

English Heritage Battlefield Report: Newbury I 1643

Newbury I (20 September 1643)

Parishes: Enborne; Speen; Newbury

District: West Berkshire

County: Berkshire

Grid Ref: SU 450650 (centred on the Falkland Memorial)

Historical Context

By the summer of 1643 the balance of the Civil War between King and Parliament appeared to be shifting the way of the Royalists. In July 1643 Prince Rupert stormed Bristol and King Charles decided to exploit the success by capturing the Parliamentary stronghold of Gloucester. With Gloucester in Royalist hands the Severn Valley would be cleared of the enemy, freeing communications between Oxford and the Royalist recruiting grounds in South Wales.

Once the siege of Gloucester began, the Parliamentary leaders in London decided that the beleaguered city must be relieved at all costs. The Earl of Essex was despatched with an army 15,000 strong to accomplish the task. Marching slowly from London westwards he arrived at Gloucester on 8 September, only to discover that the Royalists, in anticipation of his arrival, had raised the siege three days earlier. Essex had successfully completed the first half of his mission; all that remained now was to carry his army back to London without mishap.

The Parliamentary army followed a route for London that would take them south of Oxford, the Royalist 'capital'. On 18 September, however, in a skirmish at Aldbourne Chase, Prince Rupert's cavalry sufficiently delayed Essex's troops to enable King Charles and the main Royalist army to occupy the town of Newbury before their opponents, blocking the path of the Parliamentarians and capturing supplies that had been awaiting them there. Essex had been outmanoeuvred: his army, probably now about 14,000 strong, was confronted by equal sized force markedly superior in the dominant arm of the day, cavalry. The only course open to him was to bludgeon his way past the Royalist roadblock. His shortage of supplies left him no option.

Location and Description of the Battlefield

Essex had been attempting a difficult manoeuvre, a flank march, and to put an obstacle between himself and the Royalists he had crossed the River Kennet at Hungerford. By seizing Newbury, however, the Royalists had both denied Essex an opportunity to cross back to the Kennet's north bank and successfully bridged the river themselves, interposing their army between the Parliamentarians and London. The battle which followed therefore was fought south of the River Kennet over terrain which rises gradually to a narrow plateau a mile long before falling away again towards the River Enborne. Much of the Royalist position on the part of the plateau known as Wash Common has been obliterated by the expansion of Newbury town south-westwards down the A343 Andover Road. The Parliamentary positions, at the head of the narrow lanes which emerge at the top of the plateau from Enborne to the west, have to a greater extent survived.

Landscape Evolution

In 1643 the land to the north of the battlefield area, probably as far as the River Kennet floodplain, was enclosed with small fields with curving, irregular field boundaries following natural landscape features and contours. The settlement of Enborne had long been established and probably that at Skinner Green too. Between

these largely pasture fields many narrow lanes connected the settlements with one another and to the river crossing to Newbury, probably very much as they did a century later as shown by John Rocque's map. To the south of the battlefield area, the high plateau of Wash Common, surmounted by the group of tumuli, was probably open heath.

To the west the landscape has changed little, except for the intrusion after 1880 of the now abandoned railway line. The many lanes still exist either as road or footpaths. To the north, however, the Kennet and Avon Canal was cut in the 18th century and the Great Western Railway built in the 19th century. The regular straight lines of the former field boundaries in the adjacent land suggest the field pattern was established in the 19th century. Many of these hedges have gone since the 1st Edition OS map was published. To the east, John Rocque's map shows that Newbury had spread south of the river and started to progress up Wash Lane by 1761. However, south and south-east of the group of tumuli the heath had not been enclosed by this time.

The centre of the battlefield area appears not to have been fully enclosed until the end of the 18th or 19th century. Exactly when is not certain since the 1810 map does not show any detail for this area; this area of land was in the ownership of the Earl of Craven and therefore the detail was not necessary. However, the map does show the first enclosure of land on the high plateau next to the parish boundary. To the south of the battlefield, on top of the plateau, what was once open country suitable for Prince Rupert's cavalry was according to Walter Money, a nineteenth-century expert on Newbury and the battle, enclosed in about 1815¹.

By 1880 the Battle of Newbury I had been commemorated with the erection of the Falkland Memorial. Along Wash Lane to Oak Lodge a few villas had been built and south of Oak Lodge a new road continued down Sandpit Hill. Over the next century, and continuing today, residential development has spread south from Newbury up and along the plateau, restricted to the west by the parish boundary and to the south-east by Wash Common.

According to the various accounts of the Battle of Newbury the ground in the northern part of the battlefield was heavily enclosed in 1643. Today the reverse is the case and north of Round Hill the field system is now much more open. In the 20th century the expansion of Newbury already referred to has meant that the bulk of the Royalist position has been built over.

