

English Heritage Battlefield Report: Roundway Down 1643

Roundway Down (13 July 1643)

County:	Wiltshire
District:	Kennet, North Wiltshire
Parishes:	Bishops Cannings, Roundway, Heddington, Bromsham, Rowde
Grid Ref:	SU 020650

Historical Context

Stalemated by the vigorous defence of Sir William Waller's Western Association Forces at the Battle of Lansdown on 5 July 1643, Sir Ralph Hopton's Royalist army retreated through Marshfield towards Chippenham. Hopton's army was short of ammunition, had lost much of its cavalry in premature flight, and was low in morale following the accidental explosion of a powder cart on 6 July, the blast from which had severely injured Sir Ralph. Learning of these difficulties while resting his army at Bath, Waller secured reinforcements from the Parliamentarian garrison of Bristol and set out in pursuit.

As Waller drew close to Chippenham early on 9 July 1643 the Royalists withdrew and marched towards Devizes. Fending off Parliamentarian attempts to bring about a general engagement, but increasingly pressed by Waller's probing attacks, Hopton's troops reached the uncertain shelter of the town that evening. Making sure that Roundway Hill, a down rising to a height of 795 feet two miles to the north of Devizes, was securely held by his cavalry, Waller allowed the Royalists a brief respite. On 10 July, however, he again offered Hopton the opportunity for a general engagement, drawing his whole army up on Roundway Hill while the Royalist cavalry deployed on Coatefield Hill to the east of the town. Desperately short of powder and ammunition, outnumbered in cavalry, and with their commander still temporarily blinded and paralysed, the Royalists declined and withdrew once more into Devizes.

The town as a whole lacked formal defences but the Royalists did what they could to make it fit for a siege, placing their artillery in the remains of the castle, barricading the streets with tree trunks and carts, and lining the hedgerows around Devizes with infantry. Waller responded by deploying his musketeers in the valley at the foot of Roundway Hill to enable them to shoot at the enemy working on the barricades, and eventually by placing his guns on Coatefield Hill, from where they could fire into the town. The siege had begun. Yet it was a very fluid siege for Waller did not have the resources to impose a solid cordon around Devizes. Indeed in the evening of 10 July a Royalist Council of War decided that the remaining cavalry should break out of the town and make for Oxford to seek help. At midnight they made good their escape, first heading south-east to avoid pursuit before turning north for Oxford.

On 11 July troopers from Waller's own regiment of cavalry intercepted the Earl of Crawford who was approaching Devizes from the north-east with 600 Royalist cavalry and a re-supply of ammunition for Hopton. In a confused night skirmish Crawford's force was scattered and the ammunition captured. Although this clash had boosted Waller's immediate prospects of success he was concerned at the apparent ease with which the Royalists could leave Oxford to bring relief to Devizes. Waller urged the Earl of Essex, whose army was watching Oxford, to prevent any further intervention from the Royalist capital.

With a natural reluctance to incur heavy casualties on both sides by storming Devizes, Waller hoped to obtain a negotiated surrender and he now offered the Royalists terms. These were refused and on the morning of 12 July Waller launched an assault on the Royalist defences but was repulsed. The next day the Parliamentarian forces decided to attempt a night assault on the town, but during the morning news arrived of the approach from the

north-east of a body of Royalist cavalry.

Having escaped from Devizes, Prince Maurice's cavalry reached Oxford in the afternoon of 11 July exhausted after a march of forty-four miles. Already aware of the seriousness of the infantry's position at Devizes, the King now detached 1,500 cavalry from his army to Hopton's aid. The relief force, composed of the brigades of Lord Wilmot and Sir John Byron, rode to Marlborough, where they were joined by further Royalist cavalry, including some of Crawford's recently defeated troopers. Now with a strength of between 1,800 and 2,000 men, Wilmot pressed on from Marlborough until he halted his force on Roughridge Hill on the south-eastern fringe of Roundway Down. Waller meanwhile had drawn his army away from Devizes and had deployed on Roundway Hill, on the south-western edge of the Down. Thus from opposite hills a Royalist force composed entirely of cavalry faced a Parliamentary army of infantry, artillery, and cavalry.

