

## **The Civil War of 1459 to 1461 in the the Welsh Marches: Part 2 The Campaign and Battle of Mortimer's Cross – St Blaise's Day, 3 February 1461**

**by Geoffrey Hodges**

Recounting the bloodless battle of Ludford is relatively simple, as it is well documented. A large royal army was involved, with a fair amount of material resulting for official records and for the London chroniclers. The battle of Mortimer's Cross, however, was fought when all attention in the south-east of the kingdom was taken up by the advance of the Queen's ravaging hordes on London. The activities of Edward, Earl of March are wrapped in much obscurity; it is not at all clear what happened between the passing of the act of accord on 29 November 1460 (making the Duke of York heir to Henry VI), and the meeting between Edward and the Earl of Warwick in the Cotswolds on about 22 February 1461 -except, of course, the battle of Mortimer's Cross itself. One cannot be dogmatic about any link in this chain of events, but it is surely one of the most extraordinary stories in the annals of England and Wales, and well worth attempting to piece together.

### **Activities of the Adversaries before the Battle**

What Edward's adversary, Jasper Tudor, was doing in the same period is no more certain, but it is fairly clear that, after the defeat and capture of Henry VI at Northampton on 10 July 1460, Queen Margaret fled from Coventry into Wales. Gregory says that she made first for Harlech, 'and there hens she remeyvd fulle prevely unto the Lorde Jesper, Lorde and Erle of Penbroke, ... ', who was probably at Pembroke Castle.<sup>1</sup> Jasper seems to have grasped the strategic importance of Milford Haven as the only Welsh harbour equally accessible from France, Ireland and Scotland.<sup>2</sup> It looks as though he and the queen (his sister-in-law and distant cousin) now planned the royalist response to the Yorkist victory; his duty would be to prepare and lead against the Yorkists in the middle Marches of Wales an expedition whose starting point would be Pembroke.

The movements of James Butler, Earl of Wiltshire and Ormond, who was to be Jasper's second-in-command, seem to fit these conjectures. Wiltshire owed his English title to his popularity with the queen, and then inherited the Irish earldom which made him the head of the Butler clan. There had been doubts about his courage since he had fled from the first battle of St Albans. As Treasurer he had participated in an ugly act of terrorism against Newbury, a town belonging to the Duke of York, who named him, together with the Earl of Shrewsbury and Viscount Beaumont, as 'oure mortalle and extreme enemyes'.<sup>3</sup> Immediately after this had come the Yorkist landing in Kent, and Wiltshire had promptly fled to Holland, thus escaping the fate of Shrewsbury and Beaumont at Northampton.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps while in Holland he received orders from the Queen at Pembroke, to ask for French and Breton reinforcements, and to arrange for a contingent of his own clansmen to be ready at Waterford or Wexford. This would account for the French, Bretons and Irish whom he is reported to have brought to Mortimer's Cross. Pembroke Castle, well sheltered up its river on Milford Haven, would appear to be the obvious place for the disembarkation of these foreign troops.<sup>5</sup>

The queen's plans for the main offensive, from the north, are much better known. She sailed to Scotland about mid-October (probably from Pembroke), accompanied by the Duke of Exeter, to negotiate with the Scottish Queen, Mary of Guelders, widowed since the accidental death of James II at the siege of Roxburgh Castle in August. Scotland would provide troops for Margaret's northern army, in exchange for the cession of Roxburgh and Berwick.<sup>6</sup> The French Queen of England was in effect reviving the Auld Alliance between Scotland and France, by thus bidding for Franco-Scottish help in restoring the pro-French Lancastrian regime, more acceptable to France than the bellicose Yorkists, who were unwilling to abandon the Plantagenet claim to the French throne. Queen Margaret had also ordered the Duke of Somerset and Earl of Devon to bring further powerful reinforcements from the west country, which joined her already formidable northern army at Hull, early in December 1460.<sup>7</sup>

The new Yorkist government had been prompt to send orders to the leading Yorkists in the southern Welsh Marches. Sir William Herbert of Raglan, who had quickly rejoined the Yorkist party after Northampton, his half-brother Roger Vaughan of Tretower (near Brecon), and several Herefordshire esquires, notably Walter Devereux of Weobley, James Baskerville of Eardisley, Henry ap Gruffydd of Vowchurch (described by William Worcester as 'a man of war'), Richard Croft of Croft Castle, and Thomas Monington of Sarnesfield. All except Croft had been involved in the Yorkist invasion of South Wales in 1456; but only Devereux, and possibly Croft, had come to help York at Ludford. They were ordered to arrest people breaking the peace, and specifically two Herefordshire members of the last parliament, Sir John Barre and Thomas Fitzharry, though without success. Fitzharry, who was a lawyer, and chamberlain in South Wales, now joined Jasper Tudor. The fact that the principal commission was also addressed to Edward, Earl of March, and to several Shropshire gentry, does not alter the impression that the Yorkist centre of gravity lay in Herefordshire; most of the leaders of the 1456 expedition came from that shire, and so did most of Edward's companions at Mortimer's Cross. Although

Monington and Baskerville are not in Worcester's list, they are likely to have been there too, particularly Baskerville, whom the Yorkist government had appointed sheriff in 1460.<sup>8</sup>