The Battle: the Sources and its Interpretation

The prime source for the Battle of Newbury from the Royalist side is the pamphlet *A True and Impartial Relation of the Battaile*. Money and Samuel Gardiner, the eminent historian, believed it to have been written by Lord Digby, who was both a politician and soldier.

Upon sight of our Army they retreated into certaine hedges & Fastnesses, a mile and a halfe distant from Newbury westward. The Rebels thus happily overtaken in their flight, consultation was held of the way to prevent their further evading us, and it was resolved on for the best, to draw all the Kings Army that night into a large field on the other side of Newbury, adjoining to those closes where the Enemy had made this haul, to the end we that might be in readines to presse upon the first motion of theirs. The night was past in much uncertainty, but with opinion on our part, that they were marcht away. The next morning being Wednesday the 20 of September by breake of day, (in stead of the flight which upon all their former proceedings, we had reason to expect) we discovered them settled in the most advantagious way imaginable of receiving us, whether invited to it by the extraordinary advantages of the place, or ingaged to it by the despaire of escaping us by a Retreat, I know not, but then we found them, their Foot, their Horse, and their Cannon planted with much skill, not onely for molesting us, and preserving themselves, but even for temptation to us to assayle them upon those disadvantages. For having lodged their Baggage, and Principall Reserve both of Horse and Foot, upon a Hill side under a Wood neer Hampsted, fenced by hedges and dithes

inaccessable, but by such and such passes, and having disposed another principal part of their strength betwixt that and a place called Enbourne, in strong hedges, and houses, with apt batteries on both sides, for bravadoes sake, or to invite us, they had drawne out into Battalia into a little Heath on the South-Side of Enbourne three bodies of Foot, both lined and flanked with strong bodies of Horse, and under favour of Cannon, so as that upon all occasions they might conveniently power out thither from their Holds what new strength they pleased, or, if beaten, might have a safe Retreat, into the adjoining Fastnesses, which nature and they had both so well secured, they being so advantagiously placed for fight, and so disadvantageously for subsistence, we having Newbury at our backs to susteine us, and so many more horse then they to cut off provision. It may wel occur to your Lordship to question why (since it doth to so many more to censure that) we did not endeavour to combat them: so by their necessityes as to oblige them for wany of sustenance to retreat over some more equall Country, rather than to assaile them upon such dangerous oddes of Scituation. The answer to this objection by way of excuse, that we were in some sort to lead on, and ingaged by the tempting prospect of that little Battalia I mentioned upon the Heath; and by way of justification I am to tell you, that there was within the Enemies Dominion on a round hill not suspected nor observed by us the night before, from whence a battery would command all the plaine before Newbury, where the Kings Army stood, in so much that unlesse we possest our selves of that hill, there was no holding of that field, but the King must have retreated with his Army thence, the dishonor of which, I beleeve you will easily consent ought to outweigh the hazard of attempting them, and (to say the truth) even without their having that hill, the Kings person was exposed all day to much more hazard of the Cannon than was fitting, the Rebels imploying it very freely where ever by any signes they could discover his presence. This hill and that heath I mention'd, were the two eminent sceanes of all that days action, from 7 a clock in the morning till 7 at night, except onely one attempt made by them from their Grand Reserve upon a passe on our right hand neare the River possest by the Kings Life-guards, in which they were repulsed. The issue of the Battell on the heath (first begun and quickly ended) was a totall routing of their horse, the possessing of five pieces of Cannon there, though able to bring off but one of them, the forcing the Foot to retreat into their strength, though unbroken, for (give their due) they shewed themselves like good men, and lastly the gaining and holding the place.

This action was done meerely by our horse, for (to say the truth) our foot having found a hillocke on the Heath that sheltered them from the Enemies Cannon, would not be drawne a foot from thence. The Generall and Prince Ruperts personal presence and conduct, contributed much to the good successe, as also the Lieut. general Willmots Chiefe Officers of horse, that bore a principal part in the action it selfe...

The action of the hill was carried with as much bravery both by our Horse and Foot as on the Heath by the Horse alone, the Foot commanded by Sir Nicholas Byron, the Horse by Sir John Byron, who after six houres (the hottest dispute that hath beene scene) gained it from my Lord of Essex his owne guards that had possest it, enjoyed it quietly many houres, and in the end (the Enemy setting up his rest to regaine it, after as hot a fight as at their taking it) reposs[ess]ed him, and kept it still...

The night comming upon us soon after the Enemies finall repulse from that hill, the King drew all his Army up to the top of the heath, keeping possession both of that, and of the hill till towards night, at which time, his Horse and Foot, being extremely tyred, and beeing probably informed that the Enemy had retreated with their carriages, and a principall part of their Army, it was thought fit to draw his Horse into Quarters on the other side of the River, and his foot into the Towne, principally to refresh them and to inable them for the next daies pursuit, but

in part (for I will conceale nothing from your Lordship) to make a Bridge to a flying Enemy, least in deed too great a despaire of retreat might have made them opinionate a second fight in that disadvantageous place, where having not (to tell you the truth) Powder enough left for halfe such another day, having spent four score barrells in it, three score more than had served the turne at Edgehill, nor could we be assured that the supply from Oxford of 100 Barrelles more could come to us till the next day at noone².

