Cropredy Bridge

By Miss M. R. Toynbee and J. J. Leeming

THE bridge over the River Cherwell at Cropredy was rebuilt by the Oxfordshire County Council in 1937. The structure standing at that time was for the most part comparatively modern, for the bridge, as will be explained later, has been thoroughly altered and reconstructed at least twice (in 1780 and 1886) within the last 160 years.

The historical associations of the bridge, especially during the Civil War period, have rendered it famous, and an object of pilgrimage, and it seems therefore suitable, on the occasion of its reconstruction, to collect together such details as are known about its origin and history, and to add to them a short account of the Civil War battle of 1644, the historical occurrence for which the site is chiefly famous.

The general history of the bridge, and the account of the battle, have been written by Miss Toynbee; the account of the 1937 reconstruction is by Mr. Leeming, who, as engineer on the staff of the Oxfordshire County Council, was in charge of the work.

HISTORY OF THE BRIDGE[1]

The first record of the existence of a bridge at Cropredy dates, so far as it has been possible to discover, from the year 1312. That there was a bridge in existence before 1312 appears to be pretty certain. Cropredy was a place of some importance in the Middle Ages. It formed part of the possessions of the See of Lincoln, and is entered in Domesday Book as such. 'The Bishop of Lincoln holds Cropelie. It belongs and belonged to the church of St. Mary at Lincoln.' Up till the Reformation Cropredy provided a prebend of Lincoln Cathedral. In addition, Cropredy Church enjoyed a special claim to celebrity in the possession of the relics of St. Fremund, Frethmund, or Fredismund, of Prescote (by Cropredy).[2] Although these relics were translated to Dunstable Priory about

[1] In compiling these notes I have received valuable help from Miss Helen Loveday, of Deddington, who also supplied me with information about the locality of Cropredy and showed me the various historical sites; from the Rev. R. W. Sharpley, vicar of Cropredy from 1929 to 1937; from Mr. H. M. Walton, Archivist to the Oxfordshire County Council; and from Miss Sylvia Wood, of Steeple Aston.

[2] For the story of St. Fremund see Canon Wood, 'A Forgotten Saint,' in *The Antiquary*, May and June 1893, and F. N. Macnamara, *Memorials of the Danvers Family* (1895).

1207, it would appear that not all of them were removed. Richard Danvers, of Prescote, in his will, dated 1488, leaves 100s. to the church of Cropredy, and ' Towards the repair of the Chapel of St. Fremund where his shrine is situated,' 20s.' Again, in 1514 Sir John Danvers leaves 20s. to ' St. Frethemund's Chapel,' while as late as 1539 Ann, his widow, bequeaths ten ewes to ' the Chapel of Saynte Fredysmunde in Cropredy.' It has been very cogently argued that these bequests would scarcely have been made if no relics had been left at Cropredy. There was probably also a chapel dedicated to St. Fremund, to whom the Danvers family had a special devotion, at Prescote House. Writing as late as 1655, the fanatic Walter Gostelow, whose family then lived at Prescote, says in his *Charls Stuart and Oliver Cromwel United*, ' Some religious house I conceive it to have been, an Altar and Chappel I have known in it.'[1] St. Fremund's shrine would have been an object of pilgrimage, and therefore it would be natural to find a bridge at Cropredy before 1312. While work was being done upon the bridge in 1886 wooden piles were found a little farther down stream than the present site and remains of an earlier bridge were also found in 1937. Moreover, in the record of 1312, about to be quoted, the work of construction or *repair* of the bridge is envisaged. The Lincoln Episcopal Registers for 1312 contain the following entries :

> ' iiij Kal Oct ' apud Bannebir ' concessit episcopus .xx. dies indulgencie omnibus subvenientibus de bonis sibi a deo collatis ad construccionem seu reparaccionem pontis de Croppery etc.' (*sic*)[2]
>
> ' Eisdem die et loco [*i.e.* iij Non Nov. apud Bannebir '] concessit episcopus .xx. dies indulgencie omnibus subvenientibus de bonis suis construcioni seu reparacioni pontis de Cropperie cum ratificacione indulgencie a fratre Gilberto Enachdunensi episcopo in hac parte concessam (*sic*) et omnes indulgencias a quibuscunque episcopis regni Anglie etc.' (*sic*)[3]

The Bishop of Lincoln at that date was John de Dalderby (died 1320). Gilbert, Bishop of Annaghdown in Galway, apparently acted as suffragan to various English bishops, including the Bishop of Lincoln.

The original structure was probably a very narrow, packhorse bridge, without a parapet, and it is conjectured that a certain amount of traffic would have gone through a ford at its side.

The bridge which was standing at the beginning of the Civil War was apparently in sound condition, as it was crossed by Charles I and part of his army on the way from Edgecote to Edgehill on the morning of 23 October, 1642. It is possible that this bridge was restored in 1691. That date, with some initials, appeared on a stone in the coping of the cutwater on the north side.

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 205. [2] Reg. 3/f. 262. [3] *Ibid*, f. 264.

CROPREDY BRIDGE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY.

From a sketch by Joseph Skelton in the Sutherland Collection in the Bodleian Library, by courtesy of the Curators.

But in the absence of documentary evidence of the bridge having been restored in that year, the stone does not, in the opinion of Mr. Leeming, provide proof that such a restoration took place, for the cutting on the stone could well have been done *in situ*. The dated stone has been incorporated in the masonry of the new bridge on the north side.

