



EXPLORING THE BATTLE MORE

WALKS

Tewkesbury Battlefield Society conducts regular guided walks around the battlefield. Tewkesbury Tourist Information Centre has details of dates and times and bespoke tours may be arranged for groups of six or more with 4-6 weeks' notice.

DISPLAYS

Tewkesbury Heritage Centre on Church Street has a wonderful display of the Battle of Tewkesbury and tells the story complete with battle sounds.
www.tewkesburyheritage.co.uk

OBJECTS

Tewkesbury Museum has a display of the battle which includes a diorama made in 1971 as well as items found on the battlefield.
www.tewkesburymuseum.org

READING

There are many books published about the Wars of the Roses and the most pertinent ones to the Battle of Tewkesbury are available locally.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

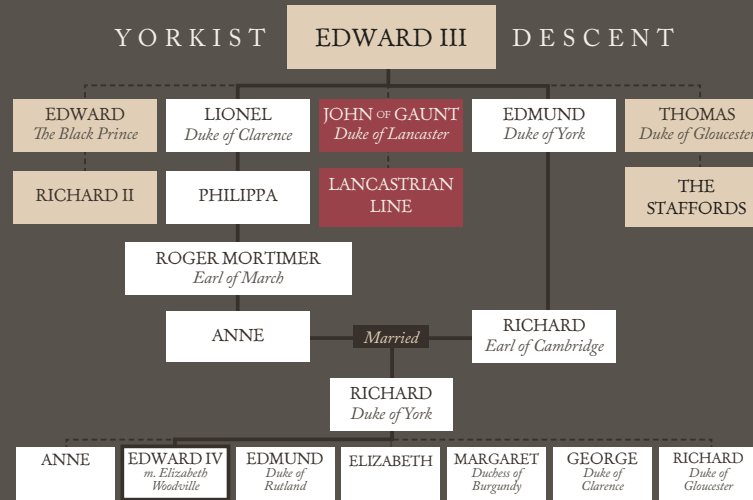
www.battlefieldstrust.com
www.tewkesbury.org.uk

EVENTS

Tewkesbury Medieval Festival is held on the second full weekend in July, every year.



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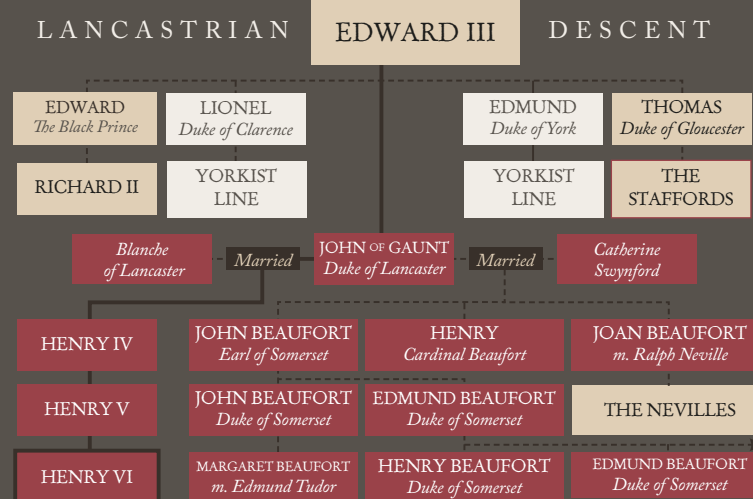
DYNASTIES & AFFINITIES

The Wars of the Roses wasn't about principles and firmly-held beliefs. It was about power for power's sake. Both sides were Plantagenets, tracing their lines back to King Edward III.

No matter what difficulties it brought, their need to be rulers was an obsession, to be pursued at all costs. The protagonists were related to each other and great families married into each other to pursue family interests.

For instance, support came from people who thought that they'd benefit by their association. Often, this was a pragmatic choice, based on the need to protect or pursue personal interests. Lesser lords looked to greater lords for protection, and in return were expected to come to their support when called upon including turning out, with their whole household, to fight.

