his trek from Chalgrove, the visitors to his death bed, the town's people and the 15,000 strong army around Thame, would have bordered on the impossible.

THE PYE PAPER

Lord Nugent's research for his biography of Hampden, 'Some Memorials of John Hampden His Party and His Times' published in 1832, brought an old anecdotal story, that had been festering in political circles and Gentlemen's magazines, into the spotlight once more. The article, found in the footnotes on pages 433 - 4 Vol. 2 of the biography,³ is retold in full below.

'There is a groundless story told, upon the authority of a nameless paper, by Horace Walpole (1717 - 1797 Lord Orford), and by Echard (1670 - 1730), of Hampden having received a wound from the bursting of one of his own pistols. All the contemporary accounts, diurnals, letters, and memoirs state the death as I (Nugent) have given them. In the Common-Place Book of Henry James Pye (1745-1813), late poet laureate, now in the possession of his son (Henry John Pye b. 1802), the lineal descendant of Sir Robert Pye (d.1701), son-in-law to Hampden, I (Nugent) find the following entry:-

"In the St. James Chronicle for the year 1761, there is an account of the death of Mr. Hampden, different from that given by Lord Clarendon. The account is, that Sir Robert Pye, being at supper at Farringdom House with two of the Harleys (Lord Oxford's family) and one of the Foleys, related the death of Hampden as follows:-

That, at Chalgrove Field, his pistol burst, and shattered his hand in a terrible manner; that, when dying, he sent for Sir Robert Pye, his son-in-law, and told him he was in some degree accessory to his death, as he had the pistols from him. Sir Robert assured him he bought them in France of an eminent maker, and tried them himself. It appeared, on examining the other pistol, that it was loaded to the top with several supernumerary charges, owing to the negligence of his servant."

'Mr. (Henry James 1745-1813) Pye adds these words, which discredit the whole of this anonymous account':-

'My father (Henry Pye 1709-1766), on reading this account, sent to enquire of Baldwin, the printer of the paper, how he met with the anecdote, who informed him, that it was found written on a loose sheet of paper in a book that he, or some friend of his, bought out of Lord Oxford's family (the Harley's). My father always questioned the authenticity of it, as my grandfather (Henry Pye 1683 - 1749) was bred up and lived with Sir Robert Pye till he was eighteen years old, and he never mentioned any such circumstance'. (My names and dates in brackets)

Lawrence Echard was an eminent historian who wrote the 'History of England'⁷ in three volumes. He began his work in 1702, finishing in 1720. Not content with this enormous feat, he went on to write an appendix of errata. This Errata is famous for its inclusion of 'Oliver Cromwell's interview with the Devil before the Battle of Naseby witnessed and related to others by Captain Lindsay'. This story Echard acknowledged was just someone's vivid imagination. In the same vain he included what seems to be the earliest reference to the exploding pistol legend. On page 572 he writes about Hampden that, *'As his Death was a great surprise, so the manner of it was very uncommon, and generally unknown, as I am assur'd by a great man, who says his death's Wound proceeded from the Breaking of one of his Pistols, which happened to be more than doubly charg'd. This was one of a choice Case presented to him by his Son-in-law Sir Robert Pye, to carry on the War and at the first sight of him in his illness he cry'd out to him ' Ah Robin, your unhappy Present has been my ruin!'*'⁷

Robert Harley (Lord Oxford) was a high standing politician in the early 1700s, becoming Secretary of State and Speaker of the House of Commons in 1701. His politics were of a Puritan persuasion, but he held views that could be easily aired by Whig or Tory. He became a chosen advisor to Queen Anne and remained so until her death in 1714. In 1715 after the accession of George I, Robert Harley was impeached with others for high treason; spending two years in the Tower. From this time on he was a marked man, as was anyone who spoke good of him at court.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

Sir Robert Walpole, a fellow Whig, had followed Harley's career from 1710, but his leanings and character were the opposite of Harley's. Maybe it is a coincidence that Walpole stepped into Harley's shoes in 1715, becoming not just the confidante of George I, but his representative in court; de facto the first Prime Minister. Robert Walpole himself was to suffer the slight of being accused of corruption, which nearly ended his political career in 1717.

In all this political intrigue did Robert Walpole try to besmirch Harley by passing to Echard the exploding pistol story? The Harleys and the Foleys were related and both were kinsman to the great John Hampden and the Pye family. This one little anecdote would tarnish everything for which Harley stood. Walpole had the opportunity for he would have been deeply involved in the arrangements for Echard to present his 'History of England'⁷ to George I. The publication of the Errata was nearly two years after the presentation of the great work to the King and Walpole by then had become the most powerful man in England. For Echard to have omitted the tale, had it been passed to him by Walpole, would have been politically naïve on his part. Is Robert Walpole the great man that Echard alludes to in his story?

Sir Robert Pye, Lord of the Manor at Faringdon, died in 1701. His grave is described in an unattributed book 'The Pye Family of Faringdon - Historette 1613 - 1813'.⁸ "*On the north side of Faringdon church called the Pleydall aisle is a white marble slab on the floor thus inscribed with " here lies Sir Robert Pye Kt. Lord of this Manor and here also lies Dame Anne his wife daughter to the famous Mr. Hampden. He was with him in Chalgrove field. They lived together sixty years and both died 1702"*. However the gravestone now in the Pleydall Aisle laid by Sir Robert's son in 1729, omits the reference to Chalgrove field. One can only speculate why this stone was laid 28 years after his father's death.

In 1761 the story when published in the St James's Chronicle had acquired further incidental detail. Walpole (4th.Lord Orford) with his undoubted talents as a publisher, verse writer, political chronicler and author of fiction, was quite capable of supplying these embellishments.

One addition was how the servant loaded Hampden's pistols each morning without extracting the unused charge. If this had happened as described it is extremely doubtful whether the pistol would have fired, because gunpowder being hygroscopic would have picked up moisture from condensation within the barrel. The main reason for cleaning a muzzle-loading pistol each day, even when it had not been fired, was to remove moisture and rust that accumulated in the barrel, which of course required extracting the charge. If it was not removed, even after a short period, the gunpowder would become a black paste that would be impossible to light.

It had been the vogue in the 18th and 19th centuries to embroider historic events with invented details. An example of this published in 'The Gentlemen's Magazine' was Clough's narrative of Hampden's last words⁹, which enquiring minds of the time accepted without question. It seems the Pye letter became more credible by invoking Echard's and Walpole's names when republishing the article on the bursting of the pistol. Echard himself acknowledged that it was only an unauthenticated story and the St James's Chronicle article is plainly taken from Echard and embellished. The final persuasion of probity of the clipping is given by the nature of how it was accidentally found in such an eminent man's private papers.

The political capital that Nugent's adversaries made out of the stories of Hampden's accidental demise, rather than his heroic death in the midst of battle, did not rest well with Nugent. His belief in extolling the Patriot's ideals for his party to follow, stirred him into an action that many of his peers found quite repugnant.