Digby informs us that the Parliamentarians, discovering the enemy in occupation of Newbury, took up post in 'certaine hedges & Fastnesses, a mile and a halfe distant from Newbury westward'. Part of their army was stationed near the village of Enborne and on a hill near Hampstead, just to the rear. But in front of both 'drawne out into Battalia into a little Heath on the South-side of Enbourne [were] three bodies of Foot, both lined and flanked with strong bodies of Horse, and under favour of Cannon'. This was the force, reinforced throughout the day, which was going to give battle.

At first sight the mention of a little heath south of Enborne might seem to refer to Crockham Heath. Samuel Gardiner acknowledged that it took a while for Walter Money to convince him that the heath in question must be Enborne Heath (which is what the Royalist newsletter *Mercurius Aulicus* called the plateau), adjoining Wash Common on the plateau further east³. Crockham Heath is, Gardiner came to realise, too low to supply a point 'from whence a battery would command all the plaine before Newbury'. The requirement is far better answered by a spur projecting from the northern end of the Enborne Heath/Wash Common plateau which, on the Ordnance Survey map today, is marked 'Round Hill' (which is how Digby described it). The Royalists had not noticed this point of vast tactical importance the night before (it only bulks large when seen from the lower ground to the north) and it was now within 'the Enemies Dominion'. What *Mercurius Aulicus* styled 'The little enclosed Hill commanding the town of Newbury'⁴ had to be taken and, throughout the day, was the scene of fierce fighting, assaulted by both Royalist Horse and Foot. The battle on the heath, where there was other significant fighting, was contested by the Royalist Horse only.

The battle for Round Hill is best described by Sir (later Lord) John Byron, who in 1647 provided details of the fighting for Sir Edward Hyde (later Lord Clarendon) to include in his *History of the Rebellion*. Byron begins by criticising the omission which allowed the Parliamentarians to secure a foothold on Enborne Heath:

Here another error was committed, and that a most gross and absurd one, in not viewing the ground, though we had day enough to have done it, and not possessing ourselves of those hills above the town by which the enemy was necessarily to march the next day to Reading.

... The next day my brigade of horse was to have the van, and about 5 in the morning I had orders to march towards a little hill full of enclosures, which the enemy (through the negligence before mentioned) had possessed himself of and had brought up two small field pieces and was bringing up more, whereby, they would both have secured their march on Reading (the highway was lying hard by) and withal so annoyed our army which was drawn up in the bottom, where the King himself was, that it would have been impossible for us to have kept the ground. The hill, as I mentioned, was full of enclosures and extremely difficult for horse service, so that my orders were, only with my own and Sir Thos. Aston's regiment to draw behind the commanded foot led by Lord Wentworth and Col. George Lisle, and to be ready to second them, in case the enemy's horse should advance towards them; the rest of my brigade was by Prince Rupert commanded to the Heath, where most of the other horse and foot were drawn. The commanded foot not being able to make good the place, my uncle Byron, who commanded the first tertia, instantly came up with part of the regiment of guards and Sir Michael Woodhouse's and my Lord Gerard's regiments of foot, commanded by his Lieut-Col. Ned Villiers, but the service grew so hot, that in a very short time, of twelve ensigns that marched up with my Lord Gerard's regiment, eleven were brought off the field hurt, and Ned Villiers shot through the shoulder. Upon this a confusion was heard among the foot, calling,

