

Civil war

Civil war broke out in England in 1642, between royalists loyal to Charles I and supporters of Parliament opposing the king's use of power.

Coventry sided with the parliamentarians, or 'roundheads', nicknamed for the characteristic shape of their helmets.



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The king comes to Coventry

In August 1642 Charles I, along with 800 cavalry and 300 foot-soldiers, demanded entry to Coventry.

The mayor offered to admit the king and 200 of his followers, only. Charles was keen to secure the city and refused the offer.



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Under siege

On 19 August the king's artillery began to bombard the city of Coventry from Park Hill, in what is now referred to as the 'siege of Coventry'.



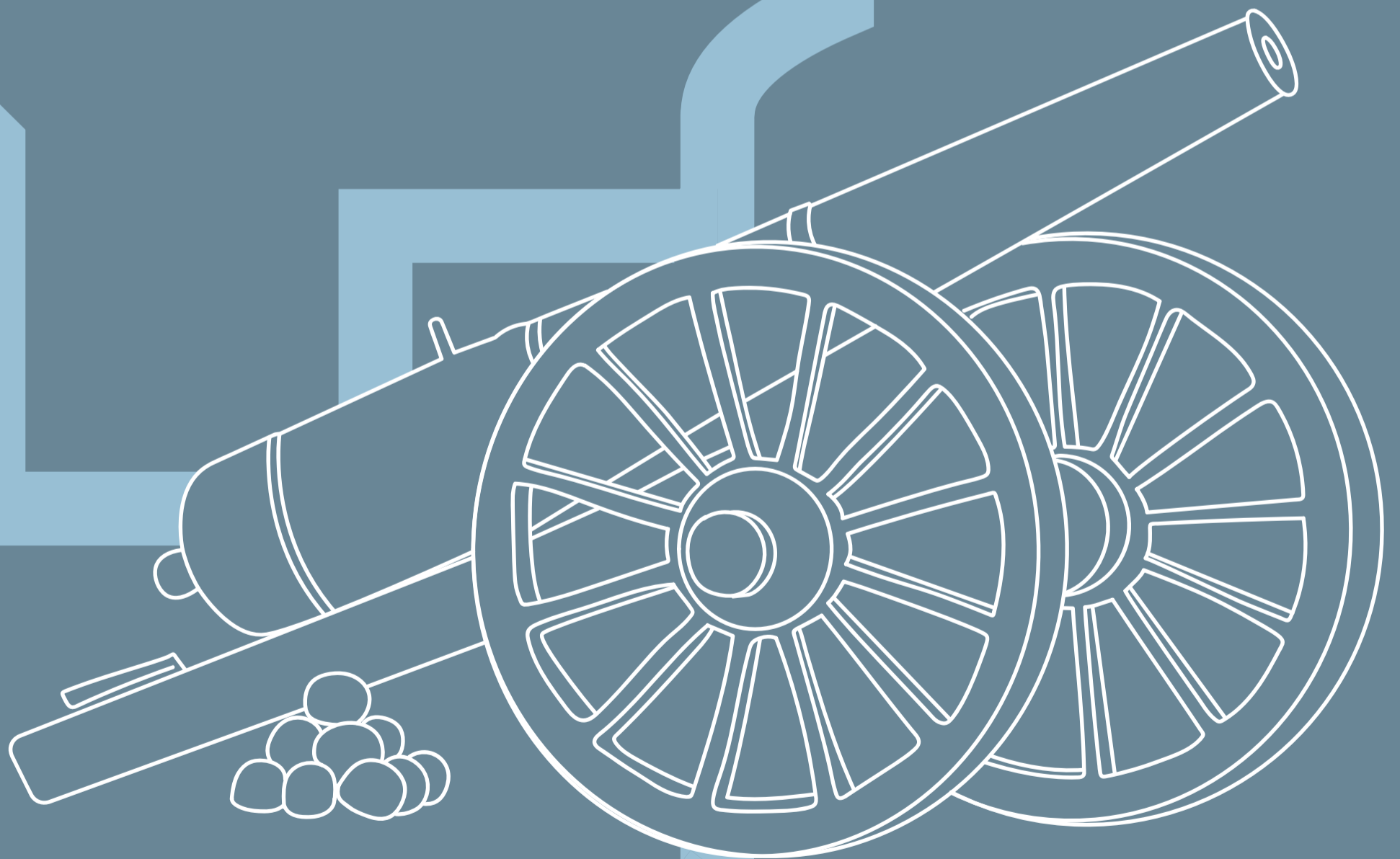
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Defending the city

An account by local puritan John Vicars describes how the king's artillery blew a hole in the wall, but the citizens created a barricade and held off the attackers, forcing them to retreat.

In a less dramatic report, the annals of the city claim that there was little damage done to the walls, and that the king's forces were unable to breach Coventry's defences. After failing to take Coventry, Charles' army retreated to Leicester and formally declared war.



