

*KILLING TIME:*  
CHALLENGING THE COMMON  
PERCEPTIONS OF THREE MEDIEVAL CONFLICTS  
—FERRYBRIDGE, DINTINGDALE AND TOWTON—  
*‘THE LARGEST BATTLE ON BRITISH SOIL’*

TIM SUTHERLAND

ABSTRACT

The Battle of Towton in March 1461 is said to be the largest battle ever fought on British soil and according to the historical sources appears to have been the longest. However, a careful reading of the sources suggests that the traditional understanding of the battle is based on a misinterpretation of the Medieval concept of time. It is suggested here that the battle was much shorter than has been supposed, and also that the Battle of Towton has been conflated with the battles at Ferrybridge and Dintingdale. What has until now appeared to be the largest battle in Britain and two contemporary small actions can now be seen as three interconnected conflicts, the combined effect of which was to put Edward IV onto the throne of England.

*Introduction*

The Battle of Towton, notable for putting the first Yorkist King, Edward IV, on the English throne, is said to be the largest battle on British Soil (English Heritage 1995). It has always eclipsed the fighting at Ferrybridge and Dintingdale, said to have taken place on the preceding day (fig. 1). The dates, times and duration of these three conflicts, fought consecutively near York, England, at the end of March 1461 have caused consternation amongst military historians since the early nineteenth century. Some devalue the conflict at Ferrybridge, whilst many ignore the one at Dintingdale completely. Towton, therefore, appears to dominate. However, this dominance is a manufactured concept, as will be demonstrated below. How the three conflicts have been perceived since 29 March 1461 is crucial to our understanding of, quite literally, how times have changed. A failure to understand these changes have divided not only opinions on how they should be interpreted but also the conflicts themselves, pushing one battle into legend and the others into obscurity.

For example, some historians quite rightly cannot accept, as ‘Hearne’s Fragment’ (Giles 1843) suggests, that a formal Medieval battle could take place at night. Most find it hard to believe, as Hall stated in the early sixteenth century (see Ellis 1809), that a Medieval battle could have lasted for ten hours. Some (e.g. Brooke 1857: 115; Boardman 1996: 75) cannot understand why the Lancastrian

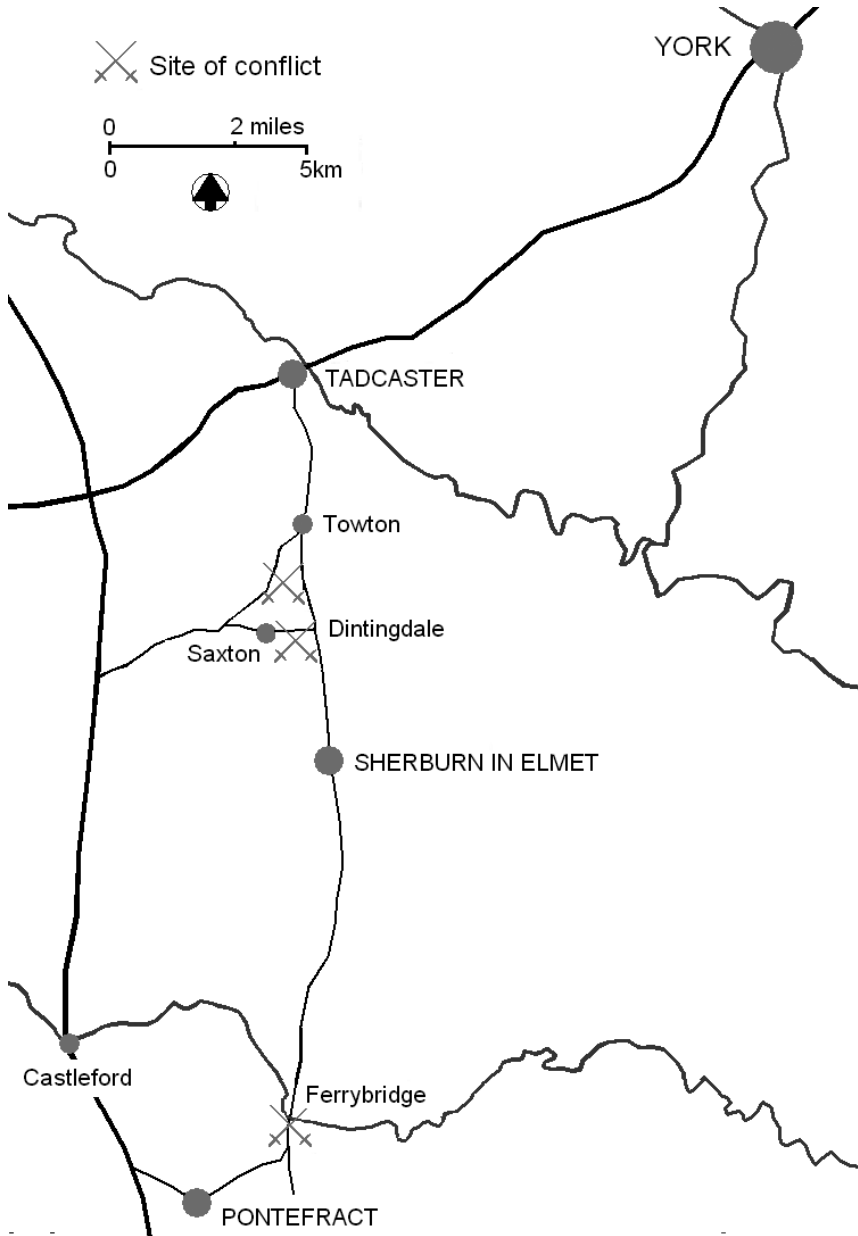


Fig. 1: Locations mentioned in text

army, if it was already camped at Towton on 28 March, as Markham (1889: 8) and Boardman (1996: 75) amongst others suggest, did not go to the assistance of their Lord Clifford as he was being attacked at nearby Dintingdale by a Yorkist force. Others (e.g. Barrett 1896: 151) disagree about when the first conflict began (27 or 28 March) and thus arbitrarily have to fill in vacant time frames between each engagement or take account of armies camping in locations where there is no historical or archaeological evidence for such events. Just as important is a problem that has been somewhat ignored; the relationship between a conflict's time and location, and the associated deaths of each of the noble combatants: Who died where and on what day?

One of the main controversies is, therefore, that of definition. When contemporary documents discussed the conflict that took place on 29 March, which one were they referring to: Ferrybridge, Dintingdale or Towton? As the three conflicts are alleged to have taken place over two different days, it has been universally taken for granted that any reference to 29 March means that those documents are discussing the Battle of Towton, as the other two conflicts are supposed to have been fought on the previous day. The resulting historical debate over the past two hundred years has been widespread (Whitaker 1816; Townsend 1848; Brooke 1857; Wheeler 1882; Markham 1889; Leadman 1889; Grange 1893; Barrett 1896; Christie 1922; Burne 2002; Green 1983; Boardman 1994; Fiorato *et al* 2000; Haigh 2002; Gravett 2003; amongst others), but it has not resolved the issue. The result is an acknowledged confusion (e.g. Boardman 1996: 66–67; English Heritage 1995, 3; see below), and thus the myths of the Battle of Towton proliferate.

