

# English Heritage Battlefield Report: Lansdown 1643

## Lansdown Hill (5 July 1643)

**Parish:** Cold Ashton, Doynton, Bitton, Charlcombe, North Stoke

**Districts:** Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire

**County:** Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire

**Grid Ref:** ST 723712

### Historical Context

In the early summer of 1643 the Royalist position in England gave rise to a certain optimism. Parliamentary morale had been dented by a series of Royalist successes which included Adwalton Moor, Hopton Heath, Ripple Field, Stratton and Chalgrove. Moreover, Oxford was still reasonably secure. In the West, however, Parliamentary garrisons continued to hold out in Devon, while Gloucester, Bristol and Bath were firmly controlled by Parliament. Sir William Waller, as Major General of the Western Association Forces, commanded Parliament's not inconsiderable military resources in Shropshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Somerset. If there was to be a chance of Sir Ralph Hopton's Royalist army marching east to join the King's Oxford army in a combined advance on London, Parliament's position in the West must first be destroyed.

Hopton's victory at Stratton in May 1643 and his subsequent progress through Devon encouraged the King to send him additional troops under Prince Maurice and the Marquis of Hertford. At Chard on 4 June Hopton's reinforced army totalled some 4,000 foot, 2,000 horse and 300 dragoons, together with 16 pieces of artillery. An ingenious command system was now evolved to encompass the dignity, rank and military skills of Maurice, Hertford and Hopton. While Hertford commanded in name, Hopton commanded in the field and Maurice devoted his attention to the Horse.

The Royalist plan for dealing with Waller rested upon constructing a firm base of operations by occupying Wells, Taunton, Bridgwater, and Dunster castle, and then applying pressure against the Parliamentary rallying point of Bath. As the Royalist forces closed in there were a number of clashes between the rival cavalry and a fierce skirmish south of Chewton Mendip on 9 June during which Prince Maurice was temporarily taken prisoner. There was now a lull of some three weeks in which Waller sought to augment his forces at Bath. Sir Arthur Heselrige arrived from London with a regiment of cuirassiers which brought the total of Parliamentary cavalry to 2,500, but Waller remained desperately short of infantry. By the first week of July Waller could set no more than 1,500 foot against Hopton's 4,000.

On 2 July the Royalists entered Bradford-on-Avon, just five miles to the south-east of Bath, and Waller moved to Claverton Down to block their advance. On 3 July Hopton's army began to push back Waller's outlying detachments and ambush parties. In the face of increasing pressure from both Maurice, who attacked Claverton, and Hopton who pursued Waller's troops through Batheaston, the Parliamentarians were compelled to fall back on Bath. Around midnight Hopton briefly considered whether to press on beyond Batheaston to ascend the southern slopes of Lansdown Hill, but having only part of the army with him he decided to wait until a rendezvous had been made with Prince Maurice next day.

Early on 4 July the Royalists closed on Lansdown only to find that Waller had beaten them to it and that his troops were already strongly posted on the summit. A Council of War decided that to attack at that point would be

foolhardy and that to remain where they were would only invite further casualties. Shortly after midday, therefore, the Royalists began to pull back to Marshfield with Hopton covering their withdrawal. It now seemed clear to Waller that the Royalists would attempt to take Bath from the north along the ridge of Lansdown Hill, and shortly after dawn on 5 July he switched his forces to the northern crest of the hill.

### Location and Description of the Battlefield

Lansdown Hill lies some five miles to the north of Bath. Its steeply rising slopes give way at the summit to a plateau that runs level from its northern crest for approximately two miles before falling down again as it approaches the City. The encounter between Waller and Hopton took place on the northern face of the hill, the centre of the Royalist attack coming roughly where the monument to Sir Bevill Grenville, who was killed in the battle, now stands. The monument, which was designed by John Harvey and erected in 1720, is in the care of English Heritage.

