



Battle of Roundway Down 1643

An Overview of the Proceedings

The Battle of Roundway Down was fought on 13 July 1643 and is considered one of the key battles in the English Civil War

The Parliamentarians under Sir William Waller were besieging the Wiltshire town of Devizes when they learned that a Royalist cavalry force some 1,500 strong, commanded by Lord Wilmot, had been despatched from Oxford to reinforce the town.

Waller quickly abandoned the siege and marched his troops to Roundway Down, hoping to defeat Wilmot before he could reach Devizes.

Although Waller held the superior higher ground, it was the heavily outnumbered Royalists that attacked first.

Under fire from the guns and musketeers of the Parliamentarian infantry the Royalist cavalry charged the hill.

The Parliamentarian ranks, shaken by the charge, finally broke and fled, Wilmot's Royalists had secured the greatest cavalry victory of the entire English Civil War.

Extract from [Historic UK](#)

To the Editor of the Devizes Gazette

Letter III

Whetham, July 20th 1839.

Sir,

Before I proceed, it will be necessary to say a few words, in order to establish the day of the week, on which the Battle of Roundway took place.

Clarendon, as quoted in my last letter, says, that Lord Wilmot reached the plain within two miles of Devizes on *Wednesday* at noon, and then describes the movements of Waller in such a manner, that I was led to conclude the battle followed on the evening of the same day, and that this Wednesday was

consequently the 13th of July – the undoubted *day of the month*, on which the event took place. But I have since had reason to alter my opinion; for upon calculation I find that the 13th of July, 1643, fell on a *Thursday*, and an entry in the parish register of Chirton, made to all appearance at the time, distinctly states that this was the day of the battle. How the evening of Wednesday the 12th was employed by the two Generals (if we admit Lord Wilmot's arrival at noon on the day recorded by Clarendon) is by no means evident: and it certainly is difficult to account for the delay of the engagement, when it was so greatly to the interest of one party at least to bring matters to an issue as speedily as possible. This point, however, I must leave to the consideration of others. The entry in the Chirton Register is as follows: -

“July the 13th, being Thursday 1643, was the great fight on Roundway Hill, in which Wm. Bartlet was shotte in the forehead and was buried in martiall wise at Rowde *. He was chiefe quarter master to the noble colonell Mr. Sands, and he was baptized (vt patet) March 26th 1615. A cloud like a lyon rampant azure, was on the army fighting”.

The evidence furnished by this extract is most satisfactory, since it puts the precise date of the day in question beyond dispute. The story of the cloud is very curious, and well worthy preservation among the most beautiful of our local traditions. We now come to the engagement – the details of which I shall give in the words of Clarendon ; to whose quaint, tho' expressive, language I have been so often indebted before. The reader will bear in mind the relative position of the Royalist and Parliamentarian armies. Lord Wilmot with his 1500 horse was advancing towards Devizes – the 3000 Cornish foot quitting the town to effect, if possible, a junction with him – and Waller drawn up “ without sound of trumpet or drum” † on the summit of Roundway Hill, anxiously endeavouring to intercept the subject of each. Wilmot having at length relinquished the hope of effecting the junction desired, and having arranged his troops in proper order to receive the enemy's charge, who was little further than musket shot off, the historian proceeds thus -