Less than a hundred years later, Cropredy Bridge was urgently in need of repair. At the Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions held at Trinity 1776 a jury presented that ' a certain Common ancient Bridge over the River Charwell commonly called Cropredy Bridge . . . being in the parishes of Cropredy and Wardington . . . in the King's Common Highway there leading from Brackley . . . to Warwick . . . on the first day of May in the sixteenth year of the reign of our sovereign lord King George the Third etc., was and yet is in great Decay broken and ruinous,' so that it was not possible to pass without great danger. The jury contended that it was the business of the inhabitants of the County of Oxford to repair the bridge whenever necessary.[1] It was found to be a true bill. On 24 August of the same year ' An Indictment being preferred at the last Sessions agst the Inhabitants of the County for a Defect of repairing Cropredy Bridge, and it being alledged on behalf of the County that the parishes of Wardington and Cropredy . . . ought in Law to repair the said Bridge, and the County, upon that Principle, intending to traverse the said Bill of Indictment—but some Repairs being necessary to be done immediately to the Bridge for the Safety of the Public, the County, by the Justices now present, and the said parishes . . . by Mr. Samuel Sparrow, their Attorney, and John Thacker, Constable of the parish of Wardington, and the prosecutor of the said Bill of Indictment, agree that such Repairs as are immediately wanted to be done for the present Support of the Bridge shall be done.'[2] The expenses were to be defrayed by the party against whom the suit was decided. At Michaelmas the inhabitants of the County, through their attorney, pleaded that the parishes of Wardington and Cropredy had always repaired the bridge, and contended that they ought to continue to do so. Wardington was held responsible for one half, Cropredy for the other.[3] It has not been possible to find the record of the way in which the case was decided, but it seems quite clear that the County emerged victorious, for it did not take over responsibility for the bridge until 1890. At any rate the repairs were carried out. Alfred Beesley[4] says that the bridge underwent considerable repairs about the year 1780. These were undoubtedly the outcome of the indictment of 1776. During this work of restoration the western arch was rebuilt and made round-headed, in contrast to the earlier, eastern arch, which was pointed.

[1] Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls.
[2] Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions Minute Book.
[3] Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls.
[4] *History of Banbury* (1841), p. 619.

In 1886 Cropredy Bridge was widened on the south side, the work being carried out by Mr. Cherry, of Cropredy, whose business is now known as Messrs. Cherry and Son. Dr. William Wood, vicar at the time, persuaded the authorities concerned to use blue brick, not red as they had intended. He failed to induce them to use stone, although plenty was available near by.

A sketch (PLATE XI) by Joseph Skelton of Cropredy Bridge as it appeared in the early part of the nineteenth century is in the Sutherland Collection in the Bodleian Library.[1] The view is taken from the south-east. An excellent photograph of the bridge from the north is given in Mr. W. G. Bond's *Wanderings of Charles I and his Army in the Midlands* (1927),[2] and another, from the south, appears in Miss E. C. Williams's *Companion into Oxfordshire* (1935).[3] In both photographs the difference between the two arches of the bridge is very striking, but more especially in the view of the northern and older side, which shows the cutwater before mentioned. The wooden rails, carried by struts on either side, are another noticeable feature.

THE RECONSTRUCTION IN 1937

By 1937 the bridge had for some time been showing signs of instability and the stonework of the upstream face was badly decayed. During the various repairs and reconstructions which the bridge underwent in the course of time very little care was taken to bond the new and old parts together. In particular the large cutwater which was such a prominent feature of the upstream face (FIG. 15) was not bonded into the main face, and two comparatively large trees were growing into the gap, forcing the cutwater away from the bridge itself. As these ancient bridges are usually built of a skin of masonry with a backing of fill it was thought that the only way of permanently removing the trees was to demolish the structure entirely, and that there was, therefore, no hope of patching up and saving the old bridge. This forecast was amply proved to be true during the demolition.

At the time of reconstruction the only really old part of the structure which was visible was the upstream face (FIG. 15), for, during the widening in 1886, the downstream face had been completely rebuilt as an exact copy of the upstream face, omitting the cutwater, in Staffordshire blue brick. The stone portions of the bridge were built of Hornton (Edgehill) stone, and the workmanship was fairly good, except for the faulty bonding referred to. The whole structure was founded on an ancient hole in the river bed which had been filled in with stones.

[1] C. II, 385. [2] *Op. cit.*, fig. 4. [3] *Op. cit.*, facing p. 6.