The Duke of York finally returned from Ireland, where he had remained in virtual inactivity, in September 1460. He passed through Shrewsbury, Ludlow and Hereford; according to Jean de Waurin, the gentry of the Ludlow area were joined by the '*seigneurs du pays de Galles*' in urging York to take the throne, because of his descent from Lionel of Clarence.<sup>9</sup> Though Waurin does not mention the Mortimer connection, that was what mattered; as Hall was to put it, 'the people on the Marches of Wales ... above measure favored ye lynage of the Lord Mortimer ...'<sup>10</sup> Waurin presumably refers to Herbert, Devereux and their affinity. Herbert had been a councillor of York for many years; being now firmly recommitted to the Yorkist cause, he may have felt that the time had now passed for any kind of compromise with Henry VI, such as Edward and the Nevilles had effected since Northampton. The queen would not forgive Herbert for his apostasy and he, a ruthless and ambitious man with a record of lawless opposition to Lancaster, may have thought it in his interest to put York forward as king. If this is so, he badly misjudged the mood of the Earls in London, who were strongly opposed to York's demands, as also, according to Waurin, were the Londoners.<sup>11</sup> The act of accord compromised by making York Henry's heir. York then took the field as regent and protector against the Lancastrians in Yorkshire, who could now legally be classed as rebels. This expedition ended fatally for him, his son Rutland and most of their troops at Wakefield on 30 December 1460; Salisbury was beheaded afterwards at Pontefract.<sup>12</sup>

Edward, Earl of March went to Shrewsbury when York left for the north. It is important to consider what were his likely intentions; it has been supposed that his mission was to recruit troops to help his father. But by this time York's record of failure was so disastrous that little good may have been expected of his northern enterprise; its ruinous outcome may well have confirmed the worst fears both of Edward (now Duke of York and heir to the throne) and of Warwick. It may reasonably be inferred that Edward and his Marcher councillors – Herbert, Devereux and the others – were unanimous in thinking that never again must the Marches, the cornerstone of Yorkist power, be exposed to such a disaster as Ludford, and that the immediate threat was from Jasper Tudor. Until this threat was dealt with there could be no question of leaving the Marches unguarded; even had he wished to do so, Edward could hardly have persuaded the Marchmen to follow him, which, however, they were very eager to do after Mortimer's Cross.<sup>13</sup>

If this reasoning is correct, it follows that the Yorkists were already keeping a close watch on Jasper; their predecessors, who in the past had held Ludlow and Wigmore for Mortimer and York, had presumably always been used to gathering political and military intelligence in Wales. They had a listening post far to the west at Kidwelly, home of the Yorkist family of Dwnn; later Jasper was to put most of the blame for the disaster at Mortimer's Cross on 'traitors March, Herbert and Dwnns'; John Dwnn, head of the family, was very probably present at the battle.<sup>14</sup>

Most contemporary chroniclers say that Edward kept Christmas at Shrewsbury, according to the *Annales* at a house of friars. The *Short English Chronicle* is alone in saying that he was at Gloucester, and that when he heard the news of Wakefield, 'and how the north was reysed like as it is a for wretyn commyng southwarde, than a none he dide sende in to dyverse shires of knowlache, and sone after he hadde xxx M<sup>1</sup> of gode men commyng to fight vith hem.'<sup>15</sup> Hall, perhaps seeing the inconsistency, returns Edward to Shrewsbury, where he was overwhelmed with offers of help. In fact Margaret was still in Scotland at the time of Wakefield, and only when she had joined her army did the march on London begin, about the beginning of February. The commission sent to Edward on 12 February to array the men of all the shires from Stafford to Dorset was probably Warwick's reaction both to the news of Mortimer's Cross and to that of the queen's advance; it could explain why the *Short English Chronicle* and Hall report that Edward raised a massive army.<sup>16</sup>

There is, in fact, no evidence that Edward did assemble a large army either at Shrewsbury, or when he received this commission. The signs are that, despite his grief, he kept a very cool head, as he was always to do at times of danger, and that the news of Wakefield prompted no precipitate move. Nothing dramatic seems to have happened during the next month, until the battle of Mortimer's Cross. The *Short English Chronicle* and Hall imply that the news of Jasper's advance was a bolt from the blue, and interfered with plans for a supposed punitive expedition into the north.<sup>17</sup> Certainly Edward must have wanted to avenge his father's death, but to launch a second foolhardy and dangerous assault on the queen's mighty northern power was hardly the way to do it. The defeat of Jasper was the first priority, and the terse account in the *Brut Chronicle*, followed almost word for word in three other chronicles, bears this out:

'And this tyme, therl of Marche beyng in Shrewsbury, hering the deth of his fadre, desired Assistance & Ayd of the town for tavenge his fadres deth; & fro thense went to Walys, wher, at Candelmasse after, he had A batail at Mortimess Crosse Ayenst therles of Penbrok & of Wilshire ...'<sup>18</sup>

The phrase 'went to Walys' may safely be construed as meaning 'to Wigmore': an appendix to the *Brut Chronicle* refers to 'the bateyle of Wygmore', the *Annales* say '*bellum prope Wigmore*', and Davies'

*English Chronicle* places the battle 'besyde Wymore in Wales'.<sup>19</sup> There is no suggestion here of any large army joining Edward at Shrewsbury, of Jasper's advance being any surprise, or of Edward having any intention of leaving the Welsh Marches until Jasper had been beaten. This tradition fits the political and strategic realities of the situation better than does the *Short English Chronicle*; but because Hall has followed it, this latter view of the campaign has always attracted more attention, with its suggestion that Edward was only able to return in the nick of time to defend Wigmore against Jasper.

