THE KING'S REVENGE

Charles II and the Greatest Manhunt in British History

DON JORDAN
AND MICHAEL WALSH

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To Dian and to Eithne

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THE KING'S REVENGE

PREFACE

The fate of the men who dared to sit in judgment upon King Charles I has intrigued us ever since we began work on our previous book, *White Cargo*. During our research we came across a curious folk tale from New England which made us wonder if we had spotted the tip of a more significant story. This is how we came to write *The King's Revenge*.

The folk tale, dating from the early English settlements in Massachusetts, was of the Angel of Hadley. The story goes that the remote pioneer village of Hadley was attacked by an overwhelming force of Algonquin warriors and faced certain annihilation. When all seemed lost, a mysterious figure appeared with flowing white hair and beard, brandishing a sword. Exhibiting considerable military prowess, the stranger marshalled the townsfolk into an effective fighting force. The enemy was repelled and the town saved. As soon as the battle was over, the stranger disappeared as quickly as he had come. Afterwards, the God-fearing people of Hadley put their rescue down to an avenging angel sent by God.

Today, there is debate about whether the attack took place or not. But what interested us was that there existed a real-life candidate for the angel – a former Cromwellian general by the name of William Goffe, who had sat as a judge in the court that sentenced King Charles I to death. Following Charles II's ascension to the throne, the general became a wanted man and fled to Massachusetts. British

troops were dispatched to find him and bring him back to face trial for treason. Unknown to the people of Hadley, their Puritan pastor hid the runaway in the attic of his house for many years. If the attack really occurred, then the former Civil War officer would have been the ideal candidate to lead the townsfolk in battle.

This story led us to wonder about all sixty-nine men who had determined the execution of King Charles I. How many, like the soldier in Massachusetts, had fled? Where did they run to and were they pursued? How many stayed in England to state their case and face the probability of death? How many were executed? How many were imprisoned? These were among the questions thrown up by the tale of the avenging angel. We decided to follow our lead and research the fate of the men who became known simply as the regicides. We discovered that their stories had never been gathered together into one coherent whole.

Several months after the execution of Charles I in 1649, his eldest son, Charles, the Prince of Wales, wrote from exile in Holland, vowing vengeance on those blamed for his father's death: '... we shall therein by all ways and means possible endeavour to pursue and bring to their due punishment those bloody traitors who were either actors or contrivers of that unparalleled and inhuman murder'.

Of course, the prince had no means by which to carry out his threat. He lived on the charity of the ruling families of Europe and, as continental states gradually came to terms with republican England, was increasingly isolated. This all changed in the summer of 1660 when Charles was invited to return and take up the throne. Catapulted into power, he could at last do something about those who had brought about his father's death.

The story of the ensuing retribution is essentially that of an unrelenting manhunt for everyone who had signed Charles I's death warrant, plus a few more whom Charles II wanted rid of.

To tell the story required our starting with the actions that led to the hunt, the trial and execution of the king. It also required the creation of a narrative that encompasses a series of individual biographies. Of

necessity, these biographies must play second fiddle to the narrative. Hence they cannot all be given the depth of attention they might each merit on their own. It is the greater story that we are after here and we have had to make judgments with which others might disagree. Those who wish to discover more on any one person will find the general bibliography at the end of the book a useful starting point.

Today we know a great deal about the frivolous side of Charles II but we know less about his more ruthless side, which saw him callously send his political enemies to the scaffold. Fresh insights into his character may still be found. Contemporary parliamentary records reveal a new role for Charles: that of the interrogator. In late 1660, just a few months after ascending to the throne, the king went to the Tower and interrogated prisoners accused of treason. According to reports, the notoriously lazy monarch was a dab hand at drawing out confessions. Fortunately for the modern researcher and writer, the seventeenth century saw the explosion of the written and printed word: official records of all types, contemporary memoirs, newspapers, propaganda sheets, personal diaries and letters, plays and poems. All these and more flowed from pens and presses. We are grateful to have been able to access these precious documents, chiefly at the British Library and the Public Record Office.