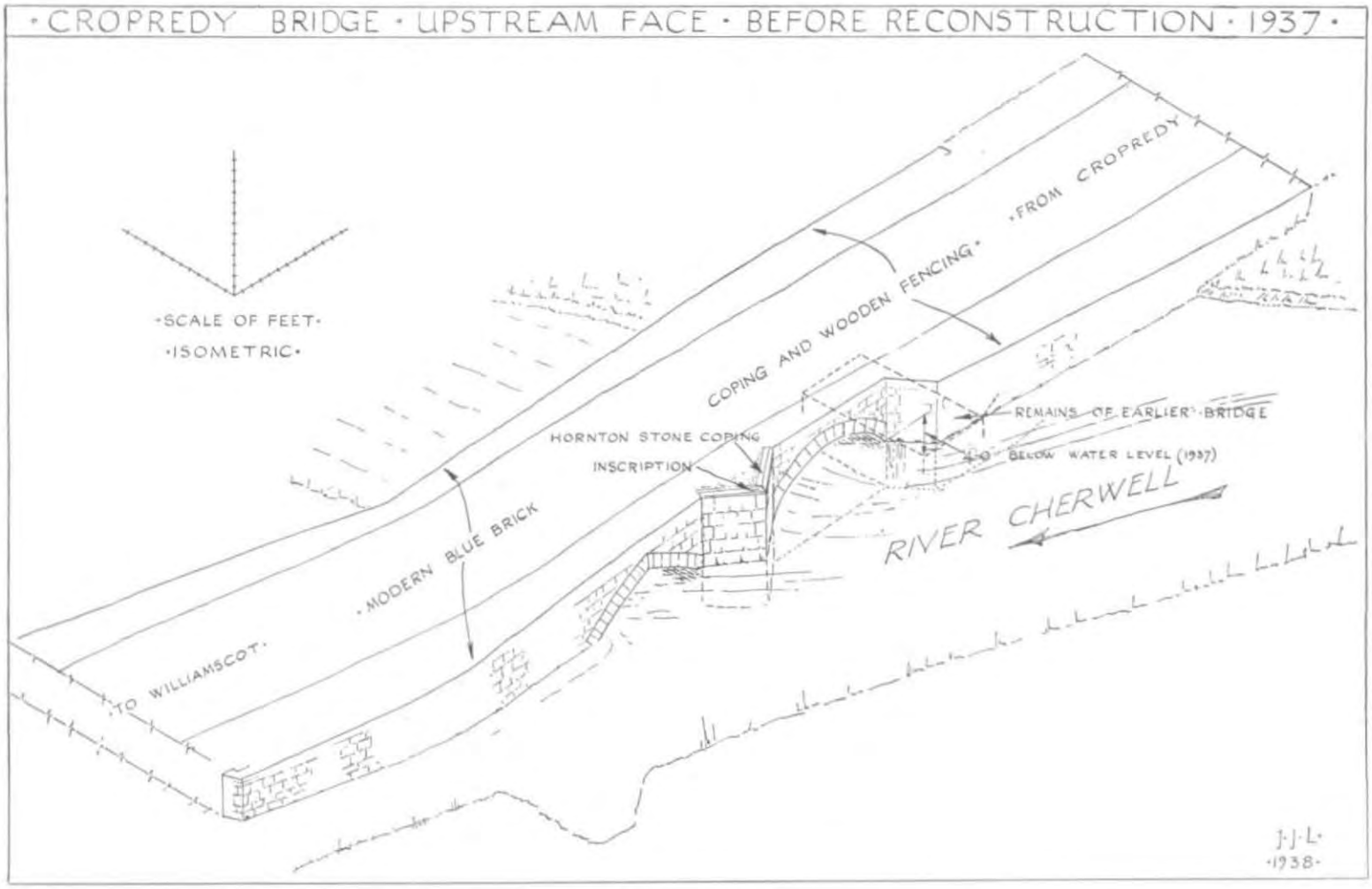

FIG. 15

ISOMETRIC DRAWING OF CROPREDY BRIDGE BEFORE RECONSTRUCTION IN 1937

During the demolition remains of a still older bridge were found, as shown on the drawing, in the Cropredy abutment. On the drawing this is shown rectangular, but it is probable, from the appearance of the upstream face of this masonry, that this earlier bridge had a cutwater on the upstream, though not on the downstream, face. It may be remarked that this absence of a downstream cutwater is often responsible for the instability of ancient bridges due to scour. A springing stone of an arch was also found in place on the Cropredy side, showing that an arch existed there in this earlier bridge. The springing level of this arch is shown on the drawing, four feet below present summer water level. This is lower than the present water level even when the sluices at Cropredy Mill, a short way below the bridge, are fully drawn, and since it is unlikely that the arch would have been built with its springing below water level, it is reasonable to assume that this earlier bridge existed before the sluices of the mill were at their present height, and to associate the hole in the river bed with it. Possibly its demolition was made necessary by the building or reconstruction of the mill. Unfortunately, however, this does not help us to assign an absolute date to this earlier bridge, for the history of the mill is unknown.

A blue brick bullnose coping had been provided for the whole of the bridge in the 1886 rebuilding, except for the cutwater, which retained the old chamfered coping of Hornton stone. On this, near the point, was an inscription 'S S (or J.J. ?) 1691' (p. 125). This inscription was taken down and replaced in part of the wall of the old bridge, shown in the left foreground of the drawing, which was incorporated in the new work.

Nothing of any interest was found during the course of the works, the whole of the site having been combed very thoroughly in the 1886 widening. The excavations for the foundations were done in coffer dams of steel sheet piling, the water being kept out by pumping. It is of interest to note, by way of a contrast in methods, that when the 1886 work was done the river was dammed off above the bridge, and the water allowed to flow over the road on the Cropredy side ! The new bridge has three twelve-foot spans, and gives a greatly improved alignment to the roadway, and also a better waterway. The deck is of reinforced concrete, and the bridge is faced with Hornton stone, as much as possible of the stone from the old bridge being re-used.

THE BATTLE OF CROPREDY BRIDGE, 1644

The events leading up to the Battle of Cropredy Bridge, 29 June, 1644, begin with the audacious escape of Charles I and his army from Oxford on the night of the previous 3–4 June. The Royalist hopes of victory, which had been very high in 1643, had, by the spring of 1644, been reduced very low. In May

