

English Heritage Battlefield Report: Blore Heath 1459

Blore Heath (23 September 1459)

County: Staffordshire

District: Newcastle-under-Lyme

Parish: Loggerheads

Grid Ref: SJ71443527 (centred on Audley's Cross)

Historical Context

The Battle of Blore Heath took place as a consequence of renewed instability in English affairs. By September 1459 the party that aligned itself with Richard, Duke of York, felt it was necessary to re-assert its influence over King Henry VI. As in 1455, the last time that the rivalry between the Yorkists and the faction headed by the Beaufort family - which had the ear of the king and his queen, Margaret of Anjou - erupted into open conflict, the supporters of the Duke of York hoped to concentrate their forces and take the field before the Court party could muster an effective response. But on this occasion the king's forces were too quick for them. As Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, hurried south from his Yorkshire stronghold of Middleham in an effort to unite with the forces of the Duke of York at Ludlow, he was intercepted at Blore Heath by Lord Audley and the local adherents of Queen Margaret and the young Prince of Wales. Audley's Lancastrian army was variously reckoned to be superior by between 4:1 and 2:1. Contemporary estimates for the Yorkists numbered from 3,000-5,000; those for their opponents between 8,000 and 14,000.

The bulk of this information can be gleaned from *The Attainder of Richard Duke of York and others*, written into the Parliament Rolls.¹ Contemporary chronicles do not disagree with the *Attainder* in any marked way, and they all explicitly refer to the battle as taking place at Blore Heath.²

Location and Description of the Battlefield

Blore Heath battlefield straddles the present A53 running south-west between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Market Drayton. It is situated approximately three miles east of the latter town.

The site of the Battlefield is pinpointed by Audley's Cross, erected reputedly upon the spot where the Lancastrian commander, James Tuchet, Lord Audley, was killed. The stone cross (SMR 27), which stands 1.2 metres high, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Staffs SAM 12) and Listed Building (Grade II). The Cross was repaired in 1765 and 1932 and still carries the inscription carved on it at the former date:

On this spot was fought the Battle of Blore Heath. In 1459 Lord Audley, who commanded for the side of Lancaster was defeated and slain. To perpetuate the memory of the action and the place, this ancient monument was repaired in 1765 at the charge of the lord of the manor, Charles Boothby Skrymster.

There is no reason to doubt either the purpose for which the Cross was raised or that it appeared soon after the event. Robert Plot was aware of the tradition of its significance when he wrote his *Natural History of Staffordshire* in 1686; and even at that time the Cross could be described as being of great antiquity.³ Moreover, as Colonel A H Burne observed in *More Battlefields of England* (London 1952), the Cross is so inconspicuously positioned on a falling slope that no one would have chosen the ground for a monument to Lord Audley unless he had been killed there.

Landscape Evolution

A reconstruction of the battlefield as it was in the fifteenth century has been attempted by Colonel R F Twemlow⁴. He was exhaustive in his research and although he sometimes drew conclusions from his topographical knowledge that were unwarranted, his findings repay careful study. For instance, his estimate of the extent of Rowney Wood (now Burnt Wood) at the time of the battle, showing where the Yorkist Left would have been anchored upon it, is particularly valuable (Folly Wood, to the north of the battlefield, is a man-made plantation last replanted in the 1970s: in 1459 it was open heathland).

Twemlow also reminds us that the route of the road between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Market Drayton (now the A53) was much altered by the 1768 Turnpike Act, although his reconstruction of the former road network is open to doubt. Daisy Lake, to the west of the battlefield, does not appear to have existed before 1704. Otherwise, apart from limited cultivation at the southern and eastern edges Blore Heath battlefield, as its name implies, consisted of barren heath. The medieval roads are signified in the landscape by, in the case of the E-W route, ancient hedgerows between Blore Farm and Bloreheath Farm, and in the case of the N-S route by a hollow way and parallel field boundaries.