Thanks to this desire to record events, we have a greater idea of the struggle some men faced: a struggle with their consciences and their impulse for self-preservation. For example, at the last Parliament to be held before the return of Charles II, Thomas Scot effectively signed his own death warrant by declaring he was proud they had killed Charles I. By contrast, Thomas Fairfax, who commanded the New Model Army in its defeat of the royalist forces, provided a white horse for Charles II to ride at his coronation. Fairfax was not alone in changing sides. For most this was a simple matter of survival. Many of our most important characters did not, however, change their allegiance. They are interesting precisely because they stood up for their beliefs.

Perhaps most exhilaratingly of all, seventeenth-century records bring to life a world of espionage. From papers held at the Public

Record Office at Kew, spymaster Sir George Downing – 'that perfidious rogue', as Samuel Pepys described him – is revealed to us in all his brilliant treachery. We see him plan with ruthless efficiency to go to the Continent and kidnap his former friends and bring them back to be executed for treason. We see a honeytrap set by Aphra Behn, the Mata Hari of her day, successfully turn a republican exile into a spy for the House of Stuart.

Some characters are interesting simply because they were *there* – and wrote down what they saw and thought. Hence the larger-than-life legal grandee Bulstrode Whitelocke who wrote in his memoirs that he evaded trial for his participation in the republic's affairs by bribing, among others, Edward Hyde, a former fellow parliamentarian and friend. Hyde was by then Charles II's Lord Chancellor and much given to moralising and lecturing the king about his mistresses, but not above extracting a small fortune from a former ally in need. Hyde's more punctilious side allowed him to write a brilliant history of those turbulent years.

The surviving documentation of the time also reveals the unsavoury side of statecraft and the law. One account of the court that was set up to judge the alleged regicides reveals that it was fixed, sending men to their deaths on specious charges and insufficient evidence. In a fit of hubris, the king's counsel John Kelying wrote a legal memoir in which he recalled how judges and the prosecutors got together beforehand to rig the rules in order to meet their own ends.

In dealing with our large cast, we have had to be wary of the sometimes misleading nature of the accounts. For example, Lucy Hutchinson's famous memoir of her husband, Colonel John Hutchinson, one of the men who signed Charles I's death warrant, needs to be approached with caution. It gives a sanitised version of how her husband evaded the death penalty after the restoration. Edmund Ludlow's published memoirs were thought to be entirely by his own hand until his original manuscript, titled *A Voyce from the Watchtower*, was discovered at Warwick Castle in 1970. Thanks to the

detective work of Dr Blair Worden, we now know this was a large part of Ludlow's original manuscript and that the memoirs as previously published were a radically rewritten version by a different hand in order to present Ludlow as more of a late-seventeenth-century Whig and less of the religious radical he was in real life.

Sometimes historical characters are fascinating because of their opacity. By far the most impenetrable character was George Monck, a professional soldier who first plied his trade for the House of Stuart. He later became one of Cromwell's most trusted commanders. After Cromwell's death, his career took a further twist: he helped to crush all parliamentary and army opposition in order to pave the way for the return of Charles II. It is hardly surprising that opinions differ on Monck's motives. The reader will see we have reached our own conclusions.

Today, the House of Stuart is remembered chiefly for its sexual scandal, a wonderful art collection and the formation of the Royal Society. Its Puritan adversaries are remembered almost solely as king killers and for Irish atrocities. They have been described as dangerous fanatics or, at best, foolhardy men who carried out a heinous deed. This is a shame, for among them were remarkable men. They played a critical role in British history, formulating forward-looking social, political and legal ideas that still hold good today, yet they have few monuments and, in the case of those who were executed, no graves. The remarkable struggle between Charles II and his recalcitrant subjects led to the longest-running manhunt in British history – a story worthy of a new and wider audience.

I

THE WATCHTOWER

The middle-aged man who climbed the hill to the church above the little town on the shores of Lake Geneva had a heft and strut that marked him out as an old soldier. He carried a sword and wore a breastplate under his cloak. A casual observer might have marvelled at the vanity of a man trying to recapture the martial glories of his youth, but the truth was that the old soldier feared for his life.