horse! horse! whereupon I advanced with those two regiments I had and commanded them to halt while I went to view the ground, and to see what way there was to that place where the enemy's foot was drawn up, which I found to be enclosed with a high quick hedge and no passage into it, but by a narrow gap through which but one horse at a time could go and that not without difficulty. My Lord of Falkland did me the honour to ride in my troop this day, and I would needs go along with him, the enemy had beat our foot out of the close, and was drawne up near the hedge; I went to view, and as I was giving orders for making the gapp wide enough, my horse was shott in the throat with a musquet bullet and his bit broken in his mouth so that I was forced to call for another horse, in the meanwhile my Lord Falkland (more gallantly than advisedly) spurred his horse through the gapp, where both he and his horse were immediately killed. The passage being then made somewhat wide, and I not having another horse, drew in my own troop first, giving orders for the rest to follow and charged the enemy, who entertained us with a great salvo of musquett shot, and discharged their two drakes upon us laden with case shott, which killed some and hurt many of my men, so that we were forced to wheel off and could not meet them at that charge. I rallied my men together again, but not so soon but that the enemy had got away their field-pieces for fear of the worst, seing us resolved not to give over, so I charged them a second time, Sir Thomas Aston being then come up with his regiment, we then beat them to the end of the close, where they faced us again, having the advantage of a hedge at their backs and poured in another volley of shott upon us, when Sir Thomas Aston's horse was killed under him, and withal kept us off so with their pikes we could not break them, but were forced to wheel off again, they in the meantime retreating into another little close and making haste to recover a lane which was very near unto it, finding then they could not keep the ground, which before they could do, I rallied the horse again, and charged them a third time, and then utterly routed them, and had not left a man of them unkilld, but that the hedges were so high the horse could not pursue them, and besides, a great body of their own foot advanced toward the lane to relieve them. Our foot then drew up on the ground from whence we had beaten the enemy and kept it, and drew the horse back to the former station; for this service I lost near upon a hundred horse and men out of my regiment, whereof out of my own troop twenty-six. The enemy drew up fresh supplies to regain the ground again, but to my uncle's good conduct (who did extraordinary service) was entirely beaten off ... What was done upon the Heath (where the main body of our horse and foot fought) I will not relate, because I was not an eye-witness of it, only this is generally confest, that had not our foot play'd the poultrons extremely that day, we in all probability had set a period to the war...⁵

Byron conveys a good impression of the confined nature of the ground near Round Hill. The lane's mouth back into which the Parliamentary Foot was forced probably belonged to Cope Hall Lane.

Quite where the anonymous Royalist cavalry officer who contributed the next account of the battle was serving is more of a mystery. Money assumed that he served under Byron and was describing the same action as his superior. Brigadier Peter Young, however, thought it more likely that the writer attacked a Parliamentary Foot Brigade further south on Wash Common⁶. Although the officer's references to a 'hill' might mean Round Hill, in the context of his description of the patrolling of Wash Common the night before 'ye hill upon our left hand' more probably refers to the plateau as a whole. Certainly, the 'hill' the officer later attacked was rode up to by Prince Rupert next morning, which suggests it was in a more southerly sector of the battlefield, since this was where the Prince was engaged throughout the day.

The King's army being drawne up on a Heath neere Newbury, the enemy were discovered approaching ye town, Prince Rupert was pleased to command mee and Major Smith with a party through the town to face the enemy, afterwards His Highness commanded mee to advance with ye party to ye hill upon our left hand, from thence we sent out parties all night, which gave His Highness satisfactory intelligence, and when it was day, His Highness went with his own

troope, a party of musqueteers and my horse to take possession of a Hill, I drew ye party into a close that contained a considerable part of the hill, then we discovered the enemy and there began the service. But before relief could come to the musqueteers, they retreated, and I drew ye horse into the next close though not without losse both from great and small shot where wee stood, untill in which time my horse received a shott in his neere shoulder. But ye foot crying out for ye horse, I returned into ye first mentioned close and was very slowly followed by reason of the straitness of the passage, but when I thought I had men enough to doe ye service, I went to ye furthest part of ye said close wheere were neere about 1,000 of ye enemies foot drawne up in order and one piece of artillery, and as I was charging my horse was shot again in ye breast, and faltered with mee, for that, I being out of hopes to do other service than to lose myself, I gave orders to ye party in these very words in Major Smith's hearing, 'Fall on, my Masters! for I must goe change my horse'

... When I was thus supplied I was going back to my charge, which I thought Major Smith would have had a care of in my absence, as I conceived in duty he ought, I being for that present disabled, but in my way back contrary to my expectation I found Captain Scot of Sir Arthur Aston's regiment and Capt. Panton of Lord Carnarvon's regiment, and some other officers of ye party with neere about 40 men, I desired that we might goe up ye Hill again, Capt. Panton answered mee that my Lord Lieut. [Earl of Brentford] commanded them to stay in that same place, whereupon I sent one to him to know his further commands. In the meantime came Sir Lewis Kirke to mee with commands from ye King to goe looke to ye passe by the river side which the enemy were then endeavouring to gain, but when I came to ye place I found Sir William Vavasour there with his brigade, which I conceived sufficiently secured that place⁷.

The officer's closing reference to the fighting in the north of the battlefield by the River Kennet confirms what Lord Digby reported, that the Parliamentarians tried to force a passage towards Newbury along the Kintbury Road. Sir William Vavasour's Foot Brigade was sufficient to close the door.

The combined impression of these Royalist reports is that their army maintained patrols on the high ground south-west of Newbury overnight but only attempted to deploy on the heights next morning. The Royalists then discovered that the enemy had established itself on the far side of the plateau, most crucially on Round Hill. Both Digby and Byron confirm that as a result it was impossible for the Royalists to remain on the defensive, which was all the strategic situation required them to do: their hands were forced by a tactical imperative, namely the field of fire which the Parliamentarians had secured for themselves. At the end of the battle, according to Digby, the Royalists had captured both the heath/plateau and Round Hill but shortage of powder forced a relinquishment of the gains.

