

English Heritage Battlefield Report: Cheriton 1644

Cheriton (29 March 1644)

Parishes: Cheriton, Bramdean and Hinton, Ampner, Bishops Sutton

District: Winchester

County: Hampshire

Grid Ref: SU 597293

Historical Context

After a year of Civil War the strategic centres of the rival war efforts were still to be found at Oxford and London. In terms of ending the fighting through a negotiated peace, if not through capitulation, the capture of either centre might prove decisive. Certainly, the Royalists would be justified in hoping that the occupation of London would lead to the rapid attainment of their war aims. The problem for the King in 1643 was how to co-ordinate his supporters in a campaign which would overwhelm the Parliamentary field armies and secure the approaches to London. Yet as the campaigning season drew to its close a solution to this problem was still no nearer. The Oxford army was precisely where it had been at the start of the year and the Royalist northern and western armies were stalled in Yorkshire and Devon respectively.

In an attempt to regain the initiative a Royalist council of war at Oxford at the end of September 1643 decided to form a new western army. Its strength would be small, only some 2,000 Foot and 1,500 Horse, but it was given the ambitious task of securing Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire and of advancing as close as it could towards London. Under the command of Sir Ralph Hopton this force took the field late in the campaigning season in November. Hopton's principal opponent was Sir William Waller at the head of an army drawn from a new South-Eastern Association comprising the counties of Hampshire, Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

In the south, the Autumn campaign of 1643 began with Winchester as the centre of attention for both the Royalists and the Parliamentarians. A Royalist force led by Sir William Ogle captured the town in October. This success required a response from Waller who left Farnham on 3 November to march towards Winchester. On hearing that a Royalist force was moving to cut his communications, Waller changed the direction of his march and advanced upon the Royalist garrison of Basing House. Basing was well defended by two regiments of Foot under the command of the Marquess of Winchester. Two attempts at storming the House failed and Waller, learning that Hopton was in the field and not more than six miles from Basing, lifted the siege and withdrew to Farnham. Hopton, now reinforced and commanding some 5,000 troops, followed and confronted the Parliamentarians at Farnham at the end of November 1643. Waller refused to be drawn and kept his army in close rein under the guns of Farnham Castle.

After failing to bring the Parliamentarians to battle at Farnham Hopton dispersed his army to winter quarters in Winchester, Alresford, Alton and Petersfield. He rounded off the year by capturing Arundel, but Waller responded with a raid which decimated the garrison of Alton, and with the recapture of Arundel Castle in January 1644. Operations were brought to an end by a period of severe weather, but Hopton, who had been reinforced by 800 Horse and 1,200 Foot under the Earl of Forth, was still anxious to bring Waller to battle and even went so far as to issue a formal challenge. At the end of March 1644, Waller, with some 5,000 Horse, 600 dragoons, and 5,000 Foot moved on Winchester from the east, and Hopton and Forth, after failing to entice the Parliamentarians into battle at Warnford, determined to make contact again at Alresford on the main Winchester to London road.

If the Royalists could occupy Alresford they would be across Waller's line of communication with London and a race developed for possession of the town. Hopton won and having placed the town in a state of defence with barricades across the entrances he concentrated the Royalist army on Tichborne Down to the south of Alresford. Waller camped for the night near to Hinton Ampner, to the south of the present A272 and in advance of a line from Bramdean Common to Cheriton.

Location and Description of the Battlefield

Within the broad sweep of ground stretching some two miles to the east of Cheriton and largely bounded in the north by Cheriton lane and in the south by the A272 lies the location of the battle which occurred between the armies of Sir William Waller and Sir Ralph Hopton on 29 March 1644. Where precisely within that area the rival armies deployed and certain episodes of the battle took place is more difficult to determine. Historians have generally accepted that the bulk of the fighting centred on the area designated in Ordnance Survey maps as the site of the battle, but John Adair, in the only full length study of Cheriton¹, has concluded that it took place further south in an area between Cheriton Wood and the A272.