A plot to assassinate him had been thwarted only by the vigilance of his landlord, who on his way to church early one Sunday had spotted two 'ruffian like fellows, desperados with long cloaks and carbines under them'.[1] He returned home and told his tenant he thought the men were up to no good. Taking a chance, the old soldier crept out to catch a surreptitious glimpse of the rogues. What he saw confirmed his landlord's fears. After that, he went to church well armed.

Though he generally shunned company, to anyone who asked he introduced himself as Edmund Phillips, an Englishman who had chosen to travel and live abroad for a while. In reality he was a fugitive with a price on his head, unable to return home on pain of death, branded a traitor and compelled to live in exile under an assumed name.

His real name was Edmund Ludlow. Born into minor gentry in Wiltshire, he was a veteran of the British Civil Wars. Before his enforced exile he had been a high-flyer: scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, attorney at the Inner Temple, Member of Parliament, Lieutenant-General of Cavalry, Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth Army in Ireland, High Sheriff of Wiltshire and member of the Commonwealth's Council of State (the Cabinet).

A portrait of him in later life shows a square sort of fellow with a large face and a determined yet small mouth above a large chin. He wears a full wig, a lace ruff and full armour befitting his status as a lieutenant-general.[2] But the old soldier's real claim to fame – or infamy – was that he had royal blood on his hands. He was a regicide, a king-killer, one of sixty-nine judges who tried Charles I for treason and sentenced him to death by beheading.

The sixty-nine men who found Charles guilty of treason were a varied lot. What they shared was the belief that Charles had a view of monarchy at odds with the spirit of the age, pursuing autocratic decision-making and promoting religious policies that stifled freedom of conscience. Most of the sixty-nine were members of the House of Commons – or, rather, remnants of Parliament after royalist sympathisers had been ejected in a military *coup d'état* in late 1648. The aim of this had been to create a Parliament composed purely of radically minded men who would agree to put the king on trial for treason for having waged war against his people. Senior officers of the New Model Army (the Parliament's victorious military force) including its creator, Oliver Cromwell, also sat as judges. The rest of the bench was made up of radical lawyers and wealthy merchants serving as aldermen, elected councillors, of London. To begin with, Parliament appointed 153 commissioners to try the king. The trial was so contentious that half refused to sit. Those who did voted unanimously to have the king executed for high treason.*

* For a full list of the regicides see Appendix 1.

By killing a king and establishing a republic, the king's judges not only changed the course of English history but altered their own futures beyond their imagining. Following eleven years of experiments in government unparalleled in British history, the son of the executed king returned to England to rule as Charles II. He had left England fourteen years before when, at the age of sixteen, he fled into exile at the tail end of the Civil War.

Charles II grew up in warfare and came of age in a foreign country, without a father. He joined his mother's court in exile at St Germain near Paris, provided for by her French royal relatives. In the seventeenth century the age of sixteen was regarded as adulthood, though thanks to growing up in war-torn England, Charles could at times be socially awkward. To the eyes of the refined French royal court, he was even *gauche*, though not completely a lost cause. One of his mother's grand relatives described him as 'Swarthy, with fine black eyes and a wide, ugly mouth . . . his head was noble, his hair black, his complexion brown, his person passably agreeable.'[3]

Charles reached maturity as an impecunious prince without a state, flitting between the courts of Europe, selling his silver plate and keeping his demons at bay with a growing passion for sex that would propel him to take on a succession of mistresses in ensuing years. When the throne was suddenly and unexpectedly awarded to him, he seized the opportunity to make up for lost time with an instinctual thirst for luxury and excess – and an understandable desire for revenge upon those who had put him through hell by killing his father.

The end of fourteen years of exile for Charles marked the beginning of a life of exile for many of his father's enemies, including Edmund Ludlow. Prime movers behind the revolution – 'the good old cause' as they called it – including Oliver Cromwell and his son-in-law Henry Ireton, only evaded retribution by dying before the accession of the new king. Ludlow watched as parliamentarians, lawyers, members of the oldest families in England, were imprisoned and charged with treason.