From their position of advantage on the northern summit the Parliamentarians looked down from an escarpment that falls sharply some 225 feet to the valley floor below. Barely a mile to the north the ground ascends steeply again to the summit of Freezing Hill whose crest is only some 100 feet lower than that of Lansdown. The two hills are 'linked' by Freezinghill Lane which runs south across the centre of Freezing Hill, descends into the valley, where it is joined from the north and west by two unclassified roads, and then climbs diagonally to the right as its ascent steepens. A sharp turn to the left finally takes the road on to the summit of Lansdown Hill from where it runs south along the course of the Roman road across the plateau towards Bath. Beyond Freezing Hill, and connected to it by a ridge, stands the somewhat higher ground of Tog Hill from which the advancing Royalists gained their view of Waller's formidable position.

It is not easy to reconstruct a precise picture of the ground over which the battle took place in 1643 from the accounts of participants, but it is possible to gain an understanding of how the terrain influenced the course of the fighting. The northern slope of Lansdown Hill, up which the Royalists advanced, remains a formidable obstacle for both cavalry and infantry to this day. In July 1643 it seemed to the Royalist Richard Atkyns like 'the eaves of an house for steepness'.<sup>1</sup> The 'high way' ascending the hill presented the only straightforward route into the Parliamentarian position for both Waller's flanks were, in the words of Colonel Walter Slingsby who served with Hopton, 'strengthened with a thicke wood w<sup>ch</sup> stood upon the declining of the hill'.<sup>2</sup> To Waller's rear was a 'faire plaine' and across it, within a 'demi-culverin-shott'<sup>3</sup> of the Parliamentarian position, ran a stone wall forming an enclosure for sheep. To his front in the valley and along its sides the ground was broken by hedge and copse, while to Waller's right, according to S R Gardiner<sup>4</sup>, a wall ran along at least part of the upper side of the road as it turned to climb Lansdown Hill. During the skirmishing which preceded the assault on Waller's position, Slingsby states that 'our whole army was raung'd in order of battle upon the large come field neare Tughill' (Toghill). He also depicts the ground beyond Toghill as 'a continuing plaine large feild all the way to Marsfeild'. Richard Atkyns provides a description of the comparatively restricted area in which the Royalist cavalry was deployed during the initial stages of the battle:

'the ground we stood in, was like a straight horn, about six score yards over at the end towards Marshfield, and twenty score over at the end towards their army; on both sides enclosed with a hedge, and woods without that'.

This is a passable definition of Freezing Hill and the ridge running back onto Tog Hill.

There is no dispute amongst historians as to the location of the battlefield or as to its extent. Eyewitness reports agree on the scene of the fighting to within less than a hundred yards.

There are numerous archaeological finds from the battlefield area and locality, but none directly related to the battle

itself. There is 19th century documentary evidence of finds of Civil War armour which were interpreted at the time as signs of burial of casualties, but the finds were not preserved.

## The Landscape Evolution

The landscape in 1643 was substantially the same as that apparent today. The contemporary references to the initial engagements along Tog Hill, Freezing Hill Lane and the slopes of Lansdown Hill indicate a well hedged landscape of pasture and some cultivated land. The irregular nature of most current hedge lines suggests they are pre-parliamentary enclosure field divisions which would probably have been present in 1643. Lansdown plateau itself was open downland and has since been enclosed with additional stone walls and fencing.

Individual features referenced by contemporary accounts include the wood and scrub on the upper slopes of Lansdown Hill (still present), 'many little pitts' on the left of the Parliamentarian position (numerous back-filled Saxon quarry pits still in evidence today), the 'shelved' land on the right of the Parliamentarian position (Roman earthworks still apparent today) and the Iron-Age earthworks on the upper slopes of Freezing Hill (referred to as 'King's Camp' in early maps and still clearly seen today).

The stone wall to be found some 400 yards behind the crest of Lansdown hill may be at least a part of the wall which formed Waller's second position. Eyewitness estimates of the distance between the wall and the breastworks established on top of the northern escarpment vary from 'about demi-culverin-shott' (Hopton) or approximately 400 yards, to 'within muskett shott' (Slingsby) or approximately 80 yards, to 'half musket shot off' (Atkyns) or 40 yards. Forming a judgement on these estimates is difficult since we do not know where the eyewitness was standing or what point in the battle had been reached when he gauged the distance. It is also clear that after dark the Royalist musketeers edged forward towards the Parliamentarian position, and they may well have come to within musket range. However, a retirement of 400 yards from a position that has been overrun would seem more prudent than one of eighty, particularly as artillery would be involved in any subsequent exchange of fire.