Location and Description of the Battlefield

Roundway Down, some two miles to the north of Devizes, rises to a plateau that is bounded by the high ground of four hills: King's Play Hill in the north-west, Morgan's Hill in the north-east, Roughridge Hill to the south-east, and Roundway Hill to the south-west. The plateau thus gives the impression of a broad, shallow bowl with its sides sloping upwards to the high ground at its rim. It is in many ways an ideal location for a battle and much can still be appreciated of the ground over which the fighting took place.

The course of the Battle of Roundway Down was briefly stated by a Colonel in Waller's army:

we found the enemy in sight, marching towards us; we long'd to charge them with our horse, which we did with some disadvantage, and were put to a retreat disorderly: But rallied againe with the helpe of our reserve. The enemy came on, and we charged them the second time, and then all our horse were routed, their reserve standing firme. Wee fled; they followed, yet our foot, being scarce considerable, stood one houre and an halfe, and forced their horse to retreat divers times: but their foote comming up from the Devizes, made ours leave their armes and flye.¹

While topographic references in eyewitness accounts are not as complete as could be wished, contemporary evidence leaves no doubt that the fighting took place on Roundway Down. Although brief in his description of the topography of the battlefield Captain Richard Atkyns, serving with the Royalist relief force, clearly identifies the high ground encircling the Down; 'there were four hills like the four corners of a die, in such a champaign, as 40,000 men might fight in.'² Colonel Walter Slingsby, a Royalist infantryman writing in 1647, largely as an aid for Clarendon in his compilation of the *History of the Great Rebellion*, also cites Roundway Down as the scene of battle:

Within three daies after Prince Mawrice and the Lord Wilmott comes to our releife with a good strength of horse; of which the enemy gave us notice by his drawing entirely of from the Towne and ordering his Army upon Roundway-downe.³

Mercurius Aulicus describes how the relief force as it drew near to Devizes was 'met with by the rebels' forces who lay betweixt them and the town on Roundway Down (for so the place is usually called) to hinder them from joining with the rest of the army.'⁴

While it is clear that the battle took place within the boundary of Roundway Down the precise location of the fighting and particularly the initial deployment of the opposing forces is more open to argument. The debate centres upon whether the Royalist cavalry initially drew up on Morgan's Hill or Roughridge Hill, and whether the Parliamentary army deployed on the top of Roundway Hill or on the ground stretching from there to King's Play Hill. A solution to these questions is important since it determines to a large degree the orientation

of the Royalist and Parliamentary attacks.

The location of the Royalist cavalry immediately before the battle rests upon the identification of the position from which Wilmot's signal guns were fired to alert Hopton in Devizes to the proximity of the relief force. John Adair⁵ and Colonel A H Burne⁶ believe that Wilmot followed the route of the London to Bath road until it reached Morgan's Hill, and then either crossed the Hill from the north (Adair) or passed to its south (Burne) before turning on to a battlefield extending between Morgan's and Roundway Hills. For Adair the signal guns were fired from Morgan's Hill and for Burne from close to a tumulus near to the spot where the road crosses Wansdyke. However, their conclusions fail to take into account the eyewitness record of the firing of the signal guns. Sir John Byron, who was in command of one of the Royalist brigades of cavalry states clearly that as they approached Devizes:

We shot off our ordnance from *an high hill that overlooks the town*, to let them know that we were there for their assistance; at the same time Waller appeared with his whole army upon an opposite hill within less than 2 miles of us⁷

The only 'high hill' that overlooks Devizes in the battlefield area, in addition to Roundway Hill, is Roughridge Hill to the east. It therefore appears probable that Wilmot swung south from the Bath road as, or before, it crossed the Wansdyke⁸, skirted Bishop's Canning Down, ascended Roughridge Hill, fired his signal guns and advanced west towards the eastern slopes of Roundway Hill. The fighting, then, took place in an east-west orientation. This accords well with the eventual flight of Waller's cavalry westwards to the fatal escarpment at the west end of Roundway Hill, for the natural inclination of beaten troops is to fly in a straight line before their pursuers. Had the battle been fought from Morgan's Hill to Roundway Hill (i.e. from north to south) the fleeing Parliamentary cavalry would have had to complete an unlikely 90 degree turn before plunging over the western escarpment of Roundway Hill. It is thus difficult to accept that the opening attacks of the battle took place on a north-south axis rather than one running east to west.

