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The Dutch War, 1652–54

Trouble Brewing

The tasks that occupied Thomas Pride after the first Civil War (raising recruits, policing St. James's) had been largely logistical and administrative, duties for which his background in trade had equipped him well. The early 1650s saw a resumption of such tasks as Pride began to distance himself from active military service. We have already identified Pride as one of the burgeoning 'Middle Sort', a proto-middle class with a preoccupation of attaining money, status and respectability. In 1650 he attained the apogee of middle-class aspiration and purchased a house in the country.

When Parliament had taken control of Crown lands following the abolition of monarchy, one of the properties confiscated was Nonsuch Palace, a sumptuous former royal residence in Surrey and a masterpiece of Henrician Renaissance architecture. The palace and the large estate in which it stood were leased separately, the building and its immediate grounds known as 'Nonsuch Little Park' and the larger estate – 1,000 acres of parkland that lay to the north – referred to as 'Nonsuch Great Park'. It was this latter property that Pride purchased, securing the lease against the arrears of pay due to his regiment and paying off the money owed to his men through the profit earned from the estate. The similarity of the two parks' names led to confusion over which property he acquired, perhaps muddled with the memory of Pride being quartered in a Royal palace (St. James's) during his stay in London in 1649. The idea that he had taken up residence in a former royal residence seems to have begun with a satire penned in 1680, just as Pride's life was passing out of living memory and myth started to occlude fact: "I die here in my own house at Non-such. It was the king's house, and Queen Elizabeth love this above all her houses".[1] A Regicide who had grown wealthy enough to live like royalty was too obvious a target for the satirists to miss. Pride was not living like a king in Tudor splendour, however, and far from palatial, his new home was quite modest in comparison.

The Great Park was commonly known as Worcester Park, named for the Earl of Worcester who had been the keeper there during the reign of James I. The Surrey

suburb that was later built over it retains the same name to this day. The Earl had a lodge built for himself on the estate – Worcester House – a modern and expensively built residence (entirely of brick and with a tile roof) but quite modest in size: three storeys and a cellar, with five bedrooms. This was to be the Pride family home for much of the 1650s. The estate – including house, outbuildings and deer park – was valued at just over £4,200.[2]

The park keeper, Charles Kirke, received compensation for the loss of his job when Pride took over the running of the estate. Kirke was granted a portion of the land, Great Park Meadow, worth £110 a year (although Pride reserved the right to any wood growing there). Kirke, whose father had been Gentleman of the Robe to Charles I and a staunch Royalist, was to receive no such compensation at the Restoration when, after a brief return to his keepership, the park passed again into private hands and Kirke once more lost his position.[3]

Worcester Park was conveniently close to Pride's Surrey breweries, six miles away at Kingston-upon-Thames. Aside from the obvious business opportunities in Kingston, the Prides may have been attracted to the area because of its reputation for religious separatism, the town described at this time as having long been a 'hotbed of radical agitation'. When the Quaker preacher Edward Burroughs was tried for libel at Kingston in 1658, he announced to the court that he wished Pride could have been in attendance as the Colonel was a sober man who would have favoured his cause.[4]

Although Worcester House was by no means palatial, its purchase by Pride was a sure sign of his success. He appears to have used the house as a show-piece for his new-won status, emulating the country squire. Visitors would be greeted by mementoes of Pride's military career – in the main hall of the house were hung a musket, a half-pike and a brace of pistols, as well as an antique two-handed sword.[5] But as well as reminding guests of his military past, Pride could also show that he had a cultured side. Other accoutrements were more genteel: a painted virginals in the downstairs dining room; the striking clock in the hall; stylish bedrooms, each of which was carefully and distinctly furnished as the red, yellow and blue chambers. It is telling, given the lingering rumours of Pride's illiteracy, that there was not a single book listed among the house's contents when he died.