In order to provide gaps through which their cavalry could charge any further Royalist advance, the Parliamentarians demolished several sections of the wall, covering these sally ports with cannon and musketeers. Cavalry emerging through these ports would require room in which to deploy before meeting the enemy. The present wall shows evidence of repaired breaches.

There is also evidence of a prehistoric walled enclosure traversing the current route of the Bath road on Lansdown plateau, immediately to the south of this stone wall. Early maps refer to the enclosure as 'old entrenchment', signalling that it may have provided part of the shelter behind which Waller withdrew.

Where the present road up Lansdown Hill towards Bath curves to the right, just below the crest, the left side of the road is buttressed by a stone wall built into the hillside. Contemporary accounts suggest Grenvile ascended the hill partly sheltered by a wall alongside the road. Old maps suggest that the current road still follows roughly its old course up the hill, and it seems likely that this walled roadside was the same one behind which Grenvile hid some of his advancing troops.

The high bank to the west of the present day footpath on the south west slope of Freezing Hill is a distinctive boundary, and forms one side of a hollow-way (or bank and ditch) leading downhill from the Iron-Age earthworks. This feature is probably the route of the south-west flanking movement of Hopton's troops.

Lansdown has changed remarkably little since the time of the battle. Lansdown plateau has been further enclosed, and the degree of wood and scrub development on the crest of Lansdown Hill will have altered since 1643. Along

Freezing Hill Lane and on Tog Hill there is probably more arable land today than previously, but the essential nature of a pastoral landscape with its topography, hedges, woodlands, roads and earthworks remains unchanged.

### The Battle: its sources and interpretation

A number of Royalist eyewitness accounts of the Battle of Lansdown have survived, most notably those penned by Ralph Hopton, Colonel Walter Slingsby, and Richard Atkyns. Hopton's record<sup>5</sup> of the Western Campaign was written in Jersey in 1646, principally as an aid for Clarendon in his compilation of the *History of the Great Rebellion*. Clarendon also made use of the excellently clear and dispassionate memoirs<sup>6</sup> of Walter Slingsby, a colonel of infantry, and he received Slingsby's account in April 1647. Thus, due to the imperative of the historian, Hopton and Slingsby's views of Lansdown were recorded within four years of the battle. Richard Atkyns' account<sup>7</sup> appeared somewhat later in 1669 and was written in different circumstances. Atkyns served the Royalist cause in 1643 as a Captain in Prince Maurice's Regiment of Horse and he provides a counter-balance to Slingsby's infantry view. It is also helpful to have an account of the battle penned by a junior officer, but the circumstances of its compilation require that it be treated with some caution. Atkyns wrote his *Vindication* while he was imprisoned in the Marshalsea for debt, and it was intended, as the title implies, to show his life in the best possible light. Understandably, as he was writing over twenty-five years after the event, Atkyns has a poor memory for dates and for the precise sequence of events, but his account is informative on many aspects of the battle and particularly the confusion that reigned as the Royalists gained the crest of the Hill. The issue of *Mercurius Aulicus* for the 'seven and twentieth weeke' provides a good Royalist account of Lansdown.

On the Parliamentary side useful records of Lansdown Hill are few and Waller set down no more than a couple of lines on the battle. The main source is to be found in the Thomason Tracts and is entitled *A true Relation of the great and glorious victory, through God's Providence, obtained by Sir William Waller, Sir Arthur Haslerig... against the Marquesse Hartford, Prince Maurice and others.*<sup>8</sup> Captain Edward Harley writing to his father Sir Robert Harley from Bristol on 15 July 1643, only ten days after Lansdown, provides a clear and fresh summary<sup>9</sup> of the key events of the battle from the Parliamentary cavalry's view, and Lansdown is also recorded in an issue of *Mercurius Civicus* (Number 7).

