**A Teacher’s Guide to Survival after The British Civil Wars**

In 1642 the [Long Parliament](https://www.worldturnedupsidedown.co.uk/glossary/#long-parliament) promised welfare payments to wounded soldiers and their widows and orphans. This was not only an act of justice and mercy but an active encouragement to fight. Those who risked their lives for the state now had an assurance that their livelihoods would not be destroyed by the debilitating effects of wounds and that their dependants would be supported.

Those who were wounded, widowed or orphaned could write a petition, a begging letter, outlining their needs and asking for financial help. Most of those in need were illiterate and required advisors to help them draft these letters, clergymen for instance, schoolteachers or clerks. The letters were shaped by legal requirements, such as the need to prove loyalty to Parliament (immediately after the wars) or the King (after the Restoration) and written to a standard format. The letters are, in almost every case, written in the third person and inflected with a delicate blend of humble deference to authority and assertive reminders of the court’s lawful duty!

After drafting this written application, petitioners were required to travel to the County Court where their stories were told. Wounds were inspected and surgeon’s certificates, proving the medical basis for their claims, examined. A successful petitioner might be offered a one-off lump sum payment or (the highest prize) an annual pension. Local reputations were crucial to success, and many petitions included lists of neighbours prepared to support the truth of their claims. But the neighbourhood was not only a place of collaboration and support. Neighbourly relations were deeply affected by the limitations on who could and could not claim, and records of neighbours denouncing one another show how the everyday politics of the parish were drawn into national affairs.

The Civil War Petitions Project has collected these petitions and is examining the fascinating insight they offer into the experiences of ordinary people, so rarely found in the historical record. Evidence of military action, medical practice, the strategies of the wounded and bereaved and women’s experience of widowhood are just some of the aspects of this fascinating period of history found in this archive.

**Links and Further Reading**

Find a film that outlines the context and process of petitioning suitable for children here

<https://www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk/about-the-project/>

Read more about this exciting historical research here

<https://www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk/blog/>

Look up your own local area and explore the archive for yourself here

[www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk/places](http://www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk/places)