



## MYTON BATTLE AND CAMPAIGN

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## **THE CAMPAIGN**

**War:** Anglo-Scottish: Scottish War of Independence  
**Campaign:** Northern campaign of 1319

### ***Background***

During the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Scots were involved in a series of campaigns to secure their independence, following Edward I's conquest in the 1290s. In 1314 Robert the Bruce had defeated Edward II's army at Bannockburn and expelled the English from Scotland. He then captured Berwick on Tweed, which had been refortified in the last years of Edward I, as the key border town controlling the important east coast road between the two kingdoms.

### ***Campaign***

In August 1319 Edward II besieged the town. Rather than sending a relief force against this major English army, an experienced Scottish army was sent into England by the west coast route, via Carlisle, in a diversionary attack. The Scottish army numbered perhaps 10-15,000 men, one account says 20,000 though medieval chronicles are notoriously inaccurate when it comes to numbers of troops involved in major actions. They were commanded by the Bannockburn veteran Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, and Lord James Douglas.

As with so many other Scottish forays into the North of England, this was a punitive raid causing destruction across the north. They crossed the Pennines heading into Yorkshire, plundering and destroying as they went, including at Ripon and then Boroughbridge before a local English response could be mounted. Intelligence from a captured Scottish spy revealed his army's location and their intention to capture the English Queen, who was staying near to York.

Like Northallerton in 1138, with the King engaged in action elsewhere the Archbishop of York, as one of the greatest magnates in the north, took charge of the defence of Yorkshire. The Queen was whisked away to safety in Nottingham and an army rapidly assembled from the local populous.

[Map](#)

### ***Consequences***

Myton was a crushing victory for the Scots, but after the battle the victorious army retreated into Scotland. They had to avoid an engagement with Edward's far more powerful army, which they could not hope to win. But Edward had been forced to raise the siege of Berwick just as the Scots had intended and he also failed to intercept the retreating Scottish army. But with Myton, just as with the far greater victory at Bannockburn, the Scottish War of Independence was not ended. The warfare dragged on for another nine years until a treaty was signed in 1328.

## ***Further reading***

**Hall, *The Penguin Atlas of British and Irish history*, London, Penguin, 2001, 90-91.** Ormrod's brief summary of the wars for control of Scotland in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century, including a national and regional map, provide an excellent broad context within which to understand the Myton campaign.

**Brown, *The Second Scottish Wars of Independence 1332-1363*, Stroud, Tempus, 2002, 9-22.** Brown provides a more extensive summary of the first Scottish war of independence, of which Myton was a part, in the introductory chapter to his study of the second war of independence.

## **THE BATTLE**

### ***Summary***

**This was an unequal match between a battle hardened Scottish army and an inexperienced Yorkshire militia force. Instead of achieving their intended surprise attack, the English were caught while in disarray. Their line of retreat across Myton bridge was cut off by an outflanking move and, as they fled, many English were cut down while others drowned trying to cross the river Swale. Myton was a crushing defeat, forcing Edward II to raise the siege of Berwick and, as this was their original objective, the victorious army immediately retreated into Scotland with their prisoners.**

**The action was fought on the west side of the river Swale on what in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was hay meadows and open fields. Today the landscape is completely transformed. The floodplain meadows have been drained and cultivated and the whole landscape enclosed in hedged fields. Even the exact location of the medieval bridge is uncertain. But the area has not been built over or quarried and so future archaeological investigation could, perhaps, help to answer many of the questions about exactly where and how the battle was fought.**

**This is now a secluded landscape with a feeling of remoteness that makes a very pleasant battlefield walk, though the uncertainties about the exact location of the action are a problem. The site has to be explored on foot but can be approached by car, along quiet lanes, and there is good pedestrian access via public rights of way and the Countryside Stewardship scheme.**

[National location map](#)

### **KEY FACTS**

Name: **Myton ('The White Battle')**  
Type: **Pitched Battle**  
Campaign: **Northern campaign of 1319**  
War: **Scottish War of Independence**  
Outcome: **Scottish victory**

Country: **England**  
County: **North Yorkshire**  
Location: **Approximate**  
Terrain: **Meadow & Open Field?**  
Grid Ref: **SE 428 675 (442800,467500)**

Date: **20<sup>th</sup> September 1319**  
Start: **afternoon**  
Duration: **until night**

Armies: **English: under Archbishop of York**  
**Scottish: under the Earl of Moray / Lord James Douglas**  
Numbers: **Scottish: perhaps 10-15,000; English: possibly 10-20,000**  
Losses: **English: claims of 1,000-4,000; Scottish: few**

OS Landranger map: **Sheet 99**

OS Explorer map: **Sheet 299, Ripon & Boroughbridge**

## ***The Armies***

### **English**

#### ***Commanders***

Sir William Meton, Archbishop of York

Sir John Hotham, Bishop of Ely and Chancellor of England.