Hopton's account of the battle sets out the events that unfolded rapidly on 5 July 1643 between Marshfield and Lansdown:

The next morning earlie Sr Wm. Waller drew out his whole Army over Lansdowne to that ende which lookes towards Marsfield, and there upon the verie point of the hill, over the high way suddenly rayseed breasted workes with faggotts and earth, and sent downe strong partyes of horse into the field towards Marsfield, where they lighted upon a party of horse and beate them in. This rowseed the Army at Marsfield and so about 8 that morning being the 13th (5th) of July 1643. all drew forth, and within verie short time a light skirmish was engaged with dragoones in the hedges on eache side; but the chiefe Commanders of the King's Army, considering that the continuing of that kinde of fight would be to little effect, but might onely waste their ammunition (whereof they had not plenty) drew off and retreated in Batalio towards their quarter to Marsfield, which the other Army percieveing tooke the courage to sende downe great partyes of arm'd horse and dragoones to charge them both in reare and flancke. Those that came upon the reare used most dilligence and, haveing left their dragoones in the ende of the Lane towards the Field charged verie gallantly, and rowted two bodyes of their horse, whereof the last was, by Prince Maurice his command to Sir Ralph Hopton winged with Cornish Muskettiers, who (poore men) though the horse were rowted between them kept their ground and preserv'd themselves till the E. of Carnarvan's Regiment of horse was drawn up to them. In the meane time Sir Nicholas Slanning was commanded with two or three hundred muskettiers to fall upon

the reserve of dragoones behinde them, which he performed verie gallantly and beate them off; and at the same time the Earle of Carnarvan with his Regiment and the forementioned muskettiers charged the Enimy's horse and totally rowted them. Presently after this appeared two great bodyes of the Enimy's horse advancing towards their flank, which induced a good charge of two bodyes of the King's horse, and some volleys of muskettiers before they brake, but at last were rowted and chased. And then the whole army in the best order they could in that broad way that leads to Lansdowne, advanced towards the Enemy, sending out as they went strong parties of muskettiers on each hand to seconde one another, to endeavour under the covert of the inclosed groundes to gaine the flank of the Enemy on the top of the hill, which they at last did, but the Pikes and the horse with the rest of the Muskettiers that advanced up the broad way, as the space would beare, had much to doe, by reason of the disadvantage of the ground, the Enemy's foot and batteries being under covert of their breast-works, and their horse ready to charge upon the very browe of the Hill, where the King's forces were five times charg'd and beaten back with disorder. There was Sir Bevil Grenvile slain in the head of his Pikes, and Major Lower in the head of a party of horse, and Sir Nicholas Slanning's horse kild under him with a greateshott, and the body of horse soe discomforted that of 2000 there did not stand above 600. Yett at last they recovered the hill, and the Enemy drew back about demi-culverin-shott, within a stone-wall, but there stood in reasonable good order, and each part played upon the other with their ordnance, but neither advanced being both soundly batter'd.<sup>10</sup>

Early in the morning of 5 July 1643 Waller had moved his troops along the Roman road which ran across Lansdown to the north escarpment in order to counter a Royalist advance from Marshfield. At the top of the escarpment he ordered his troops to construct breastworks astride the road that ascended Lansdown Hill, and he threw out a cavalry screen to probe for the enemy. Waller's troopers soon found the opposing pickets and began to harry them back to the Royalist main body in Marshfield. Roused by this challenge Hopton set the army in motion towards Lansdown, using Tog and Freezing Hills as his axis of advance. The skirmishing continued from hedge to hedge but Hopton and his co-commanders considered that little would come from these encounters, except a further expenditure of their fast dwindling ammunition supply. After some two hours of inconclusive clashes around Toghill the Royalists decided to retire to their quarters in Marshfield to think again.