How did the Parliamentarians view events? The most vivid account to emerge from their side was penned by Sergeant Henry Foster, who served with a regiment of the London Trained Bands.

The next morning, September 20, vwer early before day, we had drawn up all our army in their severall regiments, and marched away by break of day; and then advancing towards the enemy with most cheerfull and courageous spirits: The Lord Robert's souldiers had begun to skirmish with them before we came up to the enemy; which we hearing, put us to a running march till wee sweat again, hastening to their reliefe and succour. When wee were come up into the field, our two regiments of the trained bands were placed in open campania upon the right wing of the whole army. The enemy had there planted eight pieces of ordnance, and stood in a great body of horse and foot, wee being placed right opposite against them, and far lesse than twice musket shot distance from them. They began their battery against us with their great guns, above halfe an houre before we could get any of our guns up to us; our gunner dealt very ill with us, delaying to come up to us: our noble Colonell Tucker fired one peece of ordnance against the enemy, and aiming to give fire the second time, was shot in the

head with a cannon bullet from the enemy. The blew regiment of the trained bands stood upon our right wing, and behaved themselves most gallantly. Two regiments of the king's horse which stood upon their right flanke a far off, came fiercely upon them, and charged them two or three times, but were beat back with their muskettiers, who gave them a most desperate charge, and made them flie. This day our whole army wore green boughes in their hats, to distinguish us from our enemies; which they perceiving, one regiment of their horse had got green boughes, and rid up to our regiments crying, "Friends, friends"; but we let flie at them, and made many of them and their horses tumble, making them flie with a vengeance.

The enemie's canon did play most against the red regiment of trained bands, they did some execution amongst us at the first, and were somewhat dreadfull when men's bowels and brains flew in our faces: But blessed bee God that gave us courage, so that we kept our ground, and after a while feared them not; our ordnance did very good execution upon them: for we stood at so neer a distance upon a plain field, that we could not lightly misse one another: We were not much above halfe our regiments in this place; for we had sixty files of muskettiers drawn off for the forlorn hope, who were ingaged against the enemy in the field upon our left flank. Where most of the regiments of the army were in fight, they had some small shelter of the hedges and bankes, yet had a very hot fight with the enemy, and did good execution, and stood to it as bravely as ever men did. When our two regiments of the trained bands had thus plaid against the enemy for the space of three hours, or thereabout, our red regiment joynd to the blew which stood a little distance from us upon our left flank, where we gained the advantage of a little hill, which we maintained against the enemy halfe an hour: two regiments of the enemie's foot fought against us all this while to gain the hill, but could not. Then two regiments of the enemie's horse, which stood upon our right flank came fiercely upon us, and so surrounded us, that wee were forced to charge upon them in the front and reere, and both flanks, which was performed by us with a great deal of courage and undauntednesse of spirit, insomuch that wee made a great slaughter among them, and forced them to retreat; but presently the two regiments of the enemie's foot in this time gained the hill, and came upon us before wee could well recover ourselves, that we were glad to retreat a little way into the field, till we had rallied up our men, and put them into their former posture, and then came on again⁸.

Foster's categoric statement that the two Trained Bands regiments served 'upon the right wing of the whole army' has led to confusion in the past, making it difficult to reconcile his account of the battle with those of others. It has been suggested by Brigadier Peter Young, however, that the Trained Bands were actually on the extreme right of Sergeant Major General Philip Skippon's wing of the army only, which places them in a more central position on Enborne Heath⁹. It also explains why, when after three hours of fighting, the Red Regiment combined with the Blue Regiment a little to the left, they 'gained the advantage of a little hill', quite clearly Round Hill: they had not so far to travel.

The most comprehensive account of the Battle of Newbury to emerge from the Parliamentary side was in the pamphlet *A True Relation of the Late Expedition*. The Earl of Essex's endorsement on its title page ensures that this is usually regarded as the 'official' Parliamentary version of the Battle of Newbury.

The next day being Tuesday, we marched towards Newbury, and when wee approached within two miles of the towne, we might discover the enemie's forces upon an hill; their whole army, having prevented us, were gotten to Newbury and possess the towne. But the next morning, being Wednesday, by break of day order was given for our march to an hill called Big's -hill, neere to Newbury, and the only convenient place for us to gaine, that we might with better security force our passage. But when his Excellency perceived that the enemie's forces had possess themselves of that hill, marching himself upon the head of his owne regiment, Colonell Barclay's, and Colonell Holborn's brigades, he charged so fiercely that he beat them from the hill, and kept it (rather gaining than losing ground) the whole day. His Excellencie's

regiment and those other brigades, all the while they continued there, were hotly charged by the enemy's horse and foot ... but he [Essex] considered not the danger of his person, whilst he laboured to maintain that place, which of all other was most advantageous for his prospect. By this time came up the two trained bands of London, who though they were often charged by the horse and foot, stood to it with undaunted resolution.

