

EDWIN ALFRED WALFORD

EDGE HILL: THE BATTLE
AND BATTLEFIELD; WITH
NOTES ON BANBURY &
THEREABOUT

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With Notes on Banbury & Thereabout**

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Preface to Edition, 1904

For the present edition the available material of the last eighteen years has been consulted, but the plans of battle are similar to two of those of my book of 1886. They were then the first series of diagrammatic representations of the fight published, but in no case has this been acknowledged in the many plans of like kind subsequently published. Some new facts and inferences the author hopes may increase the value of the account.

The letters of Captain Nathaniel Fiennes and Captain Kightley, now added, may serve to make the tale a more living one. They are reproduced, by the kind courtesy of the authorities of the Radcliffe Library, Oxford, and the Birmingham Reference Library.

New pages of Notes on Banbury, and an extended bibliography are also given.

Edwin A. Walford.

Banbury,
March, 1904.

Preface to First Edition

In the following pages an endeavour has been made to give a concise account of the physical features of the Edge Hill district, as well as to describe the events of the first great battle of the Civil War, with which it is so intimately associated. The intention is to provide a handbook for the guidance of the visitor rather than to attempt any elaborate historical or scientific work. Though Nugent's "Memorials of John Hampden" has supplied the basis of the information, Clarendon's "History of the Great Rebellion," the various pamphlets of the time, and Beesley's "History of Banbury," have also been freely used. In order to avoid burdening the pages with foot notes, a catalogue of works upon the subject is printed as an appendix, and the letters and numbers throughout the text refer thereto. The catalogue, it is hoped, may be of use to the future student. The plans of the battle, based upon Nugent's account, must be looked upon as merely diagrammatic, the scale being unavoidably distorted for the purpose of showing the conjectured positions of the troops. In the plans it may be worth note that the troops then known as "dragooners" are classed with the infantry.

The "Notes on Banbury and Thereabouts" are in part reproduced from a small pamphlet published in 1879. Much of the detail relating to the older buildings has been derived from Skelton's "Antiquities of Oxfordshire" and Parker's descriptions in Beesley's History.

To Mr. W. L. Whitehorn my thanks are due for aid in the revision of "Edge Hill," and in the compilation of the "Notes."

Edwin A. Walford.

Banbury,
July 7th, 1886.

EDGE HILL: THE BATTLE AND BATTLEFIELD

I

To Edge Hill from Banbury a good road trends gradually up hill nearly the whole way. It rises from the 300 foot level of the Cherwell Vale to 720 at the highest ground of the ridge of the hill. At a distance of eight miles to the North-West is the edge or escarpment of high ground bounded on the East side by the vale of a tributary of the Cherwell, and on the North and West by the plain drained by the tributaries of the Avon. From Warmington, six miles from Banbury, North-Westwards to the point marked on the Ordnance Map as Knowle End, and thence South-Westwards to the Sun Rising, once the site of a hostelry on the Banbury and Stratford-on-Avon coach road, the edge makes a right angle with the apex at Knowle End. The nearest point of the hill range is at Warmington, where a fine fourteenth century Church stands high above the rock of the roadway. There is the first record of the battle—a simple headstone to the right of the path to the South porch telling how one Captain Alexander Gourdin had died on October 24th, 1642, the day after the fight. From the church-yard long flights of steps lead to the roadway and village below, where the house tops show through the foliage of the apple orchards in which they are partly hidden. Across the vale, three miles to the North, is the range of the Burton Dassett Hills, an outlier of the Edge Hill range. The Windmill Hill, the most distant, bears the Beacon House; the square tower of Burton Dassett Church may be seen amongst the elms on the lower slopes of Church Hill; Bitham Hill appears in the foreground of the range with the pretty spire and village of Avon Dassett close at hand.

