

**Speech by Professor Peter Gaunt at the inauguration of the blue plaque on  
'Cromwell House', 17 Mill Lane, Old Marston on Sunday 16 June 2013**

It is a delight to be in Old Marston today for this ceremony and an honour to be invited, in my capacity as President of The Cromwell Association, to say a few words to inaugurate this fine new blue plaque. As I always do on such occasions, I am wearing my Cromwell tie, bearing Oliver's crest and motto, which translates as the very non-p.c. sentiment of 'peace through war'. Cromwell is linked with a huge array of locations, sites and buildings which were caught up in the civil war, though in very many cases the Cromwellian link turns out to be spurious. Although the Oxford area was hardly home ground for a parliamentarian and for Cromwell and the dubbing of this property as 'Cromwell House' is stretching a point somewhat, he and his colleagues did have clear and strongly-evidenced links with this place.

The New Model Army, that dynamic field army which parliament created in spring 1645 in order to win the civil war, proceeded to do just that over the following fourteen months or so. From the perspective of a fragile peace which had returned by 1647, Joshua Sprigg wrote a history of the New Model's recent actions, in which he noted that the army's victorious campaign of the final year of the war, 1645-46, in effect had begun and ended in this area – 'Oxford, the king's royal garrison, the place of the king's ordinary residence and retreat, hath, like a parenthesis, included all the action of this army, between the two sieges of it; being first in intention and attempt, though last in execution and reduction'.

Sprigg is here referring to the New Model's first siege of Oxford, its first real military action on taking the field, but a brief, rather inglorious and unsuccessful affair, which lasted for less than a fortnight in late May and early June 1645, and to the New Model's second and successful siege operation, which ran through much of May and June 1646, culminating in late June in the surrender of Oxford on terms. In effect, the fall of Oxford ended the civil war and cemented the full parliamentarian military victory. Although a few isolated towns and castles in Wales and the west held out for longer, into the latter half of 1646 and in a couple of cases into early 1647, by June 1646 the king had already surrendered himself and fallen prisoner to parliament's Scottish allies and the surrender of Oxford, the king's war-time capital and the last town or city of much strategic importance to hold out in the royalist cause, ended the main fighting and campaigning.

Contemporary sources make clear that Marston played a role in both parliamentarian operations against Oxford, as one of the bases surrounding the city to be occupied by parts of the New Model and its senior officers. But more than that and of far more importance for us today, unusually detailed and specific contemporary sources make clear that this very building, clearly identified and referred to in those sources as the house of the pro-parliamentarian lawyer and politician Unton Crook or Croke, played a key role in these events. In spring 1645 the New Model's commander in chief, Lord General Sir Thomas Fairfax, lodged here and made it his HQ

for the first unsuccessful siege. In spring 1646 Fairfax, who may again have been lodging here, appointed it as the venue where parliamentarian and royalist commissioners should meet to negotiate the treaty or formal terms upon which the city of Oxford would be surrendered. The lengthy negotiations which unfolded in this property eventually led to the surrender of the city on quite generous terms.

We know, too, that other senior parliamentarians came to this house. In May 1645 sources reveal that Lieutenant-General Cromwell, that is Oliver Cromwell, newly-appointed as lieutenant-general of the horse and second-in-command of the New Model, came here to meet and to confer with Fairfax. During spring 1646 the parliamentarian commissioners negotiating the terms of Oxford's surrender included Cromwell's own son-in-law, Henry Ireton, and John Lambert, the man who later served as Cromwell's right-hand-man when he became head of state as Lord Protector in the 1650s. Sprigg also tells us that in early June 1646 a New Model council of war convened at Marston, to consider both the terms being offered by the Oxford royalists and the possibility of taking the city by force should negotiations fail, so that a veritable roll-call of senior parliamentarian officers met here, probably in this house.

We know of a few other surviving buildings where negotiations took place between royalists and parliamentarians during the war. We know of a number of surviving buildings linked to Fairfax or to Cromwell and their war-time activities and which we can be reasonably certain they either lodged in or at least visited in the course of the fighting and their civil war campaigns. We know of a few surviving buildings where other senior parliamentarian officers or politicians met. But to be able to identify, to view and to appreciate a specific building which was standing at the time of the civil war and which still stands today in something like the same state and where all these things occurred is very unusual, if not unique.

Thus my colleagues and I in The Cromwell Association were delighted to hear of plans to mark the building in a manner recalling and recording its war-time role and equally delighted to support and to fund the proposal. It is a thrill to see the project completed and the blue plaque in place and I am honoured to have been able to play a very small part in the process and in its inauguration today, just a week or so shy of the 367<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the surrender of royalist Oxford to which it specifically alludes. Thank you.