The battle thus begun by the foot, Sir Philip Stapleton with his Excellency's guard and regiment of horse advanced upon the plaine of the hill; when he had no sooner drawn up out of the lane's end, seconded by Colonel Dalbeir's regiment of horse (no other horse being then advanced to the place) but the enemy perceiving this advantage, being all drawn already in severall great bodies of horse, part of them advanced immediately, and charged our horse; whom we so well received (giving no fire till we joined close with them) that the enemy was wholly routed, and pursued with much execution neer to the place where their whole body of horse stood. From thence by order we drew back to our first ground; by occasion whereof opportunity was gained to bring up the remainder of our horse which had the vanguard that day: whereupon the enemy drew out some fresh regiments of his horse, and with all possible haste advanced againe upon Sir Philip; but received no better entertainment than before, being againe routed by him. By that time that he had drawn up his regiment againe into some order, the other regiments (Ramsey, Harvey, Goodwin) were come up to him, when the enemy with their whole body charged upon them bravely, and were as well received. Sir Philip Stapleton was here charged both in front and flank, his whole regiment having spent both their pistols, and was so encompassed, that the enemy and ours, with both our whole bodies, were all mixed together, and in this confusion many were slain on both sides, and our men at last were forced towards the lane's end where they first came in: Which being neer our foot, the enemies endeavoured to disengage themselves, and drew back to their own forces. Those that entered the lane with ours were most of them slain...

... The left wing of our horse commanded by Colonel Middleton, and the right wing of the enemy's horse, could not be engaged but in small parties by reason of the hedges.

The actions of our horse thus described wholly ... return we to the foot. Major General Skippon in the morning, when his Excellency (as aforesaid) was engaged upon the hill, hastened to the top of the hill, where our vanguard was in fight, having before ordered the march of our train of artillerie, and those that attended it (which were the Lord Robertes his brigade, and his owne, Sir William Springer's, Colonel Manning's, and the red and blue auxiliary regiments) to be neere to his Excellency; looking from the hill, toward Newbury, he perceived a great strength of the enemy both horse and foot in divers great bodies advancing directly towards the way which all our train was of necessity to march. To prevent therefore what he suspected, which was that the enemy would fall upon our train, or upon ye rear of those that fought on the hill, or gaine that hill behind us, our last night's quarter, or all: he speedily placed (which his Excellency did also send him a command to do) forces in places most convenient. Mean while his Excellency sending for more foot, that brigade, wherein his regiment and Springer's were, with the red auxiliaries were sent up; placing my Lord Robertes his brigade with foure or five small peeces just where the enemy advanced, who gave them so warme an entertainment that they ran shamefully: and my Lord Robertes possessed the ground which the enemy came first up into: his lieutenant colonell was shot in the face.

That forlorn-hope which he had commanded the night before, being now strengthened with three hundred musquetiers, and led by Major Fortescue, Major General Skippon placed on the left of my Lord Robertes his brigade, upon the high way that came from Newbury just upon us, upon which way four drakes were likewise placed, and well defended; though the enemies came up so close, that they took away a limmer of one of our peeces, but it was with losse of

many of their lives. Colonell Mannering's regiment was placed on the right hand between the hill and my Lord Roberts his brigade. This regiment his Excellency a while after commanded away, to the relief of his own regiment, Colonell Barckley's and Colonell Holborn's brigades, which had ben foure hours upon very hot service. It fortun'd that this regiment was no sooner brought on, but they were overcharged with two great bodies of horse and foot so, that they were forced to retreat and lose that ground which the forenamed forces had gotten: which Colonell Holborn perceiving with his brigade gave the enemy a round salvo, and instantly his own and Colonell Barckley's brigades and his Excellency's regiment again advancing beat back the enemy, regained the ground, and made good the place all the day after.