This paper derives from the work carried out during the Towton Battlefield Archaeological Survey. As such, it approached the historical problem with a different perspective to that undertaken previously; that of the re-analysis of the historical material resulting from an assessment of the now significant archaeological evidence. By doing so, it provides an alternative interpretation; that 'the Battle of Towton' is really the collective name for all three conflicts fought over a single day. This interpretation provides an explanation for the numerous anomalies, inherent in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century texts, without the need to reject them outright. It also allows for the post-eighteenth century fictitious actions and the associated modern interpretations to be eliminated. However, in terms of providing a definitive answer to this problem, the matter can only be proven archaeologically, a conclusion that is discussed within this paper.

*Background*

The skirmish at Ferrybridge (NGR SE 483246) was fought 12 miles to the south of the village of Towton, which in turn lies 10 miles to the south-west of the city of York, England. The conflict focused on the crossing point of the River Aire (Neville 1461 in Hinds 1912: 60), although no definitive archaeological evidence has been recorded to prove its location. The skirmish is commonly believed to have been fought on either the morning of 27 March (Barrett 1896: 151) or 28 March 1461 (Whitaker 1816: 154), depending upon the source of reference.

The small conflict at Dintingdale (NGR SE 484371), which lies approximately 1 mile to the south of the village of Towton, is commonly believed to have been fought on the same day as that at Ferrybridge, but in the morning of the day prior to the battle of Towton (Whitaker 1816: 154). Artefactual evidence has been collected that suggests a conflict did take place just to the south of the Towton battlefield, in the valley of Dintingdale (S. Richardson 1998: *pers com.*).

The Battle of Towton, named after the village near to where it terminated (NGR SE 479380), is formally regarded as the largest battle to have taken place in Britain (English Heritage 1995). It was fought on 29 March 1461, Palm Sunday, between the Lancastrian forces of King Henry VI and the Yorkist forces led by Edward, Earl of March, recently proclaimed King Edward IV (*ibid*). The location of the site has been archaeologically proven by the discovery of an extensive artefact assemblage, which include arrowheads (Sutherland & Richardson 2007) and mass graves (Sutherland 2003).

The current interpretation separates the three conflicts of Ferrybridge, Dintingdale and Towton in both space and, crucially for the context about to be discussed, time. However, archaeologically the patterns of artefacts from metal detector surveys tentatively suggests that the conflicts at Dintingdale and Towton might not be separated significantly in time, in that there is little distance between the artefact assemblages from what are believed to be the two engagements. As the archaeological project attempted to compare the archaeological and historical data, the problem relating to an understanding of the time element presented itself. This problem increased as the research progressed until it was considered necessary to challenge the modern interpretation of the three conflicts.

*The Origins of the Misunderstanding*

The consequences of not understanding the contemporary terminology used to describe a conflict, and therefore not knowing such fundamentals as when a conflict started and ended, often permit only vague and inaccurate interpretations. Conversely, if a different time frame could be hypothesised for an established perception of a conflict, then an entirely new and more accurate interpretation may be ascribed.

In dealing with the issues surrounding Palm Sunday 1461, modern historians generally follow the lead of John Whitaker, who in 1816 was the first to state categorically that the conflict at Ferrybridge took place: ‘... On the **Saturday morning** before Palm Sunday, 28th March’ (Whitaker 1816: 154 [emphasis added]). However, it is possible that Whitaker made a fundamental error in making such a statement. The current paper therefore presents quotes from some of the early and most pertinent documentary evidence of the events. These are followed by alternative interpretations to those generally accepted. The crucial point to be investigated is what each author was inferring when he described a certain time of day and the difference between what his perception of that day was and what it is today. In doing so it is suggested that Whitaker did not understand the time frame in question.

*Commonly Accepted Issues*

It is generally accepted that the first of the three conflicts at Ferrybridge took place at, or just before, dawn (Boardman 1996). Whether this was Saturday 28 March or Sunday 29th is the central theme of this paper and will be discussed below. A date for a battle on 27 March is considered irrelevant within the context of this paper (see below). The conflict at Ferrybridge is the starting point for the time frame in question. It is also accepted that the last of the three conflicts took place near Towton during the mid-day of Sunday 29 March, with a rout towards the city of York (10 miles away) lasting some hours, probably even over the following day (Ellis 1809). King Henry and his wife Margaret of Anjou escaped and were pursued north over the next few days (Gairdner 1876), adding another possibility for textual misinterpretation. The second of the engagements, at Dintingdale, is accepted to have taken place in the hours between the conflicts at Ferrybridge and Towton (Ellis 1809). It is also accepted that it took place on the same day as that at Ferrybridge (Boardman 1996).

*Point of Contention*

The general point of contention is as follows: did the skirmish at Ferrybridge begin in the early morning of 28 March, as is generally accepted, or 29 March (modern time) as proposed here? This timing is crucial. The former date would allow approximately 36 hours for all three conflicts to have taken place (not including the rout that followed), whereas the latter approximately only twelve hours. The latter interpretation, if correct, would necessitate a major reconsideration of either the numbers of combatants involved or the capabilities of Medieval forces to move around the landscape and conduct organised warfare on a large scale. Such considerations will not be discussed within the current paper.

The general confusion regarding these matters is typified by Boardman, who states that:

The main battle of Ferrybridge was somewhat of a dilemma for chroniclers in so much as most of the writers who considered the matter, and sadly there were few of them, failed to appreciate the sequence of events that were taking place so far north. In fact some authors could not differentiate between the battles of Ferrybridge and Towton, unaware even that they occurred on different days. (Boardman 1996: 66)

The same criticism was also made in the *Register of Historic Battlefields*, which states that:

... writers merely mention the battle [at Towton] or, if they do more, mix up their account of it with the fight that took place at Ferrybridge the previous day. (English Heritage 1995, 3)

It is possible that the confusion regarding which conflict was fought on which day is related to a potential ambiguity of the time frame in question. In the later Medieval period, the concept of time was changing. Increasingly, people began to refer to times 'of the clock' as mechanical timepieces became more evident. Previously, the ecclesiastical terminology for times such as Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, and Compline, or the basic terminology of Dawn, Noon, Dusk, and Evening, were common. Real confusion occurs when different time frames are mixed, such as in George Nevill's letter:

a great conflict ... began with the rising of the sun, and lasted until the tenth hour of the night .... (Hinds 1912, 60; see below)

It can be shown that some authors appear to have been using different time frames to others and it is this that has led to a miscomprehension of the events in question.