It seems equally unlikely that the battle was fought in the valley between Morgan's Hill and Roundway Hill. After withdrawing his troops from the siege of Devizes, Waller drew them 'up to Bagnall (Roundway) Hill, without drum or trumpet, where we found the enemy in sight'⁹ Both Richard Atkyns - 'we lost no time but marched towards the enemy, who stood towards the top of the hill'¹⁰ and Sir John Byron - 'Waller appeared with his whole army upon an opposite hill'¹¹ place the Parliamentary deployment on Roundway Hill itself not in the valley between that hill and Morgan's Hill. Indeed, Waller was given little time even to contemplate moving further on to the Down since the enemy was in sight when he reached Roundway Hill and preparing to advance. To present an open flank to a hostile cavalry force while deploying would have been foolhardy. It also made sense for Wilmot to engage Waller on the southern side of the Down since he would naturally expect Hopton's infantry to appear from this quarter, and the steepness of the southern slopes would have protected the Royalist left flank.

Waller's strength was approximately 2,500 infantry and between 2,500 and 3,000 cavalry and dragoons, but his deployment was extremely economical with space and in keeping with the limited area available to him on Roundway Hill. Richard Atkyns describes how Waller had placed his 'foot in the middle between two wings of horse, and the cannon before the foot' - a conventional deployment - but Atkyns goes on to relate something of the cramped nature of the Parliamentary cavalry's formation, particularly on the right flank where Hesilrige's regiment was stationed: 'and their right wing of horse being cuirassiers, were I'm sure five, if not six deep, in so close order, that Punchinello himself had he been there, could not have gotten in to them'.¹² Hesilrige's cavalry probably numbered no more than 1,000 troopers who, ranked five or six deep, would have occupied a narrow frontage of approximately 200 yards.

If the cavalry on Waller's left flank presented a similar frontage, while his infantry, perhaps ranked four deep, occupied somewhat over 500 yards of ground, then Waller's total frontage, even allowing for the normal interval of 100 paces between infantry and cavalry, can only have been just over 1,000 yards. There would thus

have been space on Roundway Hill for the deployment of Waller's entire force. Wilmot's cavalry, numbering perhaps 1,700-1,800 men and drawn up three deep, must have presented a combined front of little more than 600 yards.

Having deployed his army on Roundway Hill, Waller was presented with the spectacle of the Royalist cavalry moving towards his position preceded by a forlorn hope of 300 commanded men. Waller sent a party of troops to deal with the forlorn hope and the battle had effectively begun. Hesilrige then led his regiment of cavalry forward to assist the Parliamentary advance guard and Wilmot advanced with his cavalry brigade to combat Hesilrige. These initial stages of the battle most probably occurred on the slopes leading from Roundway Hill towards Roughridge Hill.

In the concluding stages of the battle much of the Parliamentary cavalry fled westwards across Roundway Hill to crash out of control down an escarpment 'where never horse went downe nor up before'¹³. The site of this spectacular tragedy was the gullies on either side of Oliver's Castle, and many of the Parliamentary troopers finished their wild descent in the appropriately named 'Bloody Ditch' at the foot of one of the gullies. The now abandoned Parliamentary infantry remained for a period 'standing upon the very crowne of the hill'¹⁴ until, realising that their cavalry had left the field for good, they disintegrated in flight.