The blew auxiliary regiment he commanded to relieve and assist the forlorn hope, which had been three or four times in their turns at the point. The fight all along the valley (more than half a mile in length) was continued as long as in any other part of the army, which was til ten a clock at night, about which time the enemy gave a good round salvo upon Colonell Barckley, and Colonell Holborn's posts. These things ordered, the major generall rode up to the top of the hill, where he espied an advantage to bestow eight or ten demiculvering shot upon the enemy, who out of an house pelted the forenamed gentlemen at neer distance; then he rallied the two train-band regiments into one body, drew them up, and placed them before, where the train of artillery did afterwards draw up to the top of the hill, and desired Major Boteler to draw the musquetiers of his regiment on the right hand before the two demiculverings, that were placed at the end of the lane on the top of the hill; and the red auxiliaries he placed on the left hand of those peeces, which before were slenderly guarded. The train of artillery that day was excellently ordered by the skill and care of Sir John Merrick, to the great advantage and safety of our army. While this was acting, two peeces which belonged to the major general's regiment, and one drake of Sir William Brook's were by his Excellencie's regiment under the command of Major Boteler, with the assistance of two hundred musquetiers recovered; and the enemy drew away from their pikes (which with their colours kept standing, with many great bodies of horse to guard them) five or six hundred musquetiers, besides dragoons, to encompass our men on the right hand among the hedges; just at which time his Excellency sent to have two hundred of the three hundred musquetiers of the forlorn-hope to go to the relief of Colonell Barclay and Colonell Holborn's souldiers. But then the enemy falling on upon our right hand diverted them, who with other of our musquetiers thereabouts beat the enemy of, who else had done us great mischief; this was about four a clock in the afternoon, when all our whole army of foot was engaged in the fight; but then he also caused some of the red auxiliary regiment to draw neerer to Colonell Barckley's post, as he himself required; at length night drew on, when the enemy both horse and foot stood in good order on the further side of the green, where we expected their stay till next morning; and that they were working (as was reported) to place their cannon, to make use of them against us when day should break; against which supposed encounter we encouraged our souldiers before hand, and resolved by God's help the next day to force our way through them or dye. But it pleased God to make our passage without blows; for the enemy was gone by night, so that the next morning we marched quietly over the same ground where the battail was fought, and where the enemy stood...¹⁰

Walter Money maintained that the 'Big's-hill' approached by the Earl of Essex was at the southern end of the plateau where there is today a Bigg's Hill (although Money admits that it was not marked as such on the first Ordnance Survey map¹¹). Colonel Alfred Burne however, writing seventy years later, thought this too far away from the Parliamentarians' direct axis of advance from Enborne and believed Big's Hill must be elsewhere. He therefore restricted the battlefield to a much smaller area further to the north in the vicinity of Round Hill and the Kennet valley¹².

Then came Brigadier Peter Young's reassessment of the battle. Although, as Colonel Burne's collaborator in the

1959 book *The Great Civil War*, he was at the outset linked with Burne's interpretation, by 1964 he had reached different conclusions. A close analysis of the Parliamentary army's order of battle led him to conclude that it was impossible to fit all the Foot and Horse brigades mentioned in *A True Relation of the Late Expedition* into the limited space allowed by Colonel Burne. Instead, he returned to Money's analysis of the extent of the Parliamentary position, placing their extreme right in front of Bigg's Hill¹³.

Despite this, the espousal by Young of Money's views was by no means total. Money's belief that the Earl of Essex commanded the left of the army and Skippon the right (an error, Young considered, into which he had been led by Sergeant Foster's claim that the Trained Bands serving with Skippon were on the extreme right of the army) was convincingly challenged. After all, if Money's contention were true, how could *The True Relation* credit Skippon with marshalling forces on the left hand, Kennet river, side of the battlefield?

So the Earl of Essex was on the right hand, southern flank of the battlefield and the struggle which the *True Relation* has him directing was on the Enborne Heath plateau. The Parliamentarians claimed that the Royalists were already in occupation of the plateau when they arrived, and that the enemy had to be driven off, which is in marked contrast to what Royalist memorialists and pamphleteers maintained, i.e. that the Parliamentarians stole a march on the King's army, gained the advantageous ground and had to be forced back. Since both sides were arguing about this point within a month of the battle taking place (see the 14 October edition of *Mercurius Aulicus*) arbitration now would be a distraction; suffice it to say that what probably happened is that the Parliamentarians, in their initial advance, drove in some cavalry pickets on the plateau, but nothing more.

Essex's Foot on Enborne Heath was supported by Sir Philip Stapleton's cavalry, which operated 'upon the plaine of the hill'. They clashed with their Royalist counterparts three times before being forced back 'towards the lane's end where they first came in' - presumably the lane that emerges on the plateau near Bigg's Hill. Digby also mentions this combat on the heath, although he wrote that it was 'quickly ended'.

What the *True Relation* mentions next about Skippon, while Essex 'was engaged upon the hill' (i.e. the Enborne Heath/Wash Common plateau), hastening to the 'top of the hill, where our vanguard was in fight' is slightly obscure, but appears to suggest that Skippon took up post on Round Hill, since from here he could look towards Newbury and see the enemy advancing along the low ground by the Kennet with the apparent intention of threatening either the rear of the Parliamentary position on the plateau, or else their encampment on the slopes of the hill near Enborne. Skippon therefore deployed troops - principally Lord Robartes' Brigade and the Red auxiliaries (who are not to be confused with the Red Regiment of the Trained Bands) - on the low ground north of Round Hill to check the threat. This they accomplished, although the 'fight all along the valley (more than half a mile in length) was continued as long as in any other part of the army', and later in the day Colonel Randall Manwaring's Red Auxiliaries could be transferred to relieve elements of Essex's command on Enborne Heath.