LORD NUGENT'S RESEARCHES

Lord Nugent, the Whig MP for Aylesbury, was a social reformer and had been invoking John Hampden's name and reputation for his own political cause long before he started his biography of the Patriot. When he began his research into Hampden's life, the question of how Hampden was wounded brought to the fore the conflicting stories, causing the Pye family further embarrassment. Henry James Pye had suffered similarly in 1784 when Mark Noble wrote a biography of the Pye family¹⁰ and again in 1812 when Nugent was elected to Parliament.

Nugent's researches had come to the attention of the Earl of Buckinghamshire and he was curious to know if Nugent had asked for permission to visit Great Hampden. Dr. Grace, the Earl's steward, in a written reply¹¹ to the Earl sometime in late March 1828, informed him that he had not received any such request, but that he would write to Nugent and offer him every assistance in his investigations.

In early April 1828 Nugent was exploring the archives held at Great Hampden. Of the few items that he found of importance only an account of a portrait of John Hampden written by the Dean of Killaloe, the old pedigree of the Hampden family, and a memorandum of the Earl of Buckinghamshire's family of Sir Miles Hobart in the reign of Charles I, interested him. He also learnt while he was there that the pavement in the church was to be taken up and re-laid sometime in the summer. This information is recounted in a letter dated the 5th April 1828 to the Earl¹² from Dr. Grace. In this same communication Grace begged the Earl, on Lord Nugent's behalf, for permission to find John Hampden's grave when the floor was taken up, with the words that he (Nugent), '*..... depends on finding the grave of the Patriot and would very much like to look into the vault if he fails in finding any inscription when the floor is removed*'. How proverbial. Nugent did not find or look for John Hampden's grave in Great Hampden church during this visit in April, for he would have learnt that the Hampden family did not possess a vault; a most unusual omission for such an eminent family.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

Reference was made, in this same note, of the building of a residence for the gardener, a Mr. Robertson and his wife and the sum to be spent on it.

In a fragment of another letter to the Earl,¹³ Dr. Grace writes in excited terms '*...that he (probably Lord Nugent) has discovered the entry of the burial of John Hampden in an old register proving beyond doubt the circumstance of his being buried at Hampden.....*'. How had this item not been seen before? Parish registers were kept in the parish chest in the church and would have been available to all who were curious. It is quite clearly written in the register¹⁴ for all to see.

LOCATING THE COFFIN

On the morning of the 21st July 1828 Lord Nugent, with an entourage of Lords, gentleman, newspaper reporters, gravediggers and assistants, stood in Great Hampden church. Imagine the scene as they debated where they would find Hampden's grave. Time was not on Nugent's side. Although the chancel floor was up, the thought of shifting tons of earth to reveal all the graves until they came upon John Hampden's was not an option; the task was far too large. Where should they dig? After some discussion they elected to excavate an area situated at the foot of a memorial that hangs on the south wall of the chancel, dedicated by John Hampden in 1634 to his wife. They reasoned that this was where Hampden's wife was interred and that he would wish to be buried alongside her.

The grave diggers set to work exposing a number of coffins, watched all the while by the noble ensemble, sure in their own minds that they would find John Hampden's and his wife's coffin side by side. All the inscriptions on the coffins around the memorial were exposed in turn and examined, but none bore the famous legend. Then, with desperation setting in, they came across a coffin with the nameplate so corroded that it crumbled away on being touched. This tomb was taken to be that of the Patriot by the fact that none of the other coffins were labelled John Hampden.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH



BY KIND PERMISSION OF MR. & MRS. G. R. ANSON.

GEORGE GRENVILLE, LORD NUGENT (1789-1850)

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

So this unidentified casket in their minds, (said by one observer of the exhumation, recounted in a letter¹⁵ to the Gentleman's Magazine, to be above the communion rail), had to be the correct one. So even though they did not find Elizabeth Hampden's coffin, they still presumed that the unintelligibly inscribed casket was that containing the body of John Hampden. However an entry in Great Hampden's Church burial register¹⁴ for the 20th August 1634 records the death of Elizabeth Hampden. So she is interred somewhere in the church or churchyard, but not under her memorial. This register also records the date of John Hampden's incarceration as the 25th June 1643, but curiously it seems to have been squeezed in as though written into the book sometime after the date of burial. The entry obviously originated from the same hand as the others in the register, but maybe it was not put in until the threat from the Royalists had subsided.

THE EXHUMATION

On the 28th July 1828 'The Times' printed a report of the exhumation¹⁶ giving details of those present, a brief history of both accounts of how Hampden received his mortal wound and of course the grisly details of the disinterment as transcribed below :-

JOHN HAMPDEN.

Narrative of the disinterment of the body of John Hampden, Esq., (commonly, called the 'Patriot') in Hampden Church, Bucks, on the 21st of July, 1828, to ascertain the cause of his death; some historians supposing that he was wounded in the shoulder by a shot from the enemy at the battle of Chalgrave-field (June, 1643); others supposing that he was killed by the bursting of his own pistol, with which his son-in-law, Sir Robert Pye, had presented him.

Present on the occasion :- The Right Hon. Lord Nugent, Counsellor Denman, the Rev. Mr. Brookes, Mr. Heron, Mr. Grace (steward to the Earl of Buckinghamshire),

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

George Coventry, six other young gentlemen, with whose names I was not acquainted, 12 grave diggers and assistants, with the clerk of the parish.

The manner in which Mr. Hampden met his death had long been a disputed point in history.

Lord Clarendon, Rushworth, Ludlow, Noble, and others, severally state that at the Battle of Chalgrave-field he was mortally wounded in the shoulder by a musket - ball, that he lingered for several days, and expired in great agony.

Lord Clarendon says, that Hampden 'being shot into the shoulder with a brace of bullets, which broke the bone, with-in three weeks after died with extraordinary pain, to as great a consternation of all that party as if their whole army had been defeated or cut off.'

Sir Philip Warwick states that 'Mr. Hampden received a hurt in his shoulder, whereof he died in three - or four days after; for his blood in his temper was acrimonious, as the scurfe commonly on his face showed'. In another place he observes, 'One of the prisoners taken in the action said, that he was confident Mr. Hampden was hurt; for he saw him, contrary to his usual custom, ride off the field, before the action was finished, his head hanging down and his hands leaning upon his horse's neck.'