A further indication that the majority of the fighting took place along Roundway Hill rather than on the north side of Roundway Down is given by Colonel Slingsby's description of events after the repulse of the Parliamentary vanguard:

soe that on a sudden, wee could see the Enemy's whole body of horse face about and run with speede,
and our horse in close bodye firing in their reare.¹⁵

Slingsby was still in Devizes with the Royalist infantry, or possibly by this stage had moved to the vantage point of Coatefield Hill, and for him to see the cavalry action from either position the Royalist and Parliamentary cavalry must have been engaged on Roundway Hill itself. What Slingsby could see was the concluding part of the main cavalry action for as the troopers of Byron's brigade were still *in close bodye* the cavalry chase had barely begun.

It is thus reasonable to conclude that the greater part of the battle was fought across the eastern slopes and crown of Roundway Hill, and that the cavalry chase spread westwards from there to the gullies at the edge of the escarpment around Oliver's Castle. While the initial stand of the Parliamentary infantry took place on Roundway Hill, their flight as a dispersed collection of individuals would have been in many directions, though predominantly northwards as escape to the west, south and east would almost certainly have been blocked by Royalist troops.

The Landscape Evolution

Settlement in the area was concentrated on good agricultural land in the Vale of Pewsey, around Devizes and at the foot of the scarp to the west. Broham and Heddington and Bishops Cannings are mentioned in the Domesday Book (the latter as a particularly rich manor). Devizes was a well established market town, with a ruined castle.

Each parish had a mix of arable and pasture land on the down. Those to the west of the scarp had been enclosed in the 16th and 17th centuries, but Bishops Cannings parish was not enclosed until the early 19th century - the Enclosure Act for Roundway was passed in 1794 - and open field systems operated on the Downs as well as extensive sheep pasture. The deed of Roundway Farm conveyed by Robert Nicholas to his son John in 1597 reveals that the 160 acres of land was at that time divided into individual strips of half-an-acre or less,

distributed across three fields.

Numerous earthworks can be found on the Down and various explanations have been advanced for their existence. Olivers Castle, the Iron Age Hill Fort would have been a distinctive feature on the tree-less scarp edge to the west. The earthworks are not all prehistoric in origin, however, and it has been suggested that a number were military encampments during the Civil War, while others may have been used as sheep enclosures.¹⁶ Wansdyke runs north-west across the eastern corner of Roundway Down and it is breached at Shepherds' Shore by the Swindon to Devizes road (A361) and at Old Shepherds' Shore by the old Bath to London coach road. In 1643 the link road to Devizes from the London-Bath road followed a different course to that of the modern A361, cutting across Roundway Hill from the north rather than passing to the south-east.

So the land over which the battle was fought would have been mostly open pasture and arable, with some boundaries formed by tracks but little by way of obstruction to mounted troops. There are few modern intrusions on Roundway Down and the nature of the land at the time of the battle can still be readily appreciated. The Army establishment at the foot of the southern slope of the Down commemorates the victors of July 1643 in the names given to the barracks: Hopton and Prince Maurice.

The Battle: its sources and interpretation

Contemporary accounts of the Battle of Roundway Down have survived from both the Royalist and Parliamentary sides, and although they show a measure of agreement amongst observers on the broad sweep of the fighting, there are numerous inconsistencies and contradictions when it comes to presenting the detail of the battle. As with many military actions in English history, surviving accounts also differ considerably over the question of the extent of the respective casualty lists. The fullest eyewitness records of the fighting are those penned by the Royalists Sir John Byron and Richard Atkyns, both of whom took part in the main cavalry action. There are other less complete but still useful accounts provided by Colonel Walter Slingsby serving with the Royalist infantry in Devizes, by Hopton himself (Sir Ralph's account was prepared as an aid to Clarendon), and by a Colonel in Waller's army. The propaganda sheets of the opposing sides provide interesting snippets of detail in the course of their partisan overviews.

