

A re-enactor examines an exhibit at the Civil War Centre

When King Charles I raised the Royal Standard over Nottingham Castle in 1642 he began a series of conflicts that would change England forever.

Collectively known as the English Civil Wars, the battles raged until 1651 by which time a king had been executed, another had been exiled and the power of the monarch was diminished for good.

The fight between the Royalists and Parliamentarians over the future direction of the country played out across the East Midlands' towns and castles. Now, National Lottery investment is helping to open up these sites so that this important part of our history is much better known.

This week, the first centre dedicated to exploring and telling the story of the conflict will be officially opened in Newark by HRH Prince Edward, The Earl of Wessex.

Newark, a Royalist stronghold, was under siege three times by forces desperate to gain control over the Nottinghamshire town's important transport links. A £3.5million HLF grant has helped to create the new National Civil War Centre inside the Grade II* listed Old Magnus Buildings. The centre gives visitors a first-hand experience of life in Newark during the siege. Visitors can get up close to weaponry, armour and the 1646 town siege plan.

Around the corner from the new centre a unique fort made of earth – known as the Queen's Sconce - dominates the HLF-supportedSconce and Devon Park. This was a key part of the town's defence system and is now a Scheduled

Ancient Monument. An HLF grant helped bring the sconce back to life and develop a new, bridged access to it. Visitors can now discover more of its history with a guidebook and family trail.

Just down the road in Southwell, the site of King Charles I's final surrender, a £1.26m HLF grant has stablised and conserved the remaining ruins of the Southwell Palace that was ransacked by the Scottish army after the death of the king. People can now visit exhibitions and community events in the surviving Great Hall building which also hosts a renowned music school.

Many of the region's castles where key battles were planned and fought – including Nottingham and Lincoln – have also received investment to help bring their role in the war to life.

So if you are planning a visit to the new Civil War Centre, make sure you find time to explore the rest of the region to truly delve into the history of this fascinating conflict.



Artist's impression of the Civil War Gallery in the Old Magnus Building

Heritage Lottery Fund success for new National Civil War Centre