The heath appears to have been enclosed after the turnpike and before 1843 - the Parliamentary Enclosure map is dated 1774. Folly Wood had been planted by 1843. With the exception of isolated groups of 20th-century housing, the landscape of the battlefield has changed little since then. An important difference, however, is the character of the valley bottom central to the battlefield. The Hempmill is accompanied by medieval earthworks indicating that the brook was dammed here. This will have caused the brook to be ponded back and, consequently, the valley will have held more water in 1459 than it does today. This evidence is crucial to an understanding of the course of events.

The Sources

Whilst Audley's Cross enables us to determine the location of the battlefield, the precise course of the battle itself can only be determined with knowledge of the preliminary dispositions of the two sides. Without an understanding of the dispositions of the armies it would be difficult to establish the extent of the battlefield.

To reach a judgement on the deployment of the Yorkist and Lancastrian forces it is necessary to consider not only the documentary sources for the battle but also the historical geography of Blore Heath and the art of war of the period. The Battle of Blore Heath has been interpreted by a number of writers over the years. They have used the sources available, but many have either misinterpreted these or used them with insufficient caution. In the following pages, therefore, it is intended to highlight the problems of interpretation by considering previous writers in turn. This will enable both the theories about the Battle of Blore Heath, and the nature of the source material employed, to be evaluated.

A.Snape, Rev. William, 'The Battle of Blore Heath in 1459', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXII, Dec 1812, pp602-05.

Using as his authority the translation of the 18th-century French writer Rapin's *Histoire d'Angleterre*, Snape supposes that following its first confrontation with Audley's host, Salisbury's army conducted a six-mile overnight retreat before turning on its pursuers at Blore Heath and destroying them. Snape concludes that the opposing armies were first ranged against each other on the Byrth and Camp Hills, to the north-east near Maer. The extract from Rapin on which he bases his theory is as follows:

Lord Audley was encamped on Blore Heath near a little river: Salisbury posted himself on the other side, as if he meant to guard the pass, and hinder his being attacked; then suddenly feigning a fear, he

retired in the night, marching so as, at break of day, his enemies could still see the rear of his army. This retreat, which seemed to be with precipitation, inspiring the Royalists with ardour, they began to pass the river in disorder, imagining that they had nothing to do but pursue the flying enemy. But, whilst they were in this confusion, some being over the river, others in the water, and others ready to pass, the Earl of Salisbury returned, and fell upon the troops already over, who had scarce time to draw up.

Snape attempts to make sense of Rapin by arguing that to be worthy of the name, Salisbury's retreat must have been conducted over a distance of miles; that in medieval times Blore Heath was probably considered to extend all the way to Maer; and that near Maer he can identify 'the pass'. He does not deny, however, that the battle itself took place in the vicinity of Audley's Cross.

It is impossible to identify the source of Rapin's story about an overnight retreat, and when a historian writes 250 years after the event he must be treated with caution, but it is as well to be aware of what he wrote, because his account was to have an influence on interpretations of the Battle of Blore Heath altogether more important than that of Snape.

B.Beamont, W, 'The Battle of Blore Heath', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological, and Historical Society for the County, City, and Neighbourhood of Chester*, 1 June 1849 to December 1855, pp81-100 (Chester 1857).

Beamont's interpretation of the battle was also based on Rapin and included as well elements of Holinshed's *Chronicles*. We have considered what Rapin wrote, but before we examine Beamont's thesis a knowledge of his other main source is clearly desirable. The extract that follows, therefore, is taken from the book that provided Holinshed with all his information about Blore Heath, Edward Hall's *The Union of The Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (1548; reprinted as Hall's *Chronicle* 1809). By quoting Hall rather than Holinshed our evaluation of the source material is made easier (Holinshed's version of the Battle of Blore Heath was, in fact, copied from Hall's description almost word for word).