The first indication received by Hopton that relief from Oxford might be at hand came when the garrison in Devizes became aware that Waller's army was lifting the siege and marching for Roundway Down:

The next morning (Thursday) there was notice brought to Sir Ralph Hopton in to his Lodging that the Enemy drew off, and upon inquiry finding that he drew off towards the downes he presently concluded, that the expected succours from Oxford were at hand, and gave order to have all the souldiers in their quarters in readiness to marche out. Verie shortly after Prince Maurice and Lo: Wilmot who were returned with a verie gallant party of the King's horse, appeared 3. miles off upon the hills, and having Ordnance with them gave two gunns for a warning to the Towne, which was answered againe by the Earle of Marleborough from the old Castle where the Trayne was.¹⁷

Hopton was anxious to sally from Devizes to support the relief force but his council of officers, suspecting some trickery by Waller, urged delay:

Then againe Sir Ralph Hopton, calling the principale Officers to him propounded to drawe out with the forces they had the Enemy being by that time drawn into Battalio 3 miles from them upon the topp of a hill, and the charge (whereof all their horse were fortunately rowted) shortly after ensuing. But the major part of the principle officers apprehendinge, reasonanbly enough, that all that was seene might be but a stratejem of Sir Wm, Wallers to gett the forces out of the

Towne, prevail'd with him to delay¹⁸

While Hopton's troops delayed taking action, Wilmot on Roundway Down, although outnumbered and lacking any infantry support, had deployed his cavalry in an attack formation of three brigades. The brigades were commanded by Wilmot, Byron, and Crawford and they were probably in echelon with Wilmot leading on the left flank, supported by Byron, and with Crawford in reserve. As Byron relates only his and Wilmot's brigades were to participate in the opening attacks:

It was resolved that we should immediately march towards them, and my Lord Wilmot very discreetly ordered it, that only his brigade & mine should charge (which both together made not above 1200 horse), and that the other troops, (because they had lately taken an affright & had been put to the worse by Waller's men), should only stand as a reserve, and not be employed till it should please God to renew their courage with our success, as we marched towards the rebels.¹⁹

The Royalists had much the better of the clash of forlorn hopes and Hesilrige's regiment of cavalry moved forward to support the retreating Parliamentary infantry. This advance triggered the main cavalry actions of the battle:

they send down some troops towards us, which were gallantly encountered by Sgt. Major Paul Smith (who led our forlorn hope, consisting of 300 commanded men), and forced them to turn their backs. Sir Arthur Hazelrig seconded these with his formidable regiment of lobsters (*sic*), I mean his cuirassiers whom the *Lieut. General* intermynded with his brigade, and forced them to retreat, not so, but that they rallied themselves again and charged the second time, but with worse success; for then my brigade being drawn up to second my Ld. Wilmot, they all ran away that could, and from that time Sir A. H. appeared no more in the battle;²⁰

According to Byron, therefore, Hesilrige's first charge, made independently of Waller, was met and turned back by Wilmot's brigade. Hesilrige then advanced again only to be turned back once more; this time decisively for his regiment fled from the field. Wilmot's initial charge was thus in response to an advance by the Parliamentary cavalry. Byron's brigade was not involved in this first clash and appears to have only joined the periphery of the action when Hesilrige charged a second time. Wilmot's success was due to the fact that he responded promptly to Hesilrige's initial movement and because his brigade overlapped the Parliamentary cavalry when the opposing ranks met:

and immediately charged the whole body; the charge was so sudden that I had hardly time to put on my arms, we advanced a full trot 3 deep, and kept in order; All the horse on the left hand of Prince Maurice his regiment, had none to charge; we charging the very utmost man of their right wing: I cannot better compare the figure of both armies than to the map of the fight at sea, between the English and the Spanish Armadas, (only there was no half moon) for though they were above twice our numbers; they being six deep, in close order and we but three deep, and open (by reason of our sudden charge) we were without them at both ends: the cannoneers seeing our resolution, did not fire their cannon. No men ever charged better than ours did that day, especially the Oxford horse, for ours were tired and scattered, yet those that were there did their best.²¹