Yorkist intelligence reports of the foreign contingent under the earl of Wiltshire arriving at Pembroke may not have been expected, and possibly explain the tradition that Edward was taken by surprise. The *Short English Chronicle* also hints that Jasper himself had been overseas to recruit troops, in which it is supported by Lewis Glyn Cothi. But the idea is dismissed by R. S. Thomas, who points out that Wiltshire, with experience in France and estates in Ireland, is much more likely to have performed this task. In any case, one feels that Jasper's place of duty during those months of preparation was at Pembroke.<sup>20</sup>

The signs are, therefore, that the Yorkists based themselves on Wigmore and Ludlow, where they could wait in comfort for the situation to develop, and plan to meet the enemy on ground of their own choosing. With time on his side, Edward would not have needed the expensive luxury of keeping a large army to feed and pay. Also, the formidable group of men who now came to his aid were, with few exceptions, from the southern Marches, and mostly from Herefordshire.<sup>21</sup> Edward, who had spent several years with his brother Rutland at Ludlow, presumably knew most of them well; we have the anecdote of the squabble between the York boys and the older Croft brothers.<sup>22</sup> William Herbert, his brother Richard, his half-brother Roger Vaughan, his brother-in-law Walter Devereux, Richard Croft, Henry ap Gruffydd and John Lingen of Sutton were all with him; Lingen was one of those denied a pardon after the 1456 expedition. John Milewater senior, of Stoke Edith, had been receiver for the Duke of York in the Marches, and had been rewarded, like Herbert, for his neutrality at Ludford. His son and namesake, however, 'a man of the war of France', had been pardoned for some seditious activity, and joined Edward. Other veterans of the French war were Walter Mytton, of Weston-under-Lizard in Staffordshire, who bore a name well known in Shropshire and had recently received a pardon from the queen. Another was Philip Vaughan, probably one of the men pardoned after the 1456 affair, described by Worcester as captain of Hay, and 'the most noble esquire of lances among all the rest'. The majority of Edward's companions named by Worcester, besides those already mentioned, bore Herefordshire names like Knill, Brydges, Walwayn, Hackluyt, Baynham, Thomas, Blewett and Wellington; 'Mr. Harper of Wellington, a man of war', had been pardoned after Ludford, together with other members of his family and Richard Croft.<sup>23</sup> There were two brothers of Roger Vaughan who are not named by Worcester but could well have been present: Watkin of Bredwardine and Thomas of Hergest; the latter had been in the 1456 expedition and pardoned afterwards.<sup>24</sup> There was one Herefordshire peer, Lord Grey of Wilton. Lord Fitzwalter from Norfolk, Lord Audley from Cheshire and Humphrey Stafford of Southwick had probably come with Edward from London. Audley, who had succeeded his father (slain at Blore Heath), and Stafford had become Yorkists recently after being captured while serving with the Duke of Somerset in his attempt to take Calais.<sup>25</sup>

It is most unlikely that the army which accompanied these officers was anything like as large as that indicated in the *Short English Chronicle*, but probably only two or three thousand at the most. But it was very likely a picked force of household retainers, mostly raised in Herefordshire, with emphasis on quality rather than quantity, and with the inestimable advantage that they would be fighting in defence of their own land. This was literally true of Croft, Lingen and their men, whose homes were right behind the battlefield at Croft and Aymestrey (where these two gentlemen were ultimately buried).

Jasper's army seems to have been neither as strong nor as compact. It contained men speaking five different languages; we know nothing of the numbers, quality or leadership of the foreign troops, except for Wiltshire who 'fled the field at the start of battle', according to Worcester. Jasper was certainly a brave, tenacious and resourceful man, without whose tireless labours Henry Tudor would never have won the throne in 1485. His Welshmen were probably his best troops, but apart from Sir Thomas Perot of Haverfordwest and Owen Tudor, they were led by esquires of Pembroke, Carmarthen and Gower who seem to have lacked military experience; two were sons of Gruffydd ap Nicholas, notable for his rebellious behaviour in the 1450s. There were, however, the four Scudamores, of Kentchurch in Herefordshire, described by Worcester as 'knights in arms in France' and 'knights for Queen Margaret'; Sir John had served at Agincourt in the retinue of Henry V, as perhaps had his brother Sir William. Sir James and Sir Henry were sons of Sir John. There was another Englishman, John Throckmorton of Tewkesbury; a 'mainpinner' of William Herbert in the sedition of 1456, he had been pardoned and had joined the court party.<sup>26</sup>

### **The March to the Battlefield**

The next question to consider is when this army began its march, presumably from Pembroke. The answer is probably as soon as possible after the arrival of the foreign troops, if indeed they came as one expedition and with Wiltshire. They may well have been late, delayed by bad weather, which would explain the gap of nearly a month between Jasper's hearing the news of Wakefield (perhaps a week

after the event) and the battle of Mortimer's Cross. The march there from Pembroke can hardly have taken more than ten days at most; it is only about 110 miles. Jasper can therefore hardly have set out much before 25 January, and he would not have wanted to keep the foreigners kicking their heels a day longer than was necessary for their recovery from the voyage. It looks as though they arrived after the middle of January, and the news should have reached Edward in under a week; in 1485 Richard III, near Nottingham, heard of the arrival of the Tudors at Milford Haven, two hundred miles away, in only five days.<sup>27</sup> It all confirms the impression that time was on the side of the Yorkists.