Westward of Warmington Church runs Camp Lane. It winds along the ridge, and commands wide views of the plain lands. A beautiful field path springs from the South side of the lane leading through the village of Ratley to the Round House and Ratley Grange. Facing Southwards, one looks upon an equally pleasant though more circumscribed view—the vale of Hornton. The Arlescot Woods clothe the Northern slopes, and the Manor House rests amongst the fine trees below. The terraced fields of Adsum Hollow are three miles down vale Southward, and Nadbury Camp, supposedly a Romano-british remain, is but a remnant of similar *natural* terracing on the South side of the Camp Lane above Arlescot.

At Knowle End, where the road to Kineton plunges steeply down hill, is the first point of the battle ground and the commencement, strictly speaking, of Edge Hill. A short distance down the Kineton Road, a pathway on the right leads under overspreading beech and oak trees for some distance along the crest of the Knoll, whence a good side view of the hill may be got. The gate on the opposite side of the Kineton Road opens to a path through the Radway Woods, and from it, where the foliage is less dense a prospect opens of many wide leagues of fair midland country—a veritable patchwork of field and hedgerow. The furze below covers in part Bullet Hill, the last stand of the Royalists on the battle ground. The road from Kineton as well as the footway through the woods leads to Edge Hill Tower, or Round House. Covering the steep hill sides are beech, elm, chestnut and lime trees of exceptionally fine growth and a wealth of common wild flowers. The Tower or Round House is an inn, which, with a *modern-antique* ruin, makes as it were a landscape gardening adjunct to Radway Grange lying in the park below. From its upper room is obtained a fine view of the country. It is an octagonal tower, and was erected with artificial ruins in 1750 to mark the spot where the King's Standard was displayed before the Royalist army descended into the plain to give battle. The village of Radway rests amongst the elms near the foot of the hill, the church spire being one of the prominent objects of the foreground. Kineton lies about four miles directly to the North, beyond which Warwick Castle may be sometimes descried, or the yet more distant spires of Coventry. Some distance from the Burton hills the smoke of the Harbury lime works drifts across the landscape. The farms Battledon

and Thistledon, about midway between Radway and Kineton, marked by the coppices which almost hide the homesteads, are noted from the fact of so much of the fight having revolved round them.

The footway to the Sun Rising, 1½ miles S.W. of the Round House, follows the hill side, and though still pleasantly wooded, soon gets clear of that heavy growth of foliage which has hitherto shut out so much of the view. The eye ranges over the flat Warwickshire plain in front, to the hills of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire on the West and the North-West. The North-Eastern outliers of the Cotteswolds, the hills of Ebrington and Ilmington, are the nearest in prominence Westwards, beyond which a clear day will allow even the distant slopes of the Malverns to be seen. The Bromsgrove, Clent and Clee hills fringe the North-West horizon, and sometimes the Wrekin is said to appear “like a thin cloud” far away.

At the point where the pathway enters the Stratford-on-Avon road stands Edge Hill House (the Sun Rising) wherein years ago were some curious relics of the fight: breast-plates, swords, matchlocks, and a sword supposed on the evidence of emblems in its decoration to have belonged to the Earl Lindsay, who commanded the royalists forces prior to the battle, and who received his death wound in the fight.

In a fir coppice about 200 or 300 yards to the South of the house, the figure of a red horse roughly cut in the turf of the hill side might formerly be seen. Dugdale gives the following account of it: “Within the Precinct of that Manour in Tysoe, now belonging to the E. of Northampton (but antiently to the Family of Stafford, as I have shewed) there is cut upon the side of Edg-Hill the Proportion of a Horse, in a very large Forme; which by Reason of the ruddy Colour of the Earth, is called The Red Horse, and gives Denomination to that fruitfull and pleasant Countrey thereabouts, commonly called The Vale of Red Horse. The Trenches of which Ground, where the Shape of the said Horse is so cut out, being yearly scoured by a Freeholder in this Lordship, who holds certain Lands there by that service.” There is a tradition quoted by Beesley^[b] of its having been cut to commemorate the slaughter of a chieftain’s horse at the battle of Towton, in 1461, the chieftain preferring to share the perils of the fight with his followers.

