

THE BATTLEFIELD OF TEWKESBURY

A preliminary report for The Battlefield Trust and Tewkesbury Town Council by Peter Marren. August 1995. 4 maps attached.

1. The Battle and its place in history

The Battle of Tewkesbury saw the decisive defeat of the forces of Queen Margaret of Anjou and, in effect, of the cause of the House of Lancaster. It was decisive because virtually the entire Lancastrian leadership was killed or captured during the battle. Margaret herself was captured several days later. Her son and heir to the throne, Prince Edward, was killed, as were their relatives, Edmund and John Beaufort. The Lancastrian dynasty was defunct, in the direct line at least. The death of Prince Edward led to the murder of his father King Henry VI in The Tower. For the remainder of his reign, King Edward IV of York ruled in peace and security. It was only with the usurpation of his younger brother Richard that the war started again, culminating in the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, which put the Tudors on the throne. These events will be familiar to everyone who knows their Shakespeare.

The wars of York and Lancaster (known by later generations as The Wars of the Roses) were a dynastic struggle. The campaigns were brief and localised, and did not produce permanent standing armies, nor protracted sieges of towns. There were no great constitutional issues at stake. The wars were the result of the breakdown of government in the 1450s under the demented and incompetent Henry VI. The nobles had their own reasons for supporting either the party of Henry VI (Lancaster) or his rebellious cousin, Duke Richard of York, and their partisanship often reflected local rivalries e.g. between the Nevilles and the Percies. Once it started, it had to be fought to the bitter end, mainly because Queen Margaret just wouldn't give up!

In 1461, King Henry was overthrown, and replaced on the throne by the now dead Duke Richard's charismatic son as King Edward IV. Nine years later King Edward himself was overthrown and sent into exile by his erstwhile leading supporter, Richard Neville, the famous 'Warwick the Kingmaker'. Warwick brought the now doddery King Henry out of prison and tried to rule through him. He also invited the exiled Queen Margaret, Henry's dynamic wife, and her son, Edward, 'called Prince of Wales', to return and join the government. Queen Margaret, however, hesitated, distrusting Warwick.

1.2 The campaign

Early next year, 1471, King Edward landed in Yorkshire with a small force and advanced on London, gathering support as he came. In April he defeated Warwick at the Battle of Barnet. It was at this point that Queen Margaret's force landed at Weymouth. With her plans thrown into turmoil by the news of Warwick's defeat, she gathered forces in Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset where many families (most notably the powerful Courtenays) continued to support the House of Lancaster. Her plan was to cross the Severn and link up with the forces of Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke, in Wales.

King Edward moved quickly to intercept Queen Margaret before her force could cross the Severn. After the city of Gloucester shut its gates and denied her the crossing, the days before the Battle of Tewkesbury formed a race, with Edward catching up with the exhausted Lancastrian army (mainly of foot) on the evening of 3 May.

1.3 The battle

Queen Margaret's force camped in the large open field to the south of the town, known then as Gastum, and since as The Gastons. Some have criticised her decision to offer battle here rather than on more defensible ground further upstream at The Mythe. Since her purpose was to cross the Severn, however, she probably needed to defend the bridge and the deep ford at Lower Lode, allowing her force a westward escape if the Yorkists could be held off. The size of her army is usually estimated at some 5 or 6,000 men. I suspect that is pitching it rather high. Of the 55 named soldiers in her force, all but four were relatively humble knights, squires and commoners, not peers of the realm. Though some, like Sir Hugh Courtenay, owned large estates, it strains credulity to believe that a Lancastrian knight or squire could bring in an average of 100 armed and apparelled men each, especially under these hurried and makeshift circumstances. King Edward camped at Tredington, three miles away. Early on the morning of 4 May he drove onwards in battle formation: in 3 divisions or 'battles', with 'afore-riders' (skirmishers) and 'scourers' (scouts) on every side. The vanguard was entrusted to his brother, Richard Duke of Gloucester; it was followed by the King's battle, and then the rearward, mainly Midlands men wearing the white livery of their lord, Lord Hastings. With wagons and artillery trains, this force, reliably computed at around 5,000 men, 3,000 of them mounted, would have choked the narrow lanes leading all the way back to Tredington. This is worth remembering, since diagrams of the battle imply that the whole of the Yorkist army was deployed in line at the start. I do not believe this was the case.