They also seem to have had the advantage of being able to choose the site of the coming battle, as Robert Bruce did in 1314 at Bannockburn, on the road which Edward II would have to take if he was to relieve the English garrison at Stirling. A Lancastrian attack on Wigmore and Ludlow appears to have been certain. In that case, and if the enemy advanced from the direction of Brecon, the obvious place to meet them would be Mortimer's Cross. Geographically it is a remarkable place. Two valleys, cutting through the limestone escarpment whose dip slope rises gently from the north Herefordshire plain, meet there at right angles. The western one, with a farm called Covenhope at its summit, was an interglacial course of the River Lugg – the Afon Llugwy, 'the brilliant, shining river', which enters the eastern valley at Aymestrey, a mile to the north. From here it runs east of, and parallel to, the Roman road, which at Mortimer's Cross intersects the road from Ludlow to Presteigne and central Wales. Two hundred yards south of the cross-roads, the main road veers left to Kingsland, while the Roman road continues as a straight, narrow lane. Here tradition has left two sign-posts: the cottage called Blue Mantle, still the title of a royal pursuivant, and the site of the once mighty Battle Oak. This marks the centre of a frontage of about a quarter of a mile: to the left is the Lugg, and to the right a steep, gradually rising bank which forms the left side of the Covenhope valley. It looks a most promising site for a battle such as the Yorkists may have been planning, with well protected flanks, and slopes on the right which were probably wooded in those days and seem admirably suited for the use of archers to deliver an arrow storm on the left of an advancing enemy force. Guns could also have been placed here, if any were available after the systematic stripping of the Yorkist castles which John Judde, master of the ordnance, had been ordered to carry out after Ludford.<sup>28</sup>

It must be emphasised that Edward's companions were heirs to a very long tradition of defending Wigmore and Ludlow. The late Sir Walter Devereux had been constable of Wigmore Castle, which overlooks a wide basin surrounded by hills except to the north and south; west of it is the tangled hill country, of steep slopes and little valleys, through the south of which flows the Lugg; it was formerly known as the *gwig mawr* – great forest – from which Wigmore may take its name.<sup>29</sup>

There can be very little doubt that Jasper and his army, having passed through Carmarthen and reached Llandovery at the head of the Towy valley, then took the road to Brecon in the Usk valley. The summit of this road is at 850 feet near Trecastle. From Brecon, a friendly town belonging to the late Duke of Buckingham, the road on into Herefordshire by way of the north bank of the Wye at Glasbury is easy, as is the road to Leominster past Sarnesfield and Weobley. Jasper was undertaking a midwinter march, well outside the normal campaigning season; he required food for some thousands of troops and followers, and forage for hundreds of horses. These considerations, when added to the season and to the possibility of blizzards and severe cold, virtually rule out the alternative route from Llandovery: it crosses the exposed Sugarloaf Pass at 950 feet, goes through sparsely inhabited country around Builth and New Radnor – both Yorkist lordships – between which is the 1250 foot pass at Forest Inn. There are two further reasons for the Brecon route, and against this one. First, in view of the apparent delay, Jasper had every possible reason for haste, and so would choose the easier route. Secondly, the Brecon route, not the Builth one, gives the approach to Mortimer's Cross which alone makes military sense of that site.

The first historian to have understood the defensive merits of Mortimer's Cross seems to have been Flavell Edmunds, writing in 1851; the accompanying plan is based on his.<sup>30</sup> He did not, however, concern himself with the question of the approach route, which Mary Clive, in a recent biography of Edward IV, saw was most likely to have been by way of Brecon.<sup>31</sup> Another Victorian writer, W. S. Symonds, wrote a wildly fanciful novel favouring the view that the enemy approached Mortimer's Cross from Presteigne. This was the opinion of Howell Evans, who favoured the Builth route, but whose plan shows that he cannot have visited the battlefield; his book is, however, a thorough and fully documented political analysis, and contains the most complete account of the Ludford and Mortimer's Cross campaigns yet written.<sup>32</sup> Three recent writers on battlefields, who do not bother with the political or strategic implications, also show the Yorkists awaiting an advance from Presteigne, and with their backs to the river Lugg. It is curious that none seems to have visited the Mortimer's Cross Inn, where there is a beautifully drawn plan based on the Edmunds theory (as is the excellent display in the Hereford City Museum).<sup>33</sup> Nothing that we know of Edward, the boldest and most aggressive commander of his day, or of the experienced captains who were with him, suggests that they would have waited for the enemy in such a bad position; if the enemy really had been coming from the west, the Yorkists would have known of the obviously advantageous position at Byton Hand, between Presteigne and Shobdon, where

they could have caught him between a steep hill and a bog. Edward had been present at both Ludford and Northampton, where on each occasion the defenders had been beaten with their backs to a river.

