Barnet and District Record Society
BULLETIN

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THE BATTLE OF BARNET, 1471

EASTER Sunday, 14th April, 1963, is of special significance to Barnet for exactly 492 years ago to the very day and date, on Easter Sunday, 14th April, 1471, the Battle of Barnet was fought.

There are several contemporary and near contemporary accounts of this remarkable battle. The earliest is "The Arrivall of King Edward IV, 1472" (edited by J. Bruce for the Camden Society, 1838). This was written by one of Edward's men either present at the battle or from eyewitnesses. Edward IV sent an abridged copy abroad (now at Ghent) so the chronicle has a high claim to authority, and has been used here as of first importance. J. Warkworth's "Chronicle-History of Edward IV" (printed, 1845) at Peterhouse, Cambridge, where the author was Master from 1473-98, is also contemporary, and was used by Leland and Stow. Two London accounts are contained in "The Great Chronicle of London" (c. 1512, edited by A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley, 1938); and "Fabyan's Chronicle," first printed in 1516, and in 1529 issued with others under the title of "The Pastyme of People: the Chronicles of dyvers Realmys," by John Rastell (died 1536), whose father-in-law lived locally, at Gobions near Potters Bar. Robert Fabyan was Sheriff of London, and Alderman from 1494-1503. He died in 1515. Polydore Vergil's account of the battle in his "Anglica Historia" was translated by Hall (died 1547) as were also the "Memoirs" of Philippe de Comines, died 1511. The second continuation of the "History of Croyland" has a further account, and there are a few references in the Paston Letters as Sir John and his brother of the same name fought in the battle. These seven or so accounts by no means agree in detail. Modern writers on the battle include F. C. Cass, "The Battle of Barnet" in *London and Middlesex Archæo. Trans.*, VI (1883); Col. A. H. Burne, *The Battlefields of England* (1950); P. M. Kendall, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (1951); and E. F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century* (1961). This short paper is an attempt to reconstruct from the foregoing a non-controversial description of the battle with its setting and results.

The battle marked the climax of the Wars of the Roses, for it settled the fate of two crowned heads and of the man who for long had been more powerful than either. This last was Warwick the Kingmaker, otherwise Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, son of Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, and husband of Anne Beauchamp, heiress through her parents of both the Beauchamps and the Dispensers. Warwick, aged 43 years, had far more lands and castles than any other Englishman, and his retainers, dressed in red coats with the Warwick badge of a bear with a ragged staff, were so numerous as to

form an army on their own. As for the two kings, Henry VI, aged 49. the great-great-grandson of Edward III through his father Henry V and his great-grandfather John of Gaunt, Earl of Lancaster, Edward III's fourth son, had for some years been fighting for the crown against Edward IV, another of Edward III's great-great-grandsons through Lionel, Duke of Clarence, and Edmund, Duke of York, Edward III's third and fifth sons. Warwick had first been the champion of Henry VI, but when the latter became ill had supported as permanent Regent Richard, Duke of York, Edward IV's father. On York's death in 1461 Warwick had declared Edward, Earl of March, king as Edward IV; and Queen Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI's wife, fled to France, her home country, with her young son Edward, Prince of Wales (later, in 1470, to marry Anne Neville, Warwick's younger daughter). To counteract possible French aid to the Lancastrians. Warwick now pursued a French alliance tied up with a French marriage for Edward IV. Meantime Edward IV was more attracted to his future brother-in-law Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy and ruler of the Low Countries, who was Louis XI's enemy. Edward IV's marriage in 1464 to Elizabeth Woodville was a public disavowal of Warwick's French policy and an attack on his all-powerful position. War consequently flared up again. Edward IV at length fled to the Low Countries and Warwick, supporting his old enemies, set up Henry VI as king again in London (October, 1470). In less than six months Edward IV, now 29 years old, received sufficient help from Charles the Bold to land, on 14th March, 1471, in Yorkshire with his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, and perhaps 2,000 men. Some 1,000 others soon joined him.