The merging of the two Trained Bands Regiment prior to their shifting to Round Hill, which is also alluded to by Sergeant Foster, is mentioned next. On Round Hill they were placed in support of two demiculverins, sited at the mouth of Skinners Green - Cope Hall Lane. For the remainder of the day the fighting continued all along the line until, at dusk, the Royalists 'stood in good order on the further side of the green' (an interesting synonym; another Parliamentary pamphlet, *A True Relation of the Late Battell neere Newbery*, refers to the battle having taken place 'upon a place called Newbery-common'¹⁴). When dawn came on the morrow Essex's army was surprised to discover the enemy gone.

It is to be hoped that the above discussion has succeeded in elucidating the sources and reconciling some of the statements that, in the past, have made reconstruction of the Battle of Newbury I so difficult. What is clear is that the battle, conducted on an extended front, resolved itself into three combats: in the Kennet valley; about Round Hill; and on Enborne Heath and Wash Common.

Indication of Importance

The first Battle of Newbury is important because it represented probably the best chance King Charles ever had of winning the Civil War. After a summer of victories the morale of his army was at its height. His opponent, the Earl of Essex, was cut off from his base and short of supplies. Yet the dogged courage of the Parliamentarians saved the day and they pushed their way past the Royalist army to reach London and safety. Exceptionally hard fought, the battle was remarkable in that it lasted all day.

A monument to the Earl of Falkland was erected during the nineteenth century by a crossroads on the Andover Road out of Newbury. It is situated near the approximate centre of the Royalist position during the battle. About 700 yards west of the monument, not far from Wash Common Farm, are a number of tumuli in which, according to Money, human bones and various military accoutrements were found in 1855¹⁵.

Battlefield Area

The battlefield area boundary defines the outer reasonable limit of the battle, taking into account the positions of the combatants at the outset of fighting and the focal area of the battle itself. It does not include areas over which fighting took place subsequent to the main battle. Wherever possible, the boundary has been drawn so that it is easily appreciated on the ground.

To the north the battlefield area has been drawn along the line of the Kennet. From Benham Lock, on the canal, the battlefield boundary travels south behind the probable position of Middleton's cavalry and Robartes' Brigade on the Parliamentarian left before joining Skinners Green Lane and running behind Round Hill along part of Cope Hall Lane. The principle underlying the drawing of the battlefield boundary thereafter behind the Parliamentarian line as far south as Enborne Street has been to include the edge of the Enborne Heath plateau only, east of which Essex's army took up position and fought. Even when the Royalists forced the Parliamentarians off the plateau they never pursued any further than the mouths of the lanes leading onto Enborne Heath, so no combat occurred beyond the plateau's edge.

Again, to the south, the point where the plateau of Enborne Heath and Wash Common falls away to the River Enborne below is taken as the boundary of the battlefield area. A similar principle applies to the battlefield boundary here.

For illustrative purposes, the extent of the battlefield including the Royalist positions has been represented by a dashed line. The battlefield area, however, in recognition of the extent to which the south-eastern part of the battlefield has been developed, adheres to the present edge of the housing in front of most of the Royalist positions. Only the location of the extreme right flank of the Royalist army remains sufficiently undeveloped to be included in the battlefield area as it rejoins the Kennet to the north-east.

Notes

1. Money, Walter *The First and Second Battles of Newbury and the Siege of Donnington Castle during the Civil War, 1643-6* (London 1881) p24.
2. Thomason Tract E. 69(10) in the British Library.
3. Gardiner, Samuel *History of the Great Civil War, 1642-48* vol II (London 1901) p214; *Mercurius Aulicus* Wednesday 20 September.
4. *Mercurius Aulicus* Saturday 14 October.
5. Quoted in Money *op. cit.* pp28, 30, 35-6, 39.
6. Young, Brigadier Peter and Adair, John *Hastings to Culloden. Battlefields in Britain*(London 1964) p133.
7. Quoted in Money *op. cit.* pp33-4.
8. *A True and Exact Relation of the Marchings of the Two Regiments of the Trained Bands of the City of London, being the Red and Blew Regiments, as also of the Three Regiments of the Auxiliary Forces, the Blew, Red, and Orange, who marched forth for the reliefe of the City of Gloucester ... by Henry Foster.* Printed in *Bibliotheca Gloucestrensis* ed. John Washbourn (Gloucester 1825) pp266-267.
9. 'The Order of Battle of the Parliamentarian and Royalist Armies at the First Battle of Newbury, 20 Sept. 1643' *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 42 (1964) pp132-3.
10. Printed in Washbourn *op. cit.* pp242-7.
11. Money *op. cit.* p24.
12. Burne, Lt-Col. Alfred H *The Battlefields of England* (London 1950) pp201-12.
13. Young *op. cit.*
14. Thomason Tract E. 69(2) in the British Library.
15. Money *op. cit.* p46.