Ludlow realised he had become a wanted man. Sooner or later, officers of the Tower would come to arrest him. He moved to the home of friends he could trust. When he learned the two Houses of Parliament were debating who should be placed on lists for trial and execution, he quietly left the city, travelling up-river at night towards Richmond. To match his new renegade status he changed his habits and his appearance. The former government minister grew a beard and flitted in and out of London on foot, joining the robbers, prostitutes, homeless and other unfortunates who kept their watch on the city by night. Ludlow knew it was risky to frequent the city but he was anxious to keep in touch with events and in contact with his family and those who could help him.

To decide upon his future, Ludlow risked convening a meeting of close friends and relatives at a house in Westminster. 'A friend and kinsman' advised him that he should 'withdraw out of England . . . assuring if I stayed I was a dead man'. Ludlow was told he would only have to go abroad for a short while and that 'he supposed within three or four months the hate and rage would be over'.[4]

Ludlow hoped that some form of the pre-restoration Parliament might be re-established, but 'not believing that it was yet a tyme to expect deliverance, I resolved to hasten my departure.'[5] His wife and friends arranged notes of credit to be sent ahead to France, and guides and accomplices to get him out of the city and across the Channel to Dieppe.

On the appointed night, his wife and some other relations arrived at his safe house with a coach. They crossed London Bridge and made through Southwark to the church of St George the Martyr. Here a guide was waiting with two horses to take the fugitive statesman to the coast.

'I tooke my leave of my deare relations, my poore wife and another friend accompanying me,' wrote Ludlow.[6] His old life was over for good. He and his guide rode through the night along the least frequented roads to Lewes, where a merchant loyal to the parliamentary cause was expecting him. For three days he 'lay as privately as I

could' until word came that a ship was ready at the coast. Stormy weather delayed the boat's departure and Ludlow was almost apprehended when searches were carried out among ships waiting to leave. Fortunately, he was hidden on a craft which the agents thought not worth searching as it lay aground on a sandbank.

The next day he got away to Dieppe and afterwards made his way to Paris, then Lyons, and ultimately towards Geneva, all the while trying to evade the royalist spies who watched out for him through Europe. Only when he arrived at Geneva – 'Calvin's City' – did he feel safe. Finally, he moved to a small, out-of-the-way town on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Years before, Charles II and Ludlow had faced one another in battle, though neither realised it at the time. It was on 23 October 1642, at the first pitched battle of the Civil War at Edgehill in Warwickshire. Twelve-year-old Charles, then Prince of Wales, was present with his father, Charles I, and his younger brother, James. Edmund Ludlow was twenty-five and a member of the life guard of the parliamentary army's commander-in-chief, the 3rd Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux. The earl bore a famous name – that of Elizabeth I's one-time favourite. Unlike his flamboyant and headstrong father, the 3rd Earl was a dour fellow, a cuckold and a laughing-stock at court.

Both sides expected the action at Edgehill to be the deciding action of the war. The king, confident of victory, had brought his sons along to watch. Up to this time, the princes had lived in pampered comfort. As heir to the throne, Charles had his own court at Richmond quite separate from the establishments of his parents at Whitehall. Since the age of eight he had been in the care of a series of aristocratic lords who acted as his governors. The first had been the unutterably grand Earl of Newcastle, who had little or no interest in looking after someone else's boy, prince or otherwise. Newcastle was a cultured man and a fine horseman whose idea of instructing the prince seems to have consisted of a series of didactic letters interspersed with short visits for a spot of archery or hunting.

In the earliest letter that has come down to us, the prince writes to his governor, 'I ride every day, and am ready to follow any other directions from you. Make haste to return to him that loves you.'[7] According to contemporary reports, Newcastle taught the prince to 'ride leaping horses and such as would overthrow others'.[8]

On more academic matters, the earl wrote perceptive letters of advice. 'What you read, I would have it history that so you might compare the dead with the living; for the same humours is now as was then, there is no alteration but in names.'[9] The earl's dry wit may have rubbed off on the boy, for the letter contains something of the cynicism with which the adult Charles was later to view his fellow creatures.