Nicholas Fleming, mayor of York

The English army was a rapidly assembled militia force, apparently drawn mainly from the city of York, but joined by countrymen en route. It also included so many clerics that the forthcoming engagement was sometimes known as The White Battle. But critically it lacked men at arms, the essential core of an effective medieval army, who were almost all in the North with Edward II at the siege of Berwick. Though apparently greatly outnumbering the Scots, some sources claiming as many as 20,000 troops, it was an inexperienced and ill equipped force.

## Scottish

### *Commanders*

Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, and Sir James of Douglas.

The Scottish army is said to have been significantly outnumbered, the contemporary sources claiming there were 10-15,000 men. But these were a battle hardened force, well equipped and well led. Both their leaders were highly experienced soldiers, having served as divisional commanders at Bannockburn.

## The Battle

**The battle was fought in the meadows and open fields to the west of Myton village on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1319. It was an unequal match, between a battle hardened Scottish army led by the Earl of Moray and a larger but inexperienced militia force raise in York and the surrounding countryside by the Archbishop of York. The English failed in their intended surprise attack. Instead they were caught, while not in battle formation, by the well armed Scottish forces in full battle array. Lacking the heavily armoured ‘men at arms’, always the core of an effective medieval army, who were all in the north with the King at the siege of Berwick, the English troops fled in the face of the Scottish advance. This enabled the mounted infantry of the Scottish army to leave the battle formation, to mount up and outflank the English forces. Cut off from their only retreat, across Myton bridge, the English had either to stand and fight or to attempt to swim the river Swale. In this dramatic Scottish victory thousands of English troops are said to have perished, either at the hands of the Scots or drowned in the river, with yet more taken prisoner.**

### *The advance*

The English army marched some 13 miles north to Myton, close to Boroughbridge, where they now knew from a captured spy that the enemy were camped. The Scottish army probably chose a location on the Ure and west of the Swale so that these two substantial rivers would have given them protection from surprise attack from the south and east. With just a small number of guards posted at the bridges at Boroughbridge and Myton, and any nearby fords, they would then have forewarning of an enemy advance.

As with any inexperienced force, even where it significantly outnumbered the enemy, if it was facing battle hardened troops then one of its best chances was to advance by stealth and to catch the enemy unawares. This was the tactic that the English army attempted at Myton. They appear to have advanced by the quickest route<sup>1</sup>, that leading from York along the east side of the river Ure, which was a major route in the 14<sup>th</sup> century passing less than 2 miles to the east of Myton.<sup>2</sup> Several sources actually state that the English

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<sup>1</sup> Skeat and Barbour, *The Bruce : or, the book of the most excellent and noble prince Robert de Broys, King of Scots*, London, Trubner for E.E.T.S., 1877. ii, 426-7.

<sup>2</sup> Hindle Brian, *Medieval roads*, Aylesbury, Shire, 1982, 20.

advance quietly through the fields, rather than in battle array, in an attempt to achieve surprise.

The English army then crossed the river Swale, over Myton bridge, to engage the enemy. The Scots are usually considered to have been deployed less than a mile to the west of the river, around the present Clott Hill Farm. However it seems more likely that they were a considerable distance further to the west, otherwise it is difficult to see how the English were allowed an unopposed crossing of the Swale, a manoeuvre that would have taken a considerable time for such a large force, even if this was a substantial medieval bridge.

### *The attack*

The attack was launched in the afternoon.<sup>3</sup> The Scots saw the English advancing in disorder, scattered through the fields rather than in battle array, and as a result, rather than retreating as at least one source suggests they had intended, they concluded that the English troops were not experienced soldiers and could be easily beaten. This disorder is taken in some sources to have been the result of the English troops inexperience and lack of discipline, or even as a misguided attempt to advance by stealth. However this disorder might perhaps have simply been or a result of the process of crossing the Swale in too close proximity to the enemy, giving the English troops too little time to reform in a proper battalia, though this might be difficult to reconcile with the subsequent reference to the smoke screen, though even the exact sequence of events is unclear in places.

