

Portslade in Stuart times. 1603-1714

Remember, remember, the 5th of November. Gunpowder, treason and plot?

When the last Tudor monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, died childless in 1603, the English throne passed to James Stuart, the son of her old enemy, Mary, Queen of Scots. Already crowned King James VI of Scotland, he was now crowned King James I of England.(pic right)

King James I is the Protestant king that Guy Fawkes (pictured) and his co-Catholic conspirators tried to blow up when they planted gunpowder in the cellars under the Houses of Parliament. The plot was discovered in the nick of time and they were all arrested, tortured and condemned to die.

Since then, children in Portslade and all over the country have burned effigies of Guy Fawkes on bonfires every 5th November celebrating his failure to blow up Parliament and the King. Isn't it reasonable therefore to assume that Guy Fawkes was burned to death at the stake? No! **FAKE NEWS!!**



History Fact Checker – fake news!! – fake news!! – fake news!! – fake news!!

Guy Fawkes was in fact sentenced to a 'traitor's death', which at the time involved being 'hung, drawn and quartered'. He managed to escape the worst of what was a slow and painful death when he jumped off the hanging platform and broke his neck, dying instantly.

Portslade and the English Civil War

Who started it?

The next Stuart king, Charles I (pictured below), was more unfortunate than his father, James. Charles was a deeply religious and strong-willed king who fell out with his Parliament over the manner of England's governance. This resulted in a violent civil war, (1642-1646), which led to him having his head chopped off!



What happened?

The war divided the country and families, including those in Portslade. On the one hand stood the supporters of the King, called Royalists. On the other stood the supporters of the rights and privileges of Parliament: Parliamentarians.

Regardless of their sympathies, tenants were called out by their landlords to fight, whilst village rogues were conscripted by the village constable who was delighted to see them gone.

Portslade was in the part of the country that supported the Parliamentarians, and some villagers would have been forced to fight for the cause whether they wanted to or not.

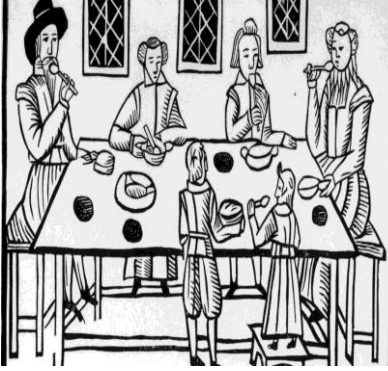
Who won? Was it Portslade?

The Parliamentarians won, the king was executed in 1649. Oliver Cromwell rose from the middle ranks of English society to be Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1653 to 1658.

Portslade ended up on the winning side.



Oliver Cromwell and Christmas in Portslade – was it really banned?



A Puritan Christmas 'party'

Did Oliver Cromwell ban Christmas? **FAKE NEWS??** Well, sort of! The banning of Christmas celebrations began in the early 1640s. Charles I was forced to recall Parliament after ruling alone for 11 years by claiming 'the divine right of kings', which made him very unpopular.

The new Parliament, later called the 'Long Parliament' because it lasted a long time (1640-1660), was dominated by 'Puritans', who saw Christmas rituals as wasteful and extravagant. It soon began the process of stopping Christmas festivities. Soldiers were ordered to patrol the streets to stop anyone making merry and to confiscate any food being prepared for Christmas feasts. When Cromwell came to power in 1653, he merely reinforced the ban.

Christmas in Portslade

In smaller villages, such as Portslade, many people still sneakily decorated their homes with holly, bay and ivy and enjoyed illegal gatherings to sing Yuletide carols - or 'wassailing', as they called it back then.

The vicar of St Nicolas Church at that time, Nathaniel Hancock, may even have carried out a secret church service on Christmas Day with the support of the Lord of Portslade Manor, Abraham Edwards. Abraham was known to invite his tenants to a Christmas feast at the Manor House before the official ban.