In 1641, having spent £40,000 of his own money running the prince's court, the earl decided the honour of being governor to the prince was one he could no longer shoulder. The dubious honour was handed on to the equally grand Marquis of Hertford, a bookish man with no interest in outdoor pursuits and none whatever in passing on his considerable wealth of knowledge. Like Newcastle, he carried out his task largely by remote control and lasted two years in the job. The prince thus had an easy-going upbringing, with a personal tutor and various ladies of the court for company and a few friends of his own age such as the sons of the Duke of Buckingham. It was a life with a little culture, a little academic effort, a little learning of field pursuits and a great deal of pleasure.

Charles was growing up to be a confident if moody boy who was, like his father, an accomplished horseman. When war broke out, his education took a practical turn with first-hand observation of the many sides of humanity under stress – the weaknesses, the prevarications, the bravery, self-interest, shrewdness and more.

For the battle at Edgehill, the young prince was given the purely honorary command of a cavalry regiment. The king's physician, William Harvey (famous for having discovered the circulation of blood), was put in charge of young Charles and his brother. As the fight progressed, Harvey forgot about his charges, who were placed at

a field medical station. When the parliamentary forces attacked the right flank of the royalist army, the Prince of Wales took his command seriously and tried to lead a charge, shouting 'I fear them not!' He was prevented from heading into battle by members of the royal party who grabbed his horse's reins. When the parliamentary forces seized an advantage and pushed through the flank of the royalist army, Charles and his brother were in great danger of being captured. Once more, quick action directed the princes away from the fighting and prevented a disaster.

As for Ludlow and his fellow life guards, they made something of a hash of their first military action. By the end of the day, thanks to tactical blunders on both sides, the battle was inconclusive. War would drag on for six more years. The heir to the throne would find himself experiencing a great deal very quickly, though after his spirited action at Edgehill, in future he was kept well away from the scene of combat.

In early 1645, Charles I made his eldest son commander-in-chief of all royalist forces in the West Country. This meant that he would now be separated from his father. He was just turning fifteen. The campaign in the west was in turmoil but the king hoped the nominal title of command would help his son grow to manhood. This it most certainly did, in more ways than one.

In the spring, the prince and his council moved to the royalist stronghold of Bridgwater in Somerset. Here, Charles was reunited with his former governess, the beautiful and pushy Christabella Wyndham. According to a contemporary account, Charles was 'diverted by her folly and petulancy'. Even when the company surrounding the prince was most numerous, Christabella would 'run the length of the room and kiss him'.[10] There were rumours the beautiful ex-governess introduced the prince to the joys of sex. The fun and games did not last long; the war was running against the royal cause. On Christmas Day the prince received a letter from his father telling him to leave England and not delay one hour.[11] The prince lingered until he could disobey no longer and sailed from

Land's End to the Scilly Isles on the night tide of 2 March 1646. From there, he went to Jersey and then to Paris to be reunited with his mother. He would never see his father again.

As for Ludlow, within two years of riding out at Edgehill, he was promoted to major. By the time he was thirty-two, he had helped organise the trial of the king, signed his death warrant and become a member of the government of a new republic. Two years later he was an effective commander-in-chief in Ireland. As a firm believer in political reform and religious freedom, Ludlow's rite-of-passage carried him through from young squire to active republican. By the age of forty-three he was a pariah and exile with a price on his head. In a period of two decades, Ludlow experienced and did more than most men could expect to see or achieve in several lifetimes – and yet at the time of his enforced flight abroad he still had thirty-two years ahead of him.