According to Byron, Waller, with Hesilrige's troopers leaving the field, now advanced with the remainder of his army:

upon this Waller drew his whole army down the hill, and advanced with his own brigade of horse, with two pieces of cannon before it, and two great bodies of foot on the left flank of it, these it fell

to my share to charge with my brigade, my Ld. Wilmot meanwhile rallying his men together to second me if occasion should be. As I marched towards them up the hill, their cannon played upon me at a very near distance, but with very small loss, killing but two in Col. Sandyes regiment; the musketeers all this while played upon our flank, and hurt & killed some; and another regiment of their horse was watching an opportunity to charge us either in the rear or in the flank, but were hindered by Ld. Crawford.²²

Ignoring the fire of the Parliamentary artillery and musketeers, Byron's troopers advanced against Waller's brigade of cavalry. They were supported by Wilmot's brigade which was in the act of re-grouping and at a critical moment, when it seemed as though fresh Parliamentary cavalry might intervene, by Crawford's brigade. The action was hard fought but the fire discipline of Byron's men carried the day:

By this time we were come very near to Waller's brigade, and the command I gave my men was, that not a man should discharge his pistol till the enemy had spent all his shot, which was punctually observed, so that first they gave us a volley of their carbines, then of their pistols, and then we fell in with them, and gave them ours in their teeth, yet they would not quit their ground, but stood pushing for it a pretty space, till it pleased God, (I thinke) to put new spirit into our tired horse as well as into our men, so that though it were up the hill, and that a steep one, we overbore them, and with that violence, that we forced them to fall foul upon other reserves of horse that stood behind to second them, & so swept their whole body of horse out of the field²³

Byron pursued the survivors of Waller's cavalry across Roundway Hill, finally driving them down the gullies by Oliver's Castle:

and pursued them *near 3m.*, over the downs in Bristol way till they came to a precipice, where their fear made them so valiant that they galloped as if it had been plain ground, and many of them brake both their own and their horses' necks.²⁴

With Waller's brigade virtually destroyed and Hesilrige's cavalry scattered in flight, Byron was able to gather those of his troopers within hailing range and return to Roundway Hill where Wilmot was failing to make any impression on the now isolated Parliamentary infantry:

In my return from the chase I took two pieces of their cannon, & divers waggons laden with ammunition, & then rallied together our scattered troops, which were as much broken as the enemy, by reason of their hot pursuit, in the meantime my Ld. Wilmot charged their foot with the horse he had with him, but could not break them, and in the charge Dudley Smith was slain, & Lt. Col. Weston, hurt & many others²⁵

For an hour and a half the Parliamentary infantry, holding steady 'upon the very crown of the hill' (Slingsby) remained impervious to attacks by the Royalist cavalry. As it became clear, however, that Byron's brigade was ready to join the engagement and as Hopton's Cornish infantry hove into view from Devizes, the Parliamentary infantrymen decided that enough was enough. What began as an orderly withdrawal quickly turned into a rout and massacre:

but when they saw my horse rallied together again before them, & the Lieut. Gen. continuing still in the rear of them, and that the Cornish foot began to sally out of the town, they thought it not fit to stay any longer, they began first gently to march off, their officer marching before them, amongst which (as I have been told since) Sir W. W. himself was, & Popham. With that I advanced towards them with those troops I had rallied, & shot at them with the cannon I had formerly taken, their officers thought it not fit to stay any longer, but such as had horses rid away as fast as they could, & too fast for us to overtake them, & the rest blew up their powder

& threw down their arms & betook themselves to their heels, our horse fell in amongst them & killed 600 of them, & hurt many more, and took 800 prisoners & all their colours, & this was the success of their great conqueror.²⁶

The Royalist victory was complete and all that remained was to gather in the prisoners and bury the dead. Parliamentary sources naturally understate the casualties suffered by Waller's army:

We have lost only fifty horse, and at the most two hundred common souldiers slaine, and taken prisoners; about five hundred armes. No man of note killed or hurt, only Sir Arthur Haselerigge who received a wound in is arme, and an hurt in his eare, but not dangerous: he fought very bravely. We know we killed many of their best men, but not known to us by name, because we lost the field: We retreated all to this city, and hope to make good Bath also.²⁷