Pride, expedient man that he was, found a much better use for the park than a mere status symbol, and its purchase at times appears to have been little more than a calculated business investment. A survey carried out in 1650 numbered 6,000 trees in the park, two-thirds of which were to be felled and sold to the navy for ship building.[6] Over the next few years Pride would systematically strip Worcester Park of its assets, felling trees for timber and ploughing land for agricultural use. His business acumen and a drive for profit led to Worcester Park becoming a working farm as much as a comfortable country estate. Not everything was sacrificed to the axe or plough, though: when, in 1851, the Pre-Raphaelite artists Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais rented the dilapidated buildings of Worcester House for use as a studio, Hunt noted a "glorious avenue of elms" along the drive leading

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...us to see how little real ... it was by financial difficul- ... Naval supply was found wanting ... -ars to have been levelled personally at ... Indeed, he should be credited with being ... at all, irrespective of the quality of the goods. ...amining just why the navy victuallers were able to ... 'extraordinary strength' beer at the time of the supply ... when excise was first imposed on beer, the authorities recog- ... strengths of beer for tax purposes: 'small', which included the weak ... known as 'sea-beer', and 'strong'. But there was a loop-hole in the excise ... in that extra-strong beer was only liable for tax at the same rate as 'ordinary' or 'common' strong beer. It was quite legal for a brewer or retailer to take one barrel of extraordinary-strength beer and mix the contents with two barrels of small beer. The result would be three barrels of a beverage with a strength equal to that of common, strong beer, but for which the higher rate of excise had only been paid on one barrel. The drink was known as 'Two Threads' or 'Three Threads', depending on the number of brews or different strengths involved in the mix. This was the reason why, in the summer of 1653, there was a ready supply of extra-strong beer

in stock: it was an easy way for brewers to reduce the amount of excise payable on their product.[41] We have already seen evidence of Pride attempting to avoid paying excise on the beer he produced (see chapter 8), but if he and his associate brewers had not been so unprincipled in paying their taxes the English fleet might never have been able to put to sea against the Dutch.

In May 1653 a detachment of Pride's foot had been appointed to the forty-six gun frigate *Sussex* as soldiers at sea (the term 'marine' in this period was not designate).[42] The English victory at the two-day battle of The Gabbard, off the Sussex coast, allowed the Commonwealth to secure the Channel and extend their control into the North Sea. The Dutch were driven back into their home ports and the United Provinces were thereafter subjected to an English naval blockade. On the 18 June *Sussex* put into Harwich laden with the fleet's sick and wounded, many suffering from fever and the onset of scurvy. So virulent and widespread was this sickness that rumour abounded of plague sweeping the English fleet. General Blake was reported to be so ill that a replacement was sought: 'we fear for his life; some report him dead, and that Col. Pride must be his successor'.[43]

Just how the rumour began that Pride was to take command of the fleet is unclear, though he was by this time quite a feature of the navy establishment. As well as the responsibility for victualling Pride was a burgess of the Portsmouth corporation, a post he had held since the previous year, when navy supply was under way and a close working-relationship with the town was needed. The office frequently included those with connections to the navy: other burgesses included George Monck and, in later years, Samuel Pepys and Admiral Byng. Pride himself was to be elected burgess twice more, in 1656 and 1658.[44] The fact that over 4,200 trees on Pride's Surrey estate were marked for use by the navy, 70% of the trees in the entire park,[45] further indicates that Pride was a figure with close navy associations during the early 1650s. It is interesting to conjecture whether, if Blake and Monck had both been killed, Pride would have taken command of the English fleet (and what the result might have been).

By August, the privations caused by the English blockade had forced the Dutch navy to attempt a break-out. The result was the largest engagement of the war thus far, a three-day running battle off the Dutch coast at Scheveningen, fought from the 8 to 10 August. The losses sustained by the English in terms of ships and men were serious enough to force them to break-off their blockade; likewise, high numbers of casualties among the Dutch sapped any remaining enthusiasm they may have had for continuing the war. Both sides were now willing to seek a political solution to the conflict. The extent to which Pride's foot soldiers were involved in the fighting with the Dutch is revealed in state papers, and a petition to the Admiralty made by a private soldier, Joshua Stevens, who was persuaded to seek compensation after losing his left hand, and a finger from his right, while serving at Scheveningen aboard *Sussex*.[46]

During October 1653 Pride's Regiment were guarding Dutch prisoners of war at Greenwich.[47] In February 1654 a further 100 soldiers were drawn out of the