The course of the battle can be read in any of the many books in print about the Wars of the Roses. They all tell the same story, since they share the same source: the document known as *The Arrivall of Edward IV*, which exists in two versions, long and short. Most of what is known about the battle is told by *The Arrivall*. It is a good contemporary account (possibly too good, because it has been accepted uncritically), probably written by an eyewitness (for it is full of circumstantial detail). Briefly, the course of the battle seems to have run as follows:

1. The Yorkist vanguard assailed the Lancastrian force in their defences, protected by hedges and dikes (brooks and drains) - "a right evil place to approche, as could well have been devised". There was an exchange of gunfire and archery, in which the superiority of the Yorkist force soon told. We're told they gave the Lancastrians 'right-a-sharp' fire.
2. Somerset led part of his force round the Yorkist left flank, probably near Southwick Park. His surprise attack was blunted when 200 mounted Yorkist men-at-arms ('a stout bushment of spears') attacked him in the flank, charging down the hillside from Tewkesbury Park. Somerset was driven back in disorder, pursued by the victorious Yorkists.
3. *With* the Lancastrian position beginning to crumble. King Edward's battle advances and comes to grips with the enemy on the Yorkist right. Lord Hastings's rearguard battle arrives and pushes forward along the meadows by the Swilgate giver.
4. Lancastrian knights and men-at-arms abandon their position and scatter towards the river, the town or the hoped-for sanctuary of the abbey. With their leaders dead, there is no one to rally them. The measure of the Yorkist victory is that not a single Lancastrian of note got away. All were killed or captured. Traditionally

the greatest slaughter took place in Bloody Meadow. Later stories related by Polydore Virgil, Hall and Holinshed tell that the Prince of Wales was murdered after refusing fealty to King Edward, and that Somerset personally killed his fellow commander Lord Wenlock for failing to support his flank attack.

Evidently the Lancastrian casualties were heavy - certainly among the men of name. We are not told whether any part of the force surrendered and was spared, and estimates of one or two thousand dead are pure guesswork. The Yorkist casualties seem to have been very light - no one of name was killed, which suggests that hand-to-hand fighting was limited. Tewkesbury was a one-sided battle. The real struggle was the campaign of the previous few days, which King Edward won. It is hard to detect serious failures of generalship to account for the Lancastrian downfall.

Somerset is sometimes blamed for breaking ranks, but, galled by gunfire and showers of arrows, he had to do something or risk losing his army. It is worth remembering that he was one of the more experienced commanders at Tewkesbury, having served with the French during his exile. Most of the other commanders (King Edward excepted) had had relatively little battle experience. Whatever he did, Somerset would probably have lost. His main failure was to omit to man and fortify the manor at Tewkesbury Park (which may have been well defended). Had the Lancastrian forces succeeded in joining forces with Jasper Tudor in Wales, or possibly the Stanleys in Cheshire, they would have presented a much greater threat to the ruling regime.

2. Site of the battlefield

I believe the Battle of Tewkesbury can be reconstructed on the ground with a fair degree of probability - more so, indeed, than many medieval battles. The main clues can be set out as follows.

- a. The Lancastrian camp. Anthea Jones has pointed to the near contemporary testimony of a monk at Tewkesbury Abbey, recorded by Leland, that Queen Margaret's forces '*campum nomine Gastum*', that is, camped in the field named *Gastum*. This is cognate with the present-day site called The Gastons. This was a large open field of some 200 acres, whose precise ancient boundary is known and is shown on Map 1. It matches the *Arrivall's* description of 'a field, in a close even at the townes ende and the abbey at their backs'.
- b. The site of Bloody Meadow. This name, and its alternative, 'Bloody Furlong' or 'Bloody Ham', was in use twenty years after the battle, and no doubt soon after the event. Bloody Meadow was not in the front line. It lies on the natural route that fleeing soldiers trying to reach the Mill *leat* and the river Severn would take as they fell back along Lincoln Green Lane. At least one named person drowned in the Mill Lode beyond. Possibly the panic-stricken Lancastrians became bottled up inside this narrow field, bounded by tall hedges and overlooked by hillsides on both sides, and that a massacre took place when they were unable to escape. It is certainly easy to imagine such a scene.
- c. The Lancastrian force would have defended a line in front of their camp, not behind it. The Tudor chronicler Hall implies that the camp, i.e. The Gastons, was itself defended, though the army had had time to erect only makeshift barricades, not dig themselves in. They would therefore have made the best