*The New Recognition of an Old Concept*

It is proposed within this paper that the generally perceived time frame for a single day, during the period in question, was from approximately 6 am until 6pm for a ‘day’ and 6pm until 6 am for a ‘night’, and that this was used by contemporaries of the conflicts. There remain vestiges of this time frame in modern terminology. The terms ‘midday’ and ‘midnight’ reflect this 6 am to 6pm and 6pm to 6 am timeframe respectively; together they make little sense in a modern day beginning at 12 o’clock at night or 0.00 hours.

The term ‘Palm Sunday eve’ would also have had a different meaning in the Medieval period to that perceived today. Now the word ‘eve’ is usually taken to represent the whole of the day before. However, the word derives from the word ‘even’ or evening and originally meant the hours *immediately* before the day in question (Oxford 1950). The following texts (see below) that refer to the words ‘the eve of Palm Sunday’ (*Hearne’s Fragment* in Giles 1843), ‘Palm Sunday evyn’ (William Gregory in Gairdner 1876) or ‘the night of Palm Sunday’ (Jean de Waurin in Hardy & Hardy 1891) would therefore have presumably meant to imply the hours immediately before Palm Sunday. If Palm Sunday began at approximately dawn, then ‘Palm Sunday eve’ would therefore refer to the hours of darkness immediately before dawn. It is thus possible to make sense of William Gregory’s 1461 Chronicle which states:

And the xxviiij day of Marche, that was ye Palme Sunday evyn, the Lorde Fewater was slayne at Ferybryge, (Gairdner 1876: 216)

Gregory is clear that the conflict at Ferrybridge took place on ‘... the xxviiij day of Marche ...’ and reinforces the matter by stating that it was ‘... ye Palme Sunday evyn ...’, traditionally taken to mean the day before Palm Sunday. The question is whether Gregory was referring to the hours before Palm Sunday (thereby implying Saturday night) or the whole of the day before as Whitaker (1816: 154) suggested.

It is known, from the letter from George Nevill that:

... on Palm Sunday, near a, town called Feurbirga ... there was a great conflict, which began with the rising of the sun .... (Hinds 1912, 60)

The conflict must therefore have started at around 6 am in the morning of Palm Sunday. This is confirmed in a letter from Master Antonio, Physician of Francesco Coppino, who also clearly stated that,

... the battle was begun on Palm Sunday, at the hour of prime [approximately 6 am], at Pontefract [by Ferrybridge]. (Hinds 1912, 71)

This cannot be interpreted as the time between the evening of 27 March and the morning of 28 March. It can therefore be determined that the writers of the relevant documents are using different concepts of time, to that used today, to put over the same information.

If all of the relevant historical texts are read in sequence with what might be termed this pre-modern timeframe (6 am–6 am) in mind, then there is much less room for misinterpretation and a very strong case is made for a re-interpretation of the events. Later texts mix pre-modern and modern time frames (12pm–12pm), and still later texts use only the modern. This results in a loss of comprehension as to when each conflict was fought.

One document by Benet (Harris & Harris 1972), which will be described in detail later, actually confirms the interpretation put forward in this paper, although Benet's work appears to have been largely ignored. Other documents appear to invite the reader to take this idea for granted rather than contradicting it. Many early documents make no sense using the accepted modern interpretation, hence the general confusion. A fundamental question that should be asked is: What conflict is each document referring to: Ferrybridge, Dintingdale or Towton? Modern interpretations would have us believe that they generally refer to a major battle, and that was at Towton. It is the aim of this paper to suggest that they generally refer to all three engagements collectively, as if they were one.

The consequence of the new interpretation also has ramifications upon the expectation as to what size of archaeological assemblage might be encountered on any of the given sites. Likewise, the death tolls on each site might be considerably less given the time frame allowed by the new hypothesis and the mass graves of the fallen would therefore be smaller. This can now be quantified by archaeological excavation. Much of the status for the battle of Towton, as 'Britain's largest battle', hangs on an understanding of these vital issues.

#### *Examples of some of the Relevant Texts*

The earliest available source to describe these events is from William Paston who wrote to his brother John Paston in a letter dated April 4, 1461, a few days after the events. He highlights one of the problems for later researchers in that he does not actually state—and neither do so many others—which conflict he is referring to. Instead, he infers that everyone should know this, even though at that time the conflict or conflicts had no generally recognised name. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows:

Fyrst, oure souerayn lord hath wonne the feld, and vppon the Munday next after Palme Sunday he was resseyued in-to York ....  
(Gairdner 1872–1875)



This gives a date, Palm Sunday (29 March), by which time ‘the conflict’, written in the singular, must have terminated. It does not provide a starting date. Unfortunately, this is typical of the kind of available information.

The next source to describe the events is from George Nevill, Bishop of Exeter and Chancellor of England. He was also brother of the Earl of Warwick and nephew of Lord Fauconberg, both of whom fought during these conflicts for the Yorkists and survived. He might therefore be expected to be a reliable, if a somewhat biased, witness who presumably received his information from relatives who fought during the actual event. He wrote to Francesco Coppino, Bishop of Terni, Apostolic Legate in Flanders in a letter dated April 7 1461, one week after the conflicts. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows,

... at length on Palm Sunday, near a town called Feurbirga, about sixteen miles from the city [York], our enemies were routed and broken in pieces. ... Finally the enemy took to flight ... That day there was a great conflict, which began with the rising of the sun, and lasted until the tenth hour of the night ... Of the enemy who fled, great numbers were drowned in the river near the town of Tadcaster, eight miles from York ...

(Hinds 1912: 60)

This gives an approximate time frame from ‘the rising of the sun’, that is, around dawn, on 29 March until ‘the tenth hour of the night’. The latter phrase initially appears ambiguous. However, the application of a potentially different time frame to the conundrum allows a perfectly acceptable interpretation. The day was perceived to have begun around dawn or the hour of ‘Prime’ (literally meaning ‘first’; approximately 6 am) and ended at sunset (approximately 6pm) although these varied with the changeable light conditions and was therefore not fixed (Dohrn van Rossum 1996). The ‘tenth hour of the night’ would therefore have been 4 am and in the pre modern timeframe, this is on the same day as the previous 4pm.

First hour (Prime) = 6 am	
6 am–6pm	= a day
6pm–6 am	= a night

The time frame for this conflict is from about dawn until ‘4 am’ (pre modern time) and therefore infers almost 24 hours, or, a single modern day and night, and hence the use of the phrase ‘That day there was a great conflict ...’

Additionally, the text infers that ‘a great conflict’ began at Ferrybridge and ended near Tadcaster (two miles north of Towton), which locations are 18 miles apart. It therefore suggests a single conflict even though it incorporates both the time frame and the ground covered during the three conflicts in question.