the Parliamentarians had decided upon a plan of campaign against the King: on the 14th the Earl of Essex left London, Sir William Waller following the next day. The result of their march westwards was that by the 26th 'the Rebels thought their Game sure, having without a Blow got the possession of Reading, Abindon, and so of all Berkshire, and thereby enforced His Majesty to draw his Army on the North side of Oxford . . . and (the best he could) to keep himself from being besieged.'[1] 'This was the deplorable condition to which the King was reduced before the end of the month of May,'[2] and it is little wonder that it soon became 'high time for the King to provide for his own security, and to escape the danger he was in of being shut up in Oxford.'[3] By 2 June the Parliamentarian forces were closing in. Waller was in possession of Newbridge, Essex was stationed at Islip. One of Charles's advisers even counselled surrender to Essex, to which the King replied that 'possibly he might be found in the hands of the Earl of Essex, but he would be dead first.'[4] Accordingly, a daring escape was planned from Oxford to the West, much of the credit of which appears to be due to Charles himself. On 3 June a 'grimace towards Abingdon drew Waller back over Newbridge,'[5] and at nine o'clock in the evening the King marched out of the 'North Port' of Oxford accompanied by a party of 2,500 foot soldiers and his whole body of horse. Twenty-seven hours later he was safely at Bourton-on-the-Water. That he should have achieved this escape unobserved by Essex and Waller, who were stationed respectively at Bletchingdon (with some forces at Woodstock), and between Eynsham and Newbridge, was indeed an extraordinary feat. It is little wonder that Walker declares the King's resolution to have been taken by divine providence. A very full account of the whole episode, with a map, was published in 1852.[6] It may be of interest to recall that it is possible to reconstruct the entire line of march via Port Meadow, Wolvercote, and Yarnton to Long Handborough Bridge over the River Evenlode, the most critical point of the flight, the army 'fearing that the Rebels had got Possession of a Bridge near Woodstock Park, which we were of necessity to pass.'[7] The old road, known as Frogwelldown Lane, from Yarnton to the bridge, is still traceable for some distance. Another link with this episode is provided by the pendant and ring given by Charles to the daughters of Mr. Perrot, of North Leigh, which were shown at the Old Times Exhibition[8] held at Oxford in April, 1937. 'The King having eaten and refreshed himself in the evening [mistake for morning]

[1] Sir Edward Walker, *Historical Discourses upon Several Occasions* (1705), p. 15.
[2] Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, VIII, 39. [3] *Ibid*, VIII, 47. [4] *Ibid*.
[5] Letter from Lord Digby to Prince Rupert dated 8 June, 1644, printed in Eliot Warburton, *Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers* (1849), II, 416–18.
[6] Vaughan Thomas, *Account of the Night-March of King Charles the First from Oxford*.
[7] Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 20. [8] *Catalogue* of the Exhibition, p. 15.

at Mr. Parret's house at North Leigh . . . went forward in the afternoon to Bourton-on-the-Water.'[1]

The greater part of the twenty-five days which elapsed between the King's escape from Oxford and the Battle of Cropredy Bridge were occupied by him in marching and counter-marching in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Essex and Waller both moved westwards when they found that Charles had eluded them, Waller in particular making it his business to pursue the King. Royalist hopes of reaching Bristol were dashed by the news that Tewkesbury had capitulated to the enemy: the surrender of Sudeley Castle to Waller on 9 June equally prevented a stand from being made at Worcester. Once more it seemed that Charles must be surrounded by hostile armies, and 'if only the King's enemies had been under a single commander, it would have been almost impossible for him to escape destruction.'[2] Fortunately, however, for the Royalist cause, Essex and Waller did not work well together. At a council of war held at Stow-on-the-Wold on 6 June it was decided that Essex should withdraw to the relief of Lyme, which was being besieged by Prince Maurice, while Waller continued to pursue the King. This meant that the Parliamentarian chances of defeating Charles in the field were greatly reduced, a fact which the Royalists were not slow to perceive. After debating whether he should join Prince Rupert in the North, on the 14th the King finally decided that he would return to Oxford and collect reinforcements so that he might give battle to Waller, who would now be unsupported. By the 18th he had marched as far east as Witney, where he was joined on the 20th by all available forces from Oxford. He slept the night of the 21st at Sir Thomas Coghill's house at Bletchingdon,[3] and the next day, with an army now numbering 5,500 foot and nearly 4,000 horse, marched on to Buckingham, where he took up his quarters until the 26th.[4] This was the same day that Waller reached Kineton, 'where the forces of Coventry and Worcester came to him . . . By the manner of his motion, His Majesty concluded that he meant to give us Battel, His Majesty resolved to abide, and rather to seek him out and offer it than to be taken at any Advantage.'[5] The result of this resolution was the Battle of Cropredy Bridge.

Our main contemporary authorities for the Battle are, on the Royalist side: (1) *The Historical Discourses* of Sir Edward Walker, Garter King-of-Arms, Secretary of War to Charles I, who was personally present. His narrative was 'written by His Majesty's especial command, and corrected, almost in every Page, with His own Hand.'[6] Walker's journals were sent to Clarendon, at the

[1] *Mercurius Aulicus*. [2] S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, 1, 353.
[3] Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 28; R. Symonds, *Diary*, p. 18; *Iter Carolinum*.
[4] Walker, p. 28; Symonds, pp. 20–22; *Iter Carolinum*. [5] Walker, p. 29.
[6] Title-page to 1705 edition.