### The Battle

What actually happened, then, and on which day? The argument is that the Yorkists were waiting for the enemy, well informed about his movements by relays of mounted scouts. It is highly probable that Edward and his staff used Croft Castle as an advance base in the final stages of the campaign: it is only two miles from Mortimer's Cross, with matchless views across north Herefordshire to the Black Mountains. The main army could have been at Wigmore (four miles away) and Ludlow (ten miles away), where there would have been no logistical problems, until the enemy were two days' march from Mortimer's Cross. However they managed it, the Yorkists were not caught napping; on the contrary, the tradition that they were waiting in ambush may be reflected in a verse by the Elizabethan poet John Daniel:

'Now like the libian lion when with paine  
The weary hunter hath pursued his prey

.....

Out rushing from his denne rapt all away  
So comes young Marche their hopes to disappoint. ...<sup>34</sup>

The battle was most likely fought on St Blaise's Day, 3 February. The two best informed writers are quite definite about this: William Worcester and the 'English Chronicler'. They are supported by the Italian merchant, Prospero Camulio, writing on 11 March 1461 to Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan; also by John Benet.<sup>35</sup> The *English Chronicle* is very emphatic:

'The iij<sup>de</sup> day of Feuerer ... , Edward the noble erle of Marche faught with the Walsshmen besyde Wygmore in Wales, whos capteyns were the erle of Penbrook and the erle of Wylshyre, that wolde fynally haue dystroyed the sayde erle of Marche.

'And the Monday before the daye of batayle, that ys to say, in the feest of Puryficacion of oure blessed Lady abowte x atte clocke before none, were seen iij sonnys in the fyrmament shynyng fulle clere, whereof the peple hade grete mervayle, and therof were agast. The noble erle Edward thaim comforted and sayde, "Beethe of good comfort, and dredethe not; thys ys a good sygne, for these iij sonnys betoken the Fader, the Sone, and the Holy Gost, and therefore late vs haue a good harte, and in the name of Almyghtye God go we agayns oure enemyes." And so by His grace, he had the vycctory of his enemyes, and put the ij erles to flyghte, and slow of the Walsshemen to the nombre of iij M'.<sup>36</sup>

Several comments are called for. First, the date is most clearly stated by a writer better informed about Yorkist affairs than any other. Secondly, he gives a strong impression that the Yorkists were waiting in order of battle at Mortimer's Cross when the famous parhelion was seen, in which case the enemy presumably arrived on the afternoon of Candlemas Day. Had the enemy gone on to Leominster, instead of turning north to Kingsland, this would have indicated an attack on Ludlow, in which case the Yorkists could easily have marched past Richard's Castle to Ludford, and met the Lancastrians there. Thirdly, a parhelion is caused by ice-crystals and is only seen in very cold weather, a further argument against Jasper using the Builth route.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the writer does not name the battle (unlike Blore Heath, another obscure place); perhaps this cross-roads acquired its name from local people, proudly commemorating the fact that here the Lord Mortimer won the battle which made him king of England. This idea is supported by the fact that the monument calls him Edward Mortimer.<sup>38</sup>

If this is so, the name was soon in use, as Gregory refers to 'Mortimer ys Crosse'. He places it near 'Hereford este', which can only mean the cathedral city, as opposed to Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire; Gregory's editor James Gairdner has further confused the issue by suggesting that he meant that distant town. Gregory says that Edward mustered his army before the battle at 'Wyg mershe', which he seems understandably to have confused with Wigmore, but which is in fact the same as Widemarsh, then an open space outside the north gate of Hereford.<sup>39</sup> This might support the argument that Edward made a forced march back from Gloucester in time to defend Wigmore, if one can believe that he really spent all those weeks at Gloucester. The Yorkists were certainly at Hereford after the battle, when Owen Tudor and other prisoners were beheaded; they are far more likely to have mustered before the battle at Wigmore, which Jasper was expected to attack. Gregory no doubt talked with Marchmen whom he met in London at the time of Edward's accession, and it is amusing to think of the misunderstandings which could have arisen between a Londoner and a Herefordian five hundred years ago. Following Gregory, Hall also placed the battle near 'Hereford East',<sup>40</sup> which in fact is seventeen miles from Mortimer's Cross.

