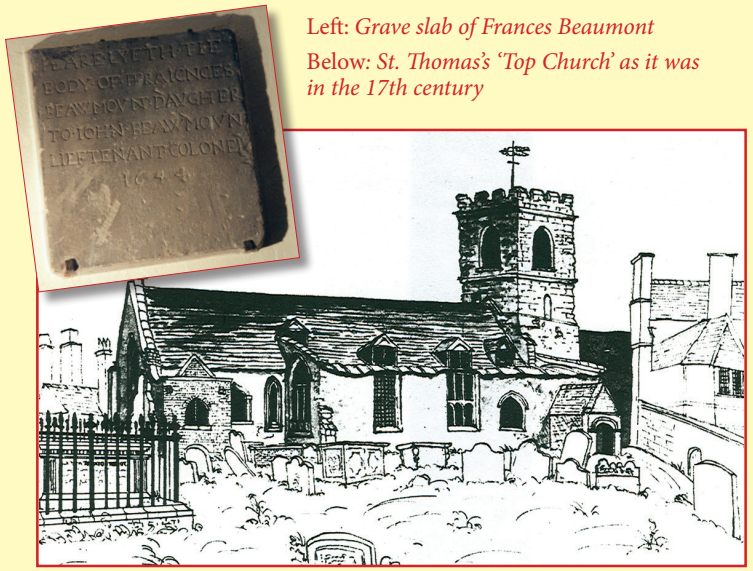
Today, we can still see the effects of the war in the ruins of the Castle. Top Church which took part in these events was different from that we see today: it was replaced by the present Gothic Revival church, built 1816-1819, although evidence of the medieval church can still be seen in its crypt. As for St Edmund's Church (Bottom Church), from its ruins a new church was built in 1724. It contains in its vestry a grave slab recording another tragedy for the Royalist second in command. As the church register explains "Mr John Beaumont had a daughter borne and buryed the 13th day" of September 1644, the year before Mistress Beaumont died.



Left: *Grave slab of Frances Beaumont*

Below: *St. Thomas's 'Top Church' as it was in the 17th century*

The Dudley Coffin Race has been established as a way of reconnecting the town with its historic origins. It is also a way of illustrating the historical associations between some of the town's key heritage assets, in particular Dudley Castle (a scheduled Monument), and St Thomas's Church (Top Church) and St Edmund's (Bottom Church), both of which are Grade II* listed and located within the Dudley Town Centre Conservation Area. For more information about Dudley's Historic Environment please go to the Council's Historic Environment web pages which can be found via the following link:
http://www.dudley.gov.uk/resident/planning/historic-environment/

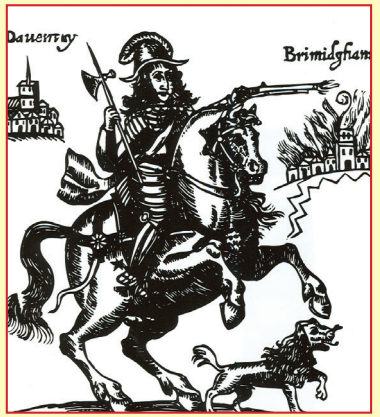
Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council

heritage lottery fund
LOTTERY FUNDED

THE DUDLEY COFFIN RACE

The Dudley Coffin Race is based on an event which took place in Dudley during the English Civil War. In April 1646, whilst the Royalist Castle was under siege by the Parliamentarians, Mistress Beaumont, wife of Colonel Beaumont, second in command to Sir Thomas Leveson, died in the Castle. Hostilities were temporarily put on hold whilst the coffin was hurriedly taken from the Castle up what is now Castle Street, through the market place and up to St Thomas's Church (Top Church) for the funeral.

When Civil War broke out in 1642, Dudley Castle was quickly garrisoned for the king and remained in Royalist hands, under the Governorship of Thomas Leveson, throughout the war until its surrender in May 1646. Troops from Dudley constantly harassed the enemy. Parliamentary Birmingham was burnt and ransacked more than once.