The Scottish forces set fire to three haystacks, creating a great pall of smoke which seems to have drifted across the field and obscured the Scottish army from view. Rather than retreating, the Scots formed into a single schiltrons, a tight battle formation of spearmen initially designed to combat heavily armoured English cavalry.<sup>4</sup> Another source suggest they were deployed in two battles, Douglas commanding the vanguard and Moray the main battle or rearguard. The Scots then advanced on the enemy with a battle formation in the form of a shield, that is like a wedge, with the wings withdrawn.<sup>5</sup> Without a strong body of men at arms to provide the core of their response, the English could not stem the Scottish attack and fled, apparently without initially coming to hand to hand fighting.

This enabled the Scots to change their tactics to a more aggressive mode, dividing up their battle formation. The Scottish hobiliers (mounted infantry) mounted up and outflanked the English forces, placing themselves between the English and the bridge. With the bridge in enemy hands, the fleeing English troops were forced either to stand and fight or to brave the waters of the Swale, many drowning in the attempt. While many English were killed even more were captured and taken as prisoners with the Scottish army when it retreated, to be ransomed. The archbishop himself fled and many more English troops escaped, thanks to the onset of night, than would otherwise have been the case.

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<sup>3</sup> The Lanercost Chronicle specifies 'after dinner'.

<sup>4</sup> English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995, 4.

<sup>5</sup> English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995, 3-4.

## Plan of Battallia

### Losses

One source suggests 1000 English were killed, of whom 300 were priests,<sup>6</sup> but other accounts claim some 4,000 were killed, including the Mayor of York, and about 1000 drowned in the Swale.<sup>7</sup>

### Further Reading

#### Secondary works

Myton is very poorly served by battlefield studies. Apart from the unpublished English Heritage report, the only other study of value is Leadman's short chapter on the battle, but his quotes are not always adequately referenced and his interpretations not always separated from primary evidence. As usual the getmapping aerial photograph is of value although in this case it covers too small an area, in particular omitting Myton village and its environs.

- English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995
- English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995; English Heritage, *Register of Historic Battlefields*, London, English Heritage, 1995-
- Getmapping, *British Battles: Amazing Views*, 2002, 32-3
- Guest and Guest, *British Battles*, 1996, 34-5
- Leadman, *Battles fought in Yorkshire*, 1891, 26-31
- Marix Evans, *The Military Heritage of Britain & Ireland*, 1998, 153
- Cummins, *Forgotten fights*, [Leeds?, s.n., 1900 – not consulted

### Contemporary Accounts

#### Written Accounts

The contemporary accounts of the battle are as good as those for most 14<sup>th</sup> century battles. There are five main sources:

- **Brut or the Chronicles of England**<sup>8</sup>: Compiled until 1333 and originally in French, this chronicle was translated into English in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Here presented in modernised English.

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<sup>6</sup> Skeat and Barbour, *The Bruce : or, the book of the most excellent and noble prince Robert de Broys, King of Scots*, London, Trubner for E.E.T.S., 1877, ii, 426-7.

<sup>7</sup> Rothwell, *English historical documents, 1189-1327*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975, 272-3.

<sup>8</sup> Brie, *The Brut : The chronicles of England*, 1906, I, 211-2.

- **Life of Edward II**<sup>9</sup>: probably completed prior to 1326.
- **Lanercost Chronicle**<sup>10</sup>: compiled at the time, in Lanercost Abbey, Cumbria.
- **Anonimalle Chronicle**<sup>11</sup>: written in about 1350 at St Mary's Abbey, York, this is a shorter version of the **Brut**.
- **The Bruce**<sup>12</sup>: The only Scottish account of the battle, written by the Archdeacon of Aberdeen in 1375. Here it is translated from the Scottish vernacular. Because written more than 50 years after the battle and his need to make the lines rhyme, the accuracy of the detail may be questioned, but it does provide what may be significant additional information.
- **St Albans Chronicle**<sup>13</sup>: written after 1330.
- **Meaux Chronicle**<sup>14</sup>