Before they had gone a mile, however, Waller launched most of his Horse and dragoons in pursuit:

...our Generall Sir William Waller perceiving their Army to retreat, immediately commanded Major Dowet to take out a party of 200 horse, and seconded by 200 more, commanded by Colonel Carre, both parties advanced toward their Army, and charged them so gallantly, that they put all their Army to a disorderly retreat, as that their horse took the rear of their foot; but they taking hart again in a full body, with their great Artillery caused our party to retire yett orderly, which Sir William perceiving, sent Colonell Burghill with a party to relieve them, and carryed all again, which put the enemy to second retreat, but the fight was variously maintained for two hours, at length our foot growing weary, a fresh supply was sent, who being but fresh Souldiers, did not make good their ground, which constrained our parties to retreat, after Colonell Burghill had received a shot through his right Arm, as his Sword was even at the throat of the Lord of Carnarvan. Our men fell back to their first ground, to bring back the two Hammer Peeeces which were taken from us at Fourd-bridge, the Munday before.<sup>11</sup>

Watching the Parliamentary forces closing on the Royalist rear, Richard Atkyns was impressed by Waller's daring tactic:

...but about 3 of the clock they (seeing their advantage) sent down a strong party of horse, commanded by Colonel [*Robert*] Burrell, Major [*Jonas*] Vantruske and others; not less than 300, and five or six

hundred dragoons on both sides of the hedges, to make way for their advance, and to make good their retreat. And this was the boldest thing that I ever saw the enemy do; for a party of less than 1000 to charge an army of 6000 horse, foot and cannon, in their own ground, at least a mile and a half from their body.<sup>12</sup>

Waller's timing was perfect. As panic and confusion began to spread through the ranks of the Royalist rearguard it was only the stoic solidity of Hopton's Cornish infantry and a timely intervention by Lord Carnarvon's Regiment of Horse that enabled Hopton to prevent a rout. Gradually more and more Royalist troops wheeled about and joined the fighting that raged around Tog Hill and across Freezing Hill, but as Colonel Slingsby noted there was much hard work before the Parliamentarians were finally beaten back:

....we faced about againe and aduanced upon them endeavouring to regain our ground where wee were before rang'd: which we gott with muche difficultye and hazard, our horse receiving some dangerous foiles; so that had not our ffoote bin excellent wee had certainly suffer'd their: the Rebells horse not enduring our charges of horse and volleys of small shott that fell upon them from our approaching bodyes of ffootte, they retir'd themselves out of that feild; but left all their dragoones upon the walls and hedges upon the farre end of the feild neare Tughill from whence our ffoote beate them suddenly....<sup>13</sup>

As the Parliamentarian Horse were pressed back along Freezinghill Lane they were enfiladed by fire from Royalist cavalry and their ranks fell into increasing confusion. Colonel Slingsby recorded, however, the prompt and effective intervention by the Parliamentarian rearguard which slowed the progress of Hopton's advance:

The enemys horse now being prest into the laine that leads ouer Tughill to lansdowne, were obseru'd to be in some disorder by reason of the narrow and ill passage. Prince Maurice therefore takes all our horse and wings them on both sides the laine within the hedges with small shott, and soe smartly fell upon them, that some run in greate disorder; but it seemes they had (like prouident souldiers) placed their best horse in the Reare who being compeld, turnes about and fights desperately, and their giues our horse another foile with the death of Major Lower, Major James and many others: but our horse being still assisted by the ffoote, att last beate them down Tughill (Freezing Hill?), where in the bottom they were cruelly gall'd by our ffoote that then drew up thicke upon Tughill.<sup>14</sup>

Thus by the early afternoon of 5 July 1643 the Royalists were firmly established before Waller's position on Lansdown Hill. Hopton was still unenthusiastic about the prospect of launching an assault up the escarpment for the natural and improvised defences awaiting such an attack were daunting. Waller had deployed his troops with his usual eye for ground:

In the brow of the hill, hee had raised brestworkes in w<sup>ch</sup> his Cannon and greate store of small shott was placed; on either fflanke hee was strengthned with a thicke wood w<sup>ch</sup> stood vpon the declining of the hill, in w<sup>ch</sup> hee had putt store of muskeiteires; on his reare hee had a faire plaine where stood rang'd his reserues of horse and ffootte; some bodyes of horse with muskeiteires hee bestow'd vpon some other places of the hill, where hee thought there was an accesse; thus fortyfied stood the foxe gazing a vs....<sup>15</sup>