Close family members could almost always be taken for granted, though there was treachery and opportunism aplenty. Edward's brother George had rebelled and made a bid for the crown, for instance, but at the Battle of Tewkesbury he was back in the family and fighting for Edward's cause.



THE BEARERS OF ARMS

Important people bore 'coats of arms'. These served the practical purpose of helping recognition in the heat of battle, but also gave a means of showing the family pedigree and importance.

Heraldry developed customs and a language of its own, and heralds were needed to interpret it, to keep the records and report on conduct in battle.

The troops belonging to an arms-bearer were all provided with a means of recognition, which was the only way of recognising which side they were fighting for. 'Livery coats', bearing the family colours and a badge which the family was known by were issued. Men-at-arms would have had well-crafted coats, but bill-men and archers are likely to have been recognised simply by a cloth badge pinned to their clothing.

It wasn't unknown for liveries to be confused and friendly troops to be attacked. Nor was it unknown for fleeing men to shed their colours as quickly as they could, to disappear into the crowds in the post-battle confusion.

THE BATTLE OF TEWKESBURY

Early in the morning of Saturday 4th May 1471 the Lancastrian army prepared for battle, forming lines behind the hedges of the fields. The Yorkists marched to meet them, with their line about 200 yards to the south.

The battle opened on the west flank, with the Duke of Gloucester attacking the Duke of Somerset's battalion with 'right-a-sharp shower of arrows and shot of gun'. The Lancastrians were getting much the worse of the exchange. Somerset attempted a diversionary movement, attacking the centre of the Yorkist army from the flank. This failed though, with his men being pushed back into the sight of 200 mounted knights who Edward had hidden in the woodland of Tewkesbury Park. They charged and cut them to pieces.

The main Lancastrian army simply stood and watched, which wasn't the plan. Somerset blamed Lord Wenlock, who commanded the Lancastrian centre, for not supporting him and according to some sources, 'spilled his brains on the field'. When the arrows ran out, the Yorkists attacked, and forced the demoralised Lancastrians back. In retreat, they stood no chance. Many were killed in Tewkesbury Park and in the Bloody Meadow and men drowned fleeing across the River Swilgate. Edward, Prince of Wales, the Lancastrian heir, was killed in the retreat, as was John Beaufort, Somerset's brother. Men were rounded up from hiding places all over the town. Many had sought sanctuary in the Abbey but were surrendered to the safe-keeping of the King, Seventeen of the most prominent Lancastrians, including the Duke of Somerset and Sir John Langstrother, Prior of the Order of St John, were found guilty of treason at a hastily convened trial and beheaded at a scaffold in Church Street.