The traditional site of the battle was first espoused by S R Gardiner² in 1893 in his *History of the Great Civil War* after a visit to Cheriton in which the scene of the fighting had been pointed out to him by a local guide. Gardiner's lead was followed by historians such as Colonel A H Burne³, and it was not challenged until Adair put forward his view. Even then Brigadier Peter Young and Richard Holmes⁴, and to a lesser extent William Seymour⁵, remained unconvinced by the new location. Cheriton was a confused battle which progressed through error and mishap, and despite the number of contemporary written sources that are available it is difficult to clarify the exact location and extent of the fighting. There is no extant contemporary plan or map to help solve these problems. However, careful consideration of all the available evidence, including landscape archaeological, does permit a firm conclusion.

We know that on the morning of 28 March, the day before the battle, the Royalists were camped south of Alresford on or adjacent to Tichborne Down and that the Parliamentarians:

....had taken their quarters in a low field joyning to the Lady Stukeley's house [*in Hinton Ampner*] not a myle and halfe from our Army so as there was but a little hill and a little vale between us; the hill they endeavoured to keepe, because it cover'd them from us, and gave them the advantage of looking into us.⁶

Hopton thus presents a scene in which the two armies are separated by a valley and a hill, with the Parliamentarians holding the high ground above their bivouac. Cheriton lies just to the north of the springs that provide the source of the River Itchen and close to the evocatively named Hinton Marsh. Although it appears to have been unseasonably hot in March 1644, the possibility of late flooding in the low ground along the Itchen's course was very real, and troops deploying for battle would naturally be drawn eastwards to the higher ground which runs in a series of spurs or ridges from Cheriton Wood towards Cheriton. The ridges are separated by sloping valleys and each ridge, to a greater or lesser degree, represents a military crest.

An army starting in the north, below Tichborne Down, and moving south towards Hinton Ampner would encounter three identifiable ridges. From the first, or northern ridge, the ground falls away onto Cowdown, then rises again to form the central ridge on East Down, before falling and then rising once more to reach the southern ridge overlooking Hinton Ampner. A crucial problem in deciding the location of the fighting on the day of the battle is identifying which ridges the rival forces occupied and which valley separated them.

The day before the battle was spent in skirmishing and Hopton records that:

Wee disputed that ground that day with little partyes, and loose skirmishes, but towards the evening we gott the topp of the hill, and the view of the Enemye's quarters, where they encamped as is

said before in a low field enclosed with a very thick hedge and ditch and their ordnance planted upon the rising of the hill behind them.⁷

Although Waller's troops were holding one of the ridges on the morning of 28 March, the Royalists it appears secured a lodgement during the day and could then look down upon the Parliamentary lines. From Hinton Ampner the ground rises towards Cheriton Wood and the southern ridge and it would seem therefore that it was this final ridge which had been occupied by some of Waller's troops. Once the Parliamentarians had been displaced Hopton did not occupy the whole ridge, but placed a picket under Sir George Lisle in a copse on top of the ridge:

Both the Generalls viewing the advantage of the ground they had gotten, and that there was a little wood on the top of that hill with a fence about it, plac'd Sir George Lisle therein with 1000 Muskettiers, and a guard of 500 horse upon the way by him....⁸

We can safely conclude that Lisle remained an advanced and somewhat isolated picket throughout the night of 28/29 March for Hopton reports that together with Lord Forth he:

...layed out the quarters for the whole army upon the same hill where they had stood in armes the night before, with command to every horseman to rest by his horse, and every footman by his armes, and every officer in his place. And so the Lo: Brainford, by the importunity of the Lo: Hopton, and the rest of the officers retyr'd to his lodgeing in the Towne, and the Lo: Hopton tooke his quarters in the head of the Army in his coache.⁹

Thus the mass of the Royalist army remained where it had camped on the night of 27/28 March close to Tichborne or Sutton Downs; only Lord Forth retiring into Alresford. Hopton was well aware of Waller's reputation for surprise night marches and he would wish to keep some distance between his army and the Parliamentary lines. As extra precautions he saw that his troops were ready for instant action and deployed Lisle well forward as a trip wire.