The Lord Audley, according to his commission, assembled about 10,000 men, and knowing by his espials which way the earl kept, approached near to him on a fair plain called Blore Heath, within a mile of the town of Drayton, in the country of Salop, commonly called Shropshire. The earl perceiving by the livery of the soldiers, that he was circumvented and likely to be trapped with the queen's power, determined rather there to abide the adventure, with fame and honour then farther to fly, with loss and reproach: and so encamped himself all the night, on the side of a little brook not very broad, but somewhat deep. In the morning early, being the day of St Tercle, he caused his soldiers to shoot their flights, toward the Lord Audley's company, which lay on the other side of the said water, and then he and all his company, made a sign of retreat. The Lord Audley, remembering not only the trust that he was put in, but also the queen's terrible commandment, (which was to bring to her presence, the Earl of Salisbury, quick or dead) blew up his trumpet, and did set forth his vanguard, and suddenly passed the water. The Earl of Salisbury, which knew the sleights, strategies and policies of warlike affairs, suddenly returned, and shortly encountered with the Lord Audley and his chief captains, ere the residue of his army could pass the water. The fight was sore and dreadful. The earl desiring the saving of his life, and his adversaries coveting his destruction, fought sore for the obtaining of their purpose, but in conclusion, the earl's army, as men desperate of aid and succour, so eagerly fought, that they slew the Lord Audley, and all his captains, and discomfited all the remnant of his people...

This account is probably the most widely used of all those that describe the Battle of Blore Heath. But while most commentators have been happy to accept that the small brook said to have divided the armies was the Hempmill, which flowed a little below Audley's Cross, Beamont dismisses the Hempmill as an insignificant rivulet. He believed that the River Tern, which winds around Market Drayton three miles away, was the 'brook' that in reality divided the two sides at daybreak on 23 September 1459. Beamont contends that on the previous evening

Salisbury had encamped on the hill, south of Market Drayton by the Tern, which bears his name. Audley personally was camped on the feature known as Audley Brow, a few miles further west, but his army was much nearer the Yorkists, and was just across the Tern on Little Drayton Common. In advancing this argument Beamont claims to be exploiting local tradition: Salisbury Hill is so named because the Earl of Salisbury encamped on it; and the implicit assumption made by Beamont is that the same applies to Audley Brow.

Although this is hardly concrete evidence, Beamont is unabashed. Having decided that the Tern was the brook in question, and that the two leaders were encamped before the battle on the two hills named after them, all that remains for Beamont to do is to fit the chroniclers' accounts into his hypothesis. This he does by postulating that on the morning of the 23rd Salisbury's archers shot arrows into the enemy camp across the Tern, fell back over three miles of broken ground, and led Audley's men into an ambush on Blore Heath prepared by Salisbury himself who had retreated during the night. The ambush took place in the vicinity of Audley's Cross. Beamont continues 'Holinshed's [*i.e. for present purposes, Hall's*] account of the discharge of arrows and of Salisbury's pretended flight, and Rapin's relation of the rear of the flying army being still in view of the enemy at daybreak, agree so well with an encampment on opposite sides of the Tern, and are at the same time so reconcilable with tradition; while the supposition of an encampment on the two sides of the Hemp Mill Brook ... is so improbable in itself, that I have not hesitated to adopt the conclusion that the stream which separated the rival hosts before the fatal day of Tecla, was no other but the Tern.'

Later writers, however, have poured scorn on the notion that the experienced Salisbury would have divided his force before a superior enemy, or that his infantry, retreating across country, would have been able to outrun Audley's cavalry, which commanded the road to Blore Heath. Evidence has been produced that Audley's Brow bore its name two centuries before Lord Audley is held by Beamont to have camped there⁵. It has been argued that the Earl of Salisbury was more likely to have camped on Salisbury Hill after the battle than before it⁶, since the Parliament Rolls state that he camped in Market Drayton *after* his victory⁷. And yet, in spite of the fact that Beamont's elaborate theory, when examined closely, is painstakingly constructed solely to take account of dubious local legend, other writers have accepted his interpretation, or at least variants of it: Sir James Ramsay in his *Lancaster and York* (1892); C.R.B. Barrett in his *Battles and Battlefields of England* (1896); and even as late as 1973 it was espoused by Philip Warner in his book *British Battlefields: The Midlands*. Their accounts, unfortunately, like Beamont's, have to be disregarded.

The objections to relying overly upon Rapin's chronicle hold good quite as much when considering Beamont's thesis as Snape's: there is no source for the story about an overnight retreat. But what of Hall? What credence can be lent to his account? Although he is writing much closer to events than Rapin, he is still not a contemporary source: more than a generation separates him from the conflict of York and Lancaster (Hall lived c.1498-1547). In the view of a rigorous modern historian, Anthony Goodman, writing in his work *The Wars of the Roses* (London 1981), this is enough to disqualify him as an authority: it is, Goodman argues, impossible to check on the source of much of Hall's information.

