

# The Battle of Towton

29<sup>th</sup> March 1461

St Zosimus Day

Palm Sunday

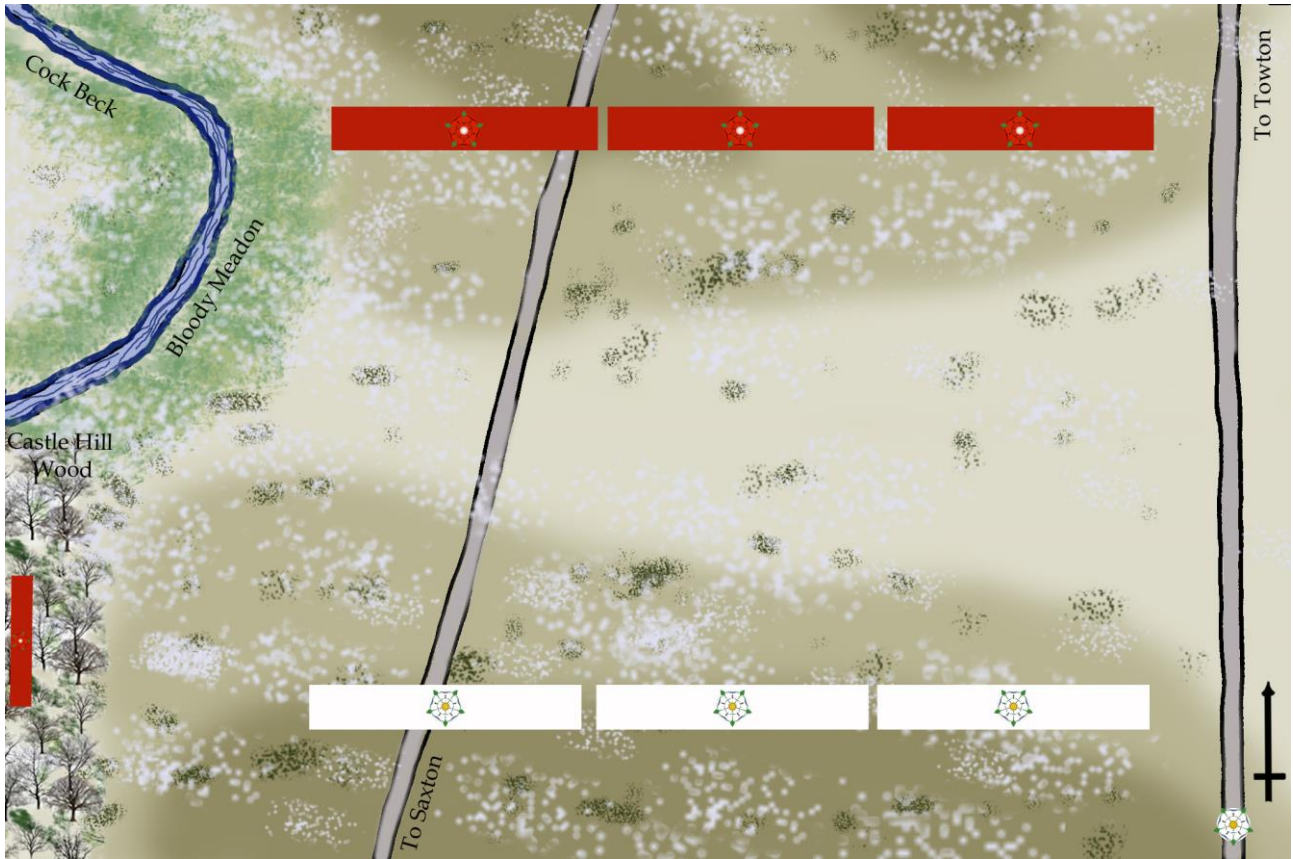
The Second Battle of St Albans was the high water mark for the Lancastrians in 1461. Following the victory Margaret, now with King Henry safe in her possession, moved the army south when she reached London her army's rapacious behaviour on its march from York now reaped a bitter harvest. The burghers of the city barred the gates and refused her entry. She tarried for a time outside the gates but when she received word of the Yorkist victory at Mortimer's Cross and that the Duke of Warwick had joined with the Duke of York she withdraw towards York.

On 26<sup>th</sup> February the Dukes of York and Warwick entered London and were welcomed as saviours of the city. On 4<sup>th</sup> March, riding this wave of popularity, the Duke of York proclaimed himself King Edward IV. Disappointingly his coronation would need to wait. The Lancastrian army was in retreat but it was not yet defeated. To bolster his army the call went out and Edward began troops from the south. Others would join him as he moved north. On 11<sup>th</sup> March Fauconberg led the Vanguard of the army out of the city and north towards York. Edward followed a few days later. The army grew as it marched as the summoned nobles brought in their men. Edward reach Pontefract Castle about ten miles from Towton on 27<sup>th</sup> March with a force of upwards of 20,000 men.