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Guarding the gates

During the decade of war that followed, the four gates controlling the major transport routes in Coventry were guarded by 400 men, day and night.

Houses outside the walls and gates were pulled down to prevent future attackers using them for cover. Most gates, including Swanswell and Cook Street were blocked up, with trenches dug outside the walls and cannon kept ready to defend the city.



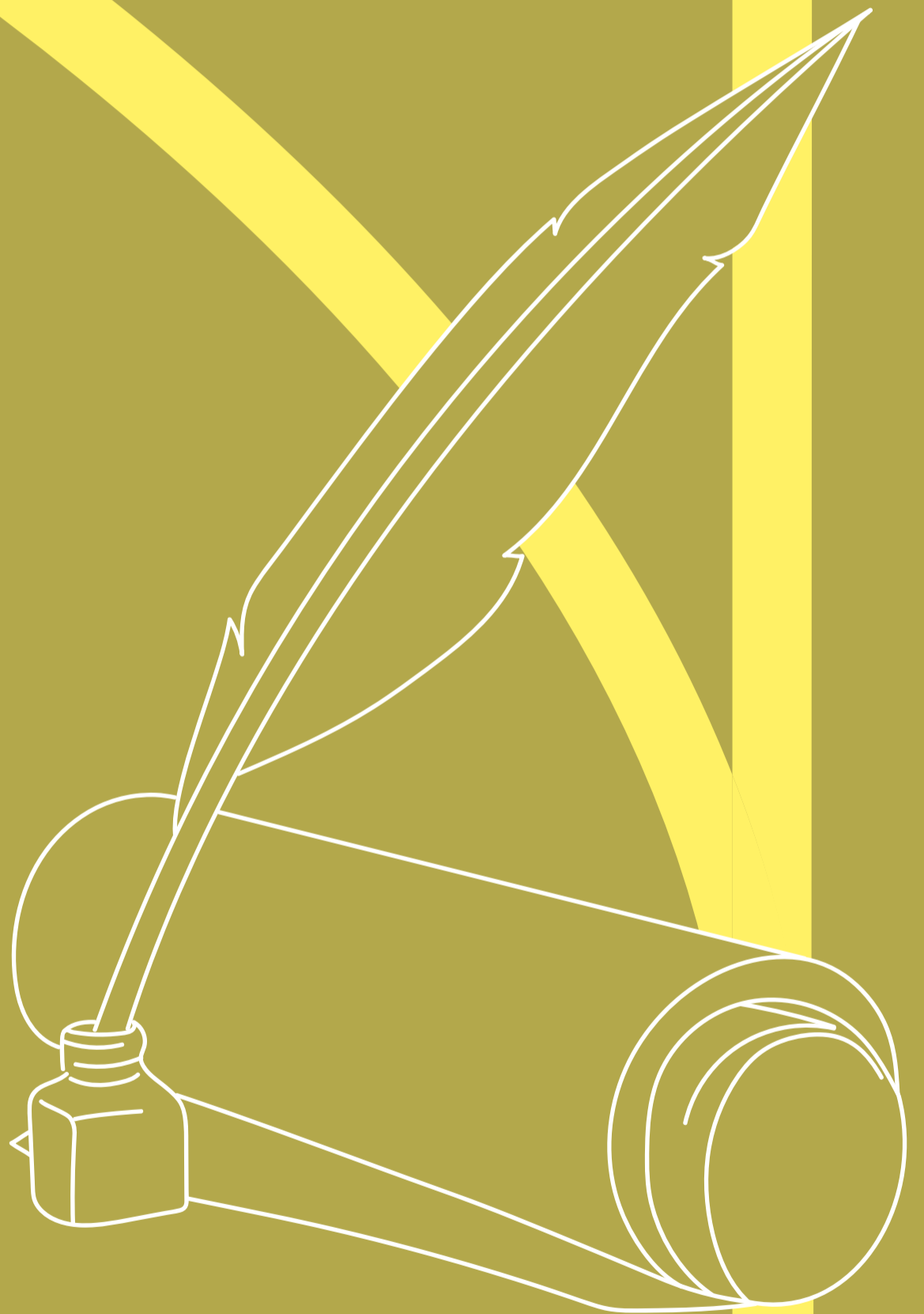
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Sent to Coventry

Nehemiah Wharton was a parliamentarian foot soldier from London, who wrote letters from Coventry where he was stationed during the war.

Impressed, he described the city 'environed with a wall equal if not exceeding that of London for breadth and height, the compass of it is near 3 miles... it has strong gates and strong battlements stored with towers... bulwarks courts of guard and other necessaries...'



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Preventative measures

As the Civil War raged on, in 1643 the women of Coventry reinforced the city's defences by filling in quarries so that they couldn't shelter the enemy.

Having been 'called together with a drum' they 'marched through the park with mattocks and spades'. It is said that they were led by 'goodwife Adderley', with 'a Hercules club at her shoulder' and Mary Herbert, reportedly armed with a pistol.



