

## Objects related to the Civil Wars in England at The Ashmolean

- Between 1642-1660 a series of conflicts began between the supporters of Charles I and his opponents. Civil wars between and within England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland led to dramatic political revolution. In 1649, Charles I was executed and the monarchy abolished. It was replaced by a republic, known as the Commonwealth. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) was appointed as the newly created 'Lord Protector' of the Commonwealth in 1653. Cromwell was a political, social and religious reformer who opposed the actions of the King and his government. He was a talented military leader who became the most powerful man in England during the revolutionary period. By 1660 the republic had come to an end and the monarchy was restored. Charles II, son of Charles I, was declared king in May of the same year.
- Elias Ashmole, founder of The Ashmolean Museum, was a strong supporter of King Charles I and it was during the civil wars in England that his connection with Oxford and the University began. He carried out military duties in the city and studied here. In 1645 Ashmole was appointed to a post in the royalist headquarters at Oxford. He was a 'Gentleman of the Ordnance' in the garrison and was responsible for arranging the transport of guns, including cannons, and for decisions during sieges. He studied at Brasenose College, and developed an interest in astrology. In 1669, he was presented with a Doctorate of Medicine ('Phisick') in thanks for cataloguing the coins then held in the Bodleian Library.

## Galleries containing objects related to the Civil Wars in England

Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Gallery 44: European Art

Gallery 7: Money



### Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

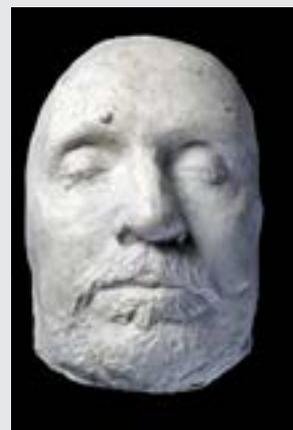
Portrait of King Charles I, after Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641)



King Charles I reigned from 1625 until his execution in 1649. His royalist headquarters were in Oxford from 1642 to 1645. This painting was presented by Elias Ashmole. WA1898.38

### Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Plaster death mask of Oliver Cromwell



Oliver Cromwell died on 3 September 1658 in Whitehall Palace. This mask was cast between 1800 and 1900 from the wax original at Warwick Castle. AN1990.91



## Gallery 44: European Art

### Group Portrait of Prince Rupert, William Legge and Colonel John Russell c.1644-45, William Dobson

The painting, commissioned by John Russell in the winter of 1645–6, is a unique artefact of the English Civil War. It shows a meeting between three Royalist commanders who were then based in Oxford, home to the royal court in exile. The group in the painting are Prince Rupert of the Rhine (L) (the King's nephew), Colonel William Legge (centre) (Governor of Oxford) and Colonel John Russell (R) (commander of the prince's elite Blue Coats).

It was painted at a moment when hopes of a Royalist victory were fading. Prince Rupert had just suffered an ignominious defeat at Bristol, the main port in Royalist hands. Once the dashing hero of the Cavalier cause, Prince Rupert then was relieved of his command by the King and ordered to leave the country. His only way of clearing his name was to face a court martial.

Colonel John Russell, commander of the prince's elite Blue Coats became famous for his 'last stand' at the Battle of Naseby where his regiment fell. Though wounded, Russell escaped and joined Prince Rupert at Bristol. He was among the colonels who attended the Prince's council of war and signed a statement defending Prince Rupert's decision to surrender the city.

The central figure is possibly William Legge who became Governor of Oxford in 1645. He was at the heart of the group of trusted soldiers Prince Rupert gathered around him and who formed his personal staff. Legge was also central to Prince Rupert's reconciliation with the King, organising the conversation between Charles I and Prince Rupert which led to the Prince's return to Oxford in December 1645.

The painting is filled with symbols and references to the recent discord between the King and his nephew and to Rupert's enduring loyalty. The scroll which Rupert holds in his right hand may refer to the blank sheet which Charles had sent to him on which to compose his confession. Instead, believing himself innocent, Rupert asked Legge to return the letter empty. This moved the King and resulted in a pardon.