Part of the abiding fame of Roundway Down lies in Richard Atkyns account of his dramatic encounter with Sir Arthur Hesilrige during the initial cavalry action:

Twas my fortune in a direct line to charge their general of horse [Sir Arthur Hesilrige], which I supposed to be so by his place; he discharged his carbine first, but at a distance not to hurt us, and afterwards one of his pistols, before I came up to him, and missed with both: I then immediately struck into him, and touched him before I discharged mine; and I'm sure I hit him, for he staggered, and presently wheeled off from his party and ran. When he wheeled off, I pursued him, and had not gone twenty yards after him, but I heard a voice saying, 'Tis Sir Arthur Haslerigge follow him'; but from which party the voice came I knew not they being joined, nor never did know till about seven years since, but follow him I did, and in six score yards I came up to him, and discharged the other pistol at him, and I'm sure I hit his head, for I touched it before I gave fire, and it amazed him at that present, but he was too well armed all over for a pistol bullet to do him any hurt, having a coat of mail over his arms and a headpiece (I am confident) musket proof, his sword had two edged and a ridge in the middle, and mine [was] a strong tuck; after I had slackened by pace a little, he was gone twenty yards from me, riding three quarters speed, and down the side of a hill, his posture was waving his sword on the right and left hand of his horse, not looking back [to see] whether he were pursued or not, (as I conceive) to daunt any horse that should come up to him; [in] about six score more I came up to him again (having a very swift horse that Corner Washnage gave me) and stuck by him a good while, and tried him from head to the saddle, and could not penetrate him, nor do him any hurt; but in this attempt he cut my horse's nose, that you might put your finger in the wound, and gave me such a blow on the inside of my arm amongst the veins that I could hardly hold my sword; he went on as before, and I slackened my pace again, and found my horse drop blood, and not so bold as before; but about eight score more I got up to him again, thinking to have pulled him off his horse; but he having now found the way, struck my horse upon the cheek, and cut off half the headstall of my bridle, but falling off from him, I ran his horse into the body and resolved to attempt nothing further than to kill his horse; all this time we were together hand to fist.

In this nick of time came up Mr Holmes to my assistance, (who never failed me in time of danger) and went up to him with great resolution, and felt him before he discharged his pistol, and though I saw him hit him, 'twas but a flea-biting to him; whilst he charged him, I employed myself in killing his horse, and ran him into several places, and upon the faltering of his horse his headpiece opened behind, and I gave him a prick in the neck and I had run him through the head if my horse had not stumbled at the same place; then came in Captain Buck a gentleman of my troop, and discharged his pistol upon him also, but with the same success as before, and being a very strong man, and charging with a mighty hanger, stormed him and amazed him,

but fell off again; by this time his horse began to be faint with bleeding, and fell off from his rate, at which said Sir Arthur, 'What good will it do you to kill a poor man? said I 'Take quarter then', with that he stopped his horse, and I came up to him, and bid him deliver his sword, which he was loathe to do; and being tied twice about his wrist, he was fumbling a great while before he would part with it; but before he delivered it, there was a runaway troop of theirs that had espied him in hold; says one of them 'My Lord General is taken prisoner'; says another, 'Sir Arthur Haslerigge is taken prisoner, face about and charge', with that they rallied and charged us, and rescued him; wherein I received a shot with a pistol, which only took off the skin upon the blade bone of my shoulder.²⁸

Indication of Importance

Militarily, Roundway Down is one of the most interesting and dramatic battles of the First Civil War for an outnumbered cavalry force of barely 1,800 men defeated a balanced army comprising cavalry, infantry, and artillery totalling approximately 5,000. The cavalry force had just completed a march of over forty miles, it did not fully co-ordinate its attacks and yet it achieved a signal victory.