*What reliance can we place upon historians, when we see such contradictory statements? Lord Clarendon says, he lingered near three weeks *- Sir P. Warwick, that he died in three or four days; the former, that two bullets broke the shoulder-bone - the latter, that he was only hurt in the shoulder. But the following is the most contradictory statement of all, equally worthy of credit, perhaps more so, as it was related by Sir Robert Pye, who married Hampden's eldest daughter :-*

'Two of the Harleys, and one of the Foleys, being at supper with Sir Robert Pye, at Farrington-house, Berks., in their way to Herefordshire, Sir Robert Pye related the account of Hampden's death as follows:-

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

'That at the action of Chalgrave-field, his pistol burst, and shattered his hand in a terrible manner. He however rode off, and got to his quarters; but finding the wound mortal, he sent for Sir Robert Pye, then a colonel in the Parliament army, and who had married his eldest daughter, and told him, that he looked on him as in some degree accessory to his death, as the pistols were a present from him. Sir Robert assured him, that he brought them in Paris, of an eminent maker, and had proved them himself. It appeared, on examining the other pistol, that it was loaded to the muzzle with several supernumerary charges, owing to the carelessness of a servant, who was ordered to see the pistols were loaded every morning, which he did without drawing the former charge.' - From Lord Oxford's papers.

In order to ascertain the real facts, application was made by Lord Nugent to the Earl of Buckinghamshire, (to whom the family estates have descended,) that the coffin might be opened, and the body carefully examined.

The Earl, after due consideration, granted the request, which was confirmed by the rector, who politely tendered his assistance to further the inquiry.

It is remarkable, that so distinguished and opulent a family as that of Hampden should never have possessed a private vault for the interment of the respective branches of the family:- such, however, is not the case; they have, from a very early period, been buried in the chancel of the church, about four feet deep.

On the morning of the 21st July we all assembled in the church, and commenced the operation of opening the ground.

After examining the initials and dates on several leaden coffins, we came to the one in question, the plate of which was so corroded, that it crumbled and broke into small pieces on touching it. It was therefore impossible to ascertain the name of the individual that it contained.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

The coffin had originally been enclosed in wood, covered with velvet, a small portion only of which was apparent, near the bottom at the left side, which was not the case with those of a later date, where the initials were distinct, and the lead more perfect and fresher in appearance. The register stated, that Hampden was interred on the 25th June, 1643, and an old document, still in existence, gives a curious and full account of the grand procession on the occasion; we were, therefore, pretty confident that this must be the one in question, having carefully examined all the others in succession.

It was lying under the western window, near the tablet erected by him, when living, to the memory of his beloved wife, whose virtues he extols in the most affectionate language. Without positive proof, it was reasonable to suppose that he would be interred near his adored partner, and this being found at her feet, it was unanimously agreed that the lid should be cut open to ascertain the fact, which proved afterwards that we were not mistaken.

The parish plumber descended, and commenced cutting across the coffin, then longitudinally, until the whole was sufficiently loosened to roll back, in order to lift off the wooden lid beneath, which was found in such good preservation, that it came off nearly entire. Beneath this was another lid of the same material, which was raised without materially giving way.

The coffin had originally been filled up with sawdust, which was found undisturbed, except the centre, where the abdomen had fallen in. The sawdust was then removed, and the process of examination commenced. Silence reigned. Not a whisper or breath was heard. Each stood on the tiptoe of expectation, awaiting the result as to what appearance the face would present when divested of its covering.

Lord Nugent descended into the grave, and first removed the outer cloth, which was firmly wrapped around the body - then the second, and a third - such care having been extended to preserve the body from the worm of corruption.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

Here a very singular scene presented itself. No regular features were apparent, although the face retain a death-like whiteness, and showed the various windings of the blood vessels beneath the skin. The upper row of teeth were perfect, and those that remained in the under jaw, on being taken out and examined, were quite sound.

A little beard remained on the lower part of the chin, and the whiskers were strong, and somewhat lighter than his hair, which was a full auburn brown. The upper part of the bridge of the nose still remained elevated, the remainder had given way to the pressure of the cloths, which had been firmly bound round the head. The eyes were but slightly sunk in, and were covered with the same white film which characterised the general appearance of the face.

Finding that a difference of opinion existed as to the indentation in the left shoulder, where it was supposed he had been wounded, it was unanimously agreed upon to raise up the coffin altogether, and place it in the centre of the church, where a more accurate examination might take place.

The coffin was extremely heavy, but by elevating one end with a crow-bar, two strong ropes were adjusted under either end, and thus drawn up by 12 men in the most careful manner possible.

Being placed on a trestle, the first operation was to examine the arms, which nearly retained their original size, and presented a very muscular appearance.

On lifting up the right arm, we found it was dispossessed of its hand. We might therefore naturally conjecture that it had been amputated, as the bone presented a perfectly flat appearance, as if sawn off by some sharp instrument. On searching under the cloths, to our no small astonishment, we found the hand or rather a number of small bones enclosed in a separate cloth.

For about six inches up the arm the flesh had wasted away, being evidently smaller than the lower part of the left arm,

to which the hand was very firmly united, and which presented no symptoms of decay further than the two bones of the fore finger loose. Even the nails remained entire, of which we saw no appearance in the cloth containing the remains of the right hand.

At this process of the investigation, we were perfectly satisfied that, independently of the result of any further examination, such a striking coincidence as the loss of the right hand would justify our belief in Sir Robert Pye's statement to the Harleys, that his presentation pistol was the innocent cause of a wound which afterwards proved mortal. It was, however, possible, that at the same moment, in the heat of the action at Chalgrave, when Colonel Hampden discharged his pistol at his adversary, that his adversary's ball might wound him in the shoulder; for he was soon after observed, as stated by Sir Phillip Warwick, 'with his head hanging down, and his hands leaning upon horse's neck.'

In order to corroborate or disprove the different statements relative to his having been wounded in the shoulder, a close examination of each took place.

The clavicle of the right shoulder was firmly united to the scapula, nor did there appear any contusion or indentation that evinced symptoms of any wound ever having been inflicted. The left shoulder, on the contrary, was smaller and sunken in, as if the clavicle had been displaced. To remove all doubts, it was adjudged necessary to remove the arms, which were amputated with a penknife.

The socket of the left arm was perfectly white and healthy, and the clavicle firmly united to the scapula, nor was there the least appearance of contusion or wound.

The socket of the right shoulder, on the contrary, was of a brownish cast, and the clavicle being found quite loose and disunited from the scapula, proved that dislocation had taken place. The bones, however, were quite perfect. Such dislocation, therefore, must have arisen, either from the force of a ball, or from Colonel Hampden having fallen from his horse, when he lost the power of holding the reins by reason of his hand having been so dreadfully shattered.

The latter in all probability was the case, as it would be barely possible for a ball to pass through the shoulder without some fracture, either of the clavicle or scapula.

In order to examine the head and hair, the body was raised up and supported with a shovel; on removing the cloths which adhered firmly to the back of the head, we found the hair in a complete state of preservation. It was a dark auburn colour, and according to the custom of the times was very long, - from five to six inches. It was drawn up and tied round at the top of the head with black thread or silk. The ends had the appearance of having been cut off. On the taking hold of the topknot, it soon gave way and came off like a wig.