A story told by Flavell Edmunds and picked up by him from an anonymous guide to Leominster of 1808 is that Jasper sent troops on to Leominster to reinforce a Lancastrian garrison already there; they then drove Yorkist detachments away, but were themselves dislodged while battle was raging at Mortimer's Cross, and driven out to Kingsland to join the routed main army. It is very doubtful whether Jasper would have divided his army so deep inside hostile country, as is the idea that there were royalist troops in

Leominster – an unwall'd monastery town. The source itself is also suspect, being by a clergyman called Rowlandson, whose value as a historian is indicated by his impossible story that Anne Neville, future Queen of Richard III, was Edward IV's mistress, and kept court at Wigmore. John Duncumb's contemporary, and much more authoritative, history of Herefordshire, says nothing of these ideas.<sup>41</sup>

It seems that, on the morning of St Blaise's Day, as soon as men were to some extent thawed out after their freezing bivouacs, the Lancastrian army formed up at its camp, which probably consisted of the baggage wagons chained in a circle. There is reason to think that this may have been near the monument, which is a mile from the Battle Oak, perhaps on the Great West Field where there is an old cottage called Battle Acre. A farm worker told Richard Brooke that he had found many metal objects hereabouts: bridle bits, stirrups, iron fragments and long bits of iron on both sides of the turnpike road.<sup>42</sup>

Deploying a polyglot and probably ill-disciplined force into the customary 'battles' of van, centre and rear must have been very difficult, but its advance over the open fields may not have taken so long. We shall never know whether they entered the trap set for them, if that is how the Yorkists had prepared it, but certainly if they had advanced past that bank, they could have received a withering storm of arrows before they came to handstrokes with Edward's men-at-arms. The latter were probably drawn up, on foot, between the river and the bank, with their centre near the Battle Oak. Again one feels that Edward's army had every possible advantage. He had had time pick an élite force and, as always in war, one well-trained professional was worth many pressed men; as Gregory was to notice at St Albans only a fortnight later, 'the substance that gate that fylde were howseholde men and feyd men.'<sup>43</sup>

Edmunds repeats Rowlandson's story about a charge by Jasper scattering Edward's right wing, which sounds very like the well-known episode of the Earl of Oxford at Barnet. Grave doubt must be expressed about this, as on that side the rising bank offered the Yorkists such a perfect opportunity to use their archers to devastating effect, that any charge could probably have been stopped in its tracks. The idea that Jasper pursued the fleeing Yorkists for three miles sounds even less likely, since the fighting was presumably on foot, as was usual at the time. Howard Green and the other writers following the Symonds theory give the honour of this charge to Wiltshire, which is virtually ruled out by Worcester's pithy comment on that Plaza-Toro of the age: 'fled the field at the start of the battle'.<sup>44</sup>

If the battle began with a fearsome hail of arrows mowing down Jasper's left, perhaps assisted by gunfire, the survivors would have moved away towards the centre, causing hopeless congestion, just as Edward's men-at-arms charged. In such a murderous struggle, with axe, mace, sword, glaive and brown bill hewing and slashing, the Irish would have suffered particularly badly; according to the Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton, they were in the vanguard:

The Earl of Ormond ....

.....

Came in the vanguard with his Irishmen,  
With darts and skains; those of the British blood,  
With shafts and gleaves, them seconding again,  
And as they fall still make their places good,  
That it amaz'd the Marchers to behold  
Men so ill-armed, upon their bowes so bold.<sup>45</sup>

Undoubtedly Edward fought in the midst of the battle, a most formidable warrior, with his towering height, great strength and clad in full plate armour. A possible Yorkist tactic at this stage, unless the ground was frozen too hard, could have been a charge by a squadron of cavalry hidden up the little valley below the Buzzards Farm; Edward, used two hundred horsemen in this way at Tewkesbury. Maybe the Lancastrians were almost encircled, as had happened to the French at Agincourt, where lightly-armed archers had been able to join in the slaughter of men-at-arms so closely packed that they could not defend themselves.<sup>46</sup>

There is reason to think, however, that fair numbers of Lancastrians were able to escape from the main battle. Tradition suggests that some fled past Covenhope to the Lugg, only to be pursued and massacred near Kinsham; the names Slaughterhouse Covert and Bank may perhaps have some bearing on this. The evidence collected by Brooke makes it highly probable that some sort of last stand was made somewhere near Battle Acre, bearing out the Rowlandson-Edmunds account of a second battle; after all, the monument is a mile from the site of the main battle, and uses the words 'near this spot'. This could well have been where Owen Tudor, Throckmorton, Scudamore and other royalist captains were taken prisoner. The execution of Owen is beyond all doubt, but some of the other gentlemen listed by Worcester as having been beheaded in fact survived, notably Thomas Fitzharry, Jasper, Wiltshire, Perot, Sir John, Sir William and Sir James Scudamore all escaped, though James was killed later that year 'at a Herefordshire manor house'.<sup>47</sup>

The figure of 4000 slain is doubtless an exaggeration, when the armies involved were probably very small. But the tradition that it was a bloody battle can be accepted; after Ludford and Wakefield the Yorkists may well have been in no mood to spare their foes, who had invaded their native soil, and probably plundered and committed atrocities on the way. Yorkist casualties may have been light; Worcester named none of Edward's companions as having been killed, though he remarks that Philip Vaughan was later killed at the siege of Harlech.<sup>48</sup> Howel Swrdwal says in the bards' usual cryptic way that Watkin Vaughan was killed fighting that year in Herefordshire, perhaps at Mortimer's Cross, though he never refers directly to the battle.<sup>49</sup>

