

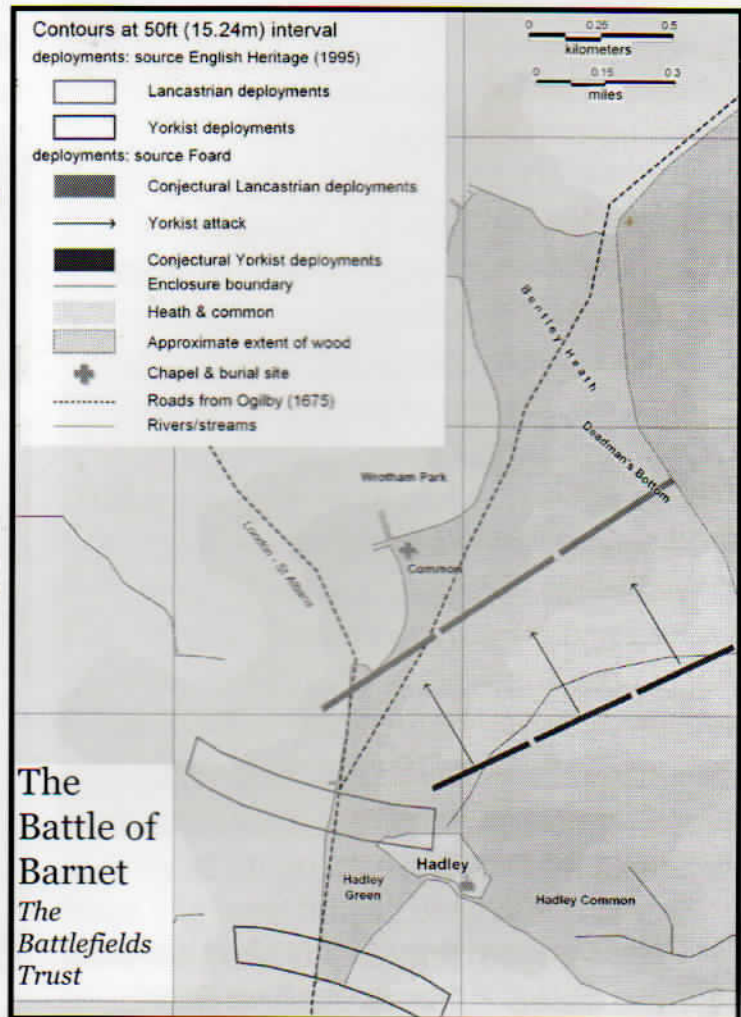
The Battle of Barnet

by Frank Baldwin, The Battlefields Trust

The Battle of Barnet on 14 April 1471 was one of the most important and eventful battles of the Wars of the Roses. It was the defining moment of a power struggle between the two men who had dominated England since 1461: King Edward IV and his cousin Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick. The battle itself is perhaps best known for the fact that it was fought in fog, which made it an unusually confusing and terrifying affair.

Three weeks before the battle, Edward IV the Yorkist King of England landed on Spurn head with a tiny force over perhaps two thousand men. He faced an almost impossible task against the combined forces of his uncle the Earl of Warwick and the Lancastrian faction. In an audacious campaign Edward had evaded pursuing armies, recruited a sizeable force and raced south followed by the army of the Earl of Warwick. On 11 April the citizens of London opened the city gates to Edward, who captured Henry VI and rescued his wife Elizabeth and their son from their sanctuary in Westminster Abbey. On 13 April Edward and his army of around 9000 marched out to confront Warwick: *...he roode to Barnete, x myles owte of London, where his afore-riders had founden the afore-riders of th'Erls of Warwikes hooste, and bet them, and chaced them out of the towne, more some what than an halfe myle; when, undre an hedge-syde, were redy assembled a great people, in array, of th'Erls of Warwike.*

Barnet also has something to tell us about the development of the use of gunpowder weapons. Warwick had



access to the Tower Arsenal and could have had up to 100 field pieces: *...on the nyght, weninge gretly to have anoyed the Kyng, his hooste, with shot of gones, th'Erls fiele shotte gunes almoste all the nyght. But, thanked be God! it so fortunated that they alway ovarshote the Kyngs hoste, and hurtyd them nothings, and the cawse was the Kyngs hoste lay muche nerrar them than they demyd.*

Edward launched a dawn attack on Warwick and eventually prevailed, despite Warwick's right overcoming Edward's left and with the help of what is now described as friendly fire between Warwick's victorious right returning to the battlefield and his centre. As a Lancastrian chronicler wrote: *... the*



The battlefield monument at the north end of Monken Hadley

The Battlefields Trust

myste was so thycke, that a manne myghte not profytely jure one thyng from anothere; so the Erle of Warwikes menne schott and faughte ayens the Erle of Oxenfordes menne, wetyng and supposyng that thei hade bene Kynge Edwardes menne; and anone the Erle of Oxenforde and his menne cryed "treasoune! treasoune!" and fledde awaye from the felde withe viij.c. menne.