Here a singular scene presented itself. The worm of corruption was busily employed, the skull in some places being perfectly bare, whilst in others the skin remained nearly entire, upon which we discovered a number of maggots and small red worms on the feed with great activity. This was the only spot where any symptoms of life was apparent, as if the brain contained a vital principle within it, which engendered its own destruction; otherwise, how can we account, after a lapse of nearly two centuries, in finding living creatures preying upon the seat of intellect, when they were no where else to be found, in no other part of the body. He was five feet nine inches in height, apparently of great muscular strength, of a vigorous and robust frame; forehead broad and high; the skull altogether well formed, such an one as the imagination would conceive capable of great exploits.

Here I close the narrative - one of singular interest to those who were eye-witnesses of the examination, which presented a scene so novel, so ghastly, but at the same time so full of moment, that it will ever prove a memorable event in the short era of our lives. We record to mind the virtuous actions of the deceased; his manly defense against the tyranny of the Star Chamber; his abandonment of every social and domestic tie for the glorious cause of freedom; and whilst we gazed upon his remains, remembered, that that voice which was once raised on behalf of his country, had contributed in no small measure to pave the way for the blessings of liberty, which, but for his warning, might to this day have been withheld from an enlightened people.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

** The battle of Chalgrave-field was fought on the 18th June, 1643. Mr. Hampden died on the 24th, and was buried on the 25th, as stated in the parish register. Sir W. Dugdale mentions several instances where persons of rank were interred the day after decease.*

THE FACTS UNRAVELLED

The description of the body and its mutilation referred to in 'The Times' letter,¹⁶ can be seen to be embellishments of the facts, or downright lies, when viewed from our advantage of 20th Century medical, physical and scientific knowledge. It was obviously written to impress an uninformed general readership by offering them what they themselves would have expected a disinterred body to resemble. The real question that must be asked, when it is proved that the facts in this letter are a complete fabrication, is why this distinguished body of gentlemen thought it necessary to publish such lies. Within this little group there were two factions, one believing in the exploding pistol theory of which Nugent's friends, William James Smith and Mr. Denman were the fiercest adherents, and the other which included Nugent, that Hampden was shot in the shoulder.

The opening two paragraphs of the letter to 'The Times' cite the reason for them being at Great Hampden and the names of some of the people who attended. What follows can only be described as a one-sided view, conditioning the reader to accept that Hampden's hand was shattered by the exploding of his pistol. Within the next few paragraphs they had dismissed all contemporary evidence of the episode and had promoted the Pye story from a contradictory statement to a fact. Any lingering doubts as to whether they were about to open John Hampden's coffin are cast aside with an oblique reference to Edward Clough's discredited narration of the Grand Procession,⁹ and the entry of Hampden's interment in the burial register.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

At around eight in the morning the party assembled in the church. Discussions began amongst them as to where Hampden's coffin would be found. They seemed to have been taken by complete surprise that such a distinguished family as the Hampdens did not possess a private vault. After a consensus of opinion the gravediggers set to work on the chosen spot below the tablet on the wall of the chancel, erected by Hampden to the memory of his wife Elizabeth; reasoning that Hampden would have wished to be buried by her side. After unearthing the first of several leaden coffins, imagine their disappointment when the nameplate was found to be that of another member of the Hampden family. How many is several? How many coffins can be buried beneath a small tablet? Unfortunately the names and the number of the coffins unnecessarily disinterred is not recorded, but just reflect on how this eminent body of gentleman were feeling as each grave was disturbed. Time was passing by and failure in their quest was staring them in the face. The press reporters from many local journals and the man from the famous 'Times' were expectant of the news of finding John Hampden. Now they were recording the unfolding fiasco. Were they allowed to watch the exhumation one wonders, as all the printed articles seem to have been taken, unquestioned, from a press handout.

Once they had convinced themselves, Nugent included, that this coffin was the one that contained John Hampden, there was no turning back. How susceptible to suggestion was Nugent when they came to the tomb with the corroded nameplate? With his peers egging him on he agreed to have the coffin cut open. Dr. Grace tells us that this tomb was under a stone marked William Hampden.¹⁷ A description of the church entitled 'Hampden Magna'¹⁸ written around 1675, but while Mr. John Yates who was inducted as rector in 1663 was still the incumbent, places this grave against the north wall above the altar rail. The three graves down the centre of the chancel were clearly marked with brasses, so these may have been left alone.

Assuming that they started digging underneath Elizabeth Hampden's memorial they would have found the first coffin near the south wall, not the western window as they stated. Was it Elizabeth Hampden's coffin they found? They did not say. No grave marking is recorded on the floor there, nor in the Hampden Magna.¹⁸ There may have been room for one more grave between the memorial and the rood screen, although again none is recorded. By the time they got to William Hampden's tomb near the northern wall they could have disturbed up to ten others. Why did they report it as being at the foot of Elizabeth's memorial when they themselves state they examined several leaden coffins? More lies to fit their story?

Dr. Grace mainly concurs with 'The Times' letter of how the coffin was opened and the condition of the corpse at first sight. With the coffin stripped of its lid and the body in its cerecloth wrapping exposed to the elements, the moment of truth had arrived. The cloths were carefully cut or torn away from the face and body to reveal the head, arms and upper torso; not unwrapped as this would entail lifting the heavy body. How the features of the face can be so differently described from the same scene is quite remarkable. Dr. Grace writes¹⁹ that the body had a chocolate colour, but the newspaper report states that the face had a death-like whiteness. The body had laid in sawdust in a wooden coffin for many years. Tannin, a chemical inherent in wood, migrates into the flesh of a body that is sealed in an air tight container and causes the skin to darken. Of course Nugent and Denman had no inkling of this chemistry and so reported what everybody knew; that the faces of dead bodies went ashen white. No-one had ever seen the exhumation of a body from an airtight coffin filled with sawdust, so it seems that they recorded what they expected to see.

The rigid corpse was lying on its back obscured by sawdust in a coffin that lay 6 or 7 feet down in the bowels of the chancel. With the cerecloths most probably still stuck to the body's back, they reported that they were of the opinion that there was an indentation in the left shoulder which was worthy of detailed examination. So they decided to lift the coffin out of the ground and onto a trestle in the chancel. In the emotionally charged atmosphere close examination

showed the hand to be somewhat badly decomposed and this was enough to persuade Denman and Smith that the body was that of John Hampden. It seems their enthusiasm also influenced Nugent's judgement, for he said on the day that the body was that of the Patriot.

They clearly wrote of the right arm being dispossessed of its hand which they found in a separate bag; with the appearance that an amputation had been performed. They added that they cut off the arms with a penknife and examined the arm sockets. They also said they removed the scalp and found worms crawling about on the brain. The hand had not been amputated and nor was it found in a separate bag. The arms were not cut off with a penknife, the head was not scalped, nor were there any worms on the head feasting on *'the seat of intellect'*. Why so many lies?