Edward IV marched southwards. As Warwick's supporters were not all assembled together, Warwick refused to do battle or treat with Edward IV at Coventry, the Kingmaker's headquarters at the time, and even allowed Edward to occupy Warwick Castle. Edward IV next began, on Friday, 5th April, to march swiftly to London, which was held for Henry VI by his guardian, Warwick's brother George Neville, Archbishop of York and Chancellor Edward travelled *via* Daventry (where he worshipped on Palm Sunday) and Northampton to St. Albans (9th April). Here he stayed the night. Meantime, on 7th April, Warwick followed Edward IV despite the defection, with a considerable body of men, of his son-in-law the Duke of Clarence, Edward IV's unstable brother — "false, perjured, fleeting Clarence." Also, Warwick had received no help from Louis XI of France, as Queen Margaret, her son and others remained stormbound in France. Others, like the Duke of Somerset, had gone to the West Country to await Queen Margaret's arrival. Reinforcements had, however, reached Warwick who, being fifty miles behind Edward IV, sent urgent letters to the City of London and to his brother, the Archbishop, entreating them to hold out if only for twenty-four to thirty-six hours. After a parade of the frail King Henry through the streets, and a meeting at St. Paul's, the Londoners decided otherwise; and Edward IV, who came *via* Newington and Shoreditch, was quietly admitted at Bishopsgate at 2 p.m. on Thursday, 11th April. The Archbishop made his peace and Henry VI became a prisoner. Edward

IV next visited his wife and new-born son (later Edward V) in sanctuary at Westminster, and he and Elizabeth stayed the night with his mother Cicely Neville, Duchess of York (Warwick's aunt). Edward IV spent the following day, Good Friday, 12th April, in religious observances, and rested himself and his men. On the afternoon of Saturday, 13th, instead of halting over Easter, as Warwick was hoping, Edward IV marched ten miles northwards out of London to meet his enemy for good or ill. With him went his prisoner, secretly in the rear. Gough's map of *circa* 1350 shows, as one of the five main roads out of London, the road to St. Albans passing through Barnet. Along this road went Edward IV and his augmented army, which now included a contingent of young picked men with the latest weapons of war[1]. In the opposite direction, from Coventry, came Warwick the Kingmaker. He passed through Northampton to St. Albans, where he too rested his men and stayed on Good Friday night. Next day he approached Barnet by the one and only road of that date, by way of South Mymms village, Dancers Hill and Kitts End to the present High Stone. He arrived in the vicinity of Barnet earlier in the day (Saturday) than his adversary and halted on Hadley Green, then called Gladmore Heath, the 400-foot plateau north of Barnet. This is the highest ground between London and York, and was described at the time as "a faire plain for twoo armies to ioyne together." About 300 yards south of the High Stone the 400-foot contour extends west and east of the road for a considerable distance, and here Warwick chose to draw up his men, half a mile or more from the little vill of Barnet. His men were in three "battles." The western one, under John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford, was protected by a hedge, parts of which, marking an ancient boundary, are still to be seen south and south-west of Old Fold Golf course. The centre "battle," made up of archers under the command of John Neville, Marquess Montagu (Warwick's brother, who had defected from Edward IV in 1470) lay across the road to Barnet. On the eastern side, possibly about 150 yards north of Hadley Church, was Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter; and behind was Warwick with the reserves. Scouts were sent into Barnet, on the edge of the great south-eastern hill, where the houses would have prevented a clear fight. At nightfall Edward IV reached Barnet. His scouts drove out Warwick's scouts as far as the hedge, and then the whole of Edward's army advanced beyond the houses onto the open common. There Edward IV performed a most difficult and unusual feat for those days: he drew up his men in battle array in the darkness — "it was right derke." Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Edward IV's youngest brother (later Richard III), a young man of 18 years, was on the right wing, which by a miscalculation overlapped the east wing of Warwick's men under Exeter. Lord Hastings commanded Edward IV's left wing, which was overlapped by the Lancastrian Earl of Oxford on Warwick's west flank. Edward IV and his brother, the Duke of Clarence, took the centre, with their prisoner Henry VI near at hand, to distress the enemy if the battle went well, and to be a hostage if there was a reverse. Some palisades were erected, and ditches dug, in case of a night attack. Edward's army was nearer the enemy than he had meant to be, so he kept his men as quiet as possible. Warwick had the more guns and he used

them all night, but his gunners overshot their enemy, whom they believed to be farther off, so little damage was done. The silence of the night was also broken by the neighing of horses, presumably in the rear of both armies and not used in the battle.