The third source to describe these events is from Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury. He also wrote to Francesco Coppino, Bishop of Terni, Apostolic

Legate in Flanders in a letter also dated April 7 1461, one week after the conflicts. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows:

... on Palm Sunday last King Edward began a very hard fought battle near York, in which the result remained doubtful the whole day, until at length victory declared itself on his side ... The heralds counted 28,000 (xxviii m.) slain, a number unheard of in our realm for almost a thousand years, without counting those wounded and drowned  
(Hinds 1912: 63)

Once again the text states that the battle lasted ‘the whole day’. It also infers that the death toll from the battle was extraordinary for the time. In the Medieval period, such a clear victory, as at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, was seen to be by divine right (Lewis E201). In fact, it is largely due to this dramatic description and the death toll counted by the heralds (see discussion below), that Towton is officially regarded as the largest battle to have been fought in Britain (English Heritage 1995). Rather than ‘the Battle of Towton’, it should be considered that the title should, more appropriately, be held by all three of the conflicts collectively under a different pseudonym (see below).

The next two sources to describe these events, a letter by Nicholas O’Flanagan, Bishop of Elphin, to Francesco Coppino, Bishop of Terni, Apostolic Legate to England, Scotland and Ireland in a letter also dated April 7 1461 (Hinds 1912: 65), and a letter, which is simply noted as ‘From Ghent’, and dated April 9, 1461 (*ibid*, 77) provide little help for this discussion.

Another letter describing these events is dated 14 April 1461 (*ibid*, 68) by Pigello Portinaro (a Milanese merchant). The appropriate portion of the text is as follows

The two camps of King Henry and ... King Edward met near York ..., and fought a very great battle, which lasted a whole day and a half.  
(Hinds 1912: 68)

This text is important as it states that the conflict lasted ‘... a whole day and a half’ and therefore incorporated a night. Unfortunately, it does not give times or dates. In theory, it might refer to half of the previous day (28 March), but cannot be stretched to the previous morning as this would be two whole days and a night. It therefore presumably refers to the notional Saturday evening (pre modern time) and all of Sunday. In a modern timeframe, this would be a single day.

The next source describing these events is by Master Antonio, Physician of Francesco Coppino, Apostolic Legate, to the Legate aforesaid and dated April 17 1461. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows:

They tell how the battle was begun on Palm Sunday, at the hour of prime, at Pontefract, and lasted until the hour of noon on Tuesday. From Pontefract to York there were 30,000 slain ....  
(Hinds 1912: 71)

This text is of great importance because the phrase cannot simply be referring to the Battle of Towton, as the battle is said to have begun at Pontefract, which lies on the same side of the river Aire as Ferrybridge at a distance of two miles. What is more, the number of the slain is counted ‘From Pontefract to York ...’ and therefore must cover all three engagements and the rout. Towton alone is currently believed to have been fought on Palm Sunday, with the other two conflicts fought on the previous day. The timeframe cannot fit the accepted modern interpretation. The reference to the Tuesday is probably confusing the extended rout and the later search for King Henry VI as part of the conflict, as it is known that Edward was received in York on Monday 30 March (Davies 1856, 29).

The next source is a letter from Prospero Di Gamulio, Milanese Ambassador to the Court of France, to Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan dated April 18. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows

... on the 29th of March the forces of King Edward and Warwick fought with the forces of King Henry ... At the beginning Fortune seemed to be on the side of King Henry ... Subsequently the wind changed, and Edward and Warwick came off victorious.

(Hinds 1912: 73)

Although this text infers that it relates simply to the battle of Towton, it describes a change in fortunes at the beginning of the conflict. This is significant as it was at Ferrybridge that Edward and Warwick’s troops customarily suffered the most, with the scouting party being almost wiped out, two of the leading Yorkists, Lord Fitzwalter and Warwick’s brother (Ellis 1809: 255) being killed and Warwick himself receiving an arrow in the leg (Gairdner 1876: 216). There is no record of Edward suffering significantly at the beginning of the conflict at Towton.

Another source is an extract from the Attainder of Edward IV. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows:

... on Sunday called commonly Palm Sunday the 29th day of March ... in a field between the towns of Sherburn in Elmete and Tadcaster, in the shire of York, called Saxtonfield and Towtonfield, in the shire of York ....

(Strachey 1767)

This text infers that the battle was fought at Towton, the site of Edward’s victory. It omits to mention Ferrybridge, where he suffered huge casualties. The information is therefore somewhat censored.

The following is an extract from *The Rose of Rouen*, by an anonymous author and is dated ca. 1461. The appropriate portion of the text is as follows

... On Palmsunday afternoon they met us in the field, Within an hour they were right fayne to flee, and eke to yield ...

(*Archaeologia* 1842: 343–347)

This poem is written about, and presumably for, the new King Edward, ‘The Rose of Rouen’. It is therefore flattering someone who had taken part in the

battle. He could therefore infer rather than state specific events. The reference to Palm Sunday afternoon presumably refers to the set engagement at Towton rather than the skirmishes beforehand, one in which Edward's forces had to retreat. The duration of one hour contradicts the documents that state the battle lasted ten hours, unless the times allowed for the other two conflicts are also being removed.

The following is a key text from William Gregory's Chronicle of 1461:

And the xxviiij day of Marche, that was ye Palme Sunday evyn, the Lorde Fewater was slayne at Ferybryge, ... And the Erle of Warwycke was hurte yn hys legge with an arowe at the same jorneye. (Gairdner 1876: 216)

Ande the xxix day of the same monythe of Marche, that was Palme Sunday, the kyng mette with the lordys of the Northe at Schyrborne ... (*ibid.*)

This is the first to mention '... the xxviiij day of Marche ...'. It clearly refers to the conflict at Ferrybridge and so, in theory, vindicates Whitaker's hypothesis that Ferrybridge took place on the morning of 28 March. However, as the Lancastrians under Lord Clifford are believed to have ambushed the Yorkist vanguard at Ferrybridge before dawn (Ellis 1809), then another interpretation is valid. If Gregory held with the common perception at the time that the perceived day ended and began at dawn, then the date of 28 March might be referring to before the dawn of 29 March, and therefore the remainder of the Saturday. The phrase 'Palme Sunday *evyn*' therefore does not simply refer to the *eve*, the day before Palm Sunday, but the evening (or night—6pm to 6 am) before Palm Sunday.

The chronicle of Jean de Waurin from 1461 (Hardy and Hardy, 1891) creates most problems regarding its interpretation of the battle of Towton. Waurin appears to confuse events completely by mixing times, places and combatants. He persistently jumps time and space during the narration therefore making it difficult to track what is happening where and when.