Dr. Grace was at the exhumation. He also assisted Mr. Norris, the local physician, the following day, when together they examined the body. That night, Tuesday 22nd July 1828, he wrote to the Earl of Buckinghamshire at the Union Club in London¹⁷ with the details of the two days' events. He said, *'...The leaden coffin has been opened, but not satisfactory proof obtained that the body contained in it, was that of the Patriot. Lord Nugent attended, accompanied by Mr. Denman & they went away under the impression that they had discovered a fracture in the collar bone, but on Mr. Norris's examination it proved to be no such thing, and he reported all the bones to be a perfect state....'*

Who were Nugent and Denman trying to convince, for they knew they were just plain lying? It was not a case of being mistaken. How did they think they could perpetrate such lies? The body was left out in the chancel until the following day for all to see. The local physician, Mr. Norris, had been invited to thoroughly and professionally examine it and this he did on the Tuesday. How the writers of the narrative thought they could get away with such audacious lies is beyond comprehension. One can only speculate why they indulged in so much invention.

An exhumed body is not a pleasant sight. Although the corpse had been sealed in an airtight coffin biological processes had continued for a while, mainly in the stomach area; that is until all the oxygen was depleted. Even Mr. Norris did not understand these chemical reactions, neither did any scientists of the day. However in burials from the 16th and 17th Centuries the arms of a corpse were not bent with the hands on the shoulders as now, but left straight with the hands resting on the lower abdomen.²⁰ Around this area the hands and the wooden coffin were partly eaten away by bacterial action; probably sufficiently so, to convince the expectant and untrained eyes of Nugent and Denman to truly believe that the hand had been shattered.

Dr. Grace wrote to the Earl on the 22nd July 1828¹⁷ and in his words said, '*....they (Nugent and Denman) went away under the impression that they had discovered a fracture in the collar bone...*'. 'The Times printed the narrative on the 28th July 1828, but Dr. Grace had not read it when he wrote to a Mr. Richard Cumberland, at the Exchequer, Palace Yard, London, on the 9th August.¹⁹ He had heard about the article in 'The Times' and had seen several accounts in other papers which he stated '*....have all been incorrect....*'. He reiterated that Nugent examined the hands himself '*....and went away with the fancied idea that both were fractured.....*'. This letter¹⁹ also describes in detail the examination on the Monday and does not include any mutilation of the body whatsoever. Except that is for the hand and this is best told in Dr. Grace's own words,¹⁹ '*..... I saw nothing like a fracture of either hands or shoulders, nor was there any dislocation. The account you saw describing the hand as being found in a separate bag (which on being examined proved to have been sawn off) was altogether incorrect, it might have been separated at the wrist by the action of moving the body from its position. There certainly was no fracture or anything of the kind and although separated at the wrist was not from a wound or by amputation - my opinion of this at the time of the disinterment was fully corroborated by Mr. Norris when he examined it afterwards the legs and lower*

parts of the body were not examined that part of the coffin was filled with sawdust. There was nothing appeared in the examination which could in any way prove, or so make it even supposable that the body was that of The Patriot on the contrary, if the prints and portraits we have seen of him can give one any idea of his person the features of this which could be seen perfectly were of a different charactr altogether. Instead of that high nose and thin visage which I have always pictured the Patriot to have had, this was a short nose and fat round face and Mr. Norris thinks it much older than the Patriot's time, and would he says if not disturbed have remained as much longer the same state. I think it not unlikely that it was Mr. William Hampden as the coffin was immediately under the stone bearing his inscription upon it. In my last letter from Lord Buckinghamshire he mentions the 20th August for coming to Hampden.....' The location of the coffin was confirmed by a letter to 'The Gentleman's Magazine' that read²³ 'that one of the party whose name is mentioned in the narrative as having been present on that occasion, unhesitatingly confesses that the account published was extremely incorrect; that the body described was not found in the spot mentioned, but under the floor within the communion rails; and that the hand discovered separate from the arm, had every appearance of having been detached by decay, and no appearance whatsoever of artificial amputation....'

By the 19th August Dr. Grace had read the narrative in 'The Times' and in a letter²¹ of the same date in a reply to inquiries by the Earl he wrote:- '*.....I daresay Lord Nugent imagined that the hand was separated from the body and that it must have been so buried, but when Mr. Norris examined the arm and shoulder bones the hand although separated at the wrist was not by a fractured wound, or by amputation, in all probability it was done by the action of moving the body from its position. Mr. Norris assures me that all the bones and joints of the arm and shoulders were in a perfect state....'*

Having blinded themselves that the body was John Hampden's because of the decayed hand, it seems Nugent and Denman had the rest of the story composed to squash any conflicting theories. After this cursory examination of the body the entourage repaired for lunch, leaving the grave open and the coffin in the chancel. It must have been immediately apparent to Nugent and the others that no bullet had hit the shoulder.

There was no question in Nugent, Smith and Denman's minds that they had disinterred John Hampden, but Denman the lawyer among them knew that alternative scenarios could be put forward that could cast doubt on their story. With the evidence presented they hoped to convince readers of the narrative that they had exhumed John Hampden. It was a believable story for readers in the 19th Century as they did not have the scientific knowledge of today to question the facts.

So the little entourage continued with their story. *'.....To remove all doubts, it was adjudged necessary to remove the arms, which were amputated with a penknife....'* A penknife was exactly that, a very small knife for sharpening a quill. The blade being no more than 2½ inches long and less than a ¼ inch wide. To try and dismember a muscular body with such an instrument borders on the ludicrous, but once they had begun inventing stories nothing stood in their way. It is doubtful that the body was raised and propped up on a shovel as they said. Should they have done so it would have cracked or broken the neck and shoulder bones, apart from other damage to the hip area, as the body bent to accommodate the lifting of the upper torso. As Dr. Grace wrote in his letter¹⁹ to Mr. Cumberland, *'.... Mr. Norris examined the skeleton and pronounced it in a perfect state at least as far as related to the fracture in the arms and shoulders....'* It does not describe a body that has been hacked to pieces.

The narration agreed with Dr. Grace's observations in his letter to Richard Cumberland on the 9th August¹⁹ *'..... the hair long and fine of a dark auburn and with a string close behind the head and spread over the back part so as to form a kind of night-cap....'*

What followed in 'The Times' letter is the greatest flight of fancy. '..... *On the taking hold of the topknot, it soon gave way and came off like a wig.*

Here a singular scene presented itself. The worm of corruption was busily employed, the skull in some places being perfectly bare, whilst in others the skin remained nearly entire, upon which we discovered a number of maggots and small red worms on the feed with great activity. This was the only spot where any symptoms of life was apparent, as if the brain contained a vital principle within it, which engendered its own destruction; otherwise, how can we account, after a lapse of nearly two centuries, in finding living creatures preying upon the seat of intellect, when they were no where else to be found, in no other part of the body.....'. How philosophical, how poetic, it must have enthralled the readers of 'The Times'.