Portsladers go wassailing in the village

Charles II - from Portslade to King of England, Scotland and Ireland

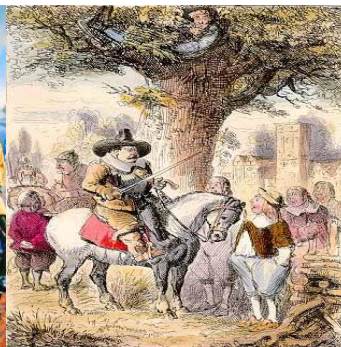
In 1651, the eldest son of Charles I, another Charles, invaded England to try to regain the crown. He was defeated at the Battle of Worcester, the final skirmish of the civil war. After the battle, the young would-be king hid himself in an oak tree to evade Parliamentary troops. Disguised as a farm labourer, he eventually escaped via Sussex, passing through Portslade before fleeing over to France from Shoreham beach. His adventure led to hundreds of pubs being called 'The Royal Oak'.



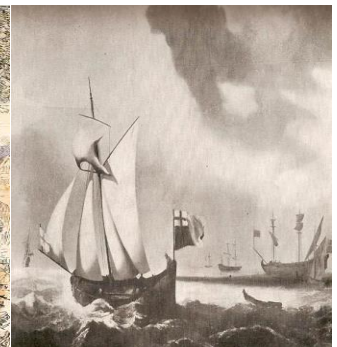
Charles II



Battle of Worcester



Hiding in an oak tree



Escape to France

He remained in exile until 1660, when he was invited back by Parliament to be crowned King Charles II, two years after the death of Oliver Cromwell. Oliver Cromwell's heir, his son, Richard, had little experience of either military or civil administration and had proved to be inept. After many years of strict Puritan rule, the people were ready for a change.

Charles II was a popular king and became known as the 'Merry Monarch', but not all of his reign was merry. In two successive years of his reign, London suffered two terrible disasters, the Great Plague of London (1665) and the Great Fire of London (1666).

See the next page on the less-merry side of Charles II reign

Bring out your dead!

There had been waves of Plague epidemics and pandemics since the 14th century. The Black Death had swept through England in the 14th century, killing around one third of the population, wiping out the village of nearby Hangleton. Many Portsladers would also have succumbed to the disease. However, the plague of 1665 appears to have been more localised to London, killing almost a quarter of its population, but unlikely to have touched Portslade.

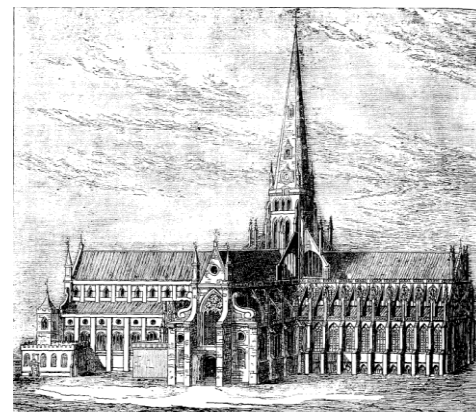
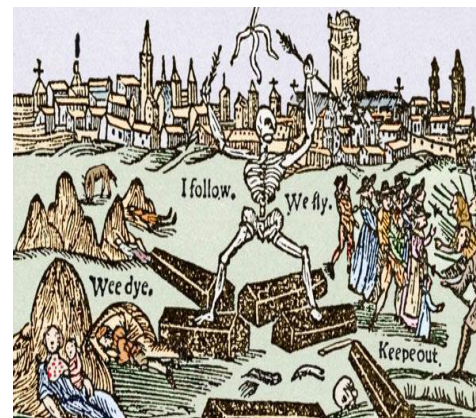
The Great Fire of London and Hangleton

In 1607 John Bridge became vicar of Portslade and remained for 30 years. In 1634, Bridge sent a gift of 10 shillings (£200 in today's money) towards the repair of St Paul's Cathedral in London. This was not the structure we are familiar with today, but the old one which was destroyed in the Great Fire of London.

In September 1666, after a hot summer, a fire broke out in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane. Fanned by a strong wind, it destroyed 13,000 houses and 88 churches, including St Paul's Cathedral. Only a few people died, but 100,000 were made homeless and London had to be rebuilt. The Government insisted that the new houses be built of brick and stone, rather than timber, as most were before. Sir Christopher Wren designed the new St Paul's Cathedral in London that still stands today.