What is not certain is whether Hopton's 'little wood on the top of that hill with a fence about it', was indeed Cheriton Wood, as the evidence would suggest, or some other wooded area which existed in 1644. The wood must have been substantial enough to provide a battleground for some 4,000 troops. Cheriton Wood figures prominently not only in the fighting itself but also in the preliminary manoeuvres, for it provided the tactical opportunity to enfilade any deployment on the southern and central ridges, and to some extent in the valley between them.

As the early morning mist cleared on 29 March, the day of the battle, Hopton discovered that during the night the Parliamentarians had occupied a wood (always assumed to be Cheriton Wood) on high ground on the right of their bivouac:

The morning was very misty, so as he could not make a cleere discovery till the sun was neere his two howers up, and then he found that the Enemy was not drawing off, but that they had in the darke of the night possest themselves of a high woody ground that was on the right hand of their owne quarters, and plac'd men and cannon in it, that commaunded the hill where Sir Geo: Lile was....¹⁰

The wood occupied by Waller's troops commanded the position held by Sir George Lisle's picket. Hopton informed Forth of this alarming development and together they took action to counter it:

Of this he presently advertized the E. of Brainford; who (notwithstanding his indisposition came instantly out to him): and, seeing the posture the Enemy was in, commanded the Lo: Hopton to draw the whole Army and cannon up to him to that ground, which he did accordingly: And placing the foote and horse that the E. of Brainford brought with him on the right wing,

himselfe with his owne foote and horse drawe to the left, which was over against that woody ground that the Enemy had newly possest, and where they understood themselves (as indeede they were) upon a great advantage under the covert of the wood, and having lin'd the hedges next to us with store of muskettiers. This the Lo: Hopton observing tooke his advantage likewise of the ground he was on, and drew all his horse and foote in order on the side of the hill that was from the Enemy, and being there within muskett shott, and yet secured commanded Coll. Appleyard (now Sir Mathew Appleyard) to draw out of the foote a commanded pa(r)ty of 1000 muskettiers, which he did, and devided them into 4 devisions, and in that order (as he was commanded) advanced towards the Enemy....¹¹

Forth ordered Hopton to 'drawe the whole Army and cannon up to him to that ground'. Thus the Royalists advanced from their camp to the ground from which their generals were observing the Parliamentary dispositions. What happened to Lisle is not clear but for the traditionalist thesis to work it must be assumed that he fell back to join the main body of the Royalist army. Given Lisle's now exposed position this would have been entirely sensible. The Royalist picket reported hearing movement in the Parliamentary lines during the night and Lisle assumed that this was a precursor to a retreat by Waller's troops. Thus Lisle or his patrols were reasonably close to the Parliamentary lines. What is harder to understand is why, if the Royalist picket was indeed deployed in Cheriton Wood overnight, the movement of Parliamentary guns and infantry into the same wood was not discovered sooner.

But where was the Royalist army in terms of the geography of the battlefield? John Adair believes that it was deployed on the southern ridge overlooking Hinton Ampner, while others would argue that it was positioned on the reverse slope of the central ridge, facing south, close to the battle symbol on the OS map. Whichever ridge he held, Hopton was in a difficult situation for he now had Waller's musketeers flanking the left of his line. To counter this threat he ordered Colonel Matthew Appleyard, with 1,000 musketeers in four divisions, to advance and clear the wood. To get into the wood Appleyard needed to climb and breast a hill, yet if his musketeers were already deployed on the southern ridge they would simply have wheeled to their left and attacked along the crest. If, however, the Royalist army was north of the central ridge as the traditionalists claim, then Appleyard's men, attacking either in an easterly or southerly direction, would have had to gain higher ground to get into the wood. Even had they been on the reverse slope of the southern ridge as Adair claims, it is difficult to categorise their movement forward to the crest as climbing a hill.