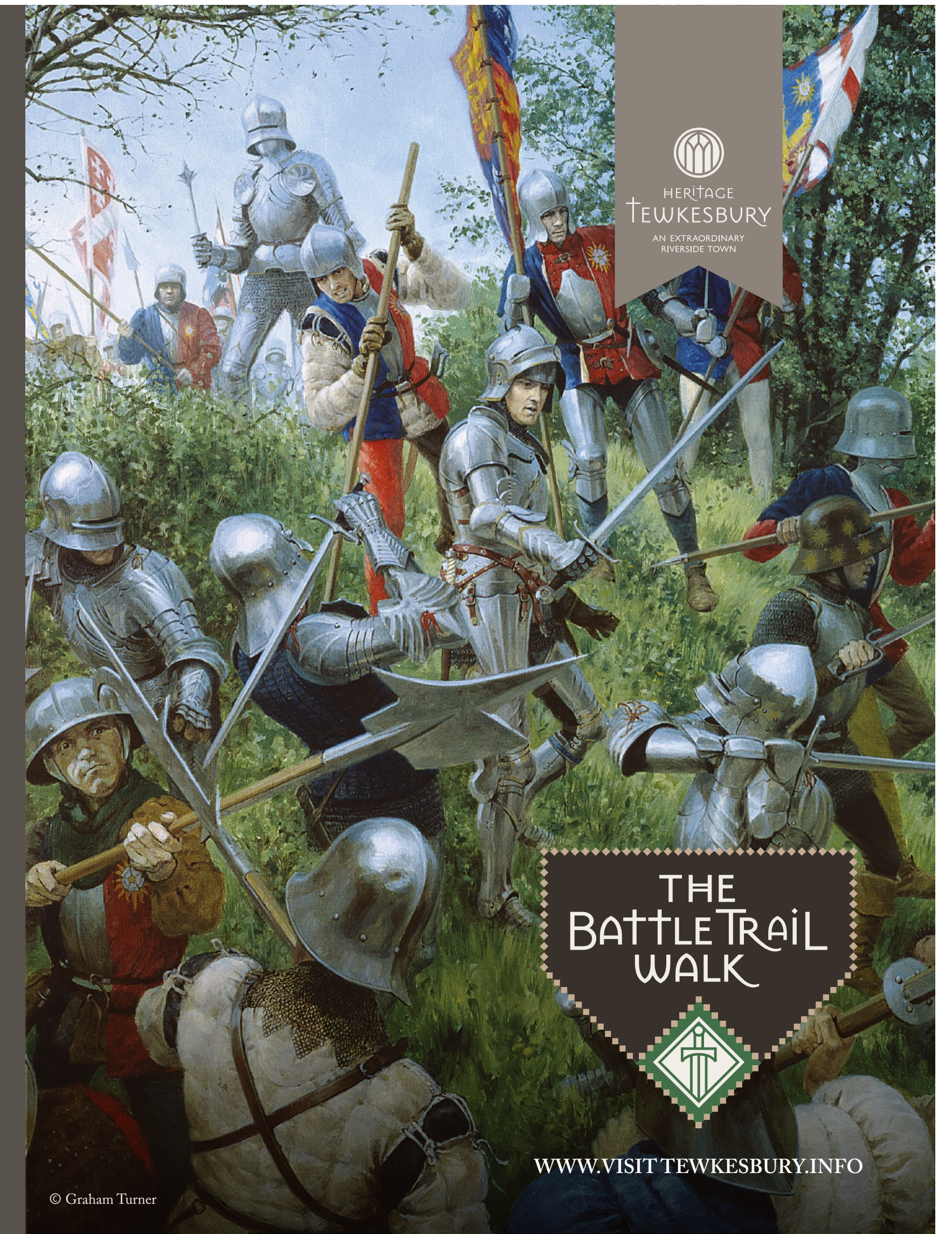
Many Lancastrians are buried in the Abbey including Edward, Prince of Wales and Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset.

Queen Margaret fled towards Wales but was captured at Little Malvern Priory and returned to London on 21st May, a prisoner of the victorious Edward IV. That night her husband, Henry VI, mysteriously died in the Tower of London where she herself was imprisoned for several years before being ransomed to France.

Edward ruled unchallenged until his death in 1483, a death which precipitated another crisis in England.



Archers by Graham Turner



HERITAGE
TEWKESBURY
AN EXTRAORDINARY
RIVERSIDE TOWN

THE BATTLE TRAIL WALK



WWW.VISITTEWKESBURY.INFO

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Battle Walk 1 2pp Z-Fold Leaflet

Tewkesbury - Word count template

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Tewkesbury Medieval Festival



ARRIVING IN TEWKESBURY

On 14th April 1471, King Edward won the Battle of Barnet. On the same day, a new threat arrived.

Queen Margaret returned from exile in France and set about raising an army. Jasper Tudor went to find troops in South Wales; Margaret with the Duke of Somerset and Earl of Devonshire went into Devon. The two groups intended to converge on Gloucester, where the Severn was bridged, and join to fight the Yorkists.

Edward had different plans. He reformed his army at Windsor and moved it to Cirencester, ignoring Margaret's pretences to be moving on London. As her army moved north, he moved south, expecting to intercept her on the road from Bath.

The Lancastrians were desperate to avoid the Yorkists and after announcing that they would fight at Sodbury, they moved with as much speed as they could towards Gloucester and safety.