use they could of natural defences, as the *Arrivall* author makes clear. Their archers would stand behind hedges, preferably those with a ditch. It is hard to believe they would have ignored two obvious strongpoints close to their lines: Gupshill Manor, and the medieval earthworks long known as Queen Margaret's Camp. Most historians have placed these between the lines, or even in the Yorkist camp; and certainly no source mentions them. However, 'Queen Margaret's Camp' lies on the crest of the ridge overlooking the Yorkist approach, exactly where one would expect the Lancastrians to position their lines. The earthworks, prominent enough today, were almost certainly deeper and steeper 500 years ago, and would have formed an ideal forward command post, especially if defended with guns. Possibly its name, which was current as long ago as the eighteenth century, and no doubt earlier, incorporates a memory of the battle. Gupshill Manor is on slightly lower ground, less than 100 metres away, and in 1471 might well have been part of the same enclosed manorial settlement since at that time the main road did not divide them. In my reconstruction, therefore, these two sites form anchor points on the Lancastrian defended line. This line runs from Lincoln Green (a natural rallying point), in front of the Gastons, connecting with Gupshill and Queen Margaret's Camp, and running east along a hedge to the Swilgate, a frontage of about 800 yards.

This reconstruction allows Somerset to manoeuvre down Lincoln Green Lane, which (as I shall show) certainly existed in 1471, running between hedge banks along the edge of Tewkesbury Park. This route would take him to "the hill that was in one of the closes" described in the *Arrivall*!. I identify this with the isolated hillock near Southwick Park, and clearly visible from Gupshill Manor. This is the only feature on the battlefield which could reasonably be called a hill and it does indeed sit within a 'close'. In my reconstruction the hillock would have helped to obscure Somerset's advance from the main Yorkist lines, while scouts at the top of Tewkesbury Park would have spotted him easily.

Somerset's manoeuvre aside, the Lancastrians evidently stayed behind cover and fought defensively. The Yorkists would therefore have to advance within bowshot (and gun shot), perhaps 150-200 m. This would place the Yorkist front line along the ridge of land running about 200 m south of Gupshill Manor as shown on Map 2, with reinforcements constantly arriving from further south. This places my reconstruction about 300 m to the south of that on the English Battlefield Register, and, if accepted, they would need to add another sliver of land to the battlefield.

I suggest that the blocks on most maps of the battlefield showing the three divisions or 'battles' on each side can be misleading, unless understood purely diagrammatically and at a particular phase of the battle. In my view, the Lancastrians would have formed a continuous defensive line, with strong points, and, probably, a large reserve guarding the camp. The Yorkists deployed as each 'battle' arrived, and it is likely that the main fighting on the left was already over by the time the rearguard arrived (which must have taken a couple of hours). The pursuit extended all over the battlefield, with knots of fighting here and there, notably at Bloody Meadow and in the precincts of the abbey. Hence, I visualise a battle of greater complexity and movement, and extending over a deeper area, than that implied by the diagrammatic maps. There were doubtless events of which we have no knowledge at all - like an assault on Gupshill Manor.

3. Reconstruction of a medieval battlefield

There are, not surprisingly, no maps of Tewkesbury dating back to 1471. The earliest good field map seems to be that of William Croome, dated 1827. At this date, the whole of the battlefield was meadow land or pasture, with the exception of gardens on Perry Hill, near the abbey, and arable fields at Southwick either side of the modern ASS. Croome names most of the fields, including The Gastons, as shown on Map 1. There were probably more enclosed fields present in 1827 than in 1471. The Gastons, for example, had been divided into several fields by 1612 (Anthea Jones pers. comm.), and the enclosed fields in Tewkesbury Park also seem (from botanical evidence) to date from about that time.

3.1 Place-names

The Place-names of Gloucestershire (1964) presents a number of place-names that date back to the time of the battle, or even earlier. Foremost among these is Bloodvurlong (1497) or Bataylham (c. 1528), that is. Bloody Meadow. The narrow, curved, shape of Bloody Meadow implies great antiquity, and this is confirmed by its hedgebanks which are certainly medieval. An early 19th century map implies that Bloody Meadow ran all the way to Lincoln Green from Lower Lode Lane. Other ancient names are:

Severn Ham - also known as Avon Ham. A 'ham' is a low-lying meadow, usually by a river or stream. The *Arrival!* author preferred the word 'close' for fields enclosed by hedges, and Croome also uses the same term for a number of fields.