latter's earnest request, in 1647, and the historian made extensive use of the account of the campaign of 1644 in his eighth book, copying Walker, indeed, in places almost *verbatim*.[1] Clarendon's description of the Battle cannot, therefore, be regarded as independent evidence.[2] (2) *The Diary of the Marches of the Royal Army during the Great Civil War; kept by Richard Symonds*.[3] Symonds, as we learn from the pedigree of his family which he drew up,[4] was serving in 1644 in the King's troop, under the command of the youthful Lord Bernard Stuart, youngest brother of the Duke of Richmond. He, like Walker, was present at the Battle. (3) *Mercurius Aulicus*, the Royalist newspaper written by Sir John Birkenhead, fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. The account of the Battle given here is shorter and contains some inaccuracies with regard to movements of troops, etc., but it is in substantial agreement with the other accounts, is extremely lively reading, including, as it does, some picturesque details not found elsewhere, and is interesting as having been published so soon after the events recorded. On the Parliamentarian side there are: (1) The Report of the Battle sent by Sir William Waller the following day, 30 June, to the Committee of Both Kingdoms at Derby House.[5] This is clear and concise, and supplies some facts wanting in the Royalist accounts. (2) *An Exact Dyarie or a breife Relation of the progress of Sir William Waller's Army . . . By Richard Coe under Cap. Gore of the Tower Hamlets* (1644). This contains a short but graphic account of the Battle by a participant. In addition to these contemporary sources, there is the account in Alfred Beesley's *History of Banbury* (1841).[6] This is based on some of the original narratives, and is valuable for the topographical details which it gives of the district as they appeared nearly a century ago.

On 26 June Charles and his army turned West. He had meant to go back to Bletchingdon, but changed his mind and lay that night at Brackley[7] and the night of the 27th at Culworth,[8] whence he intended to march the next day towards Daventry. But on receiving information that Waller was near Banbury, 'it was thought better to march thither, and to lay hold of a fit opportunity there to give the Rebels Battel.'[9] Accordingly, early in the morning of Friday, the 28th, 'the Army advanced in good order towards Banbury, and about ten of the Clock had a Rendezvous on Leigh Grounds about a Mile on the East side of that Town. It was so rainy and misty a Morning that we could not discover the

[1] See Ranke, *History of England*, VI, 15 ff.

[2] A short account of the Battle is to be found in the MS. of the *Life* at p. 264. This is printed as a note to the *History*, VIII, 73 (ed. Macray, III, 372–3). It differs somewhat from the account based on Walker, but is of no great value.

[3] Edited by C. E. Long, Camden Society, Vol. 74 (1859). [4] Printed with the *Diary*.

[5] Printed in the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1644, pp. 293–294. [6] pp. 358–366.

[7] Walker; Symonds; *Iter Carolinum*. [8] Walker; *Iter Carolinum*. [9] Walker, p. 30.

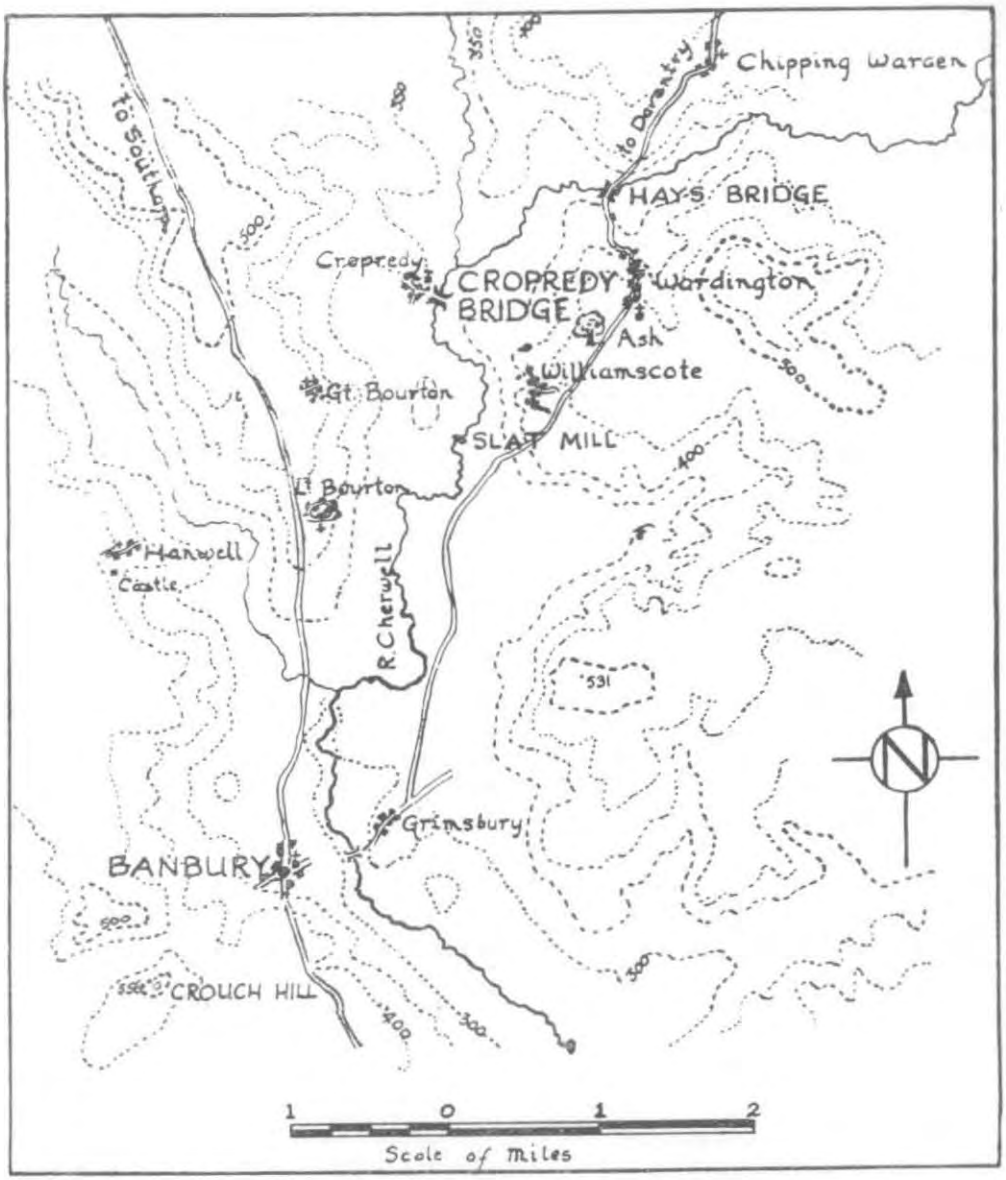

FIG. 16

SKETCH-MAP OF THE CROPREDY DISTRICT TO ILLUSTRATE THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE BATTLE.