To support the traditional view of the battle's location we must accept that with Waller's musketeers moving to occupy Cheriton Wood, the remainder of his army began to deploy on the southern ridge facing north. Indeed the movements of the Parliamentary army until almost the start of the fighting appear to indicate an unusual degree of confusion. At a council of war on the evening of 28 March the Parliamentarians decided to retreat during the night. This decision did not, according to his eulogistic biographer, find favour with Lieutenant-Colonel John Birch:

While the army was at that posture a councell of warr was called, at which it was resolved, as I have heard (upon the defeat of the Parliament's forces at Newarke and in the North), to make fiers and retreat : which being sore against your mind, whoe then was capten of the watch, you used these words to Sir Arthur Haselrieg, that surely wee did care whither that were God's cause wee had in hand; for did wee asuredly beleeve it, when hee dalled us to fight with his eneimes, wee should not run from them: for mans extremitie is Gods oppertunitie. Yet, notwithstanding that order of the councell of warr, you disposed it so, being then captain of the watche, that the parties on both sides were in the night soe engaged that there was noe marching off without a palpable discovery. Therefore, according to your desire, the army kept their ground, and the next morneing, by breake of the day, drew into batalia, your place being with our regiment in the maine battle. And presently 1000 muskateeres were drawne out, to make good the wood on the right wing: and, contrary to your desire, put under the comand of Leiftennant Collonel Layton, whome you said did sweare tood hard to have God

with him. However, hee went and tooke possession of the wood: but stayed not above half an hower before the enemies foot, under Collonel Appleyard, beat them clearly out, and tooke possession, pursueing our men, whose heells then were their best weapon, to the amazement of our whole army.¹²

In this version of events Birch kept the outposts of both armies in such a state of alarm that retreat was impossible, and by daybreak the Parliamentarians were already deployed for battle. Certainly, Waller did countermand the order to retreat and instead sent the party of guns and musketeers into Cheriton Wood under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Leighton. Waller's army may also have changed direction in order to ascend the southern ridge, and Captain Robert Harley hints as much when he remarks that

Their was on the right hand of us - as wee were now faced, - a wood which we did conceive might be of greate advantage to us if it were maintained....¹³

Did Waller's troops initially take up defensive positions facing west or north-west towards Cheriton, expecting that a Royalist attack would be delivered along the Alresford to Cheriton road?

With Hopton's troops on the reverse slope of the central ridge the two armies were now separated only by the crest of the ridge itself and by the intervening valley. This area was known as East Down. East Down Farm, although no longer standing, can be located in the nineteenth century in the valley between the central and southern ridges. Captain John Jones, writing the day after the battle mentioned that '...the enemy lay in Sutton Down, we lay in Lumbourne field, we fought in East Down between Cheriton and Alresford'¹⁴. This implies that although Captain Jones and his regiment spent the night before the battle in Lamborough fields, they fought the Royalists on East Down (i.e. between the southern and central ridges), and were to some extent north of Cheriton and south of Alresford.

Adair, however, argues that neither Gardiner nor Burne used the letter written by a Parliamentary cavalry officer, Captain Robert Harley, which makes it clear that Waller's troops began the battle with 'a little village' on their left. Adair is convinced that this could not be Cheriton, for if it were Harley would have referred to it by name as he knew of 'Cherrytowne', and that it must therefore be Hinton Ampner. This is rather negative evidence, but if John Adair's interpretation of this phrase were to be accepted then it would seem that Waller's position at the start of the battle would have to be south of the A272 and close to Hinton Ampner. It could be argued, however, that if the Parliamentary line began the day facing west or north-west, before swinging north to ascend the southern ridge, then Hinton Ampner would again have been 'a little village' on the left. Waller's deployment was undoubtedly anchored on the right on Cheriton Wood, and it would have been perverse for the Parliamentary line to run across the ridge and down to Hinton Ampner, rather than along it and down towards the village of Cheriton. It would have been equally unusual to place 1,000 musketeers in an exposed position 800 yards ahead of the main Parliamentary position if there was no intention of closing up to this body. The insertion in Cheriton Wood must have been the precursor to the occupation of the southern ridge by Waller's troops.

