

Volume 1

Number 006

The Arrest of the Five Members

Lead: In early 1641, Parliament and King Charles I of England had reached a dangerous impasse.

Tag: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Taxation, the war with Scotland, the rights of Parliament, and royal manipulation of the courts were among the subjects of a contentious and sometimes bitter struggle between a majority of the House of Commons and the government of Charles I, but it was religion that generated much of the passion of those years. For nearly a century, the Puritans, a minority in the

Church of England, had been agitating for an end to corruption in the clergy, a simpler form of church worship, and greater control of congregations by the local churches.

In late 1641, the King had had enough. He reasoned, if he could just get rid of the leadership of the House of Commons, then the opposition would be broken and the rest of the people would fall in line. On January 3, 1642 he brought charges of treason against John Pym and four other members of Parliament and ordered their arrest.

The next day, when it appeared the House would not arrest its own leaders, Charles, at the head of three

to four hundred soldiers entered the House of Commons, determined to arrest them himself. Unfortunately for the King, forewarned, they had escaped down river and were hiding in the backstreets of London. Charles seeing them gone, said, "I see all the birds are flown."

The King left the Commons that day never to return. Within six days he had fled the city and by the end of the year the English Civil War had begun. Not since that time has an English monarch breached the privilege of the House by going there.

Today, a quaint custom recalls the events of that day. Since the House is off-limits to the Queen, when her

representative goes to call the Commons to come to the House of Lords to open Parliament, the door is slammed in his face.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Ashton, Robert. *The English Civil War: Conservatism and Revolution, 1603-1649*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1978.

Smith, Lacey Baldwin. *This Realm of England: 1399-1688*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1988.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.