The most famous quote from his text is usually translated as 'So followed a day of much slaying between the two sides ...' (English Heritage 1995, 3). This once again suggests a single day, although it is usually interpreted as simply referring to the Battle of Towton following the previous day's conflicts at Ferrybridge and Dintingdale (Boardman 1996). The actual text, '... *si eut au jour de cest aprochement moult grant occision entre les deux parties, ...*' could be translated as 'Surely there was, on the day of this coming together, much great slaughter between the two sides ...' (Hardy & Hardy, 1891 translated by S. and C. Sutherland, pers. comm.). This removes the emphasis from the words 'so followed', suggesting an additional event, to 'surely there was', a confirmation of the same event.

In relation to the question of whether Ferrybridge took place on the morning or evening of 28 March, Waurin is far from clear (Hardy & Hardy 1891). However, when referring to Yorkist forces being attacked and caused to flee, which appears to refer to the conflict at Ferrybridge, he states the following;

Then when came Saturday, the night of Palm Sunday, the Earl of March mounted his horse, then ordering his advance guard forward to establish themselves two miles from their enemies, and when promptly in position the Duke of Suffolk sent a small armed company to scout the layout of their adversaries ...

This is an accurate description of the alleged events at Ferrybridge. Edward apparently established himself at Pontefract, 2 miles from Ferrybridge, the river crossing that divided the Lancastrians and Yorkists. He then sent scouts to assess the river crossing and land beyond. Later, Waurin says:

... [their] enemies caught sight of them, they sounded the alarm and drove off so much the scouts of the Earl of March that his advance guard were forced to come to their aid ...

which appears to confirm this interpretation. The scouts were holding the crossing but were attacked by Lord Clifford before dawn. They were then forced to retreat before Edward came to their aid. However, Hall states that the advanced guard or Van Guard crossed at Castleford (Ellis 1809), suggesting that the aid came in the form of an attempted outflanking ambush, which ultimately succeeded at Dintingdale.

Another part of the text states that ‘... Said bridge was won by the supporters of Earl Edward of March and they crossed the rest of the army that same night ...’. This also suggests that events were taking place at a rapid pace at or before dawn.

The translation of the text ‘Puis quant ce vint le samedi, *nuit* de la Pasque florie ...’ is ‘Then when came Saturday, the *night* of Palm Sunday ...’ Hardy’s transcription of Waurin is not vague. ‘The night of Palm Sunday’ cannot refer to the Saturday morning. It must refer to the hours before Sunday morning. This strongly infers that the engagement at the bridge at Ferrybridge and its later retrieval took place during the early hours, in what might then be perceived of as a pre-modern evening of 28 March but now a modern morning of 29 March.

The phrase ‘but nevertheless they established themselves here all that night until the following morning’ strengthens this hypothesis even though its reference to ‘all that night’ presumably meant a very short time. These elements of the text suggest that Waurin did not fully understand or had misconstrued the circumstances of the events and his narrative therefore adds confusion to the uncertainty of them.

If one accepts that Waurin's text contains most of the facts but in a disordered manner then another commonly cited text, that of *Hearne's Fragment* (1719:286), said to be written by 'a Yorkist sympathiser who claimed to have known Edward IV' (Giles 1843) might be similarly understood. The relevant parts of the text are as follows:

... and when the foreprickers cam to Ferry brigge, there was a grete skarmusfhe where as John Ratcliff then Lorde Fitzwatir was flayne, and theruppon they ever avauenced theme fel til thay cam to Towton viii. myles owte of Yorke upon a Fryday at nigt abydng the refidw of there company, the which were affemblid in goode ordre on the Saturdfday then being Palmefondays evin: and aboute iiiii. of the clokke att nigt the ii. Battailis joynid and fauge all nigt till on the morow att afir noone, when aboute the noone the forfaide John Duke of Northfolke with a fresh band of goode men of warre cam in to the ayde of the nw electe King E

(*Thomae Sprotti Chronica* 1719: 288)

This text is confusing until certain criteria are interpreted thus:

And when the foreprickers [scouts] came to Ferrybridge, there was a great skirmish .... And thereupon they ... advanced themselves until they came to Towton eight miles out of York.

The latter text is interpreted, like Waurin's first section (Hardy & Hardy 1891) as a summary. The next part, in a similar manner to Waurin's text provides certain details:

... upon a Friday at night, awaiting the residue of their company, which were assembled in good order [at Pontefract] on the Saturday, then being Palm Sunday even [the night before Palm Sunday = 28 March 1461]. And about four of the clock at night [Saturday night/Sunday morning] the two battles joined and fought [at Ferrybridge] all night till on the morrow in the afternoon [at Towton where it ended. Before it ended, at ...] About noon the aforesaid John, Duke of Norfolk, with a fresh band of good men of war came to the aid of the newly elected King Edward (Hardy & Hardy 1891)

The text might even derive from Thomae Sprotti's interpretation of Waurin's (1461) description. If the former were to be taken literally it would appear that the Yorkists '... advanced until they came to Towton ... upon a Friday night', which is certainly incorrect. If it were correct, it would mean that all the other documents, which record that both armies arrived at Towton on Palm Sunday, are in error. This whole text has also troubled historians who cannot believe, quite rightly, that there would have been a formal battle fought at night (Boardman 1996). However, the ambush at Ferrybridge could have, and by all accounts, was fought at, or just before, dawn, and therefore was perceived of as being at night in the old time frame.

Once again, the time of four 'of the clock' at 'night' makes sense if the 'night' begins at 6pm and lasts until 6 am. It would therefore refer to 4 am in a modern

time frame. It does not refer to ‘the forth hour of the night’, which would have been 10pm modern time.

When reinterpreted thus, the text compares with all of the previously written documents. A slightly early time, that of 4 am and not dawn, is suggested for the initial engagement at Ferrybridge. The suggestion that they fought ‘all night’, i.e. from the morning, ‘... till on the morrow in the afternoon ...’, suggests an almost continuous conflict. This would therefore also have taken in the conflicts at Dintingdale (although this had not been mentioned), and ultimately Towton, following that at Ferrybridge.

If other documents contemporary to *Hearne’s Fragment* are analysed, it can be seen that the latter fits into a general perception of information from this period. However, like Waurin’s text (Hardy & Hardy 1891), it is confusing the information by apparently dividing certain aspects of the text, while assimilating other parts.

Possibly the most quoted early text related to Towton is that of Edward Hall, printed in 1548 but written earlier. Hall’s chronicle is the first to mention the conflict at Dintingdale. The appropriate portions of the text (heavily edited by the author) are as follows;

... the lord Clifforde determined with his light horsemen, to make an assaye to suche as kepte the passage of Ferybridge, and so departed from the great army on the Saturday before Palmsondaye, and early or his enemies were ware, gat the bridge, and slew the kepers of the same ... The lord Fawconbridge, ... with the forward, passed the ryuer at Castelford, iii. myles from Ferebridge, ... but [the Lancastrians] departed in great haste toward kyng Henries army, but they mete with some that they loked not for, and were attrapped .... For the lord Clifforde, ... and all his company almost were there slayn, at a place called Dintingdale, not farr from Towton. When this conflict was ended at Ferebridge, the lord Fawconbridge, valeauntly upon Palm-sunday in the twylyght, set furth his army, and came to Saxton ... So the same day about. ix. of the clocke, which was the. xxix. day of Marche, being Palmsundaye, both the hostes approached in a playn felde, betwene Towton and Saxton. ... This deadly battayle and bloody conflicte, continued, x. hours in doubtfull victorie ... [The Lancastrians] ... fledde toward Tadcaster ... a great number were drent and drowned, ... The chace continued all night, and the most parte of the next day ... For in this. iii. dayes were slayn (as they knew it wrote) on both partes xxxvi. M. vii. C. lx. and xvi. [36,776] persons  
 .... (Ellis 1809).