Except for a very few men of intellect in the world at this time, it was believed that maggots and worms spontaneously generated. Francesco Redi in 1668 proved that meat kept in a vacuum jar did not produce maggots²², but he and his contemporaries did not understand why. It was not until 1862 that the great Louis Pasteur proved beyond doubt that spontaneous generation was not possible. It was not known in 1828 that maggots came from eggs laid by flies. Neither did they know that the incubation period of a fly's egg is a very minimum of 8 hours in hot weather, or that small immobile maggots would begin to hatch after this period. In the cool of the church this time would have been extended by up to a factor of two. Flies, they believed, just appeared on rotting meat and they had no concept of how a maggot evolved into a larva and then a fly. They, including Denman and Nugent, expected the spontaneous generation of maggots on a body, but few or indeed perhaps no-one until this time had exhumed a body that had been buried in an airtight coffin. We now know that had air been present in the coffin, bacteria would have consumed the flesh of the body very quickly, leaving just a skeleton. The fact that the corpse was in an excellent state of preservation, no doubt a great shock to their expectations, proves that the coffin was airtight.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

The deterioration of the hand though is to be expected, as it was resting on the lower abdomen, where bacterial activity would have been most active until all the oxygen had been depleted. Being as it was completely sealed, nothing, not even bacteria, was alive when the coffin was first opened.

Nugent and his friends, with such dedication to detail of the evidence they presented, hoped to convince their readers that they had exhumed John Hampden, without further argument.

THE ARGUMENT CONTINUED

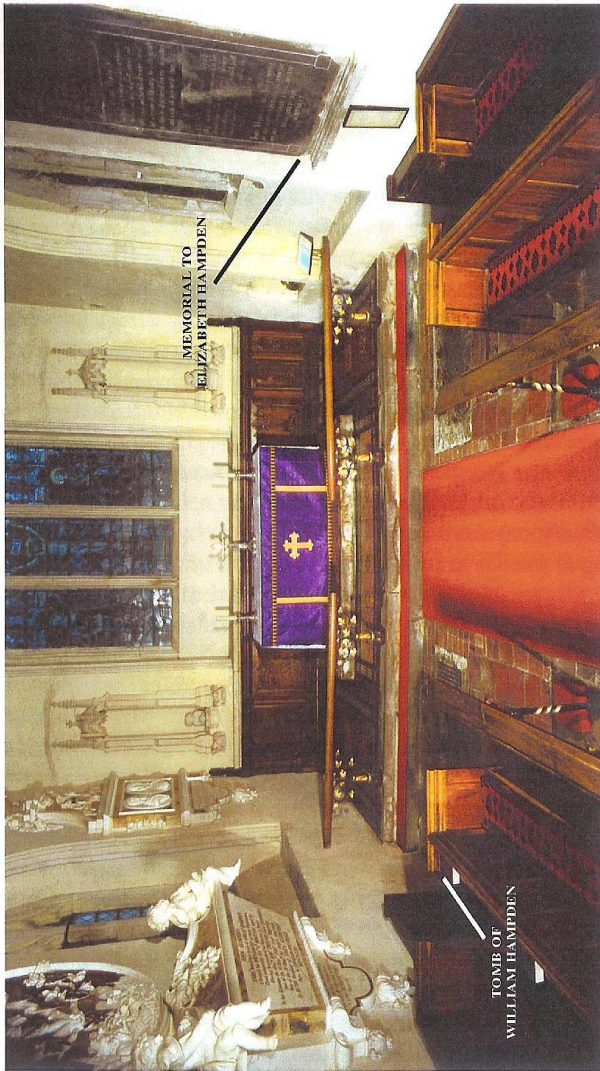
The furore over the details of the exhumation continued in many publications, such as J. de Alta Ripa's correspondence in 'The Gentleman's Magazine'.²³ Editors had to bring the debate to an unsatisfactory end after it had raged for more than a year. Lord Nugent though added nothing to the controversy and did not even mention the exhumation in his biography published some four years later.

The dispute continued over the years with Denman still protesting that they had exhumed Hampden. He replied to a letter²⁴ from Lord Nugent when accepting his invitation to the inauguration of Hampden's monument at Chalgrove in 1842, with the words, '*..... to give just honour to the great patriot, whose very identical body I am sure we saw....*'. In reply Nugent wrote²³ '*.....I certainly did see.....*' '*.....a skeleton, which I have many reasons for believing was not John Hampden's, but that of some gentleman.....*' and so the disagreement continued.

In 1845 Dr. James Grace was buried in Cowley and Lord Nugent died in November 1850 thus leaving few eye witnesses to the exhumation. Also in February 1849 the 5th Earl of Buckinghamshire died making his knowledge on the matter unattainable. In 1854 Nugent's third edition of Hampden's biography was published by Bohn's,²⁴ which also included at the front Lord Nugent's own biography. Within the footnotes is Lord Southey's relation of the events at Great Hampden in July 1828.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH



MEMORIAL TO
ELIZABETH HAMPDEN

TOMB OF
WILLIAM HAMPDEN

CHANCEL OF GREAT HAMPDEN CHURCH

His account mirrors that of Dr. Grace's, but with additional snippets of information; although his speculation of how the hand had rotted is scientifically incorrect. He writes, '*.... it was in high preservation, except that one arm had crumbled off, owing to the action of the air, which had made its way to that part through a crack in the coffin; but there had been no amputation, or operation of any kind....*'. With this new issue of Hampden's biography Denman and Smith, two of the dwindling number of eye witnesses and firmly of the persuasion they had seen the Patriot, once again put forward their views. Now though, these received no counter arguments as their adversaries had gone to their graves.

Interest in the subject continued and in 1859 a Mr. H. E. Trudal was in Great Hampden investigating the circumstances of the exhumation for an interested party. He met Mr. Robertson, the gardener who told him the following story:- '*....that the picture of the Patriot at Hampden used to hang unknown unnoticed on the best staircase, in that the first time he went up it afterwards (after the exhumation) this portrait which confronted - and appeared to be looking at him - was immediately recognised by him as that of the jawes, face and figure which was....*' (exhumed). On conveying this information to the Earl on his return from France Robertson relates, '*..... It was immediately taken down and examined and under a piece of canvas was found inscribed the name John Hampden - the date 1640. And the history of the picture..*'.²⁵ Such a convincing and irreproachable story. How can one argue against it? There it is from such an reliable and honest eye witness, with such evidence it must have been John Hampden who was exhumed. It certainly convinced the investigator and with the continuing help of Denman and Smith the story of the bursting pistol had gained near immortality.

Robertson's story looks watertight until one begins to question the content with reference to several events in 1828 that he would not have known. He implied in his statement to Mr. Trudal, that shortly after the exhumation when he went up the main staircase in Hampden House, he recognised that a portrait hanging there had the same appearance as the exhumed body.

This information, he said, was conveyed directly to the Earl on his return from France. When did the Earl go to France? It was not in July or August of 1828, nor in September, as Dr. Grace's correspondence¹⁷⁻²¹ to the Earl has his whereabouts in London or Great Hampden, with no plans for a foreign excursion. On 31st August he is booked to be back for a service at Great Hampden, presumably for the rededication of the church. So when did Robertson convey his feelings to the Earl?