Such a purist approach, however, creates difficulties. If one disregards the likes of Hall there is not much left: very few sources actually describe the Battle of Blore Heath. Indeed, because he employs only the testimony of contemporary chroniclers, all that remains to Goodman is to conclude 'There are no detailed accounts of Blore Heath'.⁸

This is altogether too negative a verdict. Hall can be used, as long as he is not linked with Rapin and extravagant theories built upon his statement that the Yorkists, at the start of the battle, conducted a feigned withdrawal. In Hall's favour is the fact that his account tallies with the terrain at Blore Heath. Rather surprisingly, he was the first chronicler to indicate that a 'brook not very broad, but somewhat deep' had any part to play in deciding the issue of the battle. The Hempmill stands only a few dozen yards from Audley's Cross and is indisputably part of the geography of the battlefield, yet Hall was the first to draw attention to it. This does much for his credibility.

Another presumption in Hall's favour is the opinion of C.L. Kingsford, author of *English Historical Literature in*

the Fifteenth Century (Oxford 1913). Kingsford draws attention to the fact that Hall's grandfather, Sir David Hall, an erstwhile captain of Caen, was a counsellor of the Duke of York and died with him a year after Blore Heath at the Battle of Wakefield. It is therefore possible that Hall had access to a reservoir of family information about the events of the Wars of the Roses passed down the generations⁹. Certainly, it is as well to remember that if Sir David Hall was with the Duke's party at Ludlow when Salisbury's army arrived from Blore Heath, he could not have failed to have heard a report of the battle.

C. Twemlow, R.F. *The Battle of Bloreheath* (Wolverhampton, 1912).

This interpretation of the battle demands careful consideration. Colonel Twemlow was a resident of the area with an expert knowledge of local topography and history. He later wrote a highly detailed study of Tyrley, the manor in which the battle took place.

However, in his interpretation of the battle he stands alone. Whereas other writers, if they are that specific, tend to assume that the two armies faced each other across the road from Newcastle-under-Lyme to Market Drayton with their alignment roughly running from the north-west to the south-east, Twemlow ranges the two sides south of the road with their battlelines running from west to east. Why?

The fact is that all Twemlow's local knowledge is undermined because he is yet another who relies too heavily on Rapin. It is not simply that he uses an authority which by no stretch of the imagination can be considered an original source, but he fundamentally misinterprets the information presented.

In 1906 Twemlow wrote a short piece on the battlefield¹⁰ and, as is usual, positioned the two battle lines across the road. He was aware of Rapin's account but he did not yet place too much emphasis upon it. Unfortunately, Rapin's information that a 'pass' figured on the battlefield later took on a greater significance for Twemlow. Snape, as has been seen, looked for a pass five miles distant; Twemlow, however, believed that he had discovered the pass in the steep gully through which the Hempmill flowed close to Audley's Cross. To ensure that the 'pass' in future had a greater role in his interpretation of the battle's outcome, Twemlow accordingly shifted the axis of the battle and gave it an east-west orientation.

Yet it was all a mistake. The English translation of Rapin states that 'Salisbury posted himself on the other side [of a little river], as if he meant to guard the pass. The original French puts it as follows:

Salisbury alla se porter sur le bord oppose [d'une petite rivière], comme s'il eût en dessein de garder ce passage.

Now a 'pass' in French would be rendered as '*défilé*', and the English translation of 'passage', when used in the context of a river, would be 'crossing' (*Collins-Robert French Dictionary*, 1978). It is clear, therefore, that there can be no justification for affording the existence of a 'pass' any role in the battle at all: the only thing to which Rapin adverted was a river crossing.