The year 1666 has a resonance for local people also as lightning struck the parsonage house at Hangleton on 31st May 1666 and set it on fire. Unfortunately, the church register of Portslade was kept there and perished in the fire. Hence St Nicolas Church only has surviving registers from 1666.

The rarity of brick and stone housing up to the 17th century is why there are very few buildings in Portslade dating back to and before that time. The only known surviving building in Portslade built in Stuart times is the Stag's Head pub, built in 1662. It was previously called 'The Bull Inn'.



Above: How St. Pauls Cathedral looked before the Great Fire of 1666
Below: St Paul's today



The invention of fake news – This is not fake news

If you thought that fake news started with social media, then think again! Coffee was unknown in Britain until 1650, when it began to be imported from Arabia. It soon became popular and coffeehouses began to spring up in towns and cities. People would meet to discuss politics and events of the day. But Charles II soon realised that the coffeehouses were being used to spread propaganda against King and government, and he banned them in an effort to control the 'fake news'. Public outcry forced him to cancel the ban, but coffee houses had to forbid their customers from uttering "false or scandalous reports against the government or its ministers."

Portslade was too small and its inhabitants too poor to support a coffee house. But the Lord of Portslade Manor would no doubt have been able to get his hands on some, as well as equally expensive tea and cocoa which were also introduced to Britain in the 17th century.

Portslade Manor in Stuart times

In 1603, Richard Snelling and family were living in the manor house. His son, Sir George Snelling, succeeded him as lord, but sold the manor to Abraham Edwards.

Portslade villagers would have been familiar with the Manor House, as this was where the manor court regularly met and many of the regulations governing their lives were laid down. Strict rules were enforced as to where and when tenants could graze their sheep and cattle on local common pastureland. For example, the 'somer foredowne' was reserved for lambs between April and 24th August. Tenants could put their sheep there from 24 August to 2nd February, but then sheep were barred until 25 March. Most of the ancient common land in Portslade is now the private property of local landowners.

Local proceedings were recorded in Portslade Manor court books, which were thought lost. But when the nuns living in the (new) manor house, then known as St Marye's Convent, were leaving the house in the 1990s, the ancient books were found. They are now kept at The Keep in Brighton. The earliest one covers the years 1660 to 1722 and is written in Latin. In 1734 records began to be written in English

Portslade and unusual Taxes

In 1662, a property tax was imposed on dwellings according to the number of their fireplaces. This was called 'the hearth tax'. The Lord of Portslade Manor would now have to pay tax on the two splendid new fireplaces (pictured right) that were installed during improvements to the Manor House during the Tudor period. Most dwellings in Portslade would have been exempt, however, due to poverty or if they lived in very small homes.

Have you ever wondered where the expression 'daylight robbery' comes from? In 1696, King William III, imposed a 'window tax.' This forced property owners in England and Wales to pay tax based on the number of windows in their home. This is why still today you can find bricked up windows in old houses, which was done to save paying taxes. The old Portslade Norman house has a surviving bricked up window (pictured) as does the new Manor House, where Emmaus is now lodged.



What else did the Stuarts do for us?

Whilst the Elizabethans invented the theatre, it was not until the 1660s that women were allowed to act in plays. Perhaps they performed at the manor?

Regular newspapers began to appear during the English Civil War (1642-51). Up until then, news was circulated by means of pamphlets, posters and ballads, as well as gossip!

Forks replaced fingers as a means of eating our dinners.

The first steam-powered water pump was developed in 1698 by Thomas Savery.

Ice houses were invented, the first home freezer!

Dr William Harvey discovers how blood circulates in our bodies.

Charles II becomes the first British monarch to keep a professional army in peacetime.

What happened next?

The last Stuart monarch, Queen Anne, had 18 children, but not one survived to inherit the throne when she died in 1707. The Stuart line thus came to an end and the throne passed to King George I. The Georgian era had begun.....