Workers for the Hampden estate, such as Robertson the gardener, would be too menial to have confronted the Earl directly and would have spoken to him through his agent Dr. Grace. Should Robertson, by some chance, have been on the main staircase and expressed his views to Dr. Grace, he would no doubt have been put in his place as to the facts. Servants did not use the main staircase in great houses, but kept their place behind the scenes and used the back stairs. Had Robertson been found on the best staircase without the expressed permission of Dr. Grace or the Earl, he would have been very severely admonished. Dr. Grace had the best opportunity to compare the body in the chancel with all the portraits on the stairs. In his letter to Cumberland¹⁹ he categorically states that the features were unlike any of the prints and portraits that he had ever seen.

Robertson's final proof, that this picture is that of the Patriot, comes when he says the portrait is taken down. There, missed by generations, is hidden conveniently under a piece of canvas the inscription as he related '*.... John Hampden - the date 1640. And the history of the Picture....*'. He completed his own narration with a description of the face of the exhumed body that mirrored 'The Times' report back in 1828. When was this inscription supposedly put on the picture? In 1640? Or was it sometime much later when the painting had a history? It seems that in his eagerness to cover all possible doubt concerning the picture's authenticity, he tried to give details to embrace every aspect of any inquiry. Unbeknown to Robertson, Lord Nugent had been scouring the archives of Hampden House in April 1828 for an actual portrait of the Patriot, but had only found the Dean of Killaloe's reference to such a portrait.¹²

Robertson did not attend the second examination of the body with Dr. Grace and Mr. Norris, for he would have seen for himself the inaccuracies of what he probably overheard the previous day. Why should Robertson lie? Did he really believe, as Denman, Smith and Nugent did on the day, that he had seen John Hampden's body? Could it be that it was in his financial interest, over the years, to keep telling the story to curious people? How much did he like to inflate his own importance in front of inquiring folk?

Had the events been as Robertson described who would have taken the painting down? Certainly not the Earl, or Dr. Grace, and Robertson would have been outside gardening while the portrait was examined. If they had found such a painting the Earl would have been overjoyed, for he had shown remarkable indulgence to Lord Nugent during his research of John Hampden and was extremely interested in every detail; as witnessed by his agreement to exhume the body. Nugent would have been told as would many others, but no-one, in all the years after the supposed find, from either persuasion of the story, raised the issue of the Patriot's portrait being found.

One painting that had hung in Hampden House since the 17th century, which was certainly there at the time of the exhumation, has on occasions been thought to be that of the Patriot. This portrait, which is still owned by the Hampden family, has recently been re-examined³ by an art historian. His comments were that if this is the painting that was compared to the body, then they had exhumed someone other than Hampden. His judgement was based on the fact that the style of painting and the clothing worn by the sitter was of a later period. He concluded that this was probably a portrait of John Hampden's son Richard.

So Robertson, it can be concluded, was mistaken in his belief that he had seen John Hampden and painted the truth with fanciful stories to convince others conclusively that he had looked into the Patriot's eyes.

SUMMARY

Hampden's fatal wounding at Chalgrove in June 1643²⁶ has given historians through the years a wealth of material to investigate. Fascination with what he stood for, both in and out of Parliament, his honesty and integrity and devout Christian upbringing have all been documented. His role in the English Civil War and speculation for what might have been had he lived, have been closely considered. His suffering for helping the common man and standing up against the might of a King, who regarded Parliament as a nuisance, raised his esteem amongst all but a few people. Even when he had spent a year in prison at the mercy of the King and seen his friend Sir John Elliot die while imprisoned in the infamous Tower of London in appalling distress, he was still willing to put his vast estates and possibly his life in the balance for the good of the common man. The imposition of Ship Money and Hampden's trial before the highest court in the land for opposing it, brought him even greater fame and admiration. His principles of no taxation without representation and his belief in the Parliamentary system guaranteed that he would always be the champion of the people and therefore at odds with the King.²⁶

Political parties of the 18th and 19th centuries looked for champions to further their objectives and John Hampden was the ideal man for the Whig faction. This man, the defender of the peoples rights against a tyrannical King, was a true role model for the Whig's cause. Lord Nugent, who in 1812 became MP for Aylesbury, was using the ideals of John Hampden in his election speeches when the story of the bursting pistol emerged from the Pye family's Common Place Book. Was it just a coincidence, or was it a conspiracy to defame Nugent's political interest in Hampden, that at this time the Pye story came into the spotlight again? Men of leisure now had time to write and question facts or fiction in the many magazines, clubs and societies that had sprung up, but the heat they generated failed to shed any light on the historical Hampden.

The article published in 1761 in the Gentleman's Magazine,³ Lawrence Echard's entry in his History of England⁷ that it was based upon, and the credence lent to it by using Sir Horace Walpole's name, were and are, the whole basis of the argument as to how Hampden reputedly came by a wound to his hand. The exhumation and the resulting letter to 'The Times' pushed the balance in favour of the shattered hand theory. Dr. Grace, who could have dispelled the argument, was too much of a gentleman to enter into the fray, so the story without counter explanation gained in stature. The debate raised by the publication of Hampden's biography in 1832, which did not mention the exhumation, and Denman's letter²⁴ concerning the erection of the Monument at Chalgrove, only added fuel to the hand story.

As the years passed those few who knew the truth died, leaving alive only those who believed in the exploding pistol theory. The interest in John Hampden and his disinterment still remained and had a revival in debates in numerous magazines in the early 1860's. These were possibly fuelled by the learned gentleman who had employed Mr. H. E. Trudal to go to Great Hampden to conduct his own research. Trudal reported to his employer the story that Robertson relayed to him²⁵ and so the legend became immortal.

Why the myth should have arisen in the face of such overwhelming contemporary evidence, that was available to most historians, may never be known. The most damning were the lines, '*.....Colonel Hampden put himself in Captain Crosse's troop, where he charged with much courage, and was unfortunately shot through the shoulder*'²; this written by the Earl of Essex to Parliament while Hampden was not only still alive, but expected to live. Hampden's close and influential friends, such as Arthur Goodwin, visited him on his death bed and all bore testimony to his injuries. They would have been quick to correct any false reports. The soldiers in Captain Crosse's troop and others at the battle did not question the reports emanating from various quarters, including the Mercurius Aulicus.⁵

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

Could it be that so many hundreds of people might keep a secret for 75 years before one of them relayed the story of Pye's bursting pistol and the shattered hand? The narration in 'The Times' of the exhumation can, in the 20th Century, be seen to be fiction. But the falsification of the facts or just bald lies were originally sufficient to fool most of the people.

