

The Battle of Blore Heath

23rd September 1459

St Thecla's Day

Background

After St Albans Richard, Duke of York, returned to London with the King under his protection. His bid to be the preeminent noble was made easier by the death of his chief rival, Somerset, and his supporters Henry Percy and Thomas Lord Clifford at St Albans. Parliament made Richard Lord Protector in November 1455 and he attempted to rule via a Council of Peers. Unfortunately he did not have universal support and he resigned as Protector in February 1456.

In August 1456 the Queen, Margaret of Anjou, left London and moved to the Duchy of Lancaster in the Midlands with the infant Prince of Wales. The King joined her shortly after and a court was established in Coventry. Once established this court became a centre of power and a focal point of opposition to Richard. Importantly, the Royal Household was embodied in a location beyond the influence of both Richard and the Council of Peers.

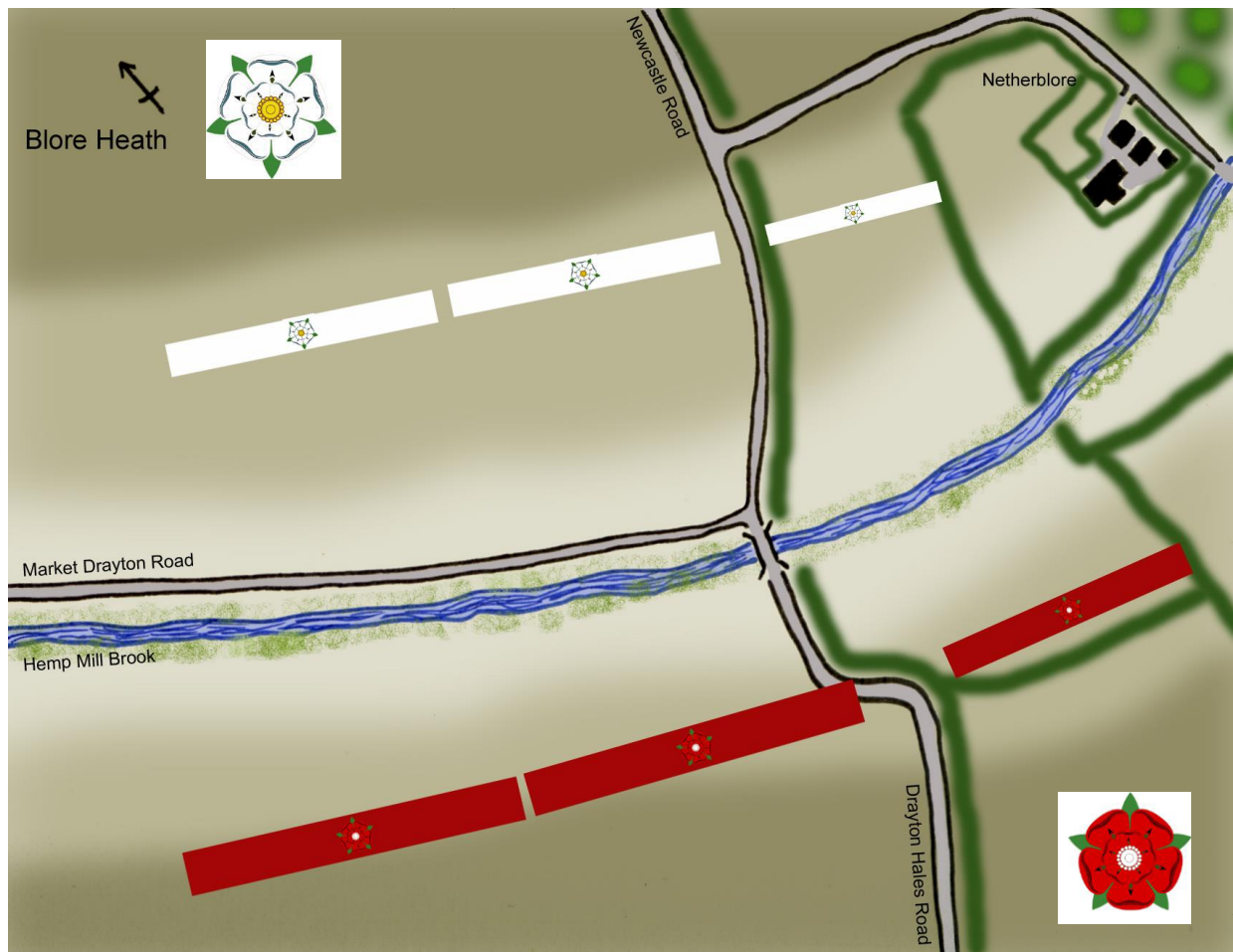
In London the Council of Peers continued to function as best it could trying to govern the country and maintain the peace in an ever-growing environment of violent disputes and outrages. In March 1458 an attempt was made to bring the brawling parties together in a ceremony of reconciliation under the king. This presented a problem for Richard however; If the nobles could be brought together and agreed to accept the King's Peace, then what role remained for the Council.

After the ceremony Margaret and the King returned to Coventry while York and the Nevilles remained in London and tried to continue to rule via an increasingly irrelevant Council. In the autumn of 1458 Margaret returned to London and made attempts to remove the Nevilles and other Yorkist supporters from their positions of power and influence. When an open attempt was made on Warwick's life Richard, Salisbury and Warwick all quit London, returning to their various estates.

In June the King called a Great Council – a meeting of all the Peers - to be held at Coventry. It was made clear that those who did not attend would be indicted. Seeing the writing on the wall the Yorkists began to muster their forces at Ludlow Castle in Shropshire, West Midlands near the Welsh border. In similar fashion the Lancastrians gathered their forces in Leicester.