Just before daybreak, between four and five o'clock on that fateful Easter Day, Edward IV[2] impetuously attacked although it was unusually early for a battle and there was a great mist. His banners were advanced, his trumpets blew, and shots were fired from guns and bows. The bill-men then advanced and fierce handfighting ensued. Edward's left wing, attacked from the front and side, gave way and many fled through Barnet to London, followed by the Earl of Oxford's men, all unknown to the rest of the armies owing to the thick mist—" soo excedynge a myst." On the east side Warwick's men under the Duke of Exeter stood firm for some time, though sorely pressed. In the centre Edward IV did great deeds of valour and was well supported by his men with swords, spears and battle-axes, Warwick and his men also fought well and victory often seemed to be with them. Then confusion spoilt their chances. The Earl of Oxford, whose badge was a star with five points, returned with his men from chasing Hastings' men and from pillaging, and in the mist was attacked by Lord Montagu, who mistook the earl for Edward IV, who had a sun with rays as his badge. The Earl of Oxford, when he realised what was happening, believed that Montagu had turned traitor, raised the alarm, and soon fled with his men from the field of battle. Edward at this crucial moment put his fresh reserves into the fight, and these were decisive. Montagu was killed, and when defeat was only too clear the Earl of Warwick leapt on his horse and fled to a thick wood (Wrotham Park) in the rear of his army, and was there trapped and slain before, says Professor Kendall, a special messenger from Edward IV could prevent the deed[3]. Exeter, left for dead on the battlefield, was found nine hours later by one of his retainers. He was attended by a leech, and in disguise reached sanctuary at Westminster. Oxford also escaped. He fell in with some of Warwick's northern contingent and made for Scotland, but some say that he changed his course and went to Wales, to Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke, uncle of the future Henry VII. On Edward's side there fell Lord Cromwell, son and heir of the Earl of Essex; Lord Say, Lord Mountjoy's son and heir; and Sir Humphrey Bouchier, Lord Berner's son and heir.

The size of neither army can now be accurately ascertained[4] There is also a marked difference of opinion over the number slain. Probably nearest the truth is Fabyan, who says that above 1,500 lost their lives. This number agrees well with Sir John Paston (more than 1,000) and with Philippe de Comines, who says that Edward lost 400 men. The defeated side would naturally have lost more, and it is also known that Edward IV gave no quarter. The men-at-arms were buried on the battlefield and a small chapel erected, but by 1600 this had become a dwelling house, possibly Pimlico House. To the north of Hadley Church is land called Dead Man's Bottom, perhaps a memory of a last desperate fight. Farther west, on the site

of the ornamental pond in Wrotham Park, a few relics of the fight have been found.