“Here Sir William Waller out of pure gayety departed from an advantage he could not again recover, for being in excellent order of battle with strong wings of horse to his foot, and a good reserve placed, and his cannon usefully planted, apprehending still the conjunction between the horse and the foot in the town, and gratifying his enemy with the same contempt, which had so often brought inconveniences upon them, and discerning their number inferior to that he had before (as he thought) mastered, he marched with his whole body of horse from his foot to charge the enemy; appointing Sir Arthur Haslerig with his cuirassiers apart to make the first impression, who was encountered by Sir John Byron, in whose regiment the Earl of Carnarvon charged as a volunteer; and after a sharp conflict, in which Sir Arthur Haslerig receiv'd many wounds, that impenetrable regiment was routed, and in a full career, chased upon their other horse. At the same time the Lord Wilmot charging them from division to division, as they were ranged, in half an hour, (so suddain alterations the accidents of war introduce) the whole entire body of the triumphant horse were so totally routed and dispersed, that there was not one of them to be seen upon that large spacious Down; every man shifting for himself with greater danger by the precipices of that hill, than he could have undergone by opposing his pursuer. But as it was an unhappy ground to fly, so it was as ill for the pursuer; and after the rout more perish'd by falls and bruises from their horses, down the precipices, than by the sword. The foot stood still firm, making shew of a gallant resistance; but the Lord Wilmot quickly seized their cannon, and turned them upon them, at the same time that the Cornish foot, who were by this come from the town, were ready likewise to charge them ; upon which their hearts failed; and so they were charged on all sides, and either killed or taken prisoners, very few escaping; the Cornish retaining too fresh a memory of their late distresses, and revenging themselves on those who had contributed thereunto. Sir William Waller himself, with a small train, fled into Bristol, which had sacrificed a great part of their garrison in his defeat and so were even ready to expire at his entry into the town, himself bringing the first news of his disaster”.

“This glorious day, for it was a day of triumph, redeem'd for that time the king's whole affairs, so that all clouds that shadowed them seem'd to be dispelled, and a bright line of success to shine over the whole kingdom. There were in this battle slain, on the enemies six hundred on the place ; nine hundred prisoners taken, besides two or three hundred retaken and

redeem'd, whom they had gathered up in the skirmishes, and pursuit ; with all their cannon, being eight pieces of brass ordnance; all their armes, ammuniti^on, waggons, baggage, and victual; eight and twenty foot ensigns, and nine cornets; and all this by a party of fifteen hundred horse, with two small field pieces (for the victory was perfect, upon the matter, before the Cornish came up; though the enemies foot were suffer'd to stand in a body uncharg'd, out of ceremony, till they came; that they might be refreshed with a share in the conquest) against a body of full two thousand horse, five hundred dragoons, and near three thousand foot, with an excellent train of artillery. So that the Cornish had great reason to think their deliverance, and victory at Roundway, more signal and wonderful than the other at Stratton, save that the first might be thought the parent of the latter, and the loss on the King's party was less; for in this there were slain very few; and of name, none but Dudley Smith, an honest and valiant young gentleman; who was always a volunteer with the Lord Wilmot, and amongst the first upon any action of danger".

Rushworth's account of this important victory differs little from Clarendon's, except that he gives Lord Wilmot 2000 horse, instead of 1500. "Waller's horse" he goes on to say "led by Sir A. Haslerig, having left the foot, galloped up the hill, and charged the King's forces, but were put to a disorderly retreat; yet with the help of their reserve they rallied, and stood a second charge, but then were totally routed. The foot made a better resistance, but Hopton's forces falling upon them, as well as Lord Wilmot's horse, and their own horse having abandoned them they were soon defeated".

I have not room in the present letter to make any comment upon the preceding passages. What I wish to say in conclusion, I shall reserve till next week, hoping by a few supplementary observations, which I shall then make, to add to the general interest of the subject I have brought under public view.

I remain, yours very obediently,
J. STOUGHTON MONEY

* Bartlet was buried at Rowde the day after the battle, as appears from the register of that parish "1643, Wm. Bartlet, the sonne of Mr. Robert Bartlet, of Chirton, who was slaine in the fight on Bagdon Hill was buried July 11th. Bagdon, now called Beacon Hill, is about a mile and a half from the edge of Roundway, and forms part of the same range of down. Quere – Is the "noble Colonel Sands" here referred to, the same Colonel Sandys, who fell in the service of the Parliament a few months before, and was left by Prince Rupert to die of his wounds at Worcester?.

† Vide Rushworth's Historical Collections.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette, 25 July 1839

OPC Note: For more details of the battle, see *The Battlefields of England*, author A. H. Burne. First published in 1950 by Methuen, but reprint since by Pen and Sword .