Isolated in the north, at Middleham, Salisbury also began collecting his forces, and in September he moved south to link up with the main Yorkist army at Ludlow. Margaret was made aware of Salisbury's movements and she ordered James Tuchet, Lord Audley, to intercept him.

Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, came upon the Lancastrian host on the Newcastle-Shrewsbury Road in Staffordshire on 23rd September. Lord Audley's force was drawn up on the south side of the Hemp Mill Brook. Audley's host significantly outnumbered Salisbury so he took up a defensive posture on the northern bank. His line was posted on rising ground back from the brook with the bend of the stream covering his left and a laager formed by his baggage wagons on his right. When it was clear to Audley that Salisbury was not going to force a crossing he in turn moved forward.



Scenario specific rules

The ground on either side of the brook is a continuous, gentle slope. Lancastrian troops attacking up the northern slope will suffer the penalty for attacking uphill as per the rules.

The brook was a wide but fordable obstacle. To cross the brook;

1. moving troops stop at the edge of the brook,
2. on the following turn troops begin to cross the water
3. on the following turn place the troops on the opposite side of the brook
4. troops may continue moving normally on subsequent turns

The two moves spent crossing the water must be executed under a Regular or Piecemeal Approach. Both moves will require a "falter" check.



Yorkists



Mainward

Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury (Peer, Old Soldier)
2 X MAA
6 X Retinue bow
2 X Levy bow

Courage 4

John Neville, Marquis of Montague (Committed, Old Soldier)
Robert Ogle, Baron Ogle (Well-Wisher, Old Soldier)
2 X MAA
5 X Retinue bow
2 X Levy bow

Courage 4

Vanward

William Stanley (Uncommitted, Amateur, Trimmer)
1 X MAA
2 X Retinue bow
3 X Levy bow
1 X Levy bill

Courage 2

John Wenlock, Baron Wenlock (Well-Wisher, Old Soldier)
1 X MAA
3 X Retinue bow
3 X Levy bow

Courage 3

Rearward

Richard Grey, Baron Grey of Powis (Well-Wisher, Practiced)
1 X MAA
3 X Retinue bow
2 X Levy bow

Courage 3

Force Deployment

The Yorkist host should be deployed within bowshot of the northern bank of the brook.





Lancastrians



Vanward

Henry Howard, Duke of Exeter (Heir, Peer, Practiced, Bloodthirsty)
1 X MAA mounted
7 X Retinue hobilar

Courage 4

Lionel Welles, Baron Welles (Committed, Old Soldier)
1 X MAA mounted
6 X Retinue hobilar

Courage 4

Mainward

James Touchet, Baron Audley (Committed, Practiced, Impetuous)
2 X MAA
4 X Retinue bow
6 X Levy bow
2 X Levy bill

Courage 3

John Sutton, Baron Dudley (Well-Wisher, Practiced)
1 X MAA
3 X Retinue Bow
4 X Levy Bow
2 X Levy Bill

Courage 2

Rearward

John Bouchier, Lord Berners (Uncommitted [Y], Practiced)
1 X MAA
4 X Retinue Bow
3 X Levy bow
1 X Levy bill

Courage 1

Sir Hugh Calveley of the Lea (Captain)
1 X MAA
2 X Retinue bow
4 X Levy bow
2 X Levy bill

Courage 2

Historical Outcome

Salisbury had between 3000 and 6,000 men. He approached Hemp Mill Brook on the Newcastle to Market Drayton Road. Various accounts place Lord Audley's strength at between 6000 and 14,000 men. He deployed his men on the south of the brook. Some say they were concealed behind hedges in the hope of ambushing Salisbury as his force headed to the lower crossing; if this was the case then his men did a poor job of hiding as they were sighted by Salisbury who drew up his force on the rising ground north the brook.

Lord Audley's force significantly outnumbered Salisbury's and so the left of his line would have overlapped Salisbury's right to some degree. To counter this threat Salisbury formed his baggage train into a crude redoubt on that flank and perhaps reinforced it with a ditch and some stakes.

How the battle commenced is open to conjecture. Some say that when negotiations for a peaceful outcome failed Audley ordered an attack. Others suggest that Salisbury feigned withdrawing and this prompted an uncontrolled advance by Audley's semi-disciplined troops. If this was so then it seems at odds with the baggage train redoubt story. Another version has it that Yorkist archers descended the slope and so annoyed the Lancastrians that they crossed the stream and attacked.

Regardless of the cause all sources agree that Audley's men moved over the brook and assaulted Salisbury's position. A French source has the Lancastrian attack lead by cavalry. While this would have been a common sight on continental battlefields it was a rare tactic on English ones. This source also mentions the stakes and ditches; so perhaps he was describing what should have occurred on the field and not what actually happened.

The Lancastrians are reported to have made three assaults on the Yorkist line without breaking it. At some point in the action Audley was killed and Dudley captured. There are also reports that some Lancastrians changed sides. John Bouchier, Lord Berners, may have been the culprit, though he fought for the Lancastrian's both here and at First St Albans; he would shortly become a committed Yorkist.

With events turning against them and their attacks making no impression on the Yorkist line the Lancastrians broke and routed from the field. Most maps show them withdrawing westward along the north bank of the brook towards the lower ford and Market Drayton and not back across the stream. After the battle Salisbury continued on his way to Ludlow and joined Richard there.

Loses: York: 500, Lancaster: 2000