Poor William Hampden, upended from what should have been his last resting place, is now just bones. John Hampden may also be a skeleton, as there was a shortage of oak planks and lead to make two wooden casks and a leaden coffin for a tomb in keeping with his status as the Lord of the Manor. In the parish register¹⁴ of Great Hampden church it is recorded that on the 25th June John Hampden was laid to rest. He may not be buried in the chancel as are his ancestors, for this was the time of civil war, with the little church of Great Hampden exposed to the front line. The possibility of this great man being disinterred, his body mutilated, his head left to rot on the end of a pike, was a risk that had to be considered. With the controversy removed as to how he was mortally wounded, the doubts remain as to his precise burial place. Nevertheless let him rest in peace as the hero of Chalgrove Battlefield and saviour of the rights of the common people. A true Patriae Pater.

SOURCES

- 1 His Highnesse Prince Rupert's Late Beating Up the Rebels Quarters at Postcomb and Chinner. Bodleian Library Oxon. Wood 376 (14)
- 2 Two Letters from his Excellency, Robert Earl of Essex. British Library Thomason Tracts E 55 (19)
- 3 Some Memorials of John Hampden, his Party and his Times. 2 volumes. Lord Nugent. George Grenville 1st edition pages 429 - 436. British Library.
- 4 The True Relation of a Gret Fight. Between the Kings Forces and the Parliament's, at Chinner near Tame on Saturday last. Thomason Tracts. British Library.
- 5 Mercurius Aulicus. British Library. 17th - 20th June 1643 Pages 320 - 325
- 6 Parliament Scout. British Library Thomason Tracts E.96 June 20th - 27th 1643. July 13th - 20th 1643.
- 7 History of England, Lawrence Echard Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- 8 Notes on The Pye Family as written by Norman Lawrence (descendant of the Pyes) in his unpublished History of the Pye Family. Held by his son. Included is "The Pye Family of Faringdon - Historiette 1613 - 1813" not attributed. Note by Norman Lawrence - Possibly by Samuel James Arnold, son in law to H. J. Pye. (1745 - 1813)
- 9 The Gentleman's Magazine May 1815. Letter signed A. of Stoneleigh, March 26. British Library. Clough's narrative of Hampden's Last Days. British Library.
- 10 The History of the Hampden Family as written by Norman Lawrence (descendant of the Pyes) in his unpublished 'History of the Pye Family'. Mostly according to Mark Noble 1784. Held by his son.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

- 11 Letter fragment from Dr. James Grace to the Earl of Buckinghamshire March 1828 Bucks County Record Office D/MH 39/88
- 12 Letter from Dr. James Grace to the Earl of Buckinghamshire 5th April 1828 Bucks County Record Office D/MH 39/84
- 13 Letter fragment from Dr. James Grace to the Earl of Buckinghamshire (March) 1828 Bucks County Record Office D/MH 39/87
- 14 Great Hampden burial register. Microfilm at Bucks County Library.
- 15 The Gentleman's Magazine June. 1829. Letter by P. Q. Bucks County Record Office. D/MH Trans. 11.
- 16 Letter to 'The Times' published 28th July 1828. Microfilm Hatfield Library.
- 17 Letter from Dr. James Grace to Earl of Buckinghamshire, Union Club, Cockspur Street, London. 22nd July 1828. Bucks County Record Office AR 62/92 (Box File) A6
- 18 Hampden Magna notes on - A description of the tombs in the chancel of Great Hampden after 1674/75, but during the lifetime of the rector Mr. John Yates. Bucks County Record Office AR62/92 (Box File) A4.
- 19 Letter from Dr. James Grace to Richard Cumberland at the Exchequer, Palace Yard, London. 9th August 1828. Bucks. Record Office D/MH 39/86 Transcript 11.
- 20 The Shaking of the Sheets : Death 1350 - 1660 Jane Nuggett.
- 21 Letter from Dr. James Grace to the Earl of Buckinghamshire 19th August 1828. Bucks County Record Office D/MH 39/85
- 22 Encyclopaedia Britannica. Spontaneous Generation (Abiogenesis) : Fly - Life Cycle.

THE CONTROVERSY OF JOHN HAMPDEN'S DEATH

- 23 The Gentleman's Magazine Sept. 1828. Letter by J. De Alta Ripa. Bucks County Record Office. D/MH Trans. 11.
- 24 Some memorials of John Hampden his Party and his Times. Lord Nugent. 3rd edition frontispiece containing 'Memoir of Lord Nugent'. British Library. Pub. Bohn's.
- 25 Letter from Mr. H. E. Trudal to an unknown Gentleman 31st August 1859. British Library Manuscript Room 38986 f. 266 Lanyard Papers.
- 26 Life of John Hampden The Patriot 1594-1643, John Adair ISBN 0 354 04014 6 Macdonald and Janes.
- 27 The History of Antiquities of the County of Buckinghamshire. George Lipscombe Esq. Vol. II 1847 p. 252 - 254 Bucks County Library Aylesbury.
- 28 The Death of John Hampden, John Adair. 'History Today' October 1979.
- 29 Article in 'The Academy', magazine Nov. 29th 1889. British Library .
- 30 The John Hampden Society magazine 'The Patriot' Number 4 Autumn 1993

Col. John Hampden's Regiment of Foote

For more information about John Hampden

www.johnhampdensregiment.org.uk

would answer your questions.

How to load and fire a musket.

Fend off the cavalry with a pike.

Load and fire a cannon.

Ride a horse into battle.

Become an apothecary.

Become the Lady of the big house.

Become a blacksmith.

Become a cordwainer.

Musicians always welcome.

Sit round a campfire under the stars with a beer
while singing to music.

Come and join online at

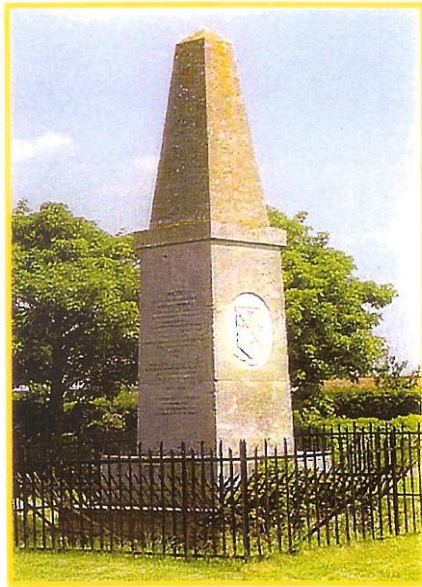
www.johnhampdensregiment.org.uk

PROFESSOR JOHN ADAIR, MA, BLitt, PhD, F.R. HistS.,

eminent historian and authority on John Hampden, when reviewing this book stated :-

“Now at last..... we have a really thorough and satisfactory account of this most unsatisfactory and yet intriguing episode. The authors have uncovered many more sources than those used in my article, and their discussion of the evidence is both judicious and fair. The writing is vivid and makes you think you were actually there on that July day in 1828. At last the matter can now safely be said to have been resolved”.

JOHN HAMPDEN'S MONUMENT



CHALGROVE, OXFORDSHIRE