

Prisoners at Hurst Castle

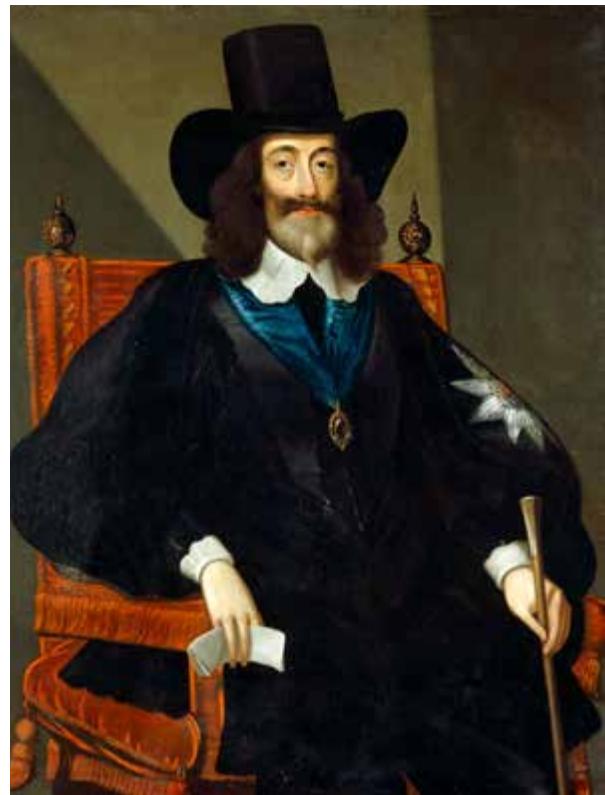
Only two unfortunates are known to have endured the bleak walls of Hurst as a prison: one a king, the other a priest who died here after 30 years.

King Charles I

In the winter of 1648 Charles I arrived by boat at Hurst Castle under Parliamentary guard from the Isle of Wight. He was held in the keep, probably on the first floor, from 1 to 19 December.

Sir Thomas Herbert, appointed the king's servant by the army, recalled: 'the Captain of this wretched place was not unsuitable; for at the King's going ashore, he stood ready to receive him, with small Observance: his Look was stern, his Hair and large Beard were black and bushy; he held a Partizan (spear) in his hand anda great Basket-hilt Sword by his side'. Herbert noted that the room the king ate in was dark, even at noon, it being winter; and required candles, and that at night the King had a wax lamp set in a silver basin. For exercise Charles was allowed to walk along the spit.

According to Herbert, the king woke one night hearing the sound of the bridge being lowered and horsemen entering the keep. It was the arrival of orders to move him from Hurst. On 19 December he was taken on towards London, his trial and execution.



Charles I

Father Paul Atkinson

In 1700 Hurst was chosen as a prison for those convicted for spreading the Roman Catholic faith. A Franciscan friar, Father Paul Atkinson (1656-1729) was, however, the only prisoner sent here. He had pleaded guilty to hearing the confession of a young woman, Elizabeth Rich, and absolving her of her sins.

The castle governor, Captain Samuel Pitman, sent a petition for provisions shortly after the arrival of the friar, describing him as 'having very few friends, being very poor and infirm' and 'by reason of his weakness...expensive to fire and candle, it being a dear place for these necessaries and cold'. Pitman was already spending half his pay on his men, who had 'not been paid these three years and upwards'.

Atkinson appealed himself. In 1713, after 13 years, he wrote to a Colonel Homes: 'It must doubtless move pity and compassion when they consider I have committed no crime, I have given no offence to the government nor ever was charged with any such thing'. Despite this and other pleas for mercy, and although briefly allowed some local freedom, Atkinson remained in the castle for 30 years until his death, at the age of 74.