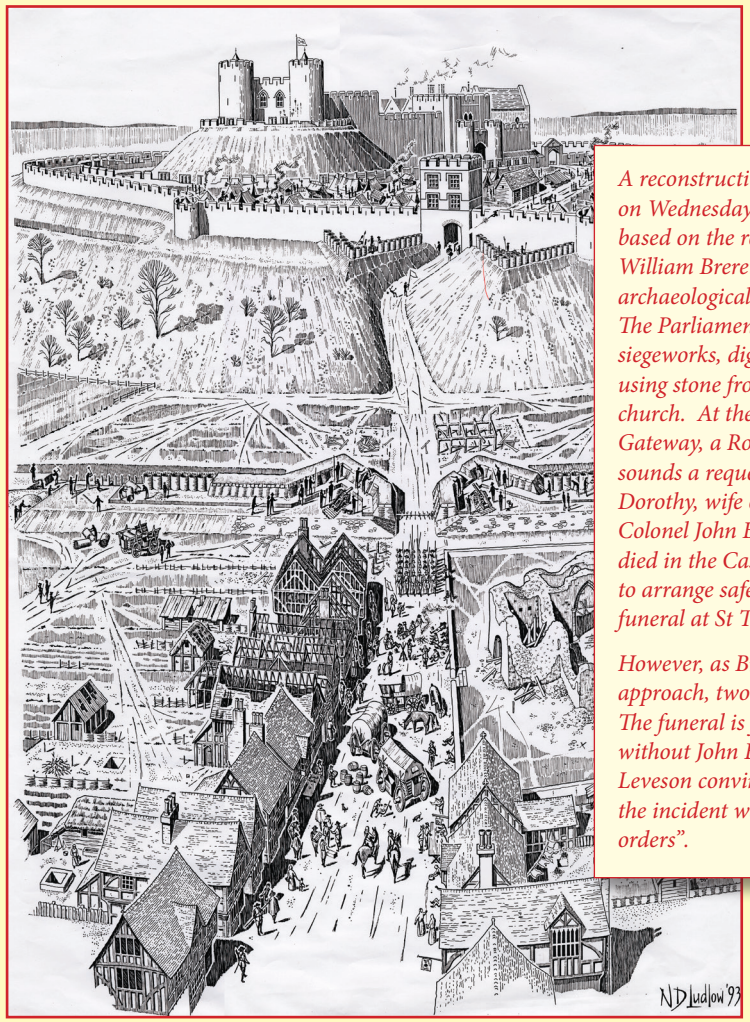
There were two major sieges of Dudley Castle during this time, in 1644 and 1646. In 1644, the Castle was besieged by the Parliamentarians who bombarded the castle with a cannon called the 'Stafford Great Piece', inflicting some damage on the keep (a cannon ball was found underneath the floor during an excavation in the 1980s). The resident officer in charge, Lieutenant Colonel Beaumont, had to sit tight until a relieving force from the King at Worcester was able to repel them.

Above: *Prince Rupert with his dog 'Boy' and the sacking of Birmingham.*

However, the King's last field army had been destroyed at the Battle of Naseby in 1645, leaving Royalist garrisons isolated and vulnerable. After the battle, Leveson returned to Dudley Castle, his forces depleted and with little hope that the Royalist cause would succeed. In the following year, Parliament ordered Sir William Brereton to take Dudley Castle.

Knowing that the Parliamentary forces were on their way, Leveson ordered the demolition of St Edmund's Church, to deny his enemy a vantage point. On the 27 April 1646, Parliamentary forces under Sir William Brereton *(pictured right)* arrived in Dudley and laid siege to the Castle.

It was during this siege that Mistress Beaumont died. Sir Thomas decided to parley to arrange to bury Mistress Beaumont. He sounded a drum to call the Parliamentarians to the castle, but two of Brereton's messengers were shot as they answered the call. Sir William now complained about the behaviour of the Royalists and although safe conduct was allowed for the funeral to take place, her husband was not allowed to attend.



A reconstruction of the situation on Wednesday 28 April 1646, based on the records of Sir William Brereton and on archaeological work in the area. The Parliamentarians construct siegeworks, digging ditches and using stone from the demolished church. At the castle Lower Gateway, a Royalist drummer sounds a request for talks: Dorothy, wife of Lieutenant Colonel John Beaumont, has died in the Castle and he wishes to arrange safe conduct for a funeral at St Thomas's Church.

However, as Brereton's men approach, two are shot dead. The funeral is finally allowed, without John Beaumont, after Leveson convinces the besiegers the incident was "contrary to my orders".

On 13 May, knowing the King's cause was lost, Colonel Leveson surrendered his garrison of 40 officers and 300 men. A victorious Parliament ordered the dismantling of the Castle's defences, leaving the ruin which still dominates the town today.

We know a lot about what went on during the Second Siege due to Sir William having all his letters copied into a letter book, which has survived.

Extracts from the letterbook of Sir William Brererton:

From the Govr of Dudley touching Lt Col Beaumonts wife beinge dead

Sr
Luietenant Colonell Beaumonts wife being Deade I shall take it for a favour if you will permitt us to bury her in the upper Church of Dudley without interupeon

Fr the Commander in Chief of the Parlia forces before Dudley

Yr Servant
Thos Leveson

Col Levesons re to Sr W Brereton touching burying Mary Beaumont

Sr
I thanke you for your civilite in afforrdinge a quiet burial to my Lt Coloneils wife. I have here sent you a list of such as I . . . desire may attend the funeral for when I desire your passe to Come and returne. For your Men that were shot comeinge to receve my Drum it was Contrary to my orders wee doe I know by whom twas done.

Dudley Castle
April 28 1646

Yr Servant
T. Leveson