### **Brut or the Chronicles of England**

'The Scots went over the water of Solway ... and privily they steal away by night, and come into England, and robbed and destroyed all that they might, and spared no manner [of] thing until they come to York. And when the Englishmen at last heard of this thing, all that might travel - as well monks and priests and friars and canons and seculars - come and meet with the Scots at Myton upon Swale, the 12th day of October. Alas! What sorrow for the English husbandmen that knew nothing of war, they were quelled and drenched in the River of Swale. And their holinesses, Sir William of Melton, Archbishop of York, and the Abbot of Selby with their steeds, fled, and come into York. And that was their own folly that they had that mischance, for they passed the water of Swale; and the Scots set on fire three stacks of hay; and the smoke thereof was so huge that [the] Englishmen might not see the Scots. And when the Englishmen were gone over the water, so come the Scots with their wings in manner of a shield, and come toward the Englishmen in a rush; and the Englishmen fled, for they lacked any men of Arms; for the King had them all almost lost at the siege of Berwick; and the Scots hobilers [mounted infantry] went between the bridge and the Englishmen. And when the great host had them met, the Englishmen almost all were there slain. And he that might wend over the water was saved; but many were drenched, Alas, for sorrow! for there was slain many men of religion, and seculars, and also priests and clerks; and with much sorrow the Archbishop escaped; and therefore the Scots called it 'the White Battle'

<sup>9</sup> Denholm-Young, *The life of Edward the Second, by the so-called Monk of Malmesbury*, London, Nelson, 1957, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Rothwell, *English historical documents, 1189-1327*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975, 272-3.

<sup>11</sup> Childs Wendy, et al., *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1307 to 1334 : from Brotherton Collection MS 29*, [Leeds], Yorkshire Archaeological Society 1991, 1991, 97-99.

<sup>12</sup> Skeat and Barbour, *The Bruce : or, the book of the most excellent and noble prince Robert de Broys, King of Scots*, London, Trubner for E.E.T.S., 1877, ii, 426-7.

<sup>13</sup> Riley Henry and Blanford, *Chronica et annales : Regnantibus Henrico tertio, Edwardo primo, Edwardo secundo, Ricardo secundo, et Henrico quarto : A. D. 1259-1296, 1307-1324, 1392-1406*, London, Longman's Green Reader and Dyer, 1866, 103.

<sup>14</sup> Bond Edward, *Chronica monasterii de Melsa : a fundatione usque ad annum 1396, auctore Thoma de Burton, abbate. Accedit continuatio ad annum 1406 a monacho quodam ipsius domus*, London, Longman's Green Reader and Dyer, 1867, ii, 336.

### **The Life of Edward the Second**

‘On the second day, on which according to the spy the Scots would be found in their lairs, the laymen, clerks, and men of religion issued forth again from the city of York. They went stealthily and without noise, to take the enemy by surprise, because if they were warned they might perhaps take flight. Nevertheless they were well enough warned, yet they did not flee. For when they perceived our men advancing in disorder, they said: ‘These are not soldiers but huntsmen; they will not achieve much.’ So the Scots set fire to a large amount of hay that had been gathered there, and the rising smoke spread far and wide. The smoke made it difficult for our men to see, so that they found prepared for battle those whom they thought had fled. They were indeed men picked from the whole of Scotland for their fighting ability, fit for every task. Many of our men on the other hand were untrained in the art of war, and were readier to flee than to fight. When battle was joined many of our men were killed and many more taken prisoner; but the Scots returned unharmed to Scotland with their captives.’

### **Chronicle of Lanercost**

‘My lord Thomas Randolph, earl of Moray and Sir James of Douglas, not daring to encounter the king of England and the earl, invaded England with an army, burning the country and taking captives and booty of cattle, and so pressed as far as Boroughbridge. When the citizens of York heard this, without knowledge of the country people and led by my lord archbishop William de Meltoun and my lord the bishop of Ely, with a great number of priests and clerics, among whom were sundry religious men, both beneficed and mendicant, they attacked the Scots one day after dinner near the town of Myton, about twelve miles north of York; but, as men unskilled in war, they marched all scattered through the fields and in no kind of array. When the Scots beheld men rushing to fight against them, they formed up according to their custom in a single schiltron, and then uttered together a tremendous shout to terrify the English, who straightway began to take to their heels at the sound. Then the Scots, breaking up their schiltron wherein they were massed, mounted their horses and pursued the English, killing both clergy and laymen, so that about four thousand were slain, among whom fell the mayor of the town, and about one thousand, it was said, were drowned in the water of the Swale. Had not night come on, hardly a single Englishmen would have escaped. Also many were taken alive, carried off to Scotland and ransomed at a heavy price.’

