

1. INTRODUCTION

Warfare is a significant aspect of human behaviour. Physical evidence of warfare forms a correspondingly important part of the historic environment. Many aspects of warfare have been the subject of much archaeological research. Weapons have been researched from the Neolithic onwards. Fortifications have been even more extensively studied, and the evidence they present is relatively well understood. In contrast, the archaeology of combat, whether from open battle or assaults upon fortified positions, is little studied and poorly understood. This is not least because the material traces of battle are far more ephemeral

While a siege site will normally have defensive remains that enable investigations to be clearly focused, a battlefield is 'just a field'. Even finding the field – the exact piece of ground, as distinct from the neighbourhood – is often difficult, particularly for earlier periods. Moreover, if the battlefield is to have more than commemorative value then the character of its landscape at the time must be understood. Using the written and archaeological record, the battle's events must then be placed accurately in that context. Only when the action has been so located can the terrain, the tactically relevant components of the historic landscape, be used better to understand the event itself. Where combat in the past has left material traces, and where those traces survive sufficiently well on a given site, then they will uniquely complement primary written sources in developing our understanding of the event.

For present purposes 'fields of conflict' must therefore be classified according to the nature of the evidence as it exists for both terrain and action. While the two broad types of combat – battles (including lesser open actions), and sieges – are complementary in the history and study of warfare, they differ in their potential and hence to a degree must be separately assessed. The identification and study of a siege site may be somewhat easier because it is located by the fortifications. The material record of a battle or skirmish is usually much more scanty. Research on battles is thus normally dependent upon written records to identify the existence and whereabouts of an action. On this basis four main phases of warfare can be defined:

1 Pre-Roman: no written records; at present, only siege sites appear to be identifiable and amenable to study.

2 Roman and early medieval (1st to 11th centuries AD): quantity and character of documentary evidence seldom sufficient to enable secure location of sites in a period where the existence of battle archaeology has yet to be demonstrated in Britain. Battles of this period are thus not normally amenable to study. It remains to be seen the degree to which siege sites are identifiable.

In due course it is possible that investigation of siege sites will lead to an understanding as to whether, and if so how, early battles may be located and investigated. The current bias in conventional research, that for the most part does not embrace either the kinds of question or methodologies considered here, means that fields of conflict in this period cannot yet be adequately assessed.

3 Later medieval (1100-1500): locations are normally known and effective terrain analysis is often possible, but ability to place action remains variable. So far only one site, Towton, has produced substantial battle archaeology. Even here, however, the lack of detailed archaeological analysis makes it impossible to transfer Towton's lessons to other sites, because it is not yet clear what the lessons actually are. Until this situation improves, it will be impossible to disprove a location even when that location is subject to field survey.

4 Early modern (1500-1750): a wide range of documentary and physical evidence normally exists both for terrain and action, the latter being particularly prominent in the distribution of lead bullets. An effective methodology has been demonstrated for the investigation of bullets which can be implemented on a battlefield-wide scale. The methodology requires further refinement to facilitate general use.

The transition between phases 3 and 4, when firearms and effective artillery were being introduced emerges as a stage that calls for a major programme of research. While its material traces may be limited, focused research is needed to establish the full character of that resource and what questions could be posed of it. Investigation of this transitional period may have the additional benefit of helping to resolve some uncertainties about the potential of later medieval fields of conflict.

Scope of the assessment

This assessment was prepared as the first stage of work to assist English Heritage in determining the most appropriate management strategies for historic fields of conflict in England, particularly battlefields, and to determine what guidance should be provided to Local Authority Archaeologists and others who are involved in the management of archaeological assets. Sites have accordingly been assessed as archaeological monuments where physical evidence offers the potential to advance understanding of both individual actions and warfare in general.

Public interpretation and memorialization lay outside the brief, except where memorialization can assist understanding of the event itself. Nonetheless, where data relevant to these aspects have been identified, they have been recorded so that a summary of the character and distribution of both is now available.

The report provides an overview of the resource by *type of action*, and by the *spatial and chronological distribution of events*. It then proceeds to review the *character* of the physical evidence and its *research potential* and *management needs*. Where appropriate, these issues have then been further developed through a number of more detailed *case studies* based both on existing work and new research undertaken within the project. Finally, a series of recommendations is given for further action.

This was primarily a desk-based assessment working mainly from secondary sources, data in the National Monuments Record (NMR) and Historic Environment Records (HER). The primary task was to enhance the Battlefield Trust's *UK Fields of Conflict database*, which was initially developed for assessment of Scottish battlefields. Where not specifically referenced in the present text, information on specific actions and features or evidence related to them will be found in the database. While this database does not claim to be comprehensive, it does aim to include all located battles and iconic lesser actions. To facilitate comparison, the classification follows the one already applied in Scotland. Ideally, assessment should be on a European scale.

Type of action distinguishes between battles (including any rout) and skirmishes, raids, sieges and civil unrest. Siege sites were to be excluded, but practical considerations, including the degree to which their archaeology is an essential complement to that of fields of conflict, have demanded that they be included to a limited degree though they need more intensive treatment equivalent to that given to battles. Naval actions are excluded because they represent a distinctly different resource which requires separate assessment.

As work progressed it became clear that different periods of warfare are reflected in sites of different *archaeological* (as distinct from other kinds) potential. This accordingly required a shift away from a policy of equal emphasis towards an approach wherein more attention is paid to sites and issues of the later medieval and especially the early modern periods, and correspondingly less to earlier periods. It also became clear that essential aspects of battle archaeology had never been

adequately characterized or defined, and so these too became prerequisites for the assessment of research potential and management needs.