In support of the Hinton Ampner-East Down location for the battle Adair cites the general agreement that the London regiments were quartered in Lamborough fields, and argues that nineteenth century tithe maps and the 1810 Ordnance Survey map show that these fields stretched along the Itchen stream beneath Hinton Ampner. He then appears to conclude that since the London Regiments were camped in Lamborough fields they must necessarily have fought close by. There is no dispute as to the site of Waller's bivouac, but it seems unduly restrictive to assume that the Parliamentary army fought more or less where it had slept and did not manoeuvre before the fighting began, particularly as Waller took the trouble to occupy Cheriton Wood.

Adair is on more positive ground when he asserts that there is no evidence to support Gardiner and Burne's assumption that Lisle must have pulled back from his position on the southern ridge, thus allowing Waller to deploy there. If Lisle did not withdraw then the Royalist army must have joined him there before the battle

began, and Waller would have deployed elsewhere, most probably across the valley close to Hinton Ampner. Hopton's *Bellum Civile* is not straightforward on precisely where the Royalist army formed up for battle. When Hopton discovered, on the morning of 29 March, that Lisle's position was flanked by the Parliamentarians in Cheriton Wood, it is clear that Lisle was on a different hill to the remainder of the Royalist army: 'that commaunded the hill where Sir Geo: Lile was.' Forth and Hopton then considered the position and Forth ordered that 'the whole army and cannon' should be drawn up 'to him to that ground'. This suggests that the army, including Lisle, deployed on the ground from which Hopton and Forth were surveying field. This is identified by the traditionalists as the central ridge on East Down.

While the balance of probability supports the traditional view of the site of the battle, the case is not clear cut. Sufficient imponderables remain for it to be unwise to dismiss John Adair's thesis out of hand. At a number of points in the battle particular actions could have taken place in the locations proposed by Adair, and the ambiguity of the available sources argues against dogmatic judgements. It is only when assessing the overall shape of the fighting that the traditional view develops greater conviction and strength.

The Landscape Evolution

A survey of 1560 and the SMR record, together with landscape evidence, give a good indication of what the landscape was like at the time of the battle.

The quality of evidence allows a picture to be painted of the landscape which stretched before the Parliamentary army. The troops occupying the western edge of Cheriton Wood (not in leaf in March) would have commanded the open ridge and had good all round views across downland and arable fields, crossed by lanes the hedges of which would have given good cover. Beyond would have been the hedged enclosures of small fields around Cheriton, the meadows in the valley below Hinton Ampner, arable fields and small pockets of woodland such as at the present Dark Copse on the ridge to the north.

Cheriton Wood did not extend northwards as far in 1644 as it does today; narrow enclosures survive within Tenant Woods, for example, which show that part of the field system has become overtaken by woodland since the battle. An earlier line of Cheriton Lane is traceable along what was then the northern edge of the wood. The right-angled bend of the Lane near Common Farm is a tell-tale sign of realignment around the later plantation of Tenant Wood.

The regular pattern of fields now evident over the battlefield are an indication that the landscape took on its present character as a result of Parliamentary enclosure in the early 19th century. Farmsteads such as Middle Farm were part of this reorganisation of the landscape. However, underlying the whole landscape, although only surviving in visible form in Cheriton Wood, is a prehistoric or Roman field system which demonstrates the continuity of farming in the landscape over at least two millennia.

The Battle: its sources and interpretation

The Battle of Cheriton is unusually fortunate in the sheer number of eyewitness accounts penned by both officers and soldiers. Hopton recorded his view of the fighting in some detail, as did the always interesting and usually perceptive Colonel Walter Slingsby. On the Parliamentary side, Roe's biography of Colonel John Birch provides an account that contains a good deal of personal bias, but a letter from Captain Robert Harley to his brother contains useful if at times perplexing detail of the fighting.