II

The reign of King Charles I. showed a widening of the difference between the ecclesiastic and puritan elements of the English community—elements which were the centres of the subsequently enlarged sections, royalist and parliamentarian. In the later dissensions between the King and the Commons it was early apparent how widespread had been the alienation of the people from the King's cause—an alienation heightened, as Green in his "Short History" tells us, by a fear that the spirit of Roman Catholicism, so victorious on the continent, should once more become dominant in England. How great was the tension may be known from the fact of the contemplated emigration to the American colonies of such leaders as Lord Saye and Sele, Lord Warwick, Lord Brooke, and Sir John Hampden and Oliver Cromwell. When the rupture at last came, the Parliament was found to have secured the larger arsenals, and also to have forces at its disposal in the trained bands of London and in the militia, which it was enabled rapidly to enrol. Though the unfurling of the Royal Standard near Nottingham failed to secure many adherents to the King's cause, Essex hesitated to attack the royalists when they might have been easily dispersed, thinking no doubt to overawe the King by mere show of force. Yet when Charles began recruiting in the neighbourhood of Shrewsbury, he was soon able to gather an army, and on October 12th, 1642, he commenced his march upon London. The astute and carefully moderate policy of the Commons was to rescue the King from his surroundings, and to destroy the enemies, especially the foreign enemies, of the State, about the King's person. The sanctity of the King's person was yet a prominent factor—the belief in divinity of Kingship, notwithstanding all the misrule there had been, was yet alive in the hearts of the people. Therefore when the King had gathered his forces together and began his Southward march, Lord Essex with his army was commissioned "to march against his Majesties Army and fight with them, and to rescue the persons of the King, Prince and Duke of York." The Earl of Essex, with the Parliamentary forces, was at that time in Worcestershire, endeavouring to prevent the recruiting of the King's troops; and though the Earl moved two days later on by rapid marches into Warwickshire, it was only to find that he had been out-marched by the King, who, after resting at Southam, stood with the Royalist army at Edgcot across the way to the capital. That this had been accomplished, notwithstanding the opposition of the strongholds of Warwick and Coventry, speaks not unfavourably for the generalship of Earl Lindsay, the King's Lieutenant-General, whom we find at Edgcot contemplating an attack upon Banbury Castle. The King's was a good position: it commanded all the roads to London, held Banbury in its hand, covered the Cherwell bridge and fords, and had within touch the dominating escarpment of Edge Hill. If the purpose was the subjection of some prominent leaders of the Parliamentarians it succeeded only in the taking of Lord Saye and Sele's house at Broughton, and of Banbury, and Banbury Castle; in the partial destruction of Lord Spencer's house[B] at Wormleighton, and in sending a summons to Warwick Castle to surrender.

Kineton, on October 22nd, was the headquarters of the Parliamentary army, the troops in the evening disposing themselves on the surrounding plain. "The common soldiers have not come into a bed, but lain in the open field in the wet and cold nights," says the Worthy Divine[PG] "and most of them scarcely eat or drank at all for 24 hours together, nay, for 48, except fresh water when they could get it." The want of transport, which had necessitated Hampden and Hollis struggling behind a day's march in the rear in the neighbourhood of Stratford-on-Avon, had no doubt entailed these privations upon the army. Nor do the Royalists appear to have fared better, for Clarendon[B381] complains of the hostility of the country people, stating also that the circuit in which the battle was fought, being between the dominions of Lord Saye and Lord Brooke, was the most eminently corrupt of any in the kingdom. The King's forces seem to have been quartered about the country between Wormleighton and Cropredy, Prince Rupert with his cavalry near Wormleighton, the King himself staying at Edgcot House, whilst the main body of the army occupied the slopes and high lands on the

Northamptonshire side of the Cherwell vale near by. Thus the three roads North of Banbury were dominated by the Royalist troops, and the fourth, the old London road, was within striking distance.