### **Anonimale Chronicle**

‘There came to England, in the vicinity of Carlisle, Thomas Randolph, earl of Moray, and James Douglas with twenty thousand well armed Scots, and during the day they occupied and stayed in woods and marshes far from the towns, so that the people of the area should have no knowledge of them, and at night they rode with their army until they reached Boroughbridge and Myton-on-Swale which was only twelve leagues from York. They wished to go on to the city of York and to take the city by force, but soon news reached Sir William Melton archbishop of the city, and Sir John Hotham, who was then the king's chancellor, and immediately they assembled all the force that they could gather and raise

for themselves. And a certain Nicholas Fleming who was then the mayor of the said city, a noble and valiant man, went with many others from the city in strength with all their force towards Myton to oppose the malice of their Scottish enemies. And when they had come to Myton, with the support of the local people, they formed up to give battle to their Scottish enemies. But the Scots, who were well marshalled and well equipped for war, had great scorn for the English and now began to sound their trumpets and without further delay began to fight the English and soon the English were killed and defeated; many were drowned in the River Swale, over which there was sorrow, and the said Nicholas Fleming was there cut down and dismembered. The archbishop, Sir William Melton, and Sir John Hotham, the chancellor, fled as best they could to the city of York and closed the gates and remained there. But Sir William Ayremynne, a noble and valiant clerk, was captured there and taken to Scotland, imprisoned, and was subsequently freed for a heavy ransom.'

### **The Bruce**

'Then he [the archbishop] displayed his banner,  
And other bishops that there were  
They display banners also.  
All in a host forth can they go  
Towards Myton the ready way;  
And when the Scotsmen heard say  
That they were to them coming near,  
They prepared themselves on their best manner,  
And divided themselves into battles two.  
Douglas the vanguard he can make;  
The rearward made the Earl Thomas [Moray],  
For chieftain of the host he was.  
And, so ordered it in good array,  
Towards their foes they held their way.  
When each had of other sight,  
They pressed on both halves to fight.  
The Englishmen come on sadly  
With good countenance and hardy,  
Right in front with a Banner,  
Until they their foes come so near  
That they their visage well might see;  
Three spear-length, I believe [well] might be  
Between them, when such drawing back  
Took them, but more, into a hasty turn,  
They turned their backs, and to go.  
When Scottishmen had seen them so  
Afrightened flee all their [way],  
In great haste upon them dashed they,  
And slew and took a great party.  
The rest fled full afrightened  
As they best might, to seek a place of refuge.

They were chased so near at hand,  
That well one thousand dead were;  
And of [them] there three hundred were  
Priests, that died in that chase.  
Therefore that fight called it were  
'The chapter of Myton'; for there  
Slain so many priests were.'

## The Battlefield

### Location

**The location of the battlefield has been established with some confidence, but its extent to the west and north has not been securely established, due to the very limited topographical information contained in the contemporary accounts and the current lack of any archaeological evidence relating to the action. Even the bridge, which is central to the interpretation of the action, is still not securely located. Neither is the historic terrain or the wider road network understood in sufficient detail to allow an adequate understanding of the battle.<sup>15</sup>**

The accounts refer to Myton on Swale, the river Swale and a bridge. Given the Scottish advance was from the North West to Boroughbridge, it is normally assumed that the Scottish army will have been on the north of the river Ure and west of the Swale, taking the protection of the rivers rather than placing it dangerously across their line of retreat.<sup>16</sup> However, given the presence of a major road, on the east side of the Swale in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, running north to Topcliffe and thus across the Pennines to Carlisle, the latter need not have been a problem.<sup>17</sup> However, if they had been on the east side of the river then the English army marching north on that road, the shortest route from York, would not have had to cross a bridge to engage the Scots. This would only have been necessary if the English had taken the more circuitous and improbable route via Boroughbridge.

The English army's approach, if along the road on the east of the river Ure, will have brought it within a mile or so of Myton. From here Myton bridge gave access across the river Swale, leading into Myton Pastures, which is the site of the battle according to local tradition recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is the best fit for the limited topographical evidence in the contemporary accounts.