After their victory the Yorkists spent over two weeks at Hereford. Owen Tudor and the other prisoners were executed.<sup>50</sup> Fighting patrols no doubt chased the enemy into Wales, until there was no further danger from that direction. Probably fresh troops were raised, and other preparations made for the advance to London which could now be safely undertaken. Last, but not least, Edward must have discussed his personal future with his councillors, as he had no doubt done since the battle of Wakefield had made him heir to the throne. By now the act of accord seemed less realistic than ever. Did Herbert and Devereux now urge him to go to London and claim the throne? It seems quite likely. When the news came of Warwick's defeat at St Albans, and his loss of the puppet king, the Yorkists at once left Hereford. This is suggestive; it is generally agreed that St Albans settled the question as to whether Edward should take the throne. It confirmed arguments that Henry, as well as his followers, had broken the act of accord. But the decision is more likely to have been taken by Edward and his Marcher councillors than by Warwick; the 'shield of our defence' had completely bungled his battle at St Albans and was now in flight. Warwick certainly endorsed any decision which may have already have been made, when he met his victorious cousin at Burford.<sup>51</sup>

The queen's retreat, when she had apparently had London at her mercy, was due partly to the weakness of her own army, partly to the extremely hostile attitude of the Londoners, and partly to the news that the Earl of March was on his way.<sup>52</sup> When Edward and Warwick reached London on 26 February, the enthusiasm of the Londoners for 'thys fayre whyte ros and herbe, the Erle of Marche' knew no bounds; London herself thus played a vital part in the process which led to Edward's proclamation as King on 4 March.<sup>53</sup> But he would probably not have become King without his crushing victory at Mortimer's Cross; the monument is, however, wrong in saying that it 'fixed' him on the throne. The great slaughter at Towton had to be accomplished first. Edward himself had no doubts about the importance of his triumph at Mortimer's Cross, following as it did that threefold omen of divine favour, 'for which cause, men imagined, that he gaued the sunne in his full brightnes for his cognisaunce or badge'.<sup>54</sup>

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**The Three Suns** are the only detail of the battle which is well known; it is mentioned in the *English Chronicle* (note 36), in the *Short English Chronicle* (p.77) - which adds the detail that the suns were seen to come together, by Gregory (p.211) - who places the event at 'Wyg mersche', and by Abbot Whethamstede (p.386) - who does not mention Mortimer's Cross, but simply speaks of the parhelion as one of several strange signs which happened that time.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. J. Gairdner ed., *The historical collections of a citizen of London in the fifteenth century* (Camden Society, new series, vol. 17, 1876), p.209 - Gregory's Chronicle.
2. H. T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (Cambridge 1915), pp.95-6.
3. J. S. Davies ed., *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI* (Camden Society, old series, vol. 64, 1856), p.90; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1452-61*, p.613.
4. *English Chronicle*, p.90.
5. J. Gairdner ed., *A Short English Chronicle in Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles* (Camden Society, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 28, 1880), p. 77.
6. *English Chronicle*, p.99; Gregory, p.209.
7. J. Stevenson ed., *Annales Rerum Anglicarum in Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France* (Rolls Series, 2 vols. in 3, 1864), vol. 11, part ii, pp.774-5.
8. *CPR 1452-61*, pp.607, 612; J. H. Harvey ed., *Itineraries of William Worcester* (Oxford 1969), pp.202-5.
9. W. & E. L. C. P. Hardy eds., Jehan de Waurin, *Recueil des Croniques et anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne* (5 vols., Rolls Series 1864-91), pp.311-2.
10. H. Ellis ed., Edward Hall, *Chronicle* (London 1809), p.251.
11. Grants and commissions had been given to several Yorkist gentry after Ludford: *CPR 1452-61*, p.549 (Herbert), p.594 (Henry ap Gruffydd), p.602 (Richard Croft and Thomas ap Roger Vaughan of Hergest - brother of Roger of Tretower). For Waurin on the attitude of the Earls and Londoners to York's claim, see pp.314-8.