### *Interpretation of Hall*

This text is simpler to comprehend if a pre-modern time frame is applied. For example, Lord Clifford departed from the main army on the Saturday and either later that evening (pre-modern time) or early on Palm Sunday (modern time) carries out an ambush and holds the bridge at Ferrybridge. Fawconbridge (Lord

Fauconberg) attempts to outflank him by crossing the Aire at Castleford, just three miles away—suggesting a contemporary manoeuvre—but Clifford knew or suspected this and retreated back to the main Lancastrian force, again suggesting another contemporary manoeuvre. Clifford was ambushed at Dintingdale and killed. When the conflict at Ferrybridge was over, Lord Fauconberg, ‘... upon Palm Sunday in the twilight, set furth his army, and came to Saxton ...’, inferring once again a rapid sequence of events.

If the date of the conflict at Ferrybridge was the morning of 28 March, as Whitaker suggests (Whitaker 1816), it would mean that the timeframe between the conflict at Ferrybridge (before dawn) and the conflict at Towton (after dawn) would be more than 24 hours. In this time, Lord Fauconberg would have been moving from Dintingdale to Saxton, which is much less than one mile. The inference is therefore that he stayed in the same place and it is more likely that the timeframe is continuous. It was very near to the Towton battlefield, probably at Dintingdale, near Saxton, that all of the Yorkist forces met up, according to Hall, at around 9 am.

Most historians already agree that Ferrybridge and Dintingdale were fought on the same day but here Hall clearly states that:

*So the same day* about ix. of the clocke, which was the xxix. day of Marche, being Palmsundaye, both the hostes approched in a playn felde, betwene Towton and Saxton

(Ellis 1809 [emphasis added])

This clearly implies that the skirmish at Dintingdale and the Battle of Towton were fought on the same day. The implication is that the skirmish at Ferrybridge was also fought in the hours preceding the conflict at Dintingdale. As the main conflict was fought on Palm Sunday, at some time after 9 am in the morning, there is therefore no allowance for a space in the timeframe. Hall sums up and clarifies the events by stating that ‘This deadly battayle and bloody conflicte, continued, x. hours in doubtfull victorie ...’, that is, the conflicts at Ferrybridge Dintingdale and Towton lasted 10 hours, after which the rout continued ‘... all night, and the most parte of the next day ...’

#### *A Generally Uncited Text*

There is little space in this paper to discuss every text relating to the battle of Towton. However, that of John Benet’s *Chronicle* (Harris & Harris 1972: 151–233) written in 1460–1462 is of the utmost importance. He is the only early author categorically to give a detailed time frame for the events between Ferrybridge



and Tadcaster, although his work has been largely ignored by modern historians. The relevant sentences are as follows.

And the King went in to the town Ferebrygh and there on the 6th of April (sic) which is Palm Sunday the Duke of Summerset [etc.] met the King and a big number of 40 thousand warriors against King Edward whom he all bravely killed ... And then other lords fought against the king at the same day near Shirborn in Elmet [the next town south of Dintingdale] ... and thirdly the King at the same day fought against ... others [at Towton] near the town of Tadcaster and he killed those and put them to flight.

On the following day he entered the town of York.

This clearly refers to three separate engagements and to three different locations. It also clearly states that they all took place on a single day. Benet's work contains what appears to be an error as Palm Sunday is noted as 6 April. However, if 28 March—the 'evening' of the start of the conflict—is converted from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar it computes as 6 April. This therefore appears to be a transcription error as the calendar was not changed in Britain until 1752 (Walker 2006). Nevertheless, Benet is perfectly clear about his time frame within that day.

### *Death Tolls*

The deaths of the leading combatants in the series of conflicts are also a factor in both determining how the initial death toll was determined and also how each author later perceived each conflict.

It is often stated that, before the conflict—either at Towton or before the series of engagements—orders of 'no quarter' were issued (Boardman 1996: 107). Ordinarily, these orders would presumably exclude most of the nobles and people of worth who would have been ransomed for their inherent wealth. Boardman makes an important point by highlighting that

... almost all the nobility of England was assembled for the battle of Towton, in contrast with the usual Wars of the Roses armies fielding relatively small turnouts of nobles ....  
(*ibid*: 105)

He therefore infers that 'Towton' is different because of the presence of large numbers of nobles. This large attendance is not surprising given that the soon to be deposed king of England, Henry VI and the new king of England, Edward IV headed the Lancastrian and Yorkist armies respectively. However, the later Medieval period in general and the Wars of the Roses specifically saw a difference in the manner that leading nobles were treated in battle. At St Albans in 1455, for example, the 'butchering' of several leading Lancastrian nobles such as the senior Lord Clifford, the senior Duke of Somerset and the

senior Earl of Northumberland (*ibid*: 13) lead to distinct reprisals at the battle of Wakefield (1460), where the then potential Yorkist king—the Duke of York—and the earl of Rutland were sought out, hunted down and killed by the sons of those nobles killed at St. Albans. This lack of quarter given to even the leading nobles had a similar effect in March 1461 when revenge appeared to be a priority. If a high proportion of the nobility were present at Ferrybridge, Dintingdale and Towton and in reality no quarter *was* given by each faction on the day—a likely scenario given the vengeance sought by those who had prolonged the Wars of the Roses (*ibid*: 107)—then it follows that many more nobles would have died than was the custom. As the record of the dead was probably related to the number of each noble or high ranking person killed, then it also follows that the overall number of dead combatants would appear to rise proportionately. The Herald's report of 28,000 dead (Gairdner 1872–1875) would therefore have been an approximation based upon the number of nobles killed and persons worth noting and not the actual number of commoners killed. Every dead person would not have been counted, especially given the extent of the area of slaughter between Ferrybridge and York, a distance of 26 miles. The conflicts would therefore have appeared to be larger simply due to the manner in which these deaths were recorded.

The confusion relating to the scale of death can be seen in the differences between the contemporary documents. For example, letters from Nicholas O'Flanagan, dated 7 April 1461 (Hinds 1912: 65) and Francesco Copino, dated 27 April 1461 (*ibid*: 81) clearly state that 800 Yorkists died, whereas those by Pigello Portinaro, dated 14 April 1461 (*ibid*: 68) and Prospero Di Gamulio, dated 18 April 1461 (*ibid*: 73) give the figure as 8,000, a figure greater by a factor of ten.

