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“Civil War battlefields”

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Civil War battlefields

John Cole

I have been involved in arguments regarding the value of showing battlefield sites on small-scale maps and found justification not particularly easy. An accurate position for the initial clash of arms is difficult and often debateable. There is usually nothing to see on the ground and the lie of the land is of interest purely to military historians.

Nevertheless, as one who has a particular interest in the military history of the 1642-46 English Civil War, I have always been pleased to see them and my very first sighting on my first one-inch New Popular map (a thirteenth birthday present I believe) delighted and intrigued me.

At school the period obviously came up in history lessons and mention was made of the three 'main' battles, Edgehill, Marston Moor and Naseby. My up-to-date list numbers nineteen, plus a further five in Scotland, and thirty or so minor battles, actions, sieges – either reliefs or stormings. That list is by no means complete, but all except eight of the major and a surprising five of the minor battles have been noted on the New Popular and Seventh Series one-inch map whilst a recent inspection of the *Landranger* series revealed an increase in the west of England. This is an area that I will deal with in particular: the rest only in general.

As a very rough rule of thumb, a criterion for a major Civil War battle is that it usually involved an army of ten thousand per side. This certainly did not mean ten thousand well-armed and uniformed men, for when Sir Thomas Fairfax reviewed his Parliamentary army prior to the battle of Nantwich¹ the constituents reportedly caused him to burst into tears! And at the battle of Adwalton Moor² he and his father mustered barely three thousand to attack the Earl of Newcastle with reputedly four times that number.

Taking the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset as the western theatre, the first significant battle in Cornwall (involving less than ten thousand in total) took place on 19 January 1643 at Braddock Down between Liskeard and Lostwithiel. It is shown as site of battle ('battle' being in non Roman antiquity type) on Popular Edition sheet 143, crossed swords appearing on the Fifth Edition. These appeared in grid square 1561 on New Popular and Seventh Series sheet 186 but with the advent of *Pathfinder* SX06/16 in 1989, they had not only shifted dramatically to square 1762 but also with a date of 1642/3! I queried both at the time but was informed there was a problem with the calendar as calculated in the seventeenth century³ and the site itself had been challenged on good evidence (which I have seen confirmed).

Whilst the more important battle of Stratton which followed in May of that year has been continuously recorded on the one-inch and *Landranger* maps, albeit with a wrong date of 1645 on my 1960 Seventh Series, there has never been any indication of the Lostwithiel campaign of 1644 – the last major Royalist success of the war. King Charles I with some sixteen thousand men had pursued the Earl of Essex, with ten thousand, into Cornwall. Essex had assumed that Sir William Waller's force would be able to deal with the King, unaware that the former's army had virtually disintegrated after the battle of Cropredy Bridge in

¹ Not recorded on OS one-inch or 1:50,000.

² Which is recorded.

³ Prior to the Gregorian calendar, the civil year started on Lady Day, 25 March. The form '1642/3' is sometimes used for dates after 31 December 1642 and before 25 March 1643. – *CJH*

Oxfordshire some two months before. The Parliamentary army became bottled up on the west side of the River Fowey between that town and Lostwithiel. Clashes took place at Beacon Hill (1259), just southeast of Lostwithiel, and Castle Dore (1054), which is marked as an antiquity site although there are no crossed swords to be seen. Eventually although about two thousand cavalry escaped, the remaining infantry (deserted by their commander who escaped to Plymouth by small boat) surrendered near Fowey in early September 1644.

Before leaving Cornwall, it should be mentioned that although the site and date of the battle of Braddock Down appear on the 2003 revision of *Explorer* 107, it is absent from the *Landranger* revised in 2002.

The Cornish Royalists under Sir Ralph Hopton, following their success at Braddock Down, ‘invaded’ Devon but came to grief at Modbury (6651) about one month later, where the crossed swords so puzzled me on one-inch sheet 187. This was a relatively minor affair involving some 1600 Royalists and about four times that number of Parliamentarians.

An even less significant action took place towards the end of the 1642-46 war on the adjoining sheet 188, and is duly recorded at 8276 as the battle of Bovey Heath. Parliamentary horse under one Oliver Cromwell (making a rare military appearance in the south west) routed morale-battered Royalist cavalry under Lord Wentworth, described as ‘horse whom only their friends feared and the enemy laughed at, being terrible in plunder and resolute at running away’.

Soon after, on 16 February 1646, followed the battle of Torrington. Not previously shown on the one-inch map but it is now on the *Landranger* with the crossed swords shown inside the built-up area, where indeed the battle took place. Fairfax and Cromwell led the Parliamentary force and the former had a narrow escape when the Royalist magazine housed in the church exploded – an event commemorated annually in the town.