While the Royalist troops waited for orders in the valley they were subjected to fire from the Parliamentarian guns on Lansdown Hill. Hopton's Cornish infantry, who were men of strong self-belief, rapidly lost their patience and, as Colonel Slingsby records they pleaded to be allowed to attack Waller's artillery:

Now did our ffootte belieue noe men their equals, and were soe apt to undertake anything....for they desir'd to fall on and cry'd lett us fetch those cannon.<sup>16</sup>

Hopton at last gave way and ordered both Horse and Foot to storm Waller's position. The central attack was to be delivered by the Horse who would advance up the escarpment via Freezinghill Lane, while musketeers attempted to drive the Parliamentarians out of the woods on either side of the road. If successful the infantry would then outflank Waller's line.

Unfortunately for Hopton, the Royalist Horse were repulsed with loss and it was only through the intervention of Colonel Sir Bevill Grenvile that the momentum of the attack was maintained. Seeing the Royalist Horse falling back in confusion Grenvile led his Cornish pikeman forward up the Hill with musketeers in support on his left and cavalry on his right. With their progress partly screened by the wall to the left of the road and by dead ground, the Cornishmen pressed on up the escarpment only to meet a withering fire as they crested the rise. The advance came to a rapid halt and Sir Arthur Heselrige's Regiment of Horse charged the Cornishmen three times as they struggled to establish a position on level ground. In the third charge Grenvile and many of his men were cut down:

Sr Beuill Grenvile....gain'd with much gallantry the brow of the hill receiving all their small shott and cannon from their brest worke, and three charges of horse two of wch he stood, but in the third fell with him many of his men....<sup>17</sup>

Grenvile's defence had for the moment broken the offensive spirit of the Parliamentarian Horse at a decisive point in the battle:

...yett had his (Grenvile) appearing upon the ground so disorder'd the Enemy, his owne muskeiteires firing fast upon their horse, that they could not stay upon the ground longer; the Rebels ffoote tooke example by their horse and quitt their brestworks retyring behind a long stone wall that runs across the downe; our ffoote leps into their brestworks; our horse draws up upon their ground: our two wings that were sent to fall into the two woodes had done their businesse and were upon the hill as soone as the rest.<sup>18</sup>

Waller now pulled his troops back behind the shelter of a stone wall some 400 yards behind his breastworks on the edge of the escarpment. The Royalists were thus confronted by a second, not inconsiderable line of defence which would have to be stormed:

The Enemy (observing our ffront to enlarge it selfe upon the hill, and our cannon appearing their likewise) began to suspect himself, and drew his whole strength behind that wall, wch hee lined well with muskeiteires, and in seuerall places broke down breaches very broade that his horse might charge if there were occasion, wth breaches guarded by his cannon and bodyes of pikes.<sup>19</sup>

It was stalemate, for the exhausted Royalists could not muster the strength to go forward into a second curtain of fire:

Thus stood the two Armys taking breath looking upon each other, our cannon on both sides playing without ceasing till it was darke, legs and arms flying apace, the two Armys being within muskett shott: After it was darke there was greate silence on both sides, att wch time our right wing of shott got muche nearer their army lodging themselves amongst the many little pits betwixt the wall and the wood from whence wee gald them cruelly.<sup>20</sup>

For many Royalists, such as Richard Atkyns, the lull had barely come in time, for the young Captain found the edge of the plateau to be a most unhealthy deployment:

When I came to the top of the hill, I saw Sir Bevill Grinvill's stand of pikes, which certainly preserved our army from a total rout, with the loss of his most precious life: they stood as upon the eaves of an house for steepness, but as unmovable as a rock; on which side of this stand of pikes our horse

were, I could not discover; for the air was so darkened by the smoke of the powder, that for a quarter of an hour together (I dare say) there was no light seen, but what the fire of the volleys of shot gave; and 'twas the greatest storm that ever I saw, in which though I knew not whither to go, nor what to do, my horse had two or three musket bullets in him presently, which made him tremble under me at that rate, and I could hardly with spurs keep him from lying down; but he did me the service to carry me off to a led horse, and then died: by that time I came up to the hill again, the heat of the battle was over, and the sun set, but still pelting at one another half musket shot off....<sup>21</sup>