Based on the 1 *in. Ordnance Survey Map with the Sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.*

Rebels : but it presently growing Fair, we discovered their Army drawn up in Hanwel Warren about a Mile before us on the West side of the Charwel.'[1] Both armies were anxious to secure a place of advantage on which to fight, and both manœuvred for the possession of Crouch Hill, a conspicuous eminence, over 500 feet high, one mile to the south-west of Banbury (FIG. 16[2]). Waller, having the easier task, seized the hill first, and drew up his army at the foot, ' having a hill at his backe, a great hedge with a deep ditch for his front and flanked about with divers hedges and ditches.'[3] The Royal army had perforce to fall back upon a position in the fields under Grimsbury Hill,[4] a short distance to the north-east of Banbury. The afternoon witnessed some slight skirmishes between the two armies, in which the Parliamentarians were repulsed with loss. The King passed the night of the 28th at ' a Yeoman's house ' at Grimsbury,[5] close to his army. Charles was desperately anxious to ' get Waller to quit his strength,'[6] but realising that it would be dangerous to try to force him thence, marched northward on the morning of the 29th in the direction of Daventry, ' to expect a fitter Opportunity and Place to give him Battel.'[7] This move met with success. ' We were no sooner on our March, but the Rebels drew off from their Ground, and coasted us on the other side of the River, but at such a Distance that we did not at all believe they would have attempted us.'[8] The van of the Royal army was led by the Earl of Brentford ; the King and Prince of Wales were in the main body ; the rear consisted of 1000 men under Colonel Thelwall, and the Earls of Northampton and Cleveland's brigades of horse.

The scene of the action has been vividly described by Mr. W. G. Bond,[9] and I cannot do better than quote his words. It ' may be described as rather open rolling country . . . Waller marched along the road from Banbury towards Southam, which road, at a distance of some three miles north of Banbury, runs up on to and along a high commanding ridge distant about half a mile to one mile from the river Cherwell. The country on this side does not rise so sharply from the river level as do the hills on the other side, and is markedly more open, verging, indeed, on the bleak. The Royal Army marched along the Banbury-Daventry road, which keeps closer to the river, although at a considerable height above it. Both roads are in full view of one another, their distance

[1] *Ibid.* Symonds, a precise topographer, says ' at a faire howse of [Sir Anthony] Cope's,' *i.e.* Hanwell Castle. The distance would really be about three miles.

[2] From a sketch-map by J. J. Leeming.

[3] *Mercurius Aulicus*, p. 1055. Elsewhere the author says ' you know his condition of old, hils, boggs, hedges, these you must grant him, hee'll not fight else.'

[4] By Grimsbury Hill Walker, who mentions it, probably means the ridge with highest point 531 ft. O.D. (see FIG. 16) N.E. of Grimsbury.

[5] *Iter Carolinum.* [6] Walker, p. 30. [7] *Ibid.* [8] *Ibid*, p. 31. [9] *Op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.

apart as the crow flies being about a mile near Banbury and two miles or more opposite Cropredy. Both forces were, therefore, though in sight of one another, yet out of range of each other, which must have been somewhat exasperating for the hot-heads.' Symonds speaks of two ' passes ' over the Cherwell. These were Cropredy Bridge, about four miles north of Banbury, carrying a cross road between the two main roads, with a ford at its side ; and another ford at Slate (more correctly Slat) Mill, ' a long mile,' as Mr. Bond calls it, below the Bridge.[1] After Cropredy, as one follows it northwards, the river bends sharply to the north-east, and is crossed on the Banbury-Daventry road barely two miles further on by Hays Bridge,[2] between the villages of Wardington (Oxfordshire) and Chipping Warden (Northamptonshire). It is important to remember the existence of Hays Bridge, which was crossed by the van of the Royal army before the engagement really began. It is referred to by Walker simply as ' the Bridge,' and it is therefore easy to confuse it with Cropredy Bridge and to imagine that this latter had been crossed by the Royalist main army, which was, however, never the case.

The first act of the Royalists on their northward march was to send on a body of dragoons to hold Cropredy Bridge, while the King and his army passed beyond it on the Daventry road. On receiving intelligence that a body of 300 enemy horse was about two miles ahead of the army, intending to join with Waller, the Royalist van was ordered to march quickly forward and to cut off this reinforcement, with the result that there was soon a large and dangerous gap between the van and rear of the Royal forces. Waller at once seized his chance, and the Parliamentarians ' advanced with 1500 Horse, 1000 Foot and 11 Pieces of Cannon to Croprady, and forced that Pass, our Dragoons quitting it without much Resistance.'[3] Waller's intention was to cut off the Royalist rear—' to bite the heele according to his custome '[4]—and in order to make sure of this he sent another 1,000 horse, under the command of Lieutenant-General Middleton, to cross the ford at Slat Mill, ' to fall upon the Rear of all.'[5] This was about one o'clock.