Perhaps an explanation of why Twemlow was to later prove more receptive to Rapin's writing can be hazarded. In the interim between 1906 and 1912 he had discovered the account written of the Battle of Blore Heath by the Burgundian chronicler Jehan de Waurin. Waurin based much of the later part of his *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istoures de la Grant Bretagne, à present nommé Engleterre* (c. 1470)¹¹ on information received from participants in the events. As a result his account often possesses the vividness of an eye-witness description. Although it is true that Waurin, in common with many foreign observers of a country's affairs, makes errors regarding dates (at one point he places the battle in 1457) and personalities (a number of Yorkist and Lancastrian notables are listed who were not at Blore Heath), he displays an affinity for the subject. His description of Salisbury's tactical deployment, with the Yorkists dismounting behind a forest, securing one wing upon the wood itself and their open flank against a laager of wagons, suggests a writer with an insight into the art of war.

The Earl of Warwick [by whom Waurin meant his father, Salisbury] then favoured the Duke of York and his faction, and held - as has already been said - command of his army, accompanied by around 25 knights and from 6,000 to 7,000 armed men, among whom there were not 40 Men at Arms. He went to confront the Duke of Exeter [*i.e. Audley*], and the two parties met at Blore near a forest between the Duchy of York and the County of Derby. Then the Count of Salisbury, the Count of Warwick [*the latter was not at the battle*] and their men, perceived directly at dawn the army of Exeter and Lord Beaumont [*i.e. Audley and Lord Dudley*] behind a great hedge of trees, and saw only the tops of their standards. They assembled on foot in front of a wood which gave them protection on one side, and on the other side they put their wagons and their horses tied together, and made a big trench for security, and in front they fixed their archers' stakes in the English manner. And when they had been put in battle order, Exeter's [*i.e. Audley's*] army came and ranged itself in front of them, all mounted, and doing their best to catch Warwick [*i.e. Salisbury*] and his army at a massive disadvantage, at a cost of little work or danger. After Warwick's [*Salisbury's*] officers and followers had been shriven and prepared themselves for death, they all kissed the ground where they stood, which they now took as sacrament, determined that they would live or die there. And when the aforesaid Exeter and Beaumont [*Audley and Dudley*] came so close to their enemies that they could use their bows, the latter began to shoot so intensely that it was frightful, and so violently that everything in range suffered so much that lots of horses were killed, with around 20 or 22 men of Warwick's [*Salisbury's*] company, but fully 500 to 600 of Exeter's [*Audley's*]. Hence Exeter's [*Audley's*] troops retired to around maximum range for an archer, but shortly afterwards charged again impetuously upon Warwick [*Salisbury*], in which operation about 100 of Exeter's [*Audley's*] men died, for about ten of Warwick's [*Salisbury's*]. Then the Lord Beaumont [*Dudley*] and his company, considering that they were winning little honour and less profit on horseback, dismounted with around 4,000 men who returned to rejoin the battle with Warwick [*Salisbury*], where they fought hand to hand for a good half hour, hoping to be helped by their allies who were still mounted. But the latter saw the resistance encountered by their men on foot and kept away from the battlefield, thus leaving the men on foot to their own devices. Among them a knight of Beaumont's [*Dudley's*] entourage, who commanded around 500 men, began to cry with his men 'Warwick, Warwick!' and attacked the company of Beaumont [*Dudley*], so that they trampled them underfoot once more into retreat. And when Warwick [*Salisbury*] saw this he shouted out to march forward, which was done, and finally Beaumont [*Dudley*] and his troops were discomfited, and from their number, according to their heralds, there died 2,000 men, whereas from Warwick's [*Salisbury's*] there were 56¹².

While Waurin's propensity for error has prompted some modern writers to doubt the accuracy of his other details (see Goodman and Rowney below), Twemlow clearly had sufficient confidence in the veracity of Waurin's testimony to use it in conjunction with his local knowledge. This, however, had an unfortunate consequence. Twemlow's use of Waurin, allied to his reliance on the mistranslation of Rapin and the importance that he attached to a non-existent 'pass' as a result, accelerated his tendency to shift the entire Lancastrian line south-east of the turnpike road leading back to Market Drayton. Rapin's and Waurin's accounts fed off each other: they dovetailed too well for Twemlow's own good and he attempted a radical re-interpretation of the Battle of Blore Heath as a result.