Waller had in fact decided that a retirement along Lansdown Hill to Bath would be the most prudent course of action, and the growing indications of the enemy's departure were greeted with relief by the Royalist infantry perched on the crest:

About 11 of the clock we receiud a very greate volley of small shott but not mixt with cannon by which some of us judg'd that hee was retreating....It was not long before wee knew certainly that they were gone, att their departure they left all their light matches upon the wall and whole bodys of pikes standing upright in order within the wall as if men had held them; wee were glad they were gone for if they had not I know who had within an hower....<sup>22</sup>

Waller would have been vexed to learn that the orders issued to the Royalist forces lodged on the escarpment were that it would be every man for himself should the Parliamentarians launch a night attack. Hopton was, however, unable to exploit his apparent success for his army was short of powder and most of the Royalist Horse had decamped, some as far as Oxford. The Royalists began to withdraw to Marshfield early the next morning.

The true casualty figures for the battle are difficult to determine. The Parliamentary pamphlet *the true Relation*, seeking of course to show Waller's efforts in the best possible light, mentions that the Royalist losses totalled 200 dead and 300 wounded, while those of Parliament amounted to no more than 19 dead and 56 wounded. In his despatch to the Speaker, Waller stated that:

Many of there Cheife Commanders and Officers were slayne or hurt we lost only one Serjeant Major of the Dragoons and two Cornetts and not twentie common souldiers.<sup>23</sup>

As Hopton was attacking an entrenched position for much of the battle his casualties would be heavier than those of Waller, and certainly Hopton lost a number of senior officers by death or wounding. For an engagement that lasted most of the day the Parliamentary casualty figures appear to be remarkably light.

As his troops assembled on Tog Hill prior to their withdrawal, Hopton was standing close to a powder cart which also contained several Parliamentary prisoners. What happened next was recorded by Richard Atkyns:

The next morning was very clear, and about half an hour after sun rising, we rendezvoused our horse and foot upon Togge-Hill, between the hill where we quartered all night, and Marshfield; Major Sheldon and myself, went towards the Lord Hopton, who was then viewing the prisoners taken, some of which, were carried upon a cart wherein was our ammunition; and (as I heard) had match to light their tobacco; the Major desired me to go back to the regiment, whilst he received orders of his Lordship: I had no sooner turned horse, and was gone 3 horses lengths from him, but the ammunition was blown up, and the prisoners in the cart with it; together with the Lord Hopton, Major Sheldon, and Cornet Washnage, who was near the cart on horseback, and several others: it made a very great noise, and darkened the air for a time, and the hurt men made lamentable screeches. As soon as the air was clear, I went to see what the matter was; there I found his Lordship miserably burnt, his horse singed like parched leather, and Thomas Sheldon



(that was a horse lengths further from the blast) complaining that the fire was got within his breeches, which I tore off as soon as I could, and from as long as a flaxen head of hair as ever I saw, in the twinkling of an eye, his head was like a blackamoor; his horse was hurt, and run away like made, so that I put him upon my horse, and got two troopers to hold him up on both sides, and bring him to the headquarters, whilst I marched after with the regiment.<sup>24</sup>

Hopton was temporarily blinded and paralysed and morale in the Royalist army fell alarmingly.

### **Indication of Importance**

Waller believed that Lansdown Hill was a victory for Parliament. Although he had withdrawn to leave the enemy in possession of the battlefield, the Royalists had been prevented from taking Bath and they were now more concerned with their own withdrawal than with conquest. During the battle Waller had used his more numerous cavalry with some skill and had safeguarded his numerically weaker infantry. Both sides had lived to fight another day and Lansdown while not producing conclusive results in its own right must be seen as part of a continuing struggle for supremacy in the West. In so far as the Royalist cause had not been advanced at Lansdown, Parliament had reason for satisfaction.