Gupshill - variously spelt Guppishill or Gopishall in the Middle Ages. There was a manor here in 1438, but the present building dates from 1665. Possibly 'Queen Margaret's Camp' marks the site of an even earlier housestead.

Southwick - Southwyke. Was there a manor house here too? Southwick Field is mentioned 1542.

Swillgate. The flood meadows that still run along the River Swillgate are an ancient feature, named Swyllyot Meade (1491) or Silyatt Medowe (1540). Croome's 'Rushy Meadow' may be the medieval 'Rushmede' (1367, 1540).

Vineyards. These were formerly spelt with a 'W', thus Wynyardes on Croome's map and Wynyerde (1490). Their former extends marked by Croome. Some have placed the Lancastrian camp here, but the slope faces the wrong way!

Lower Lode Lane existed in 1471. It ran along the NW boundary of Tewkesbury Park, leading to the deep ford called Auenford (Avon Ford) in 1527.

Tewkesbury Park, is, of course, medieval. At the time of the battle it was a recent inheritance of the Duke of Clarence by right of his wife. As such it was hostile territory to the Lancastrians, which may be why they did not occupy it - a fatal mistake.

Woodalls. This field name is recorded in 1540 as 'Woodhawes' and probably existed at the time of the battle. This field has ancient hedgebanks and its importance has been overlooked.

Lincoln Green Lane is an ancient road, and its course marks one of the two medieval roads into Tewkesbury. It was almost certainly one of the *Arrival!* author's 'foul lanes'.

3.2 Hedges

It is important to realise that hedges are sometimes ancient features of the landscape, and that many hedges, especially those on ancient parish boundaries, have been with us since the Middle Ages, or even earlier. Because of their defensive importance, hedges are of great military significance. Those at Tewkesbury contain a great deal of elm (it is the third commonest constituent after hawthorn and sloe), and photographs show that the hedgerows were full of big, tall elm trees before disease wiped them all out in the 1970s. Hulks of these big trees survive in the hedges here and there. Since no other nationwide epidemic of elm disease is known since Neolithic times, the probability is that in 1471, the 'closes' of Tewkesbury were bounded by thick hedges and billowing elms, in effect making the battlefield a chequerboard of separate fields out of view of one another. The defensive qualities of such a battlefield are mentioned by the *Arrivall* author in a well-known descriptive passage.

'Upon every land of them fowie lanes and depe dikes, and many hedges, with hylls, .and valleys, a right evil place to approche, as cowlde well have bene devised.'

It is possible to determine the approximate age of a hedge, using 'Hooper's Law', which states (with abundant evidence) that the number of shrubs in a 30 m length of hedgerow approximates to its age in centuries. Climbing plants like bramble, *Clematis* and ivy are omitted. Additional evidence can be adduced by the presence of hedgerow trees in determinable age, and the presence of a bank and ditch. In Croome's time, most fields were probably enclosed by hedges. Many of these have since been grubbed up, but, except when smothered under brick and concrete, banks and sometimes fragments of hedge survive to indicate that the field pattern has not changed significantly in 170 years.

Map 3 shows the approximate ages of the surviving hedges. Those which existed at the time of the battle are as follows:

- a. Hedges running both sides of Lower Lode Lane. Though obscured by the sewage works, the old Park 'pale' (boundary bank) can be traced along the southern side from the picnic site almost to the ASS. Near Bloody Meadow is a strip of woodland that seems to have grown up from the hedge. Halfway along the north side is a magnificent Black Poplar tree, and the hedgerow is also distinguished by mature oaks, maples and aspens. Queen Margaret would still recognise this lane, despite the tarmac. Its present width and alignment is exactly that of 1471.
- b. Hedges running the full length of Lincoln Green Lane. both sides. This lane follows the Park boundary in an elegant curve. It is a classic medieval green lane, very well-preserved, broad (used for driving sheep and cattle) with verges and ditches on either side and hedgerows with up to 8 species per 30 m section, not counting the magnificent ancient oaks, probably planted around 1600-1650. The metalled lane peters out at Ten Acre Cottages, and its course thereafter is much overgrown but still traceable. Somerset's soldiers probably advanced and then fell back down this lane, meeting their fate in Bloody Meadow. Again, its route is exactly the same as at the time of the battle, though Lincoln Green itself is obscured by farm buildings.