In happier days, Sir Ralph Hopton had fought the Parliamentarians (under Sir William Waller) to a virtual draw at Lansdown, close to Bath, before a relief force of cavalry from Oxford routed Waller’s army at Roundway Down while Hopton and his troops were holed-up in Devizes. The battle of Lansdown, 5 July 1643, is absent from all versions of the one-inch map but was added to the *Landranger*. That at Roundway Down a week later has always been recorded on the one-inch and the *Landranger*.

Langport, 10 July 1645, is another *Landranger* addition, at 4327, and was in effect the most significant battle after Naseby. Fairfax and the ‘New Model Army’⁴ defeated Sir George Goring, an enterprising commander a little too fond of the bottle. It was the remnants of his disintegrating cavalry which were routed at Bovey Heath.

Minor battles and actions, Marshall’s Elm (Somerset), Polson Bridge (Cornwall), Sourton Down, Chagford and Lipson (Devon), have not been recorded at one-inch or 1:50,000 scales. Nor indeed have any of the important sieges: Plymouth (where the Lipson battle took place), Lyme Regis and, slightly outside the south west, Bristol and Gloucester.

Regarding the 1:25,000 scale map, the crossed swords symbol for battles (with year) first appeared on the *Pathfinder*. However, I have a pamphlet of about the early 1960s, which introduced BBC3 radio programmes on civil war battlefields of the 1642-46 era. The mapping used is the Provisional 1:25,000. ‘Battle of Edgehill’ appears in non-Roman antiquity type, together with a date of 23 October 1642. Marston Moor and Naseby are treated similarly except that ‘site of’ precedes ‘battle’. Other locations dealt with are

⁴ Formed after the mixed fortunes of 1643-44.

Chalgrove Field,⁵ the siege of Gloucester and the previously mentioned battle of Lansdown. At the latter location there is no annotation on the Provisional 1:25,000 map, but an area where the present crossed sword symbol appears is actually named ‘The Battlefields’ whilst a small square just south west is annotated ‘monument’ and commemorates the spot where one of the Royalist generals, Sir Bevil Grenville, fell.

Looking briefly at the rest of England, Scotland and Wales,⁶ the only major omission (in my opinion) is the battle of Nantwich and possibly Ripple Field near Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire. Amongst the minor actions surprisingly recorded on the one-inch map was Brentford (12 November 1642). It is also recorded on large-scale sheet TQ1776NE together with a 1016 battle on the same site. The only other instance on large scales found to date is on an Alan Godfrey 1:2500 reprint of Wigan noting a ‘supposed’ battle site without a date but almost certainly from the 1648-51 conflict.

During 1644-5 the Earl of Montrose won a number of battles north of the border against Parliament’s Scottish allies, usually with a disadvantage in troop numbers. Battles at Tippermuir (west of Perth), Inverlochy (Fort William), Auldearn (southeast of Nairn), Alford Kilsyth were all ‘on the map’, though the first named temporarily disappeared from the Seventh Series. Montrose’s eventual defeat at Philliphaugh (Selkirk) now appears on *Landranger* 73. However, the only significant battle in Wales at Colby Moor (east of Haverfordwest) is not marked on small-scale mapping.

And finally, another site to appear on the *Landranger* but on no previous small-scale maps is Stow-on-the-Wold (21 March 1646), in effect the final and relatively short engagement. Lord Astley with some three thousand troops was en-route to the King’s longstanding headquarters at Oxford when he was intercepted by Brereton’s cavalry, released by the fall of Chester, and Morgan’s infantry from Gloucester. Though some of his horse got away, the captured Astley sat on a drum and told his captors “You have done your work, boys, and may go play, unless you will fall out amongst yourselves”.

Other battles or actions recorded on the one-inch map but not mentioned were: Newbury (1643 and 1644 – crossed swords at both locations), Cheriton, Rowton Heath (Chester), Winceby and Hopton Heath (near Stafford). Both Newbury battles were arguably Parliamentary ‘wins’, as were the next three, leaving only Hopton Heath as a Royalist success.

The bitterness of the Civil War has long since passed away, and if we, as children, have taken sides in the struggle, some of us as Cavaliers, some as Roundheads – most of us, probably, on the side of the King – we grow up to understand that each side had in view much that was worth fighting for, and that the English habit of mind would have lost something of its special character if Royalist and Puritan had not had the courage of their convictions. On the Royalist side we admire the great principle of loyalty and devotion to the head of the State. And we must equally approve of the Puritan insistence upon the liberties of England and the determination never again to be dragged back into the tyrannies of the Middle Ages.

Col. Sir Charles Close, The Map of England, London: Peter Davies, 1932, 156.

⁵ For which no OS mapping is used. Indeed this battle is not indicated on any OS small-scale mapping that I am aware of.

⁶ Ireland being represented by supplying troops for the Royalist cause.