

# Piercebridge

## Battlefield 1 December 1642

The Tees Valley played a major part in the Great Civil Wars of the mid-17th century. The River Tees bridge crossings at Yarm and Piercebridge, along with nearby Guisborough, were the scene of three battles. The mainly Royalist North East provided a northern army for King Charles I. From Hull and Scarborough to the east and Leeds and Bradford to the west, Parliamentarian forces tried to stop Royalist troops and supply convoys operating between Newcastle and York. There are still places with links to the Battle of Piercebridge in the village today. Here are some of them:

### 2 - The George Hotel



Inside you can not only see Roman artefacts and the longcase clock that inspired the song "My Grandfather's Clock", but also a fireplace and features in the earliest part of the building nearest the bridge, probably from the 16th century. It is likely that the Parliamentarians made their

### 6 - Roman Fort



Remains of the fort's east gate and ditches can be seen on the eastern side of the village. The village occupies the interior of the fort.

### 8 & 9 - The Green



The focus of village life. Today, there are only a few surviving 17th century houses (above 9) but many later buildings stand on the footprint of earlier structures.

### 10 - Piercebridge Mill



There are remains of the leets and watercourses and later buildings of a mill that was probably here in the 17th century. From here are good views of the medieval bridge.



headquarters here in late November 1642 as they prepared to defend the bridge against the Royalists. From here and the high ground at Cliffe they could control movement along Dere Street and over the bridge.



### 7 - Dere Street & Carlbury Hill



The Royalists marched south along Dere Street (left) through Carlbury over an earlier Carlbury Bridge. Accounts suggest that they positioned their artillery on the high ground of Carlbury Hill between the rear of these houses and the current Carlbury Hall (built 1875) and fired on the Parliamentarians at Piercebridge.

### 11 - High Coniscliffe



Set out along the road between Darlington and Piercebridge, it sits on a high cliff with a fine view over the River Tees. The church is medieval and is the resting place of Colonel Sir Thomas Howard, killed at the Battle of Piercebridge.

### 1 - Roman Piercebridge

A Roman fort at Piercebridge guarded the important crossing of Dere Street, the main north-south road, over the River Tees. Impressive remains of either a Roman bridge or navigation dam and channel are preserved in the fields at Cliffe.



### 3 - The Bridge

The later medieval bridge continued to be a significant crossing point. As with Yarm, the 16th century bridge on the upstream side is essentially that which was fought over in 1642. It was widened on the downstream side in the 18th century and the join can still be seen on the underside of the arches.



### 4 - Betty Watson's Hill




One of two Bronze Age round barrows on the high bluff at Cliffe, local stories claim that the depression in the top was made when the mound was levelled by the Parliamentarians to create an emplacement for a cannon.

### 5 - Bridge House





Built in 1764, this house and the adjoining cottages stand on the site of where much older medieval buildings once stood. The houses here were probably defended by the Parliamentarians against the Royalists as they prepared to attack the bridge.


The Battle of Piercebridge 1 December 1642



**Tees Valley**  
Battlefield  
Trail

**1**



**A trail around the historic & picturesque village of Piercebridge, and landmarks in the story of the Civil War battle.**