The preaching of the local divines, Robert Harris, John Dod, and Robert Cleaver, had no doubt added largely to the enthusiasm of the country folk for the cause of the Commons. Though no great increase of the King's forces could be expected in such a district, yet there is an interesting account in Kimber and Johnson's *Baronetage*[NO] (1771) of a country gentleman Mr. (afterwards Sir Richard) Shuckburgh:

“Sir Richard Shuckburgh, Knt., eldest son and heir, was in no way inferior to his ancestors. As King Charles I. marched to Edgecot, near Banbury, on October 22nd, 1642, he saw him hunting in the fields with a very good pack of hounds, upon which it is reported that he fetched a deep sigh, and asked who the gentleman was that hunted so merrily that morning when he was going to fight for his crown and dignity; and being told that it was this Richard Shuckburgh, he was graciously ordered to be called to him, and was by him very graciously received. Upon which he went immediately home, armed all his tenants, and the next day attended him in the field, where he was knighted, and was present at the battle of Edge Hill. After the taking of Banbury Castle, and his Majesty's retreat from those parts, he went to his own seat and fortified himself on the top of Shuckborough Hill, where, being attacked by some of the Parliament forces, he defended himself till he fell, with most of his tenants about him; but being taken up and life perceived in him, he was carried away prisoner to Kenilworth Castle, where he lay a considerable time, and was forced to purchase his liberty at a dear rate.”

A fight for the possession of Lord Spencer's house at Wormleighton was the Saturday evening's prelude to the Sunday's battle. It had been garrisoned by some Parliamentary troops sent by Essex, and in Rupert's attack some prisoners were taken, from whom, it is said, the whereabouts of the Parliamentary army was learned.[Y] The house is said to have been partly burned down in the fight, but it is not clear whether it happened then or in the year 1643. Though with the Parliamentarians in the early part of the Rebellion, Lord Spencer became Royalist long ere the campaigns were over. The fact of an outpost being pushed so far as Wormleighton shows that the Dassett Hills were held by the Parliament forces. The Royalists had marched into the heart of a hostile country, Warwick Castle and Lord Brooke on the N.W., Fawsley House and the Knightleys on the N.E., and on the South, Sir A. Cope and Hanwell Castle, and Banbury and Broughton Castle. Lord Northampton's lands on the Western border of Oxfordshire were near enough to find touch with the King. His house played locally a most prominent part for the Royalist cause, and its military leadership was of the best.

III

Early on the morning of Sunday, October 23rd, Prince Rupert forwarded information to the King that the camp fires of the Parliamentary army had been seen on the plain between Edge Hill and Kineton. With keen foresight Earl Lindsay abandoned the intended advance upon Banbury, and speedily began the movement of the Royalist army towards the fringe of hills which dominates the Warwickshire vale. It seems at first strange that the Parliamentarians, familiar as so many of them were with the physical features of the neighbourhood, should have neglected when so near to secure possession of some part of the Edge Hill ridge. This, however, is explained in a pamphlet of the time,^[PH] “An Exact and True Relation of the Dangerous and Bloody Fight between his Majestie’s Army and the Parliament near Keynton.” Therein we learn that the artillery were unready, for want of draught horses, and with Colonel Hampden and Colonel Grantham were forced to be left behind, and hence no advance could safely be made beyond Keynton.

Hampden had with him three regiments of foot, nine or ten troops of horse, some companies of dragoons, and seven pieces of cannon, with the necessary ammunition train,^[PB] perhaps about 4,000 men in all. The troops of the Parliament were quartered in the villages of the plain. Tradition says that Tysoe was occupied, and that the soldiers took the bread from the village ovens ere they marched down street to the fight. But of the doings at Compton in the Hole, barely a mile distant, during the occupation we know nothing.

It is hard also to understand that there should have been anything in the nature of a surprise^[B] in the Royalist advance, for within a district so sympathetic to their cause, one would have supposed the Puritan leaders to have been immediately informed of every movement of their enemies. Indeed, in another quaint pamphlet, “A Letter sent from a Worthy Divine,”^[PG] the writer says that the alarm came at about eight o’clock in the morning, that the enemy were advancing, and that “it pleased God to make myself the first instrument of giving a certain discovery of it, by the help of a perspective glass, from the top a hill.”