In York the Lancastrian leaders were aware of Edward's progress. To face this threat the army moved eight miles southwest and camped on a plateau just south of Towton. This position had many advantages. At this point, that the road from Pontefract to York passed through a defile formed by a bend in the Cock Beak and low marshland to the east. Thus the army would deploy on a narrow front of about 1,500 yards on high ground. A small advanced party was sent eight miles south to Ferrybridge on the River Aire to watch the road from Pontefract.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> a Yorkist force under John Radcliffe and Lord Fitzwalter attacked this picket force and seized the crossing. The Lancastrian defenders withdrew and reported this to their camp. John Lord Clifford was dispatched to retake the bridge. He arrived early in the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> and surprised and easily routed the Yorkist defenders. His men then set about destroying the bridge. Clifford's small triumph was short lived though as the main Yorkist army was on the move. The van of the Edward's host reached the vicinity of the bridge in the afternoon. Attempts were made to fight their way across the half ruined structure were stymied by the small defending force. It was not till Lord Fauconberg crossed the river a few miles to the west at Castlefort that a passage over the bridge was achieved. Clifford was killed in the ensuing rout, the first of many Lancastrians to meet that fate.

Edward's army crossed the river in the late afternoon and camped south of Towton around the village of Saxton. In the morning both armies deployed for what would be the bloodiest battle on English soil.





## Lancastrians (Option 1)

### Vanward

Henry Percy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Northumberland

(Anti-Neville and York, Committed, Practiced [1 stm], Impetuous, Peer,)

(2s ic Ranulph Dacre, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Dacre of Gilisland)

- 3 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 2 Levy Bow

Courage 4

William Tailboys of Kyme

(Committed, Practiced, Bloodthirsty, Impetuous)

(2ic Henry Fitzhugh, 5<sup>th</sup> Baron Fitzhugh)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 2 Levy Bow

Courage 4

### Mainward

Henry Beaufort, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Somerset

(Anti-York, Committed, Audacious [3 stm], Peer,)

(2ic Robert Hungerford)

- 3 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bow
- 2 Levy Bill

Courage 4

Thomas Courtenay

(2ic Anthony Wydville)

(Committed, Amateur, Peer,)

- 3 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bow
- 2 Levy Bill

Courage 4

### Rearward

Henry Holland, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Exeter

(Anti-York, Committed, Practiced [1 stm], Bloodthirsty, Heir,)

(2ic Thomas de Roos, 9<sup>th</sup> Baron Roos)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 2 Levy Bow

Courage 4

Lionel Welles, 6<sup>th</sup> Baron Welles

(Pro-Beaufort, Committed, Old Soldier [2 stm],)

(Richard West, 7<sup>th</sup> Baron de la Warre)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 2 Levy Bow

Courage 4

## Lancastrians (Option 2)



### Vanward

Henry Percy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Northumberland

(Anti-Neville and York, Committed, Practiced [1 stm], Impetuous, Peer)

(2s ic Ranulph Dacre, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Dacre of Gilisland)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

William Tallboys of Kyme

(Committed, Practiced, Bloodthirsty, Impetuous)

(2ic Henry Fitzhugh, 5<sup>th</sup> Baron Fitzhugh)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

### Mainward

Henry Beaufort, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Somerset

(Anti-York, Committed, Audacious [3 stm], Peer,)

(2ic Robert Hungerford)

- 3 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 1 Levy Bow
- 2 Levy Bill

Courage 4

Thomas Courtenay

(2ic Anthony Wydville)

(Committed, Amateur, Peer,)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bow
- 2 Levy Bill

Courage 4

### Rearward

Henry Holland, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Exeter

(Anti-York, Committed, Practiced [1 stm], Bloodthirsty, Heir,)

(2ic Thomas de Roos, 9<sup>th</sup> Baron Roos)

- 3 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

Lionel Welles, 6<sup>th</sup> Baron Welles

(Pro-Beaufort, Committed, Old Soldier,)

(Richard West, 7<sup>th</sup> Baron de la Warre)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 2 Levy Bill
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

### Reserve Ward (Bushment)

John Neville, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Neville of Raby

(Committed, Practiced [1 stm], Impetuous,)

- 1 MAA mounted & 5 Hobilars

Courage 4

# Yorkists



## Vanward

William Neville, 6<sup>th</sup> Baron Fauconberg,  
(Committed, Old Soldier [2 stm],)  
(2ic Edward Neville, 8<sup>th</sup> Baron Abergavenny \*)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

Edward Brooke, 6<sup>th</sup> Baron Cobham,  
(Committed, Practiced, Loyalty)  
(2ic William Fiennes, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Say & Sele)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

## Mainward

Edward Plantagenet, Earl of March  
(Committed, Audacious [3 stm], Merciful, Heir,)  
(2ic William Bourchier, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Bourchier \*)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

William Bourchier, Baron Fitz-Warine  
(Committed, Amateur)  
(2ic John de la Pole, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Suffolk)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

## Rearward

Richard Neville, 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick  
(Anti-Percy, Committed, Practiced [1 stm] Artifices, Peer,)  
(2ic John Scrope, 5<sup>th</sup> Baron Scrope)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

John Clinton, 5<sup>th</sup> Baron Clinton  
(Committed, Amateur)  
(2ic Robert Ogle, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Ogle)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

## Reserve Ward

John de Mowbrey, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Norfolk  
(Committed, Practiced [1 stm], Lethargy, Peer,)  
(2ic Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy)

- 2 MAA
- 6 Retinue Bow
- 1 Levy Bow

Courage 4

\* These nobles have precedence. That is they will become the ward commanders upon the death of the current ward commander.