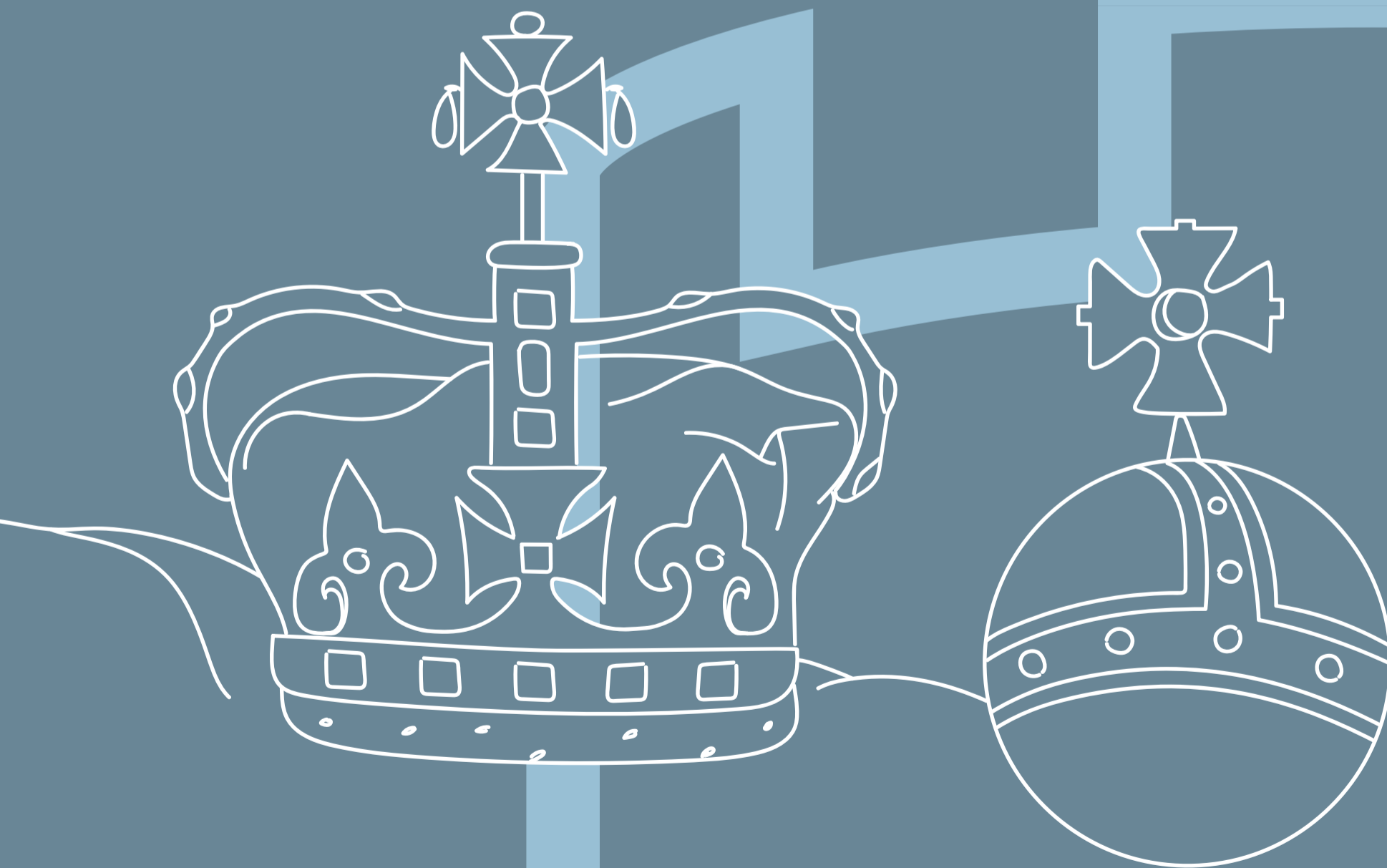
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A new king

After the war and the restoration of the monarchy in 1662, Charles II ordered Coventry's walls to be destroyed.

It is commonly believed that this was revenge for the city's opposition to his father. However, a letter written by the king at the time reveals that the destruction of the walls was ordered to prevent future rebellion, due to Coventry's hosting of parliamentarian rebels.



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Tearing down the walls

The city walls were mostly demolished in 1662, leaving only the 12 gatehouses intact.

Citizens were keen to make use of the newly available resources and carried away stones from the ruined walls to use for themselves. 380 years later, this section of city wall in Lady Herbert's Garden is the best-preserved piece left standing today, framed by the two surviving gatehouses.



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For more information about the city gates and Lady Herbert's Garden, follow the path up to the summerhouse...

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Research undertaken by Historic Coventry Trust's research team volunteers, with special thanks to Nick Le Mesurier.

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With thanks to National Lottery players and Coventry City Council