In terms of where each noble died, however, many documents initially appear to be relatively ambiguous. For example, Paston (Gairdner 1872–1875) clearly states that 'on the field [of battle] ... Lord Fitzwater [Fitzwalter] ... is slain' in addition to Lord Clifford and the Earl of Northumberland. However, other authors and modern historians acknowledge that Fitzwalter was killed at Ferrybridge, Lord Clifford was killed at Dintingdale and the Earl of Northumberland was killed at Towton. Likewise, George Nevill, 7 April 1461 (Hinds 1912: 61–62) states that 'In this battle ... the Earl of Northumberland [and] Lord Clifford ... perished'. However, all authors prior to Whitaker (1816), have the deaths of the leading combatants from the three different conflicts being killed in what they presumably perceived was a single, albeit extended conflict. The perception at the time must therefore have been that the conflicts, at the three different locations, were part of one large event and that this was a battle that began at Ferrybridge and not at Towton.

*Discussion and Conclusions*

The conclusions to be drawn from this new hypothesis are extensive. If the three conflicts took place in less than twelve hours then it is unlikely that either force was in a position to plan any lengthy strategy. Events must have been happening rapidly and counter measures taken immediately.

*New Interpretation*

There now follows a new interpretation of the three conflicts which breaks with the accepted notion that the battles were fought over at least two days.

The Yorkist army probably secured Ferrybridge on the Saturday after arriving at Pontefract from London. They were ambushed before dawn on the Sunday morning by Lord Clifford who might have led the scouting party and come across the Yorkists at Ferrybridge earlier than expected. The Yorkists certainly were not expecting them as they were attacked whilst Lord Fitzwalter was asleep (Edward Hall in Ellis 1809). Upon hearing the news of the catastrophic attack, the death of Fitzwalter and Warwick's injury, Edward appears to have sent Fauconberg, with the vanguard, straight to nearby Castleford to cross the Aire and outflank Clifford. Clifford presumably discovered or pre-empted this and rapidly retreated north. However, Fauconberg either heard of Clifford's retreat or originally intended to ride straight to Dintingdale, a more likely scenario, where he cut off and ambushed Clifford and killed most of his men. Edward's forces meanwhile had either also crossed at Castleford or crossed the hastily repaired bridge behind Clifford and were making their way north to meet up at Dintingdale. Lord Norfolk's troops would have been bringing up the rear, possibly with the slower elements of the army, including the wagons. Either the bridge was relatively easy to repair, a possibility if Clifford had little time to destroy it properly, or Norfolk's troops also crossed at Castleford. Either way, the latter was not significantly delayed as they appeared in time to influence the battle at Towton.

The main Lancastrians and Yorkists forces then met and fought at Towton some time after 9 am (Edward Hall in Ellis 1809). Norfolk's troops then arrived at or after noon to reinforce the Yorkists (*Hearne's Fragment* in Giles 1843). This influx of extra Yorkist troops and equipment caused a Lancastrian rout, resulting in a large number of deaths between Towton and York.

An important point to note is that of Henry VI's apparent surprise upon learning of the close proximity of the Yorkist army. Waurin's text states that when

... [their] enemies caught sight of them, [the Lancastrians] sounded the alarm and drove off so much the scouts of the Earl of March that his advance guard were forced to come to their aid, ... (Hardy & Hardy 1891)

Virgil reiterates this by suggesting that

... When King Henry knew that his enemies were at hand ... by day break in the morning ... he was forced to cause sound the alarm. His adversaries were there as ready as he. (Ellis 1844)

As Waurin was referring to the Skirmish at Ferrybridge, and Vergil was suggesting that Henry was surprised at daybreak, then the inference is that the Lancastrians were surprised at around the time of Clifford's attack or retreat at Ferrybridge. It may therefore have been Clifford who was surprised and he would therefore have had to act accordingly, not as part of a planned manoeuvre but as a way of slowing down the Yorkist crossing of the river. If this was the case, then a reason why the river crossing at Castleford was not also covered may be forthcoming. If a section of Waurin's text which refers to the retreat of the Yorkist cavalry (possibly the scouts and Warwick) refers to the retreat from Ferrybridge to Pontefract—a distance of 2 miles—then it also refers to an unsuccessful or non-existing flanking attack by the Earl of Northumberland. The text reads as follows

[The Lancastrians] ... charged the Earl of March's cavalry, put them to flight and chased them for eleven miles, [? possibly a mistranslation of ii miles?] so that it appeared to them that they had won great spoils, because they thought that the Earl of Northumberland had also charged on the other flank, [? at Castleford] but he failed to attack soon enough, which was his misfortune for he died there this day (Waurin in Hardy & Hardy 1891)

Was the Earl of Northumberland meant to have checked the river crossing at Castleford in a manner similar to Clifford at Ferrybridge, and was he too late? If true, this might suggest that he too was surprised by the proximity of the Yorkist army and that he might not even have set off for Castleford before it was too late. He, too, ran out of time. He was wounded during the day, allegedly at Towton, and died later, possibly in York (Boardman 1996).

If Henry dispatched the Lancastrian army immediately he heard of the Yorkist army, it would have set off from York in the direction of Pontefract. Edward in the meantime was presumably already prepared to move, having just arrived from London. This theory suggests that Clifford's troops might have formed the scouting party for the Lancastrian army and Henry therefore did not know at that time that the Yorkists were so close. A rider dispatched back to York with such information would have arrived soon after, at a time when Edward was potentially dispatching troops to Castleford to outflank or cut off Clifford. If, for arguments sake, both armies left their bases at around the same time,

the Lancastrians from York and the Yorkists from Pontefract, then they would have arrived at a location more or less half way, at approximately the same time. The battlefield at Towton lies almost half way between York (11.9 miles) and Pontefract (13.4 miles). The Lancastrian army would just have arrived first—which was allegedly the case (Boardman 1996)—and therefore would have had the choice of deployment location, which apparently they did (*ibid*). If the Lancastrian army was still arriving at Towton at a similar time to the Yorkist it would explain why the Lancastrians did not attack the Yorkists earlier, as neither side would have been ready for formal combat.

It is also important to recognise the possibility that if the Lancastrian army was not already at Towton when Clifford was ambushed at Dintingdale then it could not have intervened to help him. The answer, as to why this was not the case, has intrigued many modern historians, including Boardman (1996: 75) who describes the lack of action by the Lancastrian army as ‘... this baffling event ...’.