As we have seen the traditional approach to the battle begins with Hopton's Royalist forces deployed on a ridge to the north of Cheriton Wood with the Cheriton-Alresford road on their right. Musketeers line the hedges right up to Cheriton village. The Parliamentary army holds Cheriton Wood and is deployed along the southern ridge. The Royalists with some 6,000 troops are outnumbered almost two to one by 10,000 Parliamentarians, yet they are eager to attack. Responding quickly to the danger posed to any advance by his left flank by the

Parliamentary musketeers in the wood, Hopton has Colonel Appleyard clear the plantation.

Having consolidated this tactical victory Hopton sent a report to Lord Forth who in reply expressed the wish that the whole army should now stand on the defensive while the Parliamentarians dissipated their strength in futile attacks:

The Lo: Hopton haveing carefully placed all his guards both of horse and foote upon all the Avenues of that ground which he had from thence a faire way to fall upon the flancke of their whole army, sent Sir Jo: Paulet and Coll: Hayes to the E. of Brainford to give him an accompt of the successe he had had, and of the advantage, he conceive'd, he had at the present, and that, if his Excellence were so pleased, he would with 1000 horse, and 1000 muskettiers charge the flancke of the Enemy's Army. The E. of Brainford return'd his answeare with civilityes of great favour and encouragement for what he had done, but, that having now possest all the ground of advantage on our side, his opinion was that wee should not hazard any farther attempt, for that he conceived the Enemy would now be forced, either to charge us upon their disadvantage, or to retire. The Lo: Hopton remayn'd extremely satisfied with that solid advice....¹⁵

Unfortunately this patient and, in view of the imbalance of forces, wise strategy was overturned by a Royalist infantry officer, Sir Henry Bard, who led his regiment forward to attack the Parliamentary Horse on the right. As Hopton returned to the centre to confer with Forth he was apparently surprised to discover this movement:

And haveing settled all guards and orders upon the left whing, went himselfe towards the right whing to confer with the Lo: Generall. And being neere the midd-way upon the brow of the hill he saw troopes of the right whing too farr advanced, and hotley engaged with the Enemy in the foote of the hill, and so hard prest, as when he came to the Lo: Brainford, he found him much troubled with it, for, it seemes the engagement was by the forwardness of some particular officers, without order.¹⁶

Whether Bard's action was really taken on his own initiative and without any order is unclear. Slingsby explicitly states that both flanks of the Royalist army were ordered to advance and Bard's only fault was in moving too far too quickly:

This encourage'd us soe muche that wee made too muche hast to finishe the businesse (for had wee but stood still and make signes of falling on, they had probably melted away without fighting a stroake more), but wee were order'd to fall on from both wings, which was the only cause of their standing to fight: for then the Enemy finds most of our strength drawne of the hill into a bottome, where hee had his desir'd advantage : and our first mischance hapned on our right wing, where Sir Henry Bard, leading on his Regiment further then hee had orders for, and indeede with more youthfull courage then souldierlike discretion, was observ'd by the Enemy to bee a greate space before the rest, and out of his ground, who incontinently thrusts Sir Arthur Hassellrigs Regiment of horse, well arm'd, betwixt him and home, and there in the view of our whole Army (much to our discouragement) kills and takes every man.¹⁷