The precise battle site cannot be stated with certainty. The main contemporary source places it up to a mile north of Barnet and one account mentions a hedge, thought to be on Old Ford Manor Golf Course.

The English Heritage Battlefields panel placed the most likely site of the battle of Barnet as being "Hadley Green, due to it being a plateau and the highest local ground on the Great North Road. The most obvious site for the Lancastrian deployment is the ridge leading west of Hadley Common, with

the left east of the junction between Hadley Highstone and Dury Road and the right stretching across the golf course. The Yorkists probably deployed across the road at the northern edge of modern High Barnet."

The interpretation of the battlefield of Barnet has changed over the last two hundred years. The first interpretation was by Alfred J. Kempe, a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1844 who positioned the overlap of the Yorkists over the Lancastrians on the Western side. In January 1882, Frederick Charles Cass, the rector of Monken Hadley published an account in the *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* which positioned the battlefield in the area accepted by English Heritage. The vicar was the first to identify the site as Monken Hadley and the orientation as North South. In 1892 James Ramsay published *Lancaster and York*. He interpreted the battle with Warwick's line extending, not from east to west, but from north to south along the line of the old St Albans road either side of Hadley High Stone, in order to take the King's troops in detail as they came out of the narrow streets of Barnet. This interpretation was echoed in C R B Barrett's *Battles and Battlefields in England* (London 1896). It remained unchallenged until Alfred Burne, an experienced soldier of the Great War and local resident put forwards an interpretation that returned to that of Charles Cass. He linked the comments about Warwick's deployment close to a hedge to the ancient hedge on Old Ford Manor Golf Course.

The battle of Barnet is depicted in many books about military history. However, in most cases the interpretation rests on the above interpretations. In many cases the interpretations include fanciful detail

such as the locations of archers, cavalry and cannon for which there is no documentary evidence. These may have been present, but we have no evidence to suggest how they were employed.

The creation of the battlefields register by English Heritage was a landmark for battlefields preservation in England and indeed the UK. For the first time battlefields would receive some form of statutory protection. The battles had to meet the criteria that they were significant, the location was known and the battlefield itself had not been built over. Barnet was included with the initial assessment and the Burne interpretation was broadly followed by English Heritage in 1995.

Yet inconsistencies in the English Heritage interpretation have become more glaring. The Hadley Green position appeared to be simply too small to accommodate the forces. Did the Earl of Warwick really deploy 15,000 men on a frontage of less than a kilometre? This would be 15 deep, approximating to the depth of the phalanxes of Macedonia and the Swiss pikemen. Fitting these men into the Hadley Green position demands that a substantial part of Warwick's army fights with the slope to Dead Man's Bottom at its rear. The battlefield is far from a level plain. The Lancastrian line appears to pass through Old Ford Manor and Monken Hadley Church, neither of which is mentioned in the accounts.

In addition no archaeological evidence of the battle has turned up. Surely if an army fires up to one hundred guns all night, the cannon balls must have gone somewhere? Something should have been dropped or lost. The TV series *Two men in a Trench* excavated around the ancient hedge on Old Ford Golf Course, but found nothing conclusive. No one expected to find much from a

battle that occurred 500 years ago.

In around 2005 The Battlefields Trust worked with a group from the Hendon and District Archaeological Society (HADAS) to try to find more about the battlefield. HADAS member Andrew Coulson collected information about reported finds of shot, and local stories about battlefield finds, graves and battle accounts. A local historian Brian Warren carried out a remarkable piece of work interpreting the landscape of the C16th from old Land registry entries as well as identifying the chantry for the dead at Kitts End. This was sufficient for the Battlefield Trust's project officer Dr Glenn Foard to propose an alternative location further North at Kitts end.

The success of Glenn Foard and his team in rediscovering Bosworth opens up another possibility. As with Barnet, no one had found any archaeological evidence for the battle. But it was not because the material had decayed or been salvaged. It was because archaeologists had been looking in the wrong place. Perhaps the reason no one has found anything at Barnet is because we have been looking in the wrong place? Bosworth shows that with modern tools and techniques, patience and some good fortune, it is possible to find the relics of battles of this era.

We recently launched a project to re-examine the Barnet battlefield site. We will obtain professional support and seek to explore the battlefield within the context of other work on early gunpowder weapons. Fortunately there is no immediate threat to the battlefield and we must first raise funds to support this. If anyone would like to help, please email: harvey.watson@tiscali.co.uk

Frank Baldwin is chairman of The Battlefields Trust.