In Switzerland, he sat down to write a history of all that had occurred between taking up arms in 1642 and the end of his religious and republican dreams. When Ludlow and his fellow life guards joined up, most thought the war would last a few months at most. Two years later it was bogged down in stalemate. On the parliamentary side, the aristocratic commanders did not wish to inflict an outright victory over the king, thinking the conflict would quickly be resolved in a negotiated settlement. Essex had been appointed supreme commander by Parliament to exercise its cause on the battlefield while also preserving the life of the king.[12] Ludlow watched as the war progressed and the old aristocratic generals were replaced by the 'middling sort of men', Cromwell's appointees to run the New Model Army that would ultimately crush the royalist forces. He saw how the main protagonists who had entered the war on the parliamentary side were replaced by a generation of more radical figures who no longer adhered to the old system of royal favour and inherited influence.

In the evenings by Lake Geneva, after a day's labour at his history, Ludlow's mind would be crowded with the ghosts of the dead and

the memories of the living. Among the ghosts that visited most was that of John Cook, the brilliant young lawyer who wrote the prosecution case against Charles I. When brought to the Tower, Cook had requested that his life should be taken so that Ludlow's should be spared. What a man that was – no truer friend or colleague could any man have had. Shortly after Ludlow had made his escape, Cook was executed for treason.

When he did not dwell upon the terrible fate of his friend John Cook, Ludlow thought of the fate of many others, including his fellow exile, John Lisle, recently murdered in a Swiss churchyard barely twenty miles from Ludlow's own hideaway. The old soldier was in little doubt that the same assassins plotted to come for him, too.

And what of the ghost of Oliver Cromwell, that brilliant man who, in the eyes of Ludlow and others, betrayed the Commonwealth by becoming a king in all but name? Hated though the memory of Cromwell was, the face that leered most malevolently in Ludlow's imagination was that of George Monck, the parliamentary general who had become a turncoat and secretly plotted to install Charles II as king.

Fifteen years later, the republic was only a broken dream. General Monck, who had started out as an impoverished soldier for hire, was living in luxury with a dukedom and a fortune from a grateful king. Ludlow, who had lost everything, lived quietly with his wife Elizabeth, who had managed to join him in exile. She was his only comfort as he spent his days writing his memories of the great events he had taken part in. On his desk lay a brace of exquisite pistols, a present from a fellow exile who would later die for his convictions. The pistols were a talisman, a call to arms, to join a new army of revolutionaries and overthrow Charles II. But Ludlow was no longer the young firebrand who had handled weapons and directed men on the battlefield. He was nearing sixty and the fire had gone out in him.

From his fortified house, Ludlow could see the light shift on the

waters of Lake Geneva. It held no charms for him. He longed for the fields of England. He dipped his pen in ink and tried to conjure up the earthly paradise that England should have been, the paradise he thought he could help create. The light across the lake looked alien and unwelcoming. There was no beauty in this scene; God had turned against him. He entitled his work *A Voyce from the Watchtower*, the words taken from the book of Isaiah:

> My Lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower . . . And behold there cometh a chariot of men . . . And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen.[13]

In the evening light, the mountains turned ultramarine and sapphire, their images reflected in the still waters of the lake. Ludlow wrote of his flight from England and journey to Switzerland. His description of the city of Paris said as much for his view of life as for the French capital:

> I saw the King's stable of horses, which, though not extraordinarily furnished, gave me more pleasure than I should have received by seeing their master, who thinks fit to treat them better than his miserable people. But I loathed to see such numbers of idle drones, who in ridiculous habits, wherein they place a great part of their religion, are to be seen in every part, eating the bread of the credulous multitude, and leaving them to be distinguished from the inhabitants of other countries by thin cheeks, canvas clothing, and wooden shoes.[14]

In these words the old soldier spelled out his creed: his hatred of inequality, of priests and poverty – the Puritan credo wrapped up in words that might have been written by any young Englishman on his grand tour. As for mention of his nemesis, Charles, Ludlow could not bear to write the name, preferring to use terms like 'usurper' and 'enemy of the people'.

As the shadows lengthened across the lake, Ludlow tried not to think of the shadowy figures moving across Europe and North America, searching for him and his fellow regicides – men who had dared to sit in judgment on a king.