In particular Twemlow decided to make use of Waurin's reference to the Yorkists first glimpsing the enemy pennons behind a hedge, as a means of fixing Audley's position before the battle. The hedge in question, he adjudged, ran along the northern edge of the historic cornfield of Blore. Because the putative hedge is on a ridge line, with the ground falling away to the south, Audley's men would have been invisible but for their pennons.

However, because the village of Blore happens to be on raised ground some distance to the east, with its cornfield alongside it, Twemlow had to compensate by moving the Lancastrian army further east also. According to Twemlow their dispositions were now entirely south-east of the road to Market Drayton. Blore anchored the

Lancastrian right and the defile below Audley's Cross protected their left.

Unfortunately, the foundation of this argument, Twemlow's topographical knowledge, is here of a suspect quality. As becomes clear when one reads his 'The Manor of Tyrley in the County of Stafford down to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914' *The Staffordshire Record Society* 1945-6 (1948), Twemlow posits the existence of Blore cornfield from 16th-century manorial records. This is reasonable enough. But if one is to assume the existence of a hedge enclosing the cornfield of Blore, why not also around the cornfields of the villages of Hales and Alington, which Twemlow places to the west of Blore cornfield? Although Twemlow indulges in some speculation about the differing degrees of cultivation of these cornfields in the fifteenth century, in truth the Lancastrians could just as well have been hidden behind a hedge much further to the left. It is the selective nature of Twemlow's interpretation in an instance such as this which bears out the justice of Goodman's verdict that Twemlow 'using expert topographical knowledge and relying heavily on Waurin's inaccurate accounts of the battle, attempted a detailed but *highly speculative* reconstruction of it' [our italics]¹³.

The use made of Waurin's account by various later writers to sketch in the Yorkist deployment is nonetheless more successful. There are numerous references in early records to the great wood that skirted the eastern edge of Blore Heath in medieval times. Rowney Wood, as it was called, was a more extensive version of the present-day Burnt Wood before it was cut back or, indeed, 'burnt' for charcoal. So Waurin, as was the case with Hall's account above, can in this respect be employed with greater confidence because his details accord with known geographical facts: as the Yorkists debouched from Rowney Wood (through which the road from Newcastle-under-Lyme would have had to run) they saw the enemy. Deploying either side of the road they secured their left flank on the wood. Their right flank, however, was in the air. To secure this flank the Yorkists made a laager of their wagons, reinforcing the strongpoint and their line, as Waurin informs us, with a trench and sharpened stakes 'a la fashon d'Angleterre'. If we are to accept, as most writers have done, that Salisbury's army numbered 5000 (the figure given by the Parliament Rolls), its frontage must have been approximately 1000 yards. This, assuming that their left was hinged on the spot where the Hempmill Brook emerged from Rowney Wood, would place the Yorkist right a little to the north-west of the present Audley's Cross Farm.

D. Burne, A.H. *More Battlefields of England* (London 1952)

Colonel Burne is grateful to Twemlow for dismissing the Beament thesis of the Battle of Blore Heath, but he rejects Twemlow's theory that the Yorkists and Lancastrians faced each other south of the road. He instead has the two armies arrayed across the road and either side of the Hempmill Brook, but with their lines of battle stretching almost vertically from north to south. This alignment is rather more extreme than the one favoured by this report. In the case of the Lancastrians Burne claims that he is giving them the advantage of a shallow ridge that crosses the road 400 yards short of the Hempmill. This is reasonable. But the Lancastrian right, to accord with Waurin's story about the Yorkists glimpsing their pennons, is hidden behind a hedge which Burne assumes to have run along the ancient track to the north of the Alington and Hales cornfields (and which, as we have seen, Twemlow assumes that they lacked). The consequence of this is that the Lancastrian right becomes excessively withdrawn and is pinned back to the west; the Lancastrian line as a whole is rendered more upright. This seems arbitrary.

Strangely enough, after going to this trouble to accommodate Waurin's story about a hedge masking the Lancastrian position, Burne completely ignores the implication of Waurin's reference to the Yorkists anchoring their line on a wood. In fact, because of Burne's north-south alignment the Yorkist left, in his sketch-map of the battlefield¹⁴, is nowhere near Rowney Wood. It is a puzzling inconsistency. Only if it is accepted that the Yorkist line ran from the north-west to the south-east can Waurin's tactical observation be reconciled with the terrain.