As a battle, Lansdown is interesting for the fact that an unusual tactical formation was adopted by the Royalists. Contrary to the normal conventions of the seventeenth-century battlefield the Royalist cavalry attacked in the centre with infantry on the wings. Lansdown was also a struggle of heroic endeavour and constantly shifting fortune with the outcome hanging in the balance until the last moment. From the hectic skirmishing along the hedgerows of Tog and Freezing hills, to the pikemen of Grenvile's Regiment struggling for a foothold on crest of the escarpment, Lansdown is a Civil War battle which the mind's eye can picture.

The sources for the battle, while not numerous, are detailed and there are at least three eyewitness accounts of quality. In Colonel Slingsby's testimony in particular we have a record which provides a consistent and fair view of the fighting. There is also a rare unanimity as to the course of events on 5 July 1643 amongst those participants who wrote of the battle in letters or memoirs.

There is no dispute as to the site of the battle and the extent of the fighting can be judged with a degree of confidence. The terrain has not changed markedly since the seventeenth century.

### **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.

The battlefield area for Lansdown appears to be extensive but it must acknowledge the fact that the assault on the escarpment, dramatic and hard fought though it undoubtedly was, formed only a single stage of the battle. It was preceded by extensive and hectic skirmishing, lasting in the opinion of Richard Atkyns 'for four or five hours', which lapped not only around Freezing Hill but also Tog Hill. The skirmishes and 'ambuscadoes' were an integral part of the battle for they acted as the catalyst which finally triggered the extreme Royalist reaction of attacking the escarpment.

To the east and west of Waller's main position, space must be provided for the outflanking movements by the Royalist infantry, and on the plateau itself the battlefield area has to accommodate both Waller's first and second deployments. The Parliamentary troops maintained a defence of their second position for some hours and it was

not merely a route for retreat.

The battlefield area therefore begins north of Tog Hill where Hopton's advance began and defines a corridor along the lane using existing boundaries on either side, allowing for increasingly complex skirmishing and manoeuvring.

At the main deployment position, the western boundary uses the line of the Roman road to allow room for the flanking attack on this side, while to the east existing boundaries south of Lower Hamswell form appropriate edges for the flanking attack. The southern boundary to the battlefield has been placed tightly behind Waller's second position.

## Notes

1. 'The Vindication of Richard Atkyns'. ed. Peter Young *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 35, 1955?
2. 'Colonel Slingsby's relation of the battle of Lansdown and Roundway Down, July 5th'. Clarendon MSS., Vol. 23, No.1738 (2). Printed in Hopton Ralph *Bellum Civile*, ed. C E H Chadwyck Healey, Somerset Record Society 18 (1902)
3. Hopton, R *Bellum Civile*, ed. C E H Chadwyck Healey, Somerset Record Society 18 (1902)
4. Gardiner, S R *History of the Great Civil War* (1901)
5. Hopton *op. cit.*
6. Slingsby *op. cit.*
7. Atkyn *op. cit.*
8. *A true Relation of the great and glorious victory, through God's Providence, obtained by Sir William Waller, Sir Arthur Haslerig, and others....* London, Printed for Edward Husbands, July 14, 1643. Thomason Tracts E. 60 (12)
9. Harley, E 'Captain Edward Harley to Sir Robert Harley at Westminster'. *Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on the Duke of Portland's MSS* vol.iii, p112-113 (1894)
10. Hopton *op. cit.*
11. A true Relation *op. cit.*
12. Atkyns *op. cit.*
13. Slingsby *op. cit.* p94-95
14. *ibid.* p95
15. *ibid.* p94
16. *ibid.* p95
17. *ibid.* p95
18. *ibid.* p95-96
19. *ibid.* p96
20. *ibid.* p96
21. Atkyns *op. cit.*
22. Slingsby *op. cit.* p96

23. Letter from Waller to the Speaker, 12 July 1643. Tanner MS 62 f.164
24. Atkyns *op. cit.*