

Battle Day 2020: Bosworth Field 1485 AD Battle Pack

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The aim of the Battle Pack is to introduce the battle, give a broad description of the events leading up to and during the battle itself, and provide some observations on the challenges and issues that a Game Organiser may need to consider when planning the refight.

However, arguably Bosworth Field needs no introductions: possibly the most famous battle to have taken place in England (ok, some might say Hastings beats it), the battle where the Wars of the Roses are finally settled once and for all: Richard III and the Yorkists are defeated and Henry Tudor and Lancastrians take over. And then we have Shakespeare's play and "a horse, a horse..." So instead of re-hashing the historical backdrop, I am going to launch straight into the challenges of the refight.

The Terrain

The first challenge of any wargamer has always been the terrain. None of the accounts written by historians ever made much sense when combined with the battlefield maps. The archaeological study led by Dr Glen Foard between 2005 and 2009 changed all that forever, and resulted in the battlefield finally being identified with as much certainty as we can ever have.

This really was ground-breaking. To quote from the excellent Battlefields Trust website:

"Between August 2005 and August 2009, the Battlefields Trust undertook a major new study of Bosworth battlefield, on behalf of Leicestershire County Council.

The project pushed the boundaries of battlefield studies in an attempt to resolve many of the long-standing questions surrounding the battle of Bosworth. The investigation was part of the revitalisation scheme for the site, and was resourced largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Trust's project officer, Glenn Foard, led a team of national experts from the fields of military history, landscape history and battlefield archaeology in this study. A small group of volunteers as well as several staff from Leicestershire County Council also worked with us, playing a key role in the investigation. On site coordination was provided by Richard Mackinder, based at the Battlefield Visitor Centre.

Four years of intensive historical, topographical and archaeological research finally bore fruit as a team led by Glenn Foard of the Battlefields Trust and funded by Leicestershire County Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund solved one of the great mysteries of English military history and succeeded in locating the site of the battle of Bosworth. Archaeological investigations are now complete and maps of the location of the battlefield and associated finds can be found on the left of this web page. A map showing a conjectural landscape reconstruction of the battlefield with two options for the deployment of the Royal army can also be accessed there.

The archaeological survey unearthed the largest group of cannonballs ever found on a medieval battlefield – no less than 33 lead shot of a variety of calibres – ranging from bullets fired from handguns to roundshot from substantial artillery pieces - were uncovered. These were located within the southern tip of Upton township around 3.2km south-west of Ambion Hill, the traditional site of the battlefield and where the visitor centre is located.

In addition to the bullet evidence an ephemeral scatter of other contemporary objects, such as buckles, strap ends and other fittings were also found. Two other items were also recovered which

certainly came from the battle; a fragment of a gilded copper alloy cross-guard with roped decoration from a 15th century sword which would have been carried by a high status soldier and a silver-gilt heraldic badge in the shape of a boar which was probably worn by one of Richard III's retinue during the battle.

For a detailed account of the archaeological survey, reconstruction of the historical terrain and interpretation of the results see Glenn Foard and Anne Curry, *Bosworth 1485: a battlefield rediscovered*, Oxford 2013”

Read more of this at the excellent Battlefield Trust website, and download the various Bosworth Assessment documents such as a conjectural terrain reconstruction, at:

<http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/warsoftheroses/battlepageview.asp?pageid=824>

So the most important thing I can say to any Game Organiser is to make sure any modern books you are using were published after the Battlefields Trust study findings were published. Most of my notes below are based on my preferred book for interpreting the battle, written by Mike Ingram: *Richard III and the Battle of Bosworth*, Helion & Company 2019. Having had the pleasure of hearing Mike speak on the subject at the 2019 Society of Ancients Conference, I find much of his argument very compelling.

The Sources

The best place to read all the contemporary and near-contemporary sources is the website of the American branch of the Richard III Society:

<http://www.r3.org/richard-iii/the-battle-of-bosworth/bosworth-contemporary-tudor-accounts/>

The Size of the Armies

Mike Ingram's book has a good discussion of the size of the armies. We know that Richard's army is likely to have been larger – Tudor sources subsequently make out that it was much larger, but there are good reasons for not taking these at face value.

Ingram estimates that based on the length of the line of battlefield debris found, there was around 1,000 men in the front line of the two vanguards. Quite what depth we should assume is open to interpretation, but for the Yorkists probably at least three men and Ingram says up to 10 deep is possible. When analysing the list of nobles accompanying Richard and the likely contingents that each would bring, he overall he estimates 10-15,000 in total for Richard.

For Henry and the Lancastrians, he estimates 8-12,000 – but this includes both the French contingent and the Stanleys. Ingram is perhaps the first author to so boldly claim that the Stanleys' contingents were already a clear part of the Tudor army – read the book to find out why!

What we should note is that the army sizes are not so different – so a modest advantage for Richard is probably the right approach.

Deployment

The Yorkists seem to have deployed in the traditional three battles with Norfolk leading the vanguard, Richard behind and then Northumberland bring up the rear.