E.Rowney, Ian 'Medieval Chroniclers and the Battle of Blore Heath' *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies* 20 (1980) pp9-17.

Ian Rowney argues that during the Battle of Blore Heath the Lancastrians could not have failed to see that the road to Muckleston, which forked off the road leading from Market Drayton to Newcastle-under-Lyme and which crossed the Hempmill 600 yards further downstream, provided a better crossing of the brook than the one nearer Audley's Cross. He therefore extends the Lancastrian left much further north-westwards until their overall frontage covers a mile and a half. However, if there were any merit in this argument, it is obscured by Rowney's inaccurate criticism of Waurin's account of the battle, to whom he attributes statements which appear not in Waurin's narrative but in Hall's. Rowney's point of view is supported by nothing more than his own opinion, and were it to be accepted it would extend the bounds of the battle an unsustainable distance from its central point at Audley's Cross.

The Course of the Battle

Having examined earlier theories and sources, it remains to state a considered view of what happened during the Battle of Blore Heath. As the Lancastrian force under Audley marched east along the road from Market Drayton, its scouts encountered the Yorkist advance guard near a small stream known today as Hempmill Brook. By the time the Yorkists had negotiated the wood to the east, Audley had deployed his men along the road on a shallow ridge running down to the brook. Probably 10,000 Lancastrians were arrayed in a strong defensive position, with their whole front protected by the brook. Salisbury reconnoitred the enemy position and wisely decided against an assault by his army, which was outnumbered by at least 2:1. He ordered his men to prepare an equally strong defence, with stakes planted in front of the Yorkist line and a trench dug to their rear. He anchored the left of his line on the wood and drew up his wagons in laager to protect his exposed right. With his defence established, Salisbury's problem was to persuade Audley to advance to the attack.

Time was not on Salisbury's side: a second Lancastrian army was little more than ten miles away at Eccleshall. We do not know for certain what strategem Salisbury employed, but it is possible that he simulated the start of a Yorkist retreat by ordering that the draught-horses be re-harnessed to the wagons. Audley, who had been charged by Queen Margaret with Salisbury's capture, would be unlikely to let such an opportunity pass, and the fact that he attacked with his troops mounted, ready for pursuit, suggests that he believed the enemy to be retreating.

As the Lancastrians moved precipitately across the brook, Salisbury's men suddenly attacked them. With their ranks disorganized and their force divided by the brook, the Lancastrians were thrown back with loss. A second mounted attack met the same fate. For their third assault the Lancastrians changed their tactics, sending 4000 infantry forward as the spearhead of their attack with cavalry in support. A furious and bloody *mêlée* took place on the slopes of the Yorkist position, and it was possibly at this juncture that Audley was cut down and killed. The Lancastrian cavalry, their morale already low after their earlier defeats, now withdrew entirely, some riding off the battlefield, others deserting to the Yorkists. Unable to make progress against the enemy field works and with their commander dead and their cavalry defeated, the Lancastrian infantry broke and fled. The Yorkists, whose casualties had been minimal, harried the enemy to the banks of the River Tern. As many as 2,000 Lancastrians may have fallen during the battle and pursuit¹⁵.

Indication of Importance

The Battle of Blore Heath was a clear-cut victory for the Yorkists, but within three weeks the results had been negated by Richard of York's desertion of his army at Ludford Bridge. The battle is however of interest to historians for the tactics employed by the Yorkists. Their use of a wagon laager as a *point d'appui* revived a tactic exploited by the English at the battles of Verneuil (1424) and Rouvray (1429) during the later stages of the Hundred Years' War in France.

In common with many battles of the Wars of the Roses the written sources for Blore Heath are not as full as they

might be. However it is possible, by using Hall and Waurin in conjunction, to construct a plausible sequence of events for the battle. The presence of Audley's Cross is of great assistance in pinpointing the location of the battlefield.