Waller lost at Roundway Down because his exhausted troopers panicked and broke, and the consequences of these brief moments of fear for both the Parliamentary cause and Waller himself were far-reaching. The virtual destruction of Parliament's Western Army presented the King with an opportunity to complete the conquest of the West. With the Royalist occupation of Bath the chief prize became the elimination of the two remaining Parliamentary strongholds in the south-west at Bristol and Gloucester. Bristol, its garrison reduced to swell Waller's army before Roundway, fell to an assault by a Royalist force commanded by Prince Rupert, but Gloucester survived and with it Parliament's hopes. The King had failed to capitalise fully upon the victory at Roundway, and what might have been the decisive battle of 1643 was thus condemned to relative obscurity.

The defeat was a serious and ill-deserved blow to Sir William Waller's reputation as a soldier. It was serious because from this point can be traced the beginning of Waller's reputation as a general dogged by misfortune, and it was ill-deserved because he had hardly put a foot wrong during the Lansdown and Roundway campaign.

Although the sources for Roundway Down do not enable us to reconcile some inconsistencies in the detail of the fighting and its associated topography, the contemporary record is more than adequate for the reconstruction of the main events of the battle and for an understanding of the tactical success enjoyed by Wilmot.

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.

Cavalry actions tend to lead to extensive battlefield areas and Roundway Down is no exception. It is clear that the battlefield area must extend from the western slopes of Roughridge Hill to the western escarpment and gullies by Oliver's Castle. Roughridge marks the starting point of the battle for the Royalists and the escarpment the extent of their pursuit of Waller's cavalry.

To the south the battlefield area allows for the appearance late in the day of Hopton's Cornish infantry, and in the north for both the initial retreat of the Parliamentarian infantry and their subsequent flight and massacre.

Notes

1. *A True Relation of the Late Fight between Sir W Waller's Forces and those sent from Oxford sent from a Colonell in that Army now in Bristoll to a friend of his in London.* 1643 Reprinted in Bibliotheca Gloucestrensis ed. John Washbourn (1825)
2. 'The Vindication of Richard Atkyns'. ed. Peter Young *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 35, 1957
3. 'Colonel Slingsby's relation of the battle of Lansdown and Roundway Down, July 5th'. Clarendon MSS., Vol. 23, No.1738 (2). Printed in Hopton Ralph *Bellum Civile*, ed. C E H Chadwyck Healey, Somerset Record Society 18 (1902) p98
4. *Mercurius Aulicus* 9-15 July, Thomason Tracts: E. 70 (8)
5. Adair, John *Roundhead General. A military Biography of Sir William Waller* (1969)
6. Burne, Alfred H *More Battlefields of England* (1952)
7. *Sir John Byron's relation to the secretary of the last western action between the Lord Wilmot and Sir William Waller.* Printed at York by Stephen Bulkeley. 1643
8. There were at least two gaps in the Wansdyke which Wilmot could have used to bring his force on to Roughridge Hill. The Old Bath Road breached the Wansdyke at 'Old Sheperds' Shore' and there was further breach just to the south at Shepherds' Shore. 'Shore' comes from the Wiltshire word 'sceard' denoting a notch or gap, and if flocks of sheep past through these gaps then they would be passable to a force of cavalry.
9. *A True Relation op. cit.*
10. Atkyns *op. cit.*
11. Byron *op.cit.*
12. Atkyns *op. cit.*
13. Slingsby *op. cit.* p98
14. *Ibid*
15. *Ibid*
16. *The Victoria History of Wiltshire.* ed. R B Pugh & E Crittall. Vol 7, p188 (1953)
17. *Bellum Civile, Hopton's Narrative of His Campaign in the west (1642-1644) and other Papers,* ed. C E H Chadwyck Healey, Somerset Record Society 18 (1902) p57
18. *Ibid*
19. Byron *op. cit.*

20. *Ibid*
21. Atkyns *op. cit.*
22. Byron *op. cit.*
23. *Ibid*
24. *Ibid*
25. *Ibid*
26. *Ibid*
27. *A True Relation op. cit.*
28. Atkyns *op. cit.*