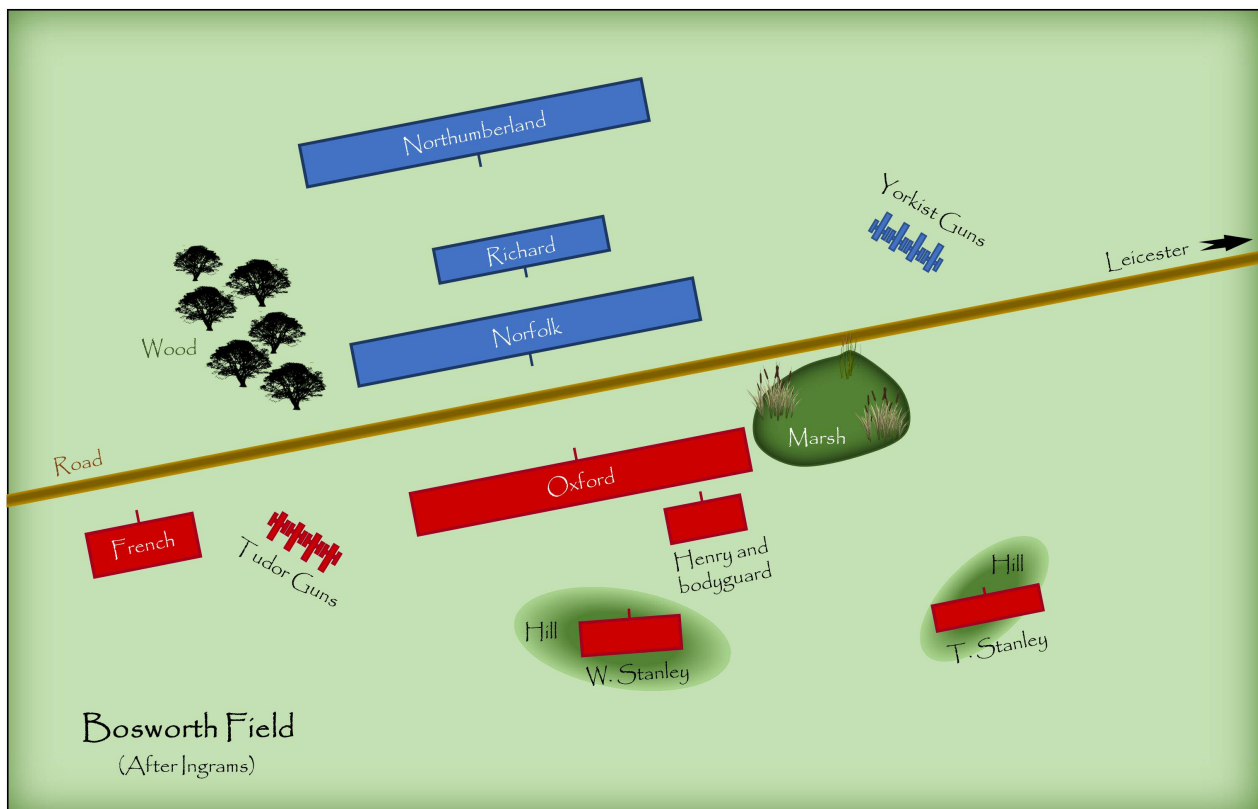
The Tudor rebels is much less clear, especially as the French contingent is barely mentioned but is believed by Ingram to have been crucial to their victory. Ingram has them lining up some way to the left flank of Oxford's vanguard, which was deployed facing Norfolk, and out of sight of the

Yorkists – so that their flanking manoeuvre to attack Norfolk/Richard in the flank was unobserved until it was too late.

The two vanguards likely had the same frontage, with varying depth - the more numerous Yorkists were probably deeper.

Ingram has the two Stanley contingents on two hills behind the Lancastrian line (and so clearly part of their army), with Henry Tudor and his bodyguard just behind the vanguard.

The map below is based on Ingram for an idea of his deployment hypothesis.



See this website map for Foard's deployments (which are different to Ingram's but on the same correct battlefield site)

<http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/media/243.pdf>

Some Considerations for the Game Organiser

1. Deployment of the armies. How this is done is going to be very important. Where the Stanleys are placed in particular, and where the French are put and in what numbers.
2. How the actions of the Stanleys are modelled. Typical past refights have seen them placed on the wings and coming into action dependent on several events occurring etc, but if you follow Ingram then they are already on the Tudor side and deployed behind them – so consideration of how or even if they get involved in the fighting is a key consideration.
3. How to deal with Northumberland. For one reason or another, his rearward battle does not seem to have engaged, and instead withdrew. How is this handled? By chance? Could he, or should he, be allowed to fight aggressively for the Yorkists?

4. The charge of Richard III – do you particularly want to encourage this? For example, victory to whoever kills the opposing leader, be it Richard or Henry, irrespective of the battle itself?

Summary

Overall, I think this is a very hard battle to refight. We have had previous challenges that may have caused standard, unadapted wargames rules to struggle – for example the attack on the marching column that was Arsuf. I am looking forward to seeing what is done with Bosworth Field! Over to you...