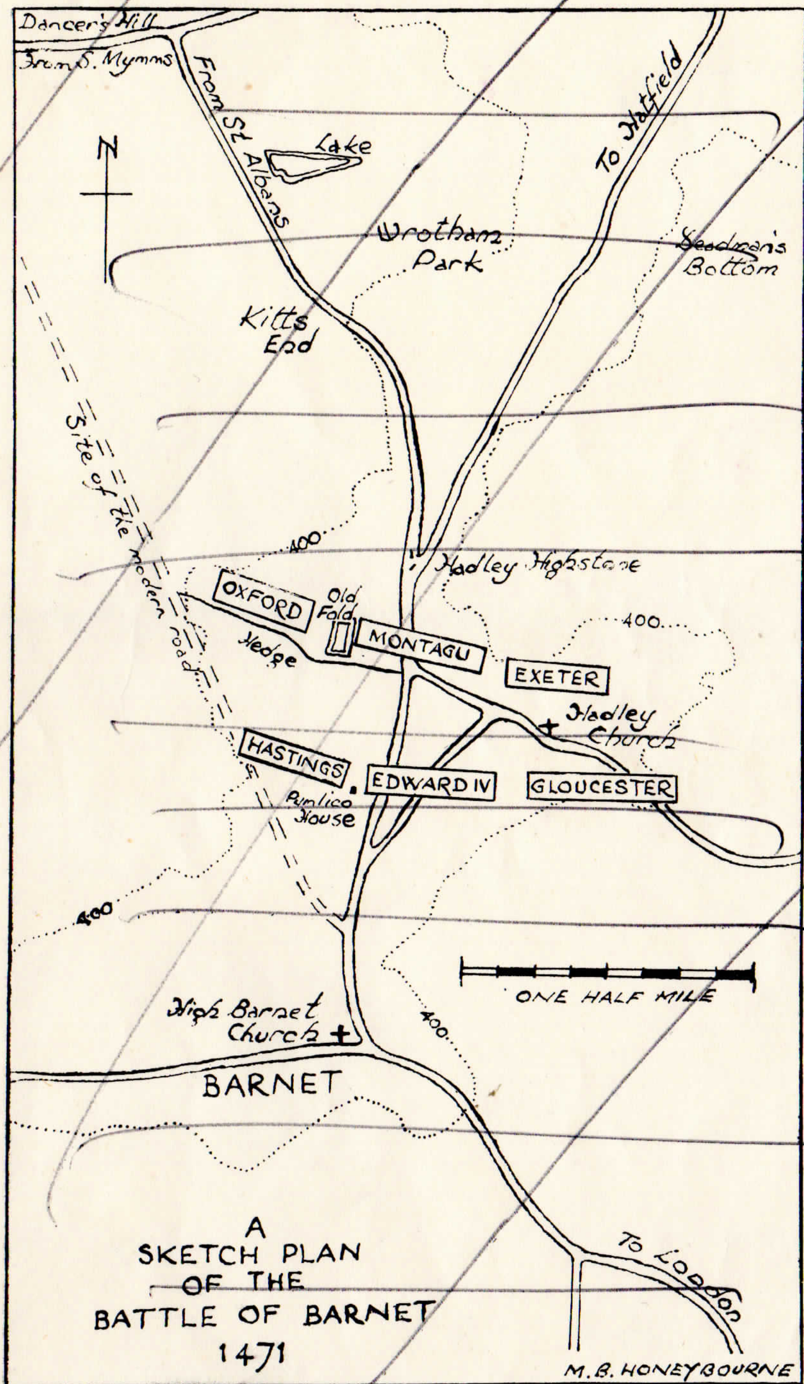
Owing to the mist the battle lasted longer than others of the fifteenth century. This time is variously given as three hours, six hours or even longer. What is certain is that the news of Edward IV's victory was known in London by about 10 o'clock in the morning. The Great Chronicle gives this time and also records that the Mayor and aldermen went to St. Paul's and caused the "Te Deum" to be sung, an example followed by most of the parish churches in the city. After the battle Edward IV and his host gave thanks to God, refreshed themselves a little in Barnet, and then returned in the afternoon to London, where the victor was royally received in St. Paul's Cathedral. He then rode to Westminster, where he stayed for a few days. At the rear of his train rode the deposed Henry VI, who was paraded through the city by way of Cheapside to Westminster, and thence to the Tower. The next day the bodies of Warwick and Montagu were exposed in St. Paul's, and then buried next to their father in Bisham Abbey. Warwick's widow, who had landed at Weymouth on the 13th or 14th April[5] with Queen Margaret, her son, his wife and others, immediately took sanctuary at Beaulieu. Edward IV went westwards and then north to defeat Queen Margaret at Tewkesbury on 4th May, 1471. After the battle her son, the Prince of Wales, was killed[6], and the queen was sent to the Tower. Edward IV returned to London on Tuesday, 21st May, two days before Ascension Day, and that same evening[7], between 11 and 12 at night, Henry VI was murdered. Most of the chroniclers say that the Duke of Gloucester "was nott all gyltlees" but both Professor Kendall and Professor Jacob say that Henry was put to death by Edward's order[8]. The body was exposed in St. Paul's and then conveyed by water to Chertsey for burial, but was later translated by Richard III, that same Duke of Gloucester, to Windsor.

In 1740 Sir Jeremy Sambrook, a local landowner, erected Hadley High Stone as near as possible to the place where Warwick fell. The inscription runs : "Here was fought the famous battle between Edward IV and the Earl of Warwick, April 14th, Anno 1471, in which the Earl was defeated and slain."

NOTES

1. See Hall's Chronicle. Were these picked men the trained bands of London?
2. The speeches of both leaders before the battle are recorded by Hall.
3. Hall says that Warwick was killed while on foot in the forefront of the battle. Warwick may have been killed while mounting his horse.
4. Warkworth says that Edward IV had 7,000 men. Professor Kendall has calculated that Edward IV had about 9,000 men, and Warwick 12,000.
5. *The Great Chronicle*, 432; Jacob, *op. cit.*, 568.
6. A year later (1472) his widow, Anne Neville, Warwick's daughter, married Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who became Richard III.
7. For the date and other details, see *The Great Chronicle*, 433.
8. "The Arrivall," a Yorkist account, attributes his death to "pure displeasure and melencly."

M. B. Honeybourne, 1963.


Dancer's Hill
From S. Mymms
From St Albans
Lake
To Hatfield
Wrotham Park
Deadman's Bottom
Kitts End
Site of the modern road
400
Hadley Highstone
OXFORD
Old Fold
MONTAGU
Hedge
400
EXETER
Hadley Church
HASTINGS
EDWARD IV
GLOUCESTER
Pimlico House
400
ONE HALF MILE
High Barnet Church
400
BARNET
To London
A SKETCH PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF BARNET 1471
M. B. HONEYBOURNE