

There is however one other candidate Duke of Cumberland who can provide answers to all these questions. In early 1644, during the Civil War, King Charles I set up a parallel parliament to the one in London at his capital of Oxford. To enable Prince Rupert of the Rhine, nephew of the King – effectively Commander in Chief for the first part of the Civil War and his most dashing cavalry commander – to take a seat in the House of Lords, he was, before January 1644, created a peer with the English titles of the Earl of Holderness and the Duke of Cumberland.<sup>3</sup>

For most of the Civil War the King's capital remained at Oxford, surrounded by a ring of outlying defensive garrisons, including Banbury to the north. Now, all the sources of the Duke of Cumberland plays (except Middle Barton and Wooburn) lie to the east of the Oxford/Banbury axis (see Map). This was, for most of the war, just about the only semi-stable frontier between the two sides and as such was much fought over. These were disputed lands, between the Royalist garrisons of Banbury and Oxford and the Parliamentary regions to the east. These twelve villages would be subjected, from 1642 onwards, to pillaging and 'taxation' from both sides.

And chief amongst the pillagers was Prince Rupert. It is difficult even now to distinguish fact from propaganda about participants in the English Civil War, but it does seem that Prince Rupert had an unenviable reputation for pillaging.<sup>4</sup> Let us for example, look at what happened in south Northamptonshire, the area around Eydon, Sulgrave and Syresham, in 1643, the second year of the war. In January, we find a force of Royalist troops led by Prince Rupert and the Earl of Northampton raiding up towards Daventry from Banbury, looking for horses and weapons. They are reported to have stolen over twelve hundred horses, leaving many villages without horses to plough or to carry.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the autumn it was reported that the area bounded by Banbury, Daventry and Towcester was the scene of heavy skirmishing, much of it led by the Prince.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in October of the same year, Prince Rupert based himself at Towcester, and 'scoured' all the region between Banbury and Northampton.

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<sup>3</sup> As footnote 2, *Dukedom...*

<sup>4</sup> *Going to the Wars; The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638 - 1651*, Charles Carlton, 1992, Routledge, ISBN 0-415-03282-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Edgehill and Beyond. The People's War in the South Midlands, 1642-1645*, Philip Tennant, Banbury Historical Society vol. 23 and Alan Sutton, 1992, ISBN 0-7509-0049-0, p.82.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122.