The Battle now began in earnest. Waller himself took little part in it, thereby seeming to lend colour to the Royalist jibes that he was very careful of his health. Nevertheless, the rumour of his having been wounded was persistent. He writes : ' The Lieutenant-General fell in with some few troops and dragoons by a mill, next beneath Cropredy, and I advanced with the remainder of those regiments over a passage next beneath him ; I had a steep hill

[1] Beesley describes the ford as being in the bridle-way leading from Bourton to Williamscote and Chacombe and about 70 yards below the mill. Slat Mill is now standing roofless, but otherwise in fair condition.

[2] Called by Beesley Ayles Bridge. [3] Walker, p. 31. [4] *Mercurius Aulicus*, p. 1056.

[5] Walker, p. 31. It is curious that neither Walker nor Symonds mentions Middleton by name.

to mount, not far from the top whereof the enemy was drawn up in a strong body. Some of the regiments came up slowly, whereupon I turned back, leaving my regiment to march on, but coming to the foot of the hill, I was advertised that the Lieutenant-General had charged the enemy and broken him, and chased them above a mile, in a most fair way to have ruined their whole army, but a great body of the enemy having rallied and charging him broke him and forced him to a quick retreat, not without loss.'[1]

Like most battles, the Battle of Cropredy Bridge is not altogether easy to follow, as the accounts even of eye-witnesses on the same side seem to differ.[2] Walker says that the first check to the hitherto successful Parliamentary forces was given by the Earl of Cleveland, ' then in the Van of that Division ' [*i.e.* the rear], who, hearing of the enemy's passage at Cropredy, drew up his brigade on rising ground facing that pass. He adds that the Earl perceiving ' a great Body of the Rebels Horse drawn up ready to have fallen on his Rear . . . (not having time to expect either Word or Orders from the Lord Wilmot Lieutenant General of the Horse) He gave his own Word,'[3] and successfully advancing, put that body of the enemy to flight and took some prisoners. Symonds, on the other hand, ascribes the chief credit to Wilmot ' who was behind them [*i.e.*the enemy] keeping of that passe next Banbury ' and ' fell upon them and after divers skirmishes, horse against horse, some few of them killed, the enemy retreated.'[4] However this may be, when Charles realised what was happening to the rear of his army he ordered the van, now well away on the other side of Hays Bridge, to halt, and drew up his own troops on the rising ground just north of the bridge. From this vantage point he could see that the enemy was preparing a second attack upon the rear. Accordingly, the King sent his cousin, Lord Bernard Stuart (Symonds's commander), ' a valiant young gentleman, who commanded his own guards,'[5] ' attended by above a hundred Gentlemen of the King's Troop (which is ever fullest in time of Action)'[6] back over Hays Bridge to the assistance of the rear, ordering him to attack on the way two bodies of Parliamentary horse which were facing Charles's own forces. Lord Bernard successfully put this cavalry to flight, an event which was of great help to the Earl of Cleveland, for it was about to attack him in the flank. Cleveland ' after his first Encounter made a little stand under a great Ash (under which His Majesty had not above half an Hour before been invited to stay and dine).'[7]

[1] Waller's Report. Although he says that he crossed by a passage *beneath* Middleton, he must surely mean that he himself crossed at Cropredy. [2] See Ranke, *op. cit.*, VI, 18–19.

[3] Walker, p. 31. [4] *Diary*, p. 23. [5] Clarendon, *op. cit.*, VIII, 66. [6] Walker, p. 32.

[7] *Ibid.* Beesley says : ' The exact spot where stood the celebrated " Wardington Ash " . . . is by the bridle-way leading from Cropredy Bridge and Williamscot to Wardington, about 70 yards from the turnpike road . . . It was gone to decay about 60 years ago ; and subsequently a young and now thriving Ash tree was planted on the same spot.' An ash, planted a few years ago, still marks the spot, which can be located as being on the Wardington side of a farm road leading to the Grange farm from the road between Williamscote and Wardington.

But he was now to face a second enemy onslaught and to fight the really decisive action of the day. Thus Lord Bernard's intervention was extremely timely. In this second encounter Cleveland was entirely victorious. ' He routed all their Horse and Foot and chased them beyond their Cannon.'[1] Best of all, the enemy park of artillery was taken, a circumstance which Waller records as being ' extreme wounding ' to him. Among the numerous officers captured, all the Royalist authorities mention with particular exultation the traitor James Wemyss, a Scot, ' being His Majesty's own Servant, and by His especial Favour made Master Gunner of England with the pension of 300 l. per annum.'[2] The author of *Mercurius Aulicus* has his usual malicious little touch. He writes that Wemyss, on being brought before Charles, said ' Gud feith his heart was always with His Majestie (so is mine with the State-Committee).'[3] Walker does speak of Wilmot taking part in this second encounter, of his being wounded, and momentarily captured. It is just possible, therefore, that Symonds, who does not really distinguish between the two encounters, has confused Wilmot's part in them. It is more likely, however, that the apparent discrepancy between Walker's and Symonds's accounts, mentioned earlier, arises from the fact that in the first instance, at any rate, Wilmot would appear to have been concerned with Middleton's forces, while Cleveland had to face the assault from Cropredy Bridge. Waller, indeed, relates that Middleton took Wilmot prisoner and wounded him, but that he was afterwards rescued. Again, Bulstrode Whitelocke, who, in his *Memorials of English Affairs* (1682), gives a short account of the Battle based on Waller's reports, declares that Middleton had a particular encounter with Lord Wilmot, whom he took prisoner. We are also told by Walker that the Earl of Northampton did his share in driving back the attack from Slat Mill. The Royalist losses, despite the deaths of two gallant Kentish colonels, Sir William Boteler and Sir William Clark, were trifling. As a result of the plucky fight put up by the Royalist rear, Waller's forces retreated westwards again beyond the River Cherwell, taking up their position upon the high ground near Bourton, between Cropredy and Hanwell. At the same time they left some foot and dragoons both at Cropredy Bridge, which they still held, and at the ford at Slat Mill.