Whatever the circumstances of Bard's advance it proved fatal for his regiment. On the right of their line the Parliamentarian cavalry had advanced into the valley and Sir Arthur Hesilrige now led 300 Horse against Bard's troops who were killed or captured to a man. A wider engagement then developed on the Parliamentarian left as commanded parties of troops from both sides began to fight for Cheriton village. As Captain Harley recorded this action went in favour of the Parliamentarians:

wee drewe downe all our horse into a heath, which stood betwixt the two hills were they did fight, but under favour of the enemy's ordinance, the hills being one from another not [a] whole

culvering shott - which was wel knowne to some of the enemy's horse which were dispersed by our shott. Here my leiftenant lost his horse and a part of his foote, but I hope he will recover speidily. Their canon did very small execution amongst us, the enemy thinking all were his owne if he could but possesse himselfe of the village and those hedges we had lined: for that intent he sent downe a partee of fifteen hundred commaunded men to possesse themselves of those places. Wee likewise sent downe twelve hundered commanded men to second our owne men. These did holde their places very neare a heath; then the enemy gotte ground and fired the village. It was noe sooner on fire but the winde turned. Our men, seeing the advantage set them to a disordered retreat: our horse seeing it, sent a partee of a hundred horse under the command of Captaine Buttlar to charge them, and another under the command of Colonel Norton to second them. Captain Fleming commanded another partee. They all of them performed their charges soe wel that thorough God's blessing they routed them all, sleue about a hundred and fifty and tooke a hundred and twenty prisoners with divers commanders of quality. Wee received not much losse....¹⁸

On the Royalist left wing regiments of Foot were also now engaged with both Parliamentarian Cavalry and infantry. Colonel Slingsby provides a dramatic view of the close-quarter fighting:

Upon this successe the Enemy resumes their first courage, which prompted them to trye a feild with us, or rather a better than that, which made them resolve to beate us; and soe with a strong body of horse charges our footte on the left wing, on that part which my Lord of Brainford was pleas'd to make your servants charge, their the Enemy horse was repulssed with losse. They immediately try'd the second charge in which Captain Herbert of my Lord Hoptons Regiment was slaine, with a fresh body and were againe repulssed, and soe againe the third time, the foote keeping their ground in a close body, not firing till within two pikes length, and then three rankes att a time, after turning up the butt end of their musketts, charging their pikes, and standing close, preserv'd themselues, and slew many of the enemy.

Then my Lord John Steward (seeing our footte like to be opprest with freshe horse) sends downe the Queenes Regiment of horse, which were most Frenche, who descended the hill into this ground with seeming resolution, but retreated after an unhandsome charge.¹⁹

Attempts by the Royalist Horse to intervene in what had by now become a general engagement along the whole line were less than successful. Slingsby, while recognising their superiority of spirit ascribes their tactical failure to the difficulties posed by their advancing down a single deep-cut lane with high hedges (possibly Bramdean Lane):

Then wee drew downe most of the horse and endeavor'd to draw up upon that plaine ground before our footte, in which our Enemy's horse stood rang'd in nine faire bodys, but having one laines end only to passe into it, they came upon great disadvantages, for by that time one body was in the ground and drawne up (before another could second it), it was over charged with number; yett I am confident our horse did performe more gallant charges that day than hath bin knowne in any one battaile this warr....²⁰

A confused and protracted cavalry battle now raged for almost four hours with the infantry of both sides playing a role in this fighting while they continued their own struggle from hedge to hedge. Gradually the Parliamentarian Foot pushed their opposite numbers across the valley and back onto the northern ridge:

....our foot for all the while was ingaged on the left wing, to drive the Enemy from the hedges, where our men played their parts gallantly and drove them from hedge to hedge by degrees, till they had forced them to the top of the hill....²¹

As the Parliamentary infantry closed in from either flank and with their own cavalry in disarray, Hopton and Forth decided to fall back on Alresford before retreating to Basing House and eventually Reading:

But by this time the disorder was so generall, and the Enemy pressed in that part so hard (espetially with their muskett shott) that it was with great difficulty that we gott off all our cannon; and making our reare as good as we could with some of the best of our hores and dragoons, we recovered our first ground upon the ridge of the hill by Alsford-towne, with all our Army, cannon and carriages; from whence we shewed so good a countenance towards the Enemy, that they gave us some respitt, unwilling (as it seem'd) to hazard their whole army upon us.²²

Captain Harley's estimate of the casualties suffered on both sides was comparatively modest given the duration of the fighting:

The slaughter on either side was very small, especially on ours....I believe in all wee did not loose sixty men. The enemy, I am confident, had slain three hundred men besides horse.²³

Indication of Importance

To contemporaries, and particularly to the Royalists, Cheriton was a significant encounter. Waller's victory ended a campaign which had been aimed at isolating, and if possible occupying, London, the home of Parliament, and of severing communications with the Channel ports. Had Hopton succeeded, and given Parliament's pre-occupation elsewhere in the country, the results could have been far-reaching.

