

The town declared for Parliament, yet, with the geographical disposition of the King's areas of support, the Castle was of obvious importance to the Royalists. Twice in 1642 the Castle was attacked, the second attack on 27th October, when cannon were brought up, and, just as soon as they began firing, the garrison surrendered. A Parliament report gives a garrison of almost a thousand men, and suggests that they surrendered through lack of supplies necessary to withstand a siege, but the real weakness was that the defenders were divided in their loyalty, for two regiments of foot and a troop of horse from the garrison took service with the King.

Leaving a garrison under the command of the Earl of Northampton, Charles moved on with his main army to Woodstock. Strenuous efforts were made in the late summer of 1644 to win the Castle for Parliament. Colonel John Fiennes, with some 3,500 men, drawn from Warwick, Northampton and Coventry, together with cannon and mortars, besieged the Castle and seemed certain of success. The walls were breached, and the small garrison, only about four hundred men, commanded by Sir William Compton, had consumed their normal provisions and all but two of their horses. Then a relieving force under the Earl of Northampton reached Banbury on 25th October and raised the siege, which had lasted for fifteen weeks.

The Royalist position in the Castle was not a happy one as the town remained loyal to Parliament and made it difficult for the garrison in the matter of supplies; the damage caused to the town in the hard fighting of 1644 had further aroused the hostility of the townfolk. Strategically the Castle was of the greatest importance to the King, for, should Oxford be lost, the King's strength in the centre of England would depend wholly on his possession of Banbury; thus the year 1645 was busily occupied in further strengthening of the Castle defences, pulling down houses in the Market Place and digging fresh earthworks, and adding to the Castle itself "2 new bulwarkes and 2 sally portes."

These preparations were opportune. In 1646 Colonel Whalley, commanding about a thousand foot and some four troops of horse, arrived before the Castle and proceeded to attack, as Sir William Compton, the young Governor of the Castle, had summarily rejected Whalley's surrender demand. As in 1644, although the Royalist garrison again numbered only four hundred men, the Castle defences held firm; engineer Captain Hooper's efforts to undermine the Castle were countered, and "by flinging down stones and hand-grenadoes" Compton "mightily annoyed the enemy."