The army arrived at Gloucester on the morning of May 3rd, to find, to their dismay, that Richard Beauchamp, Constable of the Castle, had declared for the Yorkist cause, and access was denied: the gates were shut.

With the Yorkists close on their tail, there was no option but to continue north along the Severn, looking for a fording point but there were none.

Edward's army came down from the Cotswolds at Cheltenham, and hearing that his enemy was cornered in Tewkesbury, moved his army to within three miles to camp. His tactics had worked perfectly.

The battle as depicted in the Ghent Manuscript



WHY FIGHT AT TEWKESBURY?

In truth, the town of Tewkesbury had no strategic value to either side in the battle. Its significance then, as for much of its history, lies in its place at the meeting of the Severn and Avon Rivers.

Margaret's army arrived there late on the afternoon of Friday 3rd May 1471, exhausted, desperately trying to cross the Severn to allow them to join up with Jasper Tudor and their Welsh allies. To reach the next bridge, at Upton upon Severn, meant crossing the River Swilgate bridge, south of the town, passing through Tewkesbury's narrow streets and then the precarious bridge and long causeway across the Avon and its floodplain to return to the Severn's bank and continue their journey north.

This manoeuvre would leave their army vulnerable to attack from the Yorkists whom they knew were closing in. To force their way into the town's buildings and defend them could take too long, and leave them involved in a lengthy siege.

Margaret's only real choice was to stop on the fields to the south of the town, within sight of the Abbey, and seek out the best ground available to allow her army to hold and defeat her Yorkist opponents. Her plans for recruiting in the north were abandoned, and this was now a cornered army fighting for survival.

So began the desperate job of placing a defensive line amongst the ditches and hedges of the Gaston Field, while Somerset ventured out in reconnaissance to find the features that might allow him to make a battle-winning gambit.

All the while, the townspeople looked across the narrow Swilgate to watch history unfolding on their doorstep.

The Battle Trail Walk is a waymarked tour of the fields south of Tewkesbury. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Please start anywhere on the green dotted line and follow the route.



MEN AT ARMS AND OTHER RANKS

Plate armour was immensely expensive and its wearers were men of rank and importance. The skills of fighting were taught to the nobility from a very early age and were honed by constant practice.

Powerful families maintained households able to provide fighting men. The more powerful employed crack knights. All fit young men were expected to learn a fighting skill.

When called upon by their overlords, (everyone except the King had an overlord), these households turned out to fight.

At the top of the tree were the knights and squires; equipped and trained for battle and proudly carrying the livery colours and banners of the family. These were the committed men, who were expected to fight to the death when called upon. These men fought face-to-face, toe-to-toe, with bladed weapons.

Men with pole-weapons formed a greater group. Not as well protected, they were conscripts from the common men. These were the troops who cleared the way, broke through obstacles and in Tewkesbury broke through hedges. Most were bill-men, armed with a variant of the agricultural bill-hook, able to thrust, cut and slash.

Typically, 40% of the English armies of the period were longbowmen. Light and fleet of foot, able to shoot arrows over two hundred yards with deadly accuracy and at incredible speed, these were the artillery which had swept all before them. Like bill-men, they came from the peasant classes. They learned their skills through life-long practice. Their relationship with, and commitment to, the commanders who retained them was looser. They were traditionally armed with daggers, and being lightly protected they could move quickly and use them to good effect in close-quarter fighting. In the rout, they could move quickly to escape the advancing knights.

Gunners were a new class of soldier to England which had previously been wed to archers as artillery. The Yorkists had more guns and these were probably used by Burgundian gunners; leaders in the use of handguns and loaned to Edward by his ally the Duke of Burgundy.

A lead ball, possibly from a handgun, has been found on the Gastons. Two gun-stones; the fore-runners of cannon balls have also been discovered, and can be seen in the town museum.



Tewkesbury Medieval Festival



An illustration of the battle by Graham Turner



The Arrivall sculpture