It can be argued that Cheriton marked a turning point in the King's military affairs during the First Civil War. This was not simply because one of his abler generals failed to secure victory, but rather that Cheriton signalled an end to the period in which Royalist forces could translate their offensives into strategic advantage. Before Cheriton the possibility of an overall victory for the King seemed much clearer. After Cheriton the King's military options were more limited and in the words of his Secretary, Sir Edward Walker, he was forced 'in the place of the offensive to make a defensive war'.

As an example of the contemporary art of war Cheriton left a great deal to be desired. It was an engagement in which confusion often reigned and in which actions took place as much by error and command failure as by intent. Much of the confusion which held sway once individual units became engaged may perhaps be ascribed to the fact that both armies began the battle with the same field sign - something white worn in the hat - and with the same shout - 'God with us'. In the words of Colonel Birch's biographer Cheriton 'was indeed a victory, but the worst possible of any I ever saw'.

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.

From Cheriton North End the battlefield area follows the lane northwards to the Wayfarers' Walk before heading east behind the Royalist lines, picking up Cheriton Lane near Scrubbs Bungalow. The boundary follows Cheriton Lane and the edge of the wood to incorporate the area of the Parliamentary position in the wood and Appleyard's advance to retake the wood for the King. Dog-legging southwards and then eastwards, the boundary follows a track to the Alresford Lane and across, using for convenience the 100m contour here rather than field boundaries, to the end of Upper Lamorough Lane and back to North End, thus allowing for the

Parliamentary deployment and the fighting in the enclosures by Cheriton.

Notes

1. Adair, J. Cheriton 1644 The Campaign and the Battle (Kineton 1973).
2. See map on p322 in Gardiner, S.R. History of the Great Civil War Vol. 1 1642-1644 (The Windrush Press. Moreton-in-Marsh, 1987).
3. Burne, A.H. More Battlefields of England (London, 1952).
4. Young, P. and Holmes, R. The English Civil War, A Military History of the Three Civil Wars 1642-1651 (London 1974).
5. Seymour, W. Battles in Britain 1642-1746 Vol. 2 (London 1975).
6. Bellum Civile. Hopton's Narrative of his Campaign in the West. Ed. Chadwyck-Healey, C.E.H. Somerset Record Society Vol. 18 (1902).
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. *Military Memoir of Colonel John Birch,..Written by Roe, his secretary...*Ed. Webb, J. Camden Society NS Vol. 7 (1873).
13. Letter from Captain Robert Harley to Colonel Edward Harley, dated 12 April 1644. HMC, Portland Manuscripts, Vol. 3, pp106-110.
14. A Letter from Captain Jones being in relation to the proceedings of Sir William Waller's Armie. TT: E. 40 (12).
15. Chadwyck-Healey op. cit.
16. Ibid
17. Colonel Walter Slingsby's account is printed with *Bellum Civile. Hopton's Narrative of his Campaign in the West.* Chadwyck-Healey, C E H. (ed.) Somerset Record Society Vol. 18 (1902).
18. Harley op. cit.
19. Slingsby op. cit.
20. Ibid.
21. Archer, E. A Fuller Relation of the Victory obtained at Alsford, 28 march, by the Parliaments forces. (Presented to the Lord Mayor and Committee of Militia by an eye-witness employed to attend the London Brigade). TT: E. 40 (1) 1 April 1644.

22. Chadwyck-Healey op. cit.
23. Harley op. cit.