Battlefield Area

The battlefield area boundary defines the outer reasonable limit of the battle, taking into account the positions of the combatants at the outset of fighting and the focal area of the battle itself. It does not include areas over which fighting took place subsequent to the main battle. Wherever possible, the boundary has been drawn so that it is easily appreciated on the ground.

In the case of the Lancastrians, with their force of some 10,000 men, allowance has been made for a frontage of approximately a mile extending along the ridge above the Hempmill Brook from a point near Blore in the south-east to the Mucklestone road in the north-west. For the Yorkists, with up to 5,000 men, a frontage of 1000 yards has been allowed for, anchored on the former woodland near Oaklands Farm to the south-east and extending north-westwards beyond Audley Cross Farm.

The battlefield area is defined between these preliminary dispositions with a line joining Oaklands Farm and Blore Farm on the eastern margin. Following the drive from Oaklands Farm to the A53, the battlefield boundary is carried behind the Yorkist lines and across the (later) Daisy Lake on the north-western side. The line then re-crosses the A53 and navigates by convenient field boundaries or hedge junctions behind the Lancastrians' line to return to Blore Farm.

Areas of ancillary interest to the battlefield itself include the ground on the right bank of the River Tern where many Lancastrians are reputed to have been slaughtered after the battle. According to Twemlow the killing occurred around the approaches to the present Shifford Bridge where there was a field known as Deadman's Den¹⁶. This area is not sufficiently definable to permit the drawing of a reasonable line.

A similar area of interest might be the ground to the south-east of the battlefield extending from Parkhill Farm down to the southern edge of Park Springs Wood. This was the historic medieval park 'at the back syde of the fylde' (i.e. the battlefield) where, the chronicler Gregory tells us, the night after the battle an Augustinian friar kept a second Lancastrian army at bay and enabled the Earl of Salisbury's troops to escape by periodically firing off the Yorkists' abandoned cannon¹⁷.

Notes

1. *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, ed J Stacey and others, (1767-83) V p348.
2. *Chronicles of London*, ed C L Kingsford (Oxford 1905) p169. *A Chronicle of London from 1089 to 1483, written in the Fifteenth Century, and for the first time printed from MSS in the British Museum* (London 1827) p140. *Benet's Chronicle: John Benet's Chronicle for the years 1400 to 1462*, ed G L Harriss and M A Harriss, *Camden Miscellany XXIV* (London 1972) p224. *'Gregory': The Historical Collections of a London Citizen in the Fifteenth Century*, ed J Gairdner (Camden Society 1876) p204. *Six Town Chronicles of England*, ed R Flenley (Oxford 1911) p148. *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, ed J Gairdner (Camden Society 1880) p72.
3. Twemlow, R F *The Battle of Bloreheath* (Wolverhampton 1912) p1; Burne, A H *More Battlefields of England* (London 1952) p142.
4. Twemlow *op.cit.* viii-ix; Burne *op.cit.* p141.
5. Twemlow *op.cit.*.viii.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Rotuli Parliamentorum* V p369.
8. Goodman, A *The Wars of the Roses: Military Activity and English Society, 1452-97* (London 1981) pp8-9, 27.
9. Kingsford, C L *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford 1913) pp262-3.
10. Amongst the Twemlow papers in the Staffordshire County Record Office.
11. Waurin, Jehan de *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istoires de la Grant Bretagne, à present nommée Engleterre*, V, ed Sir William Hardy and E L C P Hardy (Rolls Series 1891).
12. The original French of Waurin's account is given in Twemlow *The Battle of Blore Heath* pages xii-xiv.
13. Twemlow, R F 'The Manor of Tyrley in the County of Stafford down to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914' *The Staffordshire Record Society 1945-6* (1948) p139; Twemlow, *The Battle of Bloreheath* p13 (footnote); Goodman *op. cit.* p236.
14. Burne *op. cit.* p145.
15. In this account the story of the feigned retreat is taken from Hall. The details of the three Lancastrian assaults are taken from Waurin.
16. Twemlow, R F *The Battle of Bloreheath* p27.
17. *'Gregory': The Historical Collections of a London Citizen in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J Gairdner (Camden Society 1876) p204, quoted in Twemlow, *The Battle of Bloreheath* xi.