

# Key People in the British Civil Wars

## Source-Based Activities

### Activity 1: Sir Thomas Fairfax

#### Background:

Sir Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671) was the Commander in Chief of Parliaments' New Model Army. He was wounded in battle many times. In addition to the wounds which he describes in the sources below, he had his face slashed open with a broadsword at Marston Moor and was shot in the shoulder during the siege of Helmsley Castle.



**Source 1 a: A photograph of Sir Thomas Fairfax's wheelchair, used from 1664.**

*The Fairfax family have been careful custodians of this remarkable object for over 300 years. This image has been shared with their kind permission.*

1. Look closely at this object. What can you see that suggests that:

- It was owned by someone wealthy and important
- The wheelchair user could move himself along

**Source 1b. A description of Sir Thomas Fairfax sitting in his wheelchair, by his cousin, Brian**  
*He sat "like an old Roman, his manly countenance striking awe and reverence into all that beheld him."*

G.W. Johnson (ed.), *The Fairfax Correspondence: Memoirs of the Reign of Charles I* (London, 1848), vol. 1, p. cxiii.

2. Choose three words from the list below that describe how Sir Thomas Fairfax looked when he was seated in his wheelchair:

*sad weak feeble frail impressive imperial strong masculine frightening powerful  
confident heroic noble tired wounded useless*

3. Now choose three words that best described the reaction how people felt when they saw him in his wheelchair:

*pity respect hatred amazement admiration worship loyalty fear sympathy  
amusement*

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### Activity 1: Sir Thomas Fairfax (continued)

#### Source 2a: Extract from a letter written by Sir Thomas Fairfax

*'I received a shot in the wrist of my arm, which made the bridle fall out of my hand, which being among the nerves and veins, suddenly let out such a quantity of blood, that I was ready to fall from my horse.'*

Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Fairfax 36, 'A Short Memoriall of ye Northerne Actions during the war there, from the year 1642 Till the year 1644', folio 9v.

#### Source 2b: Extract from a letter written by Lord Fairfax in 1645 to his father, Ferdinando.

*'I am exceedingly troubled with rheumatism and a benumbing coldness in my head, legs and arms, especially on that side I had my hurts.'*

R. Bell (ed.), *The Fairfax Correspondence: Memorials of the Civil War* (London, 1849), vol. 1, p. 251

1. What happened when Sir Thomas Fairfax was shot in the wrist?
2. What were the long-term effects of Sir Thomas Fairfax's wounds?

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