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<sup>15</sup> Site visit: G Foard, 15/06/2003.

<sup>16</sup> English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995, 1-2

<sup>17</sup> The route is depicted on the Gough map of circa 1350, Hindle Brian, *Medieval roads*, Aylesbury, Shire, 1982, 20.

However there are several problems in the detail of current interpretations. One is the short distance that exists between the presumed Scottish deployment and the probable site of the bridge from Myton. It is difficult to understand how the English forces could have been allowed to achieve an unopposed crossing of Myton bridge, which would have taken the thousands of troops involved a considerable time, if the Scottish army was really positioned just under a mile (almost 1.5 km) away to the north west. If they did not intentionally allow the English crossing then it is perhaps more likely that the English advance was, as the accounts say, an attempt to catch the Scottish forces by surprise. It is then possible perhaps that the Scottish forces were camped and that their initial deployment and first stages of the action were played out further to the west than the site suggested by English Heritage. What does seem fairly certain is that the final action occurred on Myton Pasture, as the English forces fled back towards the bridge over the Swale. It is also here that the majority of the 'execution' of fleeing troops may be expected to have occurred.

The second problem is the reported burning of hayricks as a smokescreen by the Scottish forces. Hay will have been cut and stacked by the end of July and typically the hayricks will have been in or immediately adjacent to the settlements. Rarely there may have been rick places in the open fields, but never would they have been on the floodplain because of the danger of flooding, so they will certainly not have been on Myton Pastures.<sup>18</sup> If the ricks were close by the settlements then this means Ellingthorpe, 1200 metres to the west of Coney Hill, or Humberton, 900 metres to the north west of Coney Hill, or perhaps the undated settlement remains 700 metres to the north west, at The Knowles.

## Historic Terrain

**The battlefield is on low lying land on the west side of the river Swale and the north of the river Ure. Here the floodplains of the rivers are quite wide and all of this land, until enclosure in recent centuries and drainage in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, will have been hay meadow. The medieval settlements of Milby, Ellenthorpe, Humberton and another possible site at The Knowle, all lie on slightly higher ground away from the rivers. This land, mainly on sands and gravel or on silts and clays, will have been extensively exploited as the open field arable of these settlements in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. To the north west of Humberton field names indicate an area of former moorland, shared by the various townships, but there does not appear to have been any moorland on the battlefield.**

## Map

### *Settlements & townships*

The battlefield is divided between the townships of Myton, Milby and Ellenthorpe, with Humberton a little to the north. The latter two settlements are now shrunken to single

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<sup>18</sup> David Hall, pers. comm.

farms, but in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century both will have been nucleated settlements, one at Humberton farm, the other adjacent to Ellenthorpe Hall. Undated settlement remains are also recorded at The Knowles, 700m to the north west of Clott Hill Farm.<sup>19</sup>

The rectilinear plan form of Myton village and the place of the church within it is consistent with the layout being, in broad terms, the medieval plan form.

### ***Roads and Bridges***

The present Myton bridge is a cast iron construction built in 1868 and rebuilt in 2002, approached by a short causeway on the south side. Before this, from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, depicted immediately to the west of the present bridge in 1854-5, back into the medieval period the Swale was crossed by ferry. Earlier in the medieval period a wooden bridge is recorded,<sup>20</sup> the site of which is believed to have lain about 250 metres downstream of the present bridge.<sup>21</sup> The survival of a small strip of meadow on the north side of the flood bank on the north side of the river here may mean that any earthwork associated with a road leading from the bridge may still survive as an earthwork. The presence of an abandoned river channel (palaeochannel) immediately adjacent must however be kept in mind because this may have affected the exact positioning of the medieval bridge. On the south side of the river there is a slight earthwork leading out of the western end of Myton village street that might prove to be a medieval causeway to the possible bridge location. However when seen the area was under high grass and it was not clearly visible and could prove to have far more recent origins.

The present Ellenthorpe Lane, running west from Clott House Farm, is followed by several township boundaries, suggesting it is an early route, and the alignment is continued eastward along the north boundary of Myton Pastures. It is possible that this was an early road of some significance, leading to Myton bridge, perhaps a continuation of the route from York on the east side of the Ure westward towards Ripon. This would account for the presence of a bridge at Myton in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, but might suggest it lay to the north not to the west of the village. The demise of the route would explain why the bridge was not maintained later in the medieval period. If this were correct then it might give a more coherent interpretation of the battle, but at present this is merely conjecture.