12. *English Chronicle*, pp.106-7.
13. Gregory, p.215 '... the substance of hys mayny come at hyr owne cost.'
14. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1st Series, vol. I, 1846), p.146: letter from Jasper Tudor to Roger Puleston (Keeper of Denbigh Castle), written at Tenby Castle, on 25 February 1461.
15. *Short English Chronicle*, p.76; *Annales*, p.775.
16. *CPR 1452-61*, p.659; Hall, *Chronicle*, p.251.
17. *Ibid.*; *Short English Chronicle*, pp.76-7.
18. F. W. D. Brie ed., *The Brut, or the Chronicles of England*, vol. 2 (Early English Text Society, old series, 136, 1908), p.531. See also C. L. Kingsford, *Chronicles of London* (Oxford 1905), p.172; R. Flenley ed., *Six Town Chronicles* (Oxford 1911), p.167; A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley eds., *The Great Chronicle of London* (London 1938), p.193. All place Edward at Shrewsbury for Christmas.
19. *Brut*, p.602; *Annales*, p.775; *English Chronicle*, p.110; *Chronicles of London*, p.277 – 'the Journey of Wygmore in Walis'.
20. *Short English Chronicle*, p.77; R. S. Thomas, *The political career, estates, and 'connection' of Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke and Duke of Bedford (d.1495)*, Wales (Swansea) PhD thesis 1971, p.188, n.3.
21. Worcester, *Itineraries*, pp.202-5; see C. J. Robinson, *A History of the Castles of Herefordshire* (Hereford 1869) and *A History of the Mansions and Manors of Herefordshire* (Hereford 1873), in which most of these men can be found.
22. H. Ellis ed., *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (1st series, 3 vols. 1825), vol. 1, pp.9-10.
23. Worcester, *Itineraries*, pp.202-5; *CPR 1452-61*, pp.367, 530-1 (Milewaters). Thomas, 'Jasper Tudor', shows that 'Sir John Lynell' must be Lingen. At this time only Sir William Herbert seems to have been a knight; besides the three barons, the rest were all esquires, though several were to be knighted or ennobled. Pardons for Croft and Harper, *CPR 1452-61*, pp.538-9. See J. C. Wedgwood ed., *History of Parliament; biographies of the members of the Commons House 1439-1509* for the careers of Barre, Baskerville, Croft, Devereux, Fitzharry, Herbert, Mytton, Scudamore, Stafford, Monington, Throckmorton.
24. *CPR 1452-61*, p.367; the Vaughans and Herberts were the sons of Gwladys, daughter of Dafydd ap Llewelyn (Davy Gam) – see *The Poetical Works of Lewis Glyn Cothi* (Cymmrodion, Oxford 1837), p1, genealogy.
25. H. T. Riley ed., *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede* (Rolls Series, 2 vols., 1872-3), 1, p.369.
26. Worcester, *Itineraries*, pp.202-3; *CPR 1452-61*, p.360.
27. Charles Ross, *Richard III* (London 1981), pp.210-3.
28. *CPR 1452-61*, p.527.
29. Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names* (Oxford 1960, 4th edn.), p.518.
30. Flavell Edmunds, *The Battle of Mortimer's Cross* (Hereford 1851), plan facing p.12.
31. Mary Clive, *This Sun of York* (London, 1973), pp.46-9.
32. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses*, pp.125-6 and plan. W. S. Symonds, *Malvern Chase* (Tewkesbury 1881), ch.10.
33. Howard Green, (a) *Guide to the Battlefields of Britain and Ireland* (London 1973), pp.99-101. (b) *The Central Midland – The Regional Military Histories* (London 1974), pp.60-4; John Kinross, *Discovering Battlefields of England* (London 1968), pp.48-50; Neil Fairbairn, *A Traveller's Guide to the Battlefields of Britain* (London 1983), pp.56-8.
34. Thomas Wright, *The History and Antiquities of the Town of Ludlow* (Ludlow 1826), p.58.
35. Worcester, *Itineraries*, p.203; A. B. Hinds ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Milan*, vol. 1 (London 1912), p.74; G. L. & M. A. Harriss, *Camden Miscellany* vol. 24, (Camden Society, 4th series, vol. 9, 1972), p.229.
36. *English Chronicle*, p.110.
37. The author has heard of two instances, in the winters of 1940 and 1947. ,
38. Robinson, *Castles*, p.141, says without quoting any source, that the place was 'where the piety of the Mortimers had reared a cross that bore their name.'
39. Gregory, p.211; a notice at Harvington Hall, an ancient house near Kidderminster with several priest-holes, reads: on 22 August 1679, the Blessed John Kemble, a priest, was martyred at 'Wigmarsh by Hereford.'
40. Hall, *Chronicle*, p.251.
41. *The Leominster Guide* (Leominster 1808), p.82; John Duncumb, *Collections towards the History and Antiquities of the County of Hereford* (Hereford 1804), vol. 1, pp.93-6, quoting John Speed, and Michael Drayton, *Miseries of Queen Margaret*. Speed placed the battle very incorrectly, near Little Hereford, a village between Ludlow and Tenbury: Map of Herefordshire, 1610.
42. Richard Brooke, *Visits to Fields of Battle in England of the Fifteenth Century* (London 1857), pp.75-6.
43. Gregory, p.212.
44. Edmunds, pp.7-8; Green, *Central Midlands*, pp.60-2; Worcester, *Itineraries*, p.203.
45. *The Works of Michael Drayton* (London 1748), p.150: though Ormond is shown here leading the charge, he is not credited with any success.
46. I am indebted for this suggestion to Dr John Stephens (Department of History, University of Edinburgh), who visited the site with me in July 1979.



47. Worcester, *Itineraries*, p.203 and p.207.
48. *Ibid.*, p.205.
49. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses*, p.129: in an ode to Watkin Vaughan, 'The day of judgement and end came in Herefordshire. Great is our distress.'
50. Gregory, p.211, his macabre account is well known; Jasper to Roger Puleston, in *Arch. Camb.* (n.14 above), p.146.
51. Burford or Chipping Norton for this famous meeting? The former is on the road from Gloucester to Oxford, so seems more likely: Gregory, p.215, the *Annales*, p. 777, however, favour Chipping Norton. *English Chronicle*, p.93 for comment on Warwick.
52. *Brut*, p.532; Gregory, p.214-5.
53. *Ibid.*; *Chronicles of London*, pp.173-4; *Brut*, p.532.
54. Hall, *Chronicle*, p.251.