



Why did people go to war in 1642?

Case study 2: 1640-42 - Source 9

Petition from the confused gentry of Somerset, August 1642

(Catalogue ref: SP 16/491/117)

What is this source?

This petition or request was presented to a court in Somerset to be sent on to the king.

It explained the feelings of the petitioners and asked for actions to be taken.

What's the background to this source?

By 1642 relations between Charles and Parliament were disastrous. Both sides were preparing for war. Both sides had plans for the militia.

- Every county had a band of trained soldiers called the militia. Their job was to defend against enemies and to keep order.
- In March 1642 Parliament passed a law called the Militia Ordinance that said that Parliament controlled the militia.
- In June 1642 Charles sent out orders called the Commissions of Array. These orders told all local officials to get the militia ready in their area to fight for him.
- Parliament responded by telling the local gentry they had to obey the Militia Ordinance and get the militia ready to fight for Parliament.

It's worth knowing that ...

The gentry of Somerset were not the only group who were confused in 1642 about whether to obey the Parliament or the king.

In Cheshire the gentry sent a document to Parliament and the king saying that they were not prepared to take either side in a war, as civil war was a sin. There were similar developments in Staffordshire and many other counties.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What does this source tell us about the feelings of the Somerset gentry in August 1642?
2. What do the Somerset gentry want?
3. Does this source give us any clues about why the kingdom went to war in 1642?



Source 9

And Contrary
 I have heard of late from the
 Commanders of both parties that they are ready to obey all
 his Majesties commands grounded upon the Lawes of this Kingdome
 And doo humbly petition for the avoidance of the
 my service that may be fall by means of Contrary
 Commandes that his Majesties Ma^{ty} would be
 pleased to suspende the Execution of the Commission
 of Array and that the Right Hon^{ble} of Parliament
 would likewise be pleased to suspende the
 execution of the order for the Militia. And that
 for the settlement of the Militia of this Kingdome
 according to the Lawe, his Ma^{ty} and the Members
 of both Houses of Parliament would be pleased
 to assemble againe and in full Court to make an
 Act for the settlement thereof. Or to take some
 sure way for good Comise in the same way
 of stably the yeare and summer of this
 Kingdome. And that in the meane tyme the Militia
 of this County may be ordered by the Justices of
 the yeare of this County resident for the
 tyme beinge according to the Statutes
 now in force.