In the painting, Prince Rupert has discarded his scarlet cloak which he was recorded as wearing when he rode out of Bristol following his surrender. Beside the cloak is a dog wearing a collar with the initials 'P.R.' The dog is symbolic of loyalty and faithfulness. Here it may be intended to stand for Boye, Rupert's white poodle who rode into battle with the Prince and was killed in 1644 at Marston Moor. To Parliamentary pamphleteers Boye was a 'devil dog' credited with special powers, such as being weapon-proof and able to catch bullets with his teeth. Among Royalists, Boye was also immensely popular and became the army's mascot. There are hints of revenge within the painting: the central figure dips his cockade in the glass of wine which evokes biblical episodes where clothing stained with wine symbolised vengeance.

## Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Leather civilian hat fitted with iron bands



This hat was reputedly worn by Lord John Bradshaw for protection against assassination threats he received when he presided over the trial of Charles I in 1649.

AN1836 p.178.21

## Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Leather patchwork shoe, 1660s



The shoe is said to have belonged to John Bigg, reputedly one of Charles I's executioners. Bigg later became a hermit and lived in a cave at Dinton, Buckinghamshire.

AN1836 p.141.392

## Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Decorated pewter plate, mid 1600s



Decorated pewter plate said to have been used by Charles II the day before the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

AN 1836 p.135.367

## Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Silver and gold watch



This oval shaped watch with a gold dial is said to have belonged to Oliver Cromwell.

AN1836 p.140.377

## Gallery 7: Money

### The Oxford Crown



Charles I established his headquarters in Oxford during the English Civil War. The King lived at Christ Church and the Queen lived at Merton College. War needed money. A mint was set up in Oxford in New Inn Hall, the present site of St Peter's College from 1643 to 1646. This covered Charles's needs by making coins from college silver and re-minting foreign money. The Oxford Crown is very rare and represents only a fraction of this output. The writing in Latin across the coin proclaims Charles I's war aims – to uphold the Protestant religion, the laws of England, and the freedom of Parliament, Oxford 1644. The writing around the coin is from Psalm 68: "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered".

The King is shown on the Oxford Crown, proudly mounted on his horse over the Oxford cityscape, describing him in Latin as 'Charles, by the grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland'. It gives us a view of Oxford at the time of Charles I. In the foreground is the city wall and moat. On the left is Magdalen Tower. The two central spires belong to All Saints Church (reconstructed since the time of Charles I, and now Lincoln College library) and the University Church of St. Mary on the High Street. HCR 6571

## Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Portrait of Elias Ashmole by John Riley (1646-1691), oil on canvas. Limewood frame carved by Grinling Gibbons.

(1648-1721) WA 1898.36

This imposing portrait was presented by Elias Ashmole to the new museum. It contains symbols that reflect his status and interests.

Elias Ashmole was a leading figure in the intellectual world of his day. Born in Staffordshire, he trained as a lawyer and also studied physics and mathematics at Oxford University. He was curious about the natural world and the sciences and had an extensive range of interests including history, genealogy, heraldry, music, coins, medicine, botany and natural history. He also studied astrology, alchemy and magic which were popular at the time. Ashmole was involved with natural philosophers in Oxford and London who promoted scientific knowledge and was a founding member of the Royal Society.



Elias Ashmole, WA1898.36

## Gallery 2: The Ashmolean Story

Helmet made of iron, textiles and silk 1650-1700



The helmet has extensive damage from bullets and blades.

AN1836 p.178.22

## Other objects related to the Civil Wars in England

### Gallery 2 : The Ashmolean Story

- Oliver Cromwell's privy seal matrix, late 1650s
- Pewter medal commemorating the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658
- Copper alloy spur of John Hampden, a parliamentarian colonel and cousin of Oliver Cromwell
- Steel spurs with embossed silver decoration, 1640, said to have belonged to King Charles I
- Wooden plate made from the ' Royal Oak tree' where Charles II hid in 1651 at Boscobel House, Shropshire

### Top of main museum staircase

- Bust portrait of Prince Rupert of the Rhine, 1637, carrara marble

## Lines of enquiry history:

- Consider how historical artefacts can help develop knowledge and understanding about historical events.
- Use a range of historical sources.
- Explore how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed.
- Explore the cases for and against the Roundhead and Royalist causes.
- Use historical terms and concepts.
- Use evidence to support your arguments.



## Working with objects: key questions

- Who made it?
- Where and when was it made?
- What materials is it made from?
- How was it made?
- What was it used for? How was it used?
- Who used / owned it?
- How might it be interpreted by different people and at different times?

## Further resources

Ashmolean Education Learning Resources:  
[www.ashmolean.org/learningresources](http://www.ashmolean.org/learningresources)

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