### ***River***

In the late 1760s 28 miles of the Swale was made navigable and hence the character of the river will have been significantly altered at this time in the area around Myton.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> NYCC SMR.

<sup>20</sup> OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" mapping; English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995 quoting Lewis, *Topographical dictionary of England*, London, Published by S. Lewis & Co.; Bensley printer Andover, 1831, iii, 337 and Leadman, *Battles fought in Yorkshire*, 1891, 31, n.6.

<sup>21</sup> North Yorkshire SMR. But see below.

<sup>22</sup> McKnight, *The Shell Book of Inland Waterways*, Newton Abbott, David & Charles, 1975, 365.

### *Meadows*

The floodplain of the Ure and Swale was almost certainly all meadow in the medieval period because of the regular inundations.<sup>23</sup> Myton Pastures encompasses most of the floodplain of the Swale in this area and can be expected to have been meadow at the time of the battle. The high flood defence banks and associated drains together with the broad bands of trees which encompass Myton pastures on the north west and south sides have totally transformed the character of the landscape, blocking what were almost certainly wide open views across between Coney Hill and Myton village and bridge. In the small area of the preserved meadow on Myton Pastures there is an earthwork of one deep and wide palaeochannel, a former channel of the Swale. Further to the north, in an area now cultivated, there appears to be the slight trace of another former channel. Whether these were abandoned much earlier, or were still in existence in the medieval period will have had a significant influence upon the nature of the battlefield in 1319. On the unploughed pasture there are also a number of other, mainly very straight, shallow and narrow linear depressions but these appear to be drainage ditches of relatively late date.

Immediately to the west of Myton Pastures, on the floodplain next to the Ure was Ellenthorpe Ings and at its eastern end Clough Ings which were still unenclosed as late as the 1840s.<sup>24</sup> On the south side of Myton, on the east side of the Ure, is another extensive area of floodplain, known as Myton Ings.<sup>25</sup>

### *Open Fields*

Much of the higher ground, above the floodplain, on the gravel terraces, silts and clays will have been mainly if not wholly down to open field arable in 1319. In such a low lying landscape as this the very slightest of slopes, bringing the ground above the floodplain will have been significant. There are a few places where fragments of ridge and furrow still survive from these fields. For example, on the south side of Clott Hill Farm barns, on either side of the house, are two small paddocks containing a tiny fragment of earthwork ridge and furrow survives, a tiny fragment of evidence for the medieval open fields of Ellenthorpe.

The hedged fields that have replaced the open fields, meadows and moorland in the Myton area were not generally created by Parliamentary Enclosure in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>26</sup> but rather were enclosed by agreement, much of this perhaps taking place considerably earlier. Immediately south of Myton village, as seen in 1854-5, the enclosure pattern is one of long narrow parallel fields indicative of ancient enclosure of open field strips. However in 1319 little more than the tight knot of closes around the settlements is likely to have been enclosed. This was then essentially an open landscape

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<sup>23</sup> The reference in the SMR to ridge and furrow on Myton Pasture needs to be reviewed as this is unlikely, although they might prove to be post medieval, post drainage plough ridges.

<sup>24</sup> NYRO: Tithe Map of Ellenthorpe.

<sup>25</sup> NYRO: map ZLJ.

<sup>26</sup> Tate and Turner, *A Domesday of English enclosure acts and awards*, Reading, The Library University of Reading, 1978, contrary to suggestions in the English Heritage report, English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995, 2.

at the time of the battle, only the major rivers providing a significant obstacle to military action.

### ***Moor***

There are a group of moor field name to the north west of Humberton which indicate that indicate the presence of moorland in the vicinity, which may well have existed as such in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. All the surrounding townships had tongues of land extending into the area to take a share of this moorland.

### ***Warren***

It is suggested that Coney Hill, adjacent to Clott Hill Farm, may have been the site of a rabbit warren<sup>27</sup>, but this is not certain as the field name does not specify a warren, just the presence of rabbits.