Charles had now come south again and taken up his position at Williamscote (Willscot), a hamlet just west of the Banbury-Daventry road, immediately opposite to Waller's quarters at Bourton. He was joined on the way by Lord Bernard Stuart, who had found little to do after his successful charge. ' By this time it was three in the Afternoon,'[4] ' the weather very fair and very warm,'[5] and, as he had his whole army together again, the King determined to make an

[1] *Ibid.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] p. 1056. [4] Walker, p. 33. [5] Clarendon, *op. cit.*, VIII, 67

effort to get possession of Cropredy Bridge and of the ford at Slat Mill. Waller writes : ' There was hot service at Cropredy Bridge, which we made good against them ; ' and Coe, after recording the flight of the Parliamentary forces ' over a Bridge called Crapridden crying the fields lost, the fields lost,' adds ' but by God's providence and the courage of the Kentish Regiment and the Citie Hamlets, we got down two Drakes to the Bridge and staved them off so bravely and gave them so good play all day, that ere night they could not brag of their winnings.'[1] Although the Royalists failed to capture the Bridge, they succeeded in crossing at the ford and in taking the mill. The armies continued to face each other from the opposite heights, the river and the bordering low ground lying in between them. Towards evening most of the Royalist horse and foot were drawn down to the river below the ford, and cannon was fired at the enemy horse drawn up on Bourton Hill, which thereupon retired in disorder. Waller's cannon, however, retaliated. At this point Charles, with his usual desire to end the war without further bloodshed, and in the belief, which S. R. Gardiner finds hard to understand, that if only he could make his rebellious subjects hear his terms they must be accepted, ordered Walker to go and publish a message of grace and pardon in the enemy camp. Walker took the wise precaution of sending a trumpet to demand a safe-conduct, whereupon Waller replied that he had no power to treat without the consent of both Houses of Parliament. The approach of night prevented any further action.

Charles slept at ' a very poor man's house '[2] at Williamscote, and on the next day, Sunday, 30 June, ' afore nine . . . went to prayers in the feild.'[3] According to Walker, the two armies all that day ' stood in the same posture expecting who should first quit the Field.'[4] Symonds, however, says that ' sermon ended, we saw part of the body of the enemy march away towards Warwickshire, about xj of the clock.'[5] Charles, writing that day to the Queen, describes the Battle as ' yesterday's good success, which, though it has not been the greatest, yet it was the dearest that I have seen, but it was the ugliest beginning that ever I saw.'[6] On Sunday evening the King received news that Major-General Browne, who had left London about 24 June with orders to protect the country between the capital and the Royal army, was at Buckingham with 4,000 foot and 500 horse, and would probably quickly join with Waller. Charles,

[1] *An Exact Dyarie*, p. 6.

[2] *Iter Carolinum*. This house, which was latterly called the Yew Tree house, as it had a clipped yew bush on either side of the door, was pulled down in the nineteenth century. It stood where there is now a spinney, just inside an iron gate in the spinney walk. A tradition in the Loveday family asserts that Charles could not stay at Williamscote House because of smallpox there.

[3] Symonds, *op. cit.*, p. 24. [4] *Op. cit.*, p. 34. [5] *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

[6] Letter printed in *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1644, p. 314.

therefore, in view of the scarcity of his provisions and the fatigue of his soldiers, decided not to risk another encounter. After a second night spent at Williamscote, on Monday, 1 July, ' about four of the clock, his Majestie with all his army, drums beating, colors flying and trumpets sounding,'[1] ' in full view of Waller, who did not so much as attempt to fall on our Rear (no question being very well pleased to be rid of us),'[2] marched away to Aynho, deciding to return to the West and making Evesham his immediate objective.

Thus ended the month's campaigning which culminated in the somewhat indecisive Battle of Cropredy Bridge. There is no doubt that the result of it proved to be the collapse of Waller's army. But what Charles had gained was more than counterbalanced by the disastrous defeat of Marston Moor which quickly followed. In conclusion, it may be worth stressing a point made by the author of *Mercurius Aulicus*. The Parliamentary party had always declared that it was the King's evil counsellors against whom they were fighting, not the person of Charles himself. But says, Sir John Birkenhead, when the King left Oxford ' he left his Lords and Privy Counsellours behind him, and Sir William still being commanded to fight, manifests to the World that it was not the *Evil Counsellours* but the *good King* they fought against ; not to rescue him from them, but to remove him from this present world.'[3] Moreover, all the Royalist authorities agree that at the Battle of Cropredy Bridge shots were deliberately fired at the King's person by Waller's cannon from the heights across the Cherwell. *Mercurius Aulicus* goes so far as to say that the prisoners confessed that ' their Canoneers were shew'd the marke by several perspective glasses,' and ' lest the Canon should not effect it, every single Rebell was taught his lesson by their field word, which was Victory without Quarter.'[4] Further comment is superfluous. I will bring this account of the events of June, 1644, to an end in the words of *Mercurius Aulicus* (apostrophising the enemy) :— ' Sirre, no more of Bridges, Cropredy Bridge near Banbury hath halfe undone yee.'[5]

[1] Symonds, *op. cit.*, p. 24. [2] Walker, p. 34. [3] p. 1060. [4] *Ibid.* [5] p. 1062.