Deploying, therefore, before daybreak, across Cropredy Bridge, then narrower than at present, and no doubt crossing the Cherwell at certain fords also, the King’s forces marched by way of Mollington to Warmington, where they had been preceded by Prince Rupert’s horse, who would have travelled across the Southern part of the Dassett Hills. It is said^[B] that “the foot were quartered at so great distance that many regiments marched seven or eight miles to the rendezvous, so that it was past one of the clock before the King’s forces marched down hill.” Much delay would be occasioned in getting the troops across the river Cherwell, not so easy to be forded at that time of the year. The narrow bridge¹ would allow but slow passage for 10,000 or 12,000 men, with all the impedimenta of war material. Another pamphleteer says “the King’s horse were at the rendezvous between ten and eleven; the van of the foot an hour later, and the rear and artillery, including the Lord Lt. General’s own regiment, not until two hours after.”

As the Parliamentary troops take up their position upon the plain, it is worth while to pause for a few minutes to look at the composition and armament of the two forces. Many of the troops on both sides appear to have been indifferently provided with weapons. Implements of warfare that had not been in use since the Wars of the Roses—the long bow, the cross bow, &c.—resumed their places amongst the accoutrements of the men at arms.^[a] There were the heavy horse in iron casques, breast-plates and greaves, the musketeers with their matchlocks, and the dragoons or dragooners, with sword and matchlock. These last seem to have been so called from the drake, the firearm they once carried, and though not strictly speaking cavalry, yet accompanying and supporting them. Each regiment of Lord Essex’s army carried a standard inscribed on the one side with the watchword of

¹ Subsequently the scene of a fight between Waller’s Puritans and the Royalists under the Earl of Cleveland.

the Parliament, “God with us,” and on the other side the motto of the regimental commander; Lord Saye and Sele’s were the blue coats, the Commander’s were orange and Lord Broke’s purple; Colonel Ballard’s troops were clad in grey, Colonel Holles’ in red, and Lord Mandeville’s in blue. Across his breastplate each officer of the Parliamentary army wore an orange scarf, the commander’s colour.

There were on the side of the Parliament eleven regiments of foot, forty-two troops of horse, and 700 dragoons, numbering according to Nugent about 13,000, though the officers in their account[PH] place their strength as low as 10,000, which may have meant prior to the arrival of Hampden with the artillery and rear troops. The Royalist army is stated to have possessed 1,000 horse and 4,000 foot more; in all 14,000 foot and 4,000 horse and dragoons—but as very few troops were of full compliment the numbers were no doubt over estimated. The *full* strength of a foot regiment was 1,200, of a troop of horse about 120 and of dragoons about the same number to each company.

The Red and the Blue Regiments of the King’s foot were so named from the colour of their uniforms, the former being the King’s foot guards. In cavalry, however, it was that the Royalist army was predominant—more so, perhaps, from the quality of the material than from any superiority of equipment, Prince Rupert’s show troop being a prominent example. Cromwell, in a speech before Parliament,[q] bore testimony on this point, explaining his reconstruction of the army as having arisen from the fact that “such base and mean fellowes,” tapsters and serving men as they then had, not being “able to encounter gentlemen that had honour and courage and resolution in them, He strove to find such as had the spirit of God in them.”

Towards mid-day the royalist army had occupied the whole length of the brow of the hill between the Sun Rising and Arlescot; the left wing at the Sun Rising, the centre at about the point where the Round House now stands² and the right wing at Knowle End, where the road to Kineton descends the hill. Well had it been for the King had the advice of so able a soldier as Earl Lindsay prevailed at the council of war over the more impetuous policy of Rupert. He had the strong position of the hill crest, with convenient roads for the rapid movement of troops, and, moreover, natural advantages which would have masked those movements. Essex would have hesitated to risk the assault of a position of such strength, especially when defended by a force greater than his own. These advantages were, however, abandoned for the more dashing policy of Rupert to descend to the plain and at once give battle. It must not be forgotten, however, that the knowledge of the enemy’s artillery with part of the army being far in the rear,[PB] but approaching with what speed they could, and the difficulty of provisioning the army in a hostile district,[B] would give weight to Rupert’s counsel. Brilliant cavalry officer as he undoubtedly was, his defiance of control caused the Earl to resign his command, and the disposition of the forces to devolve upon Earl Ruthven, and so he decided against the King the fortunes of the then commencing war.