- c. This thick hedge lining the Coln Brook ran from Lincoln Green, along the S. side of the Gastons and thence due south along the E. side of the ancient close known as Wodhawes. Another hedge - (4) - joins it, running east towards the house called Cochise Lodge. This hedge lay across the battlefield, and parts of it were probably used in the defences. It contains a deep ditch and may be one of those referred to in the *Arrivall*. Looking at it now, you can see what an impregnable barrier it must have been, too tall and thick for a horse to jump over or a man to cut through. Unfortunately the hedge in the most critical position (5) has been grubbed out. Unlike hedges (1) and (2), this one is a wet hedge with big crack willow pollards in it. Note the sinuous boundaries of all these hedges - an ancient characteristic. Note too the brooks still wind naturally - no improver has straightened them.
- d. Hedge 6 is short but species-rich with a good bank, and may have existed at the time of the battle when it would have run all the way up hill to Queen Margaret's Camp. If so, it would have formed a strong defensive line to the Lancastrian left flank. It contains apple trees, which made me think of the men of Devon - tenants and followers of the Courtenays- who occupied this part of the field.

The hedges enclosing the Swilgate meadows are species-poor-mainly blackthorn, but many are thick with good banks, and may be older than they seem - on this wet floodland few other hedgerow plants will grow well, and Hooper's Law may not apply.

3.3 Earthworks

Map 4 shows the location of earthworks detected during my fieldwork. These are of two main types: (1) banks (-and-ditches), usually occupied by a hedge or a 'ghost hedge' (a line where a hedge once stood and where fragments may remain). (2) Ridge-and-furrow marks within the fields themselves. The hedgebanks are discussed above. So far as the surviving ridge-and-furrow is concerned, their extent in the fields south of the town is remarkable, and suggest that most of the fields not on floodland went through a phase of arable cultivation. If it could be shown that the ridge-and-furrow is medieval, it might have a bearing on the battle since it would provide hard evidence for the contemporary field pattern. However the indications are that it is later, possibly 17th century (when some of the fields were enclosed). Though I did not systematically measure the width of the furrows, those in the field called 'Pumprey's Ploughed Piece' (now part of the golf course) measured 7 m from furrow to furrow and those in other fields seemed similarly broad - and this points to a post-medieval date. It seems inherently unlikely that Tewkesbury Park would have contained so much arable within its medieval boundary. I therefore reject the ridge-and-furrow as evidence until its age has been assessed by archaeologists.

4. Envoi

In 1471, most arable land was in open field systems. The *Arrivall's* repeated mention of hedged 'closes' suggests that the battle was fought in meadows and pasture land - *bocage* country - recalling the Normandy campaign of 1944. On 4 May 1471/the buttercups were opening, the hillside was loud with larksong and there were tadpoles in the brooks. The previous day had been warm spring sunshine. I wonder whether the men of 1471, men like Sir Hugh Courtenay from the lovely Cornish manor and park of Boconnoc (which survives little changed), or Somerset's standard bearer, John Floud, or Master John Sutton the Bristol goldsmith, or King Edward's 'black and smoky sort of Flemish gunners', would have

reflected on the irony of their circumstances: to fight, bleed and perhaps die among the buttercups of sweet Severn vale within sight of the wooden spire of Tewkesbury Abbey.

5. The Battlefield Trail

The existing trail, run by Tewkesbury Borough Council since 1984 is a pleasant stroll but doesn't tell one much about the battlefield. In particular it fails to compare its account of the battle with visible features on the ground. In my view an improved trail should take in the following points and interpret them properly:

1. The Gastons (assuming the last open fields can be saved).
2. Gupshill Manor with its view of 'the hillock'.
3. Queen Margaret's Camp.
4. The hedges, banks and field called Woodalls.
5. Lincoln Green and Lincoln Green Lane.
6. Bloody Meadow, including its hedges and banks.
7. Lower Lode Lane.
8. Tewkesbury Abbey (for the sacristy door and burial sites).
9. The Abbey Cottages including 'The Little Museum' (present in 1471 and hardly changed).
10. The war memorial (execution site) and Prince Edward's House (traditional site of his murder).
11. Tewkesbury Museum (for the model), at least until a visitor centre is built.

I would welcome the opportunity to re-route and re-write the Battlefield Trail. It could be made so much more informative and interesting.

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A summary based on field work on the battlefield during August 1995. Detailed field-by-field data is also available.

Confidential details of possible sites for a visitor centre are appended separately.