If the conflict lasted, as Hall states, for ten hours then presumably it ended at some time between 2–4pm in the afternoon. The battle at Towton therefore lasted from some time after 9–11 am until 2–4pm on 29 March. For the Medieval period, this would still have been a very large conflict. The contemporary poem *The Rose of Rouen*, undoubtedly Yorkist propaganda, appears to condense Edwards’s victory into the main conflict at Towton.

... On Palmsunday afternoon they met us in the field,  
 Within an hour they were right fayne to flee, and eke to yield,  
 Twenty seven thousand the Rose killed in the field ... (*Archaeologia* 1842)

This poem has the battle lasting less than one hour, not the traditional ten hours suggesting that, at Towton at least, the conflict was perceived of as being shorter than modern historians would have us believe.

The new hypothesis, of a more rapid dynamic series of conflicts, would suggest that the large numbers of combatants taking part in the skirmishes, or ambushes, were on horseback. This fits with Waurin’s text which states that

... it was so cold from the snow and hailed so much that the armed men and horses were a pitiful sight and what made it worst for them, they were badly supplied ...

If the actions took place only on horseback then they would have been fighting with limited supplies.

This also suggests that the numbers of combatants involved in the early stages of the conflicts, at Ferrybridge and Dintingdale were not as large as has been claimed. If the numbers of combatants need to be reduced, then the numbers of deaths would potentially not have been as high as has been officially stated. Waurin (Hardy & Hardy 1891), for example, states that 3,000 men were killed at

Ferrybridge. This would imply that two groups of light troops—essentially scouts or cavalry—would have fought to the extent that 3,000 men were killed; losses almost equivalent to the higher dead tolls of any other Wars of the Roses conflict.

One point that has hopefully become clear in this paper is that the death toll given in the early accounts (Paston, Neville, Beuachamp, etc) as being 28,000 men—in addition to those wounded and drowned—would certainly have referred to all of the three engagements. It can therefore be presumed that the generally accepted figure of 28,000 cannot simply refer to the men who died at Towton, as virtually every modern work that mentions the conflict states. However, it is not known what proportions died at each location.

The aforementioned controversy suggests that the archaeological investigation of these sites, especially that of the major burials at Towton, is of great importance. The main site of the mass graves on the battlefield at Towton has now been located and awaits imminent excavation (Sutherland 2007). Although the larger bones were cleared from the graves in 1483 on the orders of King Richard III (Richard III), sufficient numbers of smaller bones (typically those of the hands, feet and spine; Holst 2004) are known to remain (*ibid*). Importantly, the dimensions of each mass grave could be calculated to provide an approximate number of men that each grave could have held. Current estimates, based upon the geophysical survey anomalies of the dimensions of the pits, suggest that this would be a few thousand (Sutherland 2006) and not tens of thousands as previously believed, although this would obviously need to be confirmed by excavation. This hypothesis would lead to a stark conclusion; that the number of deaths from the battle of Towton might have been grossly exaggerated. For example, the official figures for Towton suggest that it resulted in more deaths, approximately by a factor of ten, than any other Wars of the Roses battle (Sutherland 2006)

Interestingly, it is Waurin's text (Hardy & Hardy 1891), the source of so much confusion, that might provide a glimpse of the truth. He appears to separate the early skirmish at Ferrybridge from the battle at Towton. However, it is possible that one description is a general summary of the whole series of conflicts and the other includes some details, including the main battle at Towton. He states that the battle at Ferrybridge—the early description for the whole series of engagements—resulted in the deaths of '... more than three thousand men'. Although he later adds that all the conflicts resulted in the generally accepted figure, it is possible that he was simply misunderstanding the 'true' version and the 'official' version. Waurin may therefore have inadvertently provided the real figure for the number of deaths for the three conflicts. The correct number of deaths may in truth lie between 2,800 and 3,800, which once again is simply lower by a factor of ten than every contemporary figure and generally in line with the alleged deaths from the other Medieval battles from the Wars of the

Roses. It is possible that these conflicts were only regarded as being so large due to a combination of propaganda, the unusually large number of deaths amongst the nobles and the contemporary notion that the perceived conflict apparently lasted a whole day—an occurrence rarely experienced in Medieval battles. In essence, had the Heralds estimated correctly when claiming that more than 28,000 men had died?

### *Propaganda*

This eventual confusion would make sense if the official version of events had been manipulated from a very early stage following the conflicts. Later information was obviously biased in favour of the new King Edward IV. His losses at Ferrybridge, the location by which the conflicts were originally referred to, were therefore quickly glossed over and the name of Towton, Edward's name for the greater conflict (Strachey 1767) and the site of his subsequent victory, rose to prominence. A chantry chapel was planned to be built at Towton by Edward to commemorate the battle (National Archives C 270/26/30), but he died before he could build it. His brother Richard III started to build it at the beginning of his reign even though it was never finished (Leland in Smith 1907) and it was Richard's name rather than Edward's that became associated with it.

The increasing introduction of mechanical clocks and the manner in which a day was officially perceived was slowly changing in this period. The subsequent historical texts refer less to Ferrybridge and more to Towton. The Yorkists, who owed their royal existence to the latter battle and were so nearly wiped from history in the former, needed a clear 'God-given' victory to seal their place on the throne of England. The *Edward IV scroll* (Lewis E201), a document written to highlight Edward's legitimate claim to the throne, clearly explains this act of divine providence. Edward was crowned shortly afterwards.

Although the letters that passed back and forth around Europe over the subsequent days and weeks referred to a battle at Ferrybridge, this would not have suited the Yorkists' cause. In fact, the collective name of the three conflicts changed on a number of occasions due to the uncertain nature of its perceived location. It has been known as the battle of Ferrybridge, the battle of York, the battle of Sherburn in Elmet and the battle of Towton, amongst many others. Its most enduring name, however, and perhaps its most accurate pseudonym, relates simply to time and not to location—it was known as The Battle of Palm Sunday Field (Leland in Smith 1907).

The phrase, referring to the numbers of dead being so great that it was '... unheard of in our realm for almost a thousand years ...' (Hinds 1912: 63), was



also useful to the Yorkist cause in that it inferred a God given victory. It is therefore hardly surprising that few have now heard of the Battle of Ferrybridge. One hundred years after the conflicts, the battle of Towton was then equated to what was probably perceived of as one of the greatest classical conflicts of all time; it was called ‘... the true English Pharsalia’ (Camden 1772: 92). Edward would have been very proud of the comparison. He would, also have been pleased to know that Towton is now, albeit erroneously, officially regarded as ‘the largest battle ever fought in Britain’ (English Heritage 1995). As public relations campaigns go, it has been quite successful.

‘The history of a series of conflicts, however, is only one side of the coin—only the archaeological excavation of the battlefield will reveal what facts remain to be discovered. However, the evidence held within the landscape of battle is slowly diminishing: erosion, agricultural practices and uncontrolled metal detecting are all exacting a toll on the battlefields’ (Sutherland 2004). In terms of this paper, and of battlefield preservation in general, time is of the essence.

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