## Scenario specific rules

1. The Lancastrians have two set-up options. They can choose Option 1 and deploy all their troops in their three standard wards along the high ground at the north end of the table. Alternatively they can form four wards with the Reserve Ward being placed in a Bushment in Castle Hill Wood, Option 2.

The selected Lancastrian deployment option will be kept secret. The umpire will place all four Lancastrian ward chits in the draw cup and the Lancastrians can respond or not as they please when that Reserve Ward chit is drawn thus maintaining the illusion of an existing Bushment or the reality of one.

2. The battle was fought in a snowstorm with the wind coming from the south. This had a significant impact on the opening of the battle.

- Both sides will deploy within 26" of each other.
- The battle will commence with all three Yorkist wards activating together.
- All Yorkist Flight archery will benefit from plus one to its Intensity.
- All Lancastrian Flight archery will suffer minus one from its Intensity.
- Yorkist longbow fire will have its range increased to 24" for Flight and 10" for Sheaf.

3. Norfolk was late to arrive on the field. To allow for this at the start of turn five the Yorkist Reserve Ward chit and two Lethargy chits will be placed in the draw cup. If a Lethargy chit is drawn first the Yorkist Reserve Ward will not arrive that turn. If the Reserve Ward chit is drawn then that Yorkist Ward will enter on the Towton Road on the southern edge of the table. They will be in march column on the road and under a march order.

## Victory Conditions

The side that holds the field at the end of the game will be the victor.

## Historical Outcome

The Lancastrians are reported to have had 30,000 to 35,000 men on the field while the Yorkists had 25,000 to 30,000. It should be remembered though that Norfolk, with perhaps 5,000 men, had not yet arrived and so the Yorkists may have had as few as 20,000 at the start of the battle.

While numbers favoured the Lancastrians Nature sided with York. The 29<sup>th</sup> March was blighted by a snowstorm that blew, advantageously for Edward, from the south. With the wind at their backs Lord Fauconberg ordered the Yorkist archers forward and opened the battle with a shower of wind assisted arrows on the Lancastrian host. The Lancastrians bowmen returned fire but with the snow in their faces and the wind against them their fire was markedly less effective. This contest continued for some time till the Lancastrian leadership realized that they were getting the poorer end of the exchange and ordered a general advance.

They descended from the high ground, crossed the swale and advanced up the gentle slope to engage the waiting Yorkist. At the same time the small mounted force concealed in Castle Hill Wood broke cover and charged the Yorkist left. The contest was bitter and continued, supposedly, for several hours with the Yorkists gradually giving ground. The fight had almost been decided in the Lancastrian's favour when Norfolk arrived on the Towton Road.

This reinforcement turned the tide on the Yorkist right and then progressively across the front. Soon the whole Lancastrian host was in full flight to the north and west. Yorkist Hobilars turned the retreat into a rout and the Lancastrians were slaughtered. The massacre was greatest in the bend of the Cock Beck west of the battlefield as the fleeing Lancastrians attempted to cross the river there. Such was the loss of life here that the area has been called Bloody Meadow ever since.

The final tally of loses is not know. Some chroniclers put it as high as 36,000 though modern writers favour a lower, but no less horrific, figure of 20,000, with the Yorkist suffering perhaps a third of that total. Not till July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916 would England see such casualties as these again. Not only was the Lancastrian army destroyed but also its leadership was decimated. The Earl of Northumberland, the Duke of Buckingham and lords Dacre, Welles, Willoughby and Mauley were slain. Also among the fallen was that old soldier, the newly knighted, Sir Andrew Trollope. The Earl of Wiltshire escaped, yet again, but this time his luck ran out and he was caught and executed. The surviving leaders fled to York where Margaret and Henry had waited out the battle. They did not tarry long there and were soon on the road north to Scotland.

Edward entered York early on the 30<sup>th</sup> March and took down the heads of his father the Duke of York, his brother Edmund and the Earl of Salisbury. In their place were mounted those of killed Lancastrian leaders. Edward also released several Yorkist captives who were being held there. He also pardoned a number of Lancastrians but his mercy had its limits and 42 knights, nobles and lords taken on the field of Towton or during the rout, were executed. Edward saw out Easter in the northern city before returning to London. With his rival in exile and with no army to oppose him Edward's claim to the throne was secure and his delayed coronation took place.