## The Battle

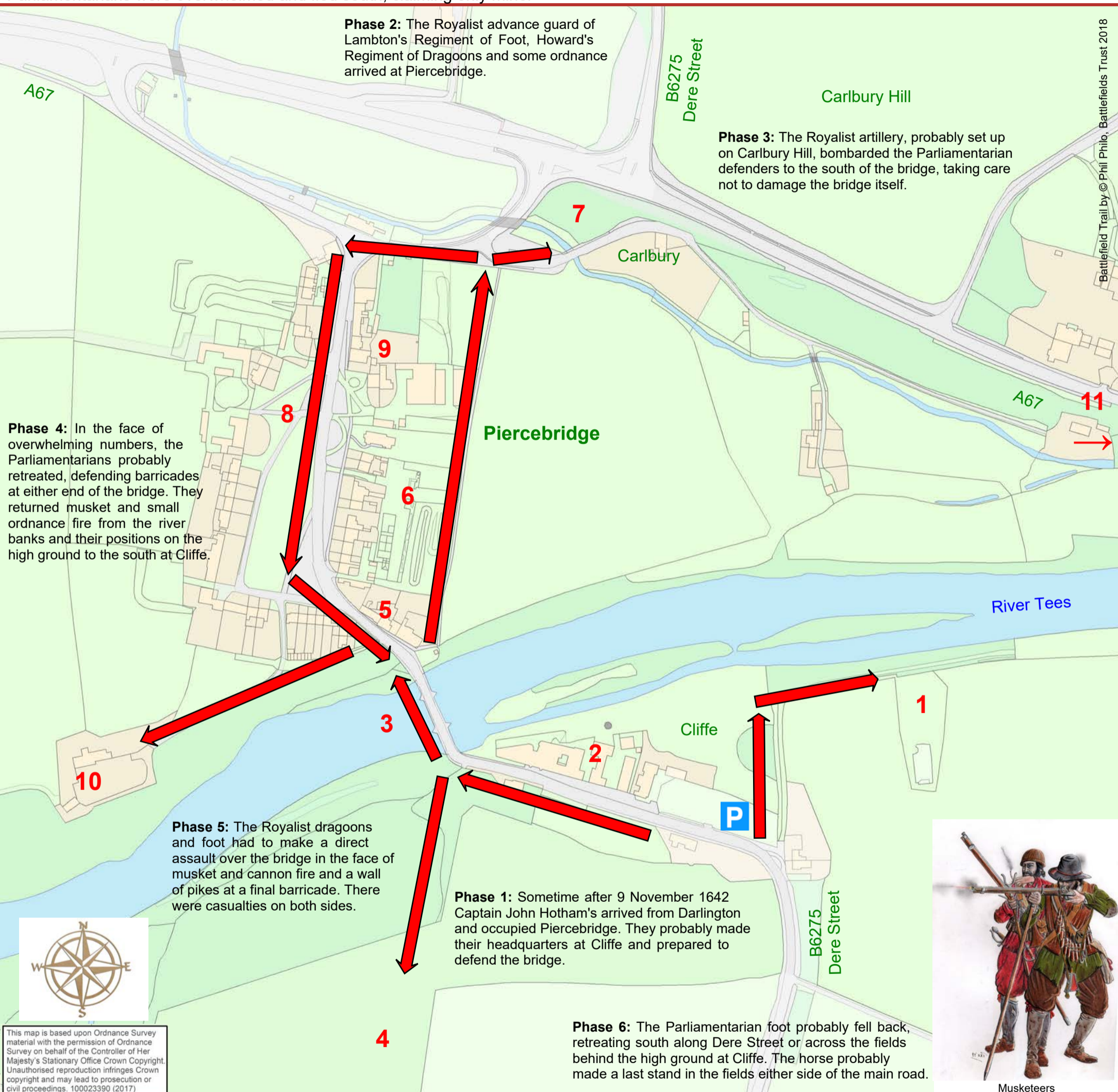
On 1 December 1642, the Earl of Newcastle's Royalist army of between 6,000 and 8,000 soldiers reached the bridge crossing of the River Tees at Piercebridge. A small Parliamentarian occupying force of about 500 foot, horse and two small cannon under Captain John Hotham opposed the crossing and attempted to halt the Royalists' march from Newcastle to the north to reinforce the city of York to the south.

The Royalist advance guard of a regiment of foot and one of dragoons, supported by ordnance, attacked the Parliamentarian defenders, mainly positioned on the bridge, road and high ground at Cliffe. Hotham's Parliamentarians were overwhelmed and fled south, claiming only minor

casualties. They joined the main Parliamentarian army around Tadcaster. Royalists Colonel Thomas Howard was killed in the assault, probably along with many ordinary un-named soldiers on both sides. The Royalists arrived in York unopposed on 3 December and on 6 December drove the Parliamentarians out of Tadcaster.

There were further battles at Guisborough and Yarm early in 1643. From 1644, Royalist, Parliamentarian and Scottish Covenanter armies crossed the River Tees using the bridge at Piercebridge.

For further information see: <http://www.teesarchoeology.com/downloads/documents/TheFirstGreatCivilWarintheTeesValley.pdf>



## Suggested Walk

From the Car Park, George Hotel Start or finish by taking the footpath at the far side, eastern end of the car park to view the impressive remains of Roman engineering at **1**.

Walk east past the George Hotel **2** and continue to the bridge and the River Tees **3**. Carefully cross the busy road to go through the gap in the wall at the south west corner of the bridge. Take the winding path up through the trees and across the field to Betty Watson's Hill **4**. Return by the same footpath to the bridge, noting the commanding view that the Parliamentarians would have had. Carefully cross the road and cross the bridge. Take the narrow footpath to the right of Bridge House **5** and follow it north. Go through the gate on the left to visit the site of the Roman **6**. Continue north along the footpath. After the narrow gap turn right to Carlbury Bridge **7**. This is the original line of Dere Street into Piercebridge

used by the Royalist army. Retrace your steps and then take the left road turn into the village and The Green **8**. Notice the 17th century stone farmhouse on the left before the church **9**. Continue south along The Green back to the bridge. There is an option to take the path off to the right down to the site of the mill with a good view of the bridge **10**.

Visit medieval St. Edwin's Church, High Coniscliffe, **11** with commanding view over the River Tees and picturesque graveyard where Royalist Colonel Howard, who was killed leading his dragoons in the assault on Piercebridge, was buried. Either go by vehicle or walk the Teesdale Way along the north bank of the River Tees (about 1.5km).

The walk is about 1.5 - 2km and takes up to about 45-60 minutes. Toilets and refreshments available at: The George Hotel; Piercebridge Organic Farm Shop & Cafe; & The Fox Hole.