The Parliamentarians had in the meantime not been idle. Turning aside from church, whither they had been going, the divines encouraged the soldiers as they stood drawn up ready for the fight. Poor retrenchment as they were said to have had, the ground lent itself to preparation for defence: the thick growth of furze tied and wattled together on the gently sloping upland: (the old phrase a “good bush whacking” may point to its service in fight). Also there was the long ditch with its wet clay banks covering the front. It is certain that a large number of the force were fighting on their own ground and for their own homes. Evidence shows how heavy the fight was thereabouts.

The centre consisted of three regiments of infantry, including one of the general’s, under Lord Brooke and Colonel Ballard, another regiment, under Colonel Holles, being in the rear. These faced the Battledon Farm, about one mile North-West of Radway, and on some rising ground to the right the artillery was posted.

² The cottage at the foot of the hill near Radway, which tradition pointed out as the one in which the King breakfasted, has been pulled down.

The right wing moved towards the Sun Rising. It was composed of four brigades of horse, under Sir John Meldrum, Col. Stapleton, and Sir William Balfore (the divisional general), with Col. Fielding's brigade and some guns in the rear. Capt. Fiennes' regiment was with this wing, which was covered on the right by some musketeers. Captain Oliver Cromwell fought there also. Infantry, including the Oxfordshire Militia under Sir William Constable and Lord Roberts, took up the intervening space between the centre and the right wing. The cavalry of the left wing, covering the Kinton road, was made up of twenty-four troops, under Sir James Ramsay: the infantry in five regiments, officered by Cols. Essex and Chomley and Lords Wharton and Mandeville, with Sir Wm. Fairfax in reserve, occupied the ground between the cavalry and the main body. A few guns were placed in the rear of the horse.

Imposing indeed must the sight have been in bright sunlight of that early Sunday afternoon as the Royalist troops, began to descend the hill side! The slopes do not appear to have been so thickly wooded as they are now, and the unenclosed country, without the many obstacles of fence and hedgerow,[\[B388\]](#) offered all that a cavalry officer could desire for the exercise of his art and arm. Before this[\[PF\]](#) the King had summoned the officers to the royal tent, and in his brief speech had said: "My Lords and Gentlemen here present,—If this day shine prosperously for us, we shall be happy in a glorious victory. Your King is both your cause, your quarrel, and your captain. The foe is in sight. Now show yourselves no malignant parties, but with your swords declare what courage and fidelity is within you. * * * Come life or death, your King will bear you company, and ever keep this field, this place, and this day's service in his grateful remembrance." The King,[\[a286\]](#) wearing a black velvet mantle over his armour, and steel cap covered with velvet on his head, rode along the lines of his troops and spoke to them: "Matters are now to be declared with swords, not by words."[\[PF\]](#) Perhaps, however, the most beautiful of these records is that of the truly soldier-like prayer of Lord Lindsay,[\[a286\]](#) "O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day; if I forget Thee do not Thou forget me."

I

BATTLE OF EDGE HILL

(Commencement of Battle)

The King's centre, under General Ruthven, moved forward as far as the village of Radway. The six columns of infantry of which it was composed were under the divisional command of Sir Edmund Verney and Sir Jacob Astley; Earl Lindsay and Lord Willoughby led their Lincolnshire regiment. Between these and the right wing were eight other regiments of infantry. The cavalry of the right wing, under Prince Rupert, commenced slowly the steep descent of the road through Arlescot wood and the Kinton road, the base of which is known as the Bullet Hill, and drew up there in a meadow at the bottom of the hill.[\[PB\]](#)

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