## **Archaeology of the Battle**

No archaeological evidence has been identified which relates to the battle. Local tradition, recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is that the battle was fought on the west of the Swale and that many of the dead were buried in Myton churchyard. On the evidence from other battles the latter would seem unlikely, except for those who later died of their wounds.<sup>28</sup> It is far more likely that the dead would have been buried in mass graves o the battlefield.

## **Research information**

### ***Historic administrative areas***

County: Yorkshire (North Riding)

Township (parish): Myton (Myton), Ellenthorpe (Aldbrough), Milby (Aldbrough)

### ***Sites and Monuments Record***

North Yorkshire County Council

### ***Portable Antiquities Officer***

<http://www.finds.org.uk/>

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<sup>27</sup> English Heritage, *Battlefield Report: Myton-on Swale 1319*, English Heritage, 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Leadman, *Battles fought in Yorkshire*, 1891, 30.

### ***Record Offices***

North Yorkshire County Record Office

### ***Local Studies Collections***

None consulted

## ***Further reading***

### **Secondary works**

There are several works which may contain information relevant to the battle and battlefield that have not been consulted:

Cook John, *Notes relative to the Manor of Myton. [With plans.] L.P*, Hull, A. Brown & Sons, 1890; Thompson, *Plan of certain Myton Enclosures. Drawn by I. Brownlow Thompson ... From information supplied by A.B. Wilson-Barkworth ... Scale, 4 chains to 1 inch*, 1924; Travis-Cook, *Notes relative to the Manor of Myton. L.P*, Hull, A. Brown & Sons, 1890

### **Primary sources**

#### ***British Geological Survey maps***

1:50,000 scale: sheet 62, Harrogate.

#### ***Historic Maps***

##### Historic Ordnance Survey Maps

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" mapping 1854-5: <http://www.old-maps.co.uk/>

##### Other Historic Maps

#### **Myton**

Tithe map: 1848, Borthwick, Ta1785 or PRO 42/579 (not seen)

Enclosure Map/ Award: none

Estate maps: Myton Ings, 1739: NYRO ZLJ (microfilm 2062/351-5)

#### **Ellenthorpe**

Tithe map: NYRO: microfilm 3495; Borthwick: Ta2695

Enclosure Map/ Award: none

#### **Humberston:**

Tithe: NYRO microfilm 1794

#### **Milby**

Tithe map: NYRO microfilm 1797

Enclosure Map/ Award: none

### *Historic Documents*

St Mary's Abbey, York held property in Ellenthorpe.

## ***Management Assessment and Strategy***

If the battle of Myton is to be better understood then a detailed reconstruction of the medieval landscape is required for the area bounded by Myton village & the Swale, the Ure and extending at least to Ellenthorpe and Humberton. It must include the investigation of the course and number of channels of the Swale and Ure at the time. This could usefully be combined with a study of the area extending west to the Great North Road and beyond, if linked with a study of the Boroughbridge battlefield. A more accurate definition of the major components of the communication system in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is also required to better understand the strategic situation and the tactical opportunities and constraints faced by the two armies.

## **Assessment**

### *Military History*

### *Military Archaeology*

### *Historic Landscape*

### *Access*

### *Interpretation*

There is no interpretation on site, no published leaflet and no interpretation in any museum or visitor centre in the area.

## **Research Agenda**

## **Conservation Strategy**

### *Existing Designations*

Access and designations etc:

<http://www.magic.gov.uk>

Countryside Stewardship area on Myton Pastures.

### *Threats*

### *Management priorities*

Evaluation, recording, conservation

## **Conservation Information**

The barns at Clott Hill Farm and the trees on the north side of the road close to where one can park, are identified as belonging to the Crown Estate. It is uncertain how extensive this landholding is across the battlefield area, but is likely to encompass at least part of the north western part of the Registered area.

### *Conservation status*

[Map?](#)

### *Modern administrative areas*

North Yorkshire County Council

Harrogate District Council  
Hambleton District Council

### *Local Archaeological curator*

County Archaeological Officer, North Yorkshire County Council.

## **Visiting the Battlefield**

[Battlefield Walk map](#)

### **The value of a site visit**

Myton is one of the least satisfactory of battlefield visits, due mainly to the lack of topographical detail in the contemporary sources or of any archaeological evidence to help to pin down the exact locations of the main events. This is unfortunate because the landscape itself is a quiet, pleasant one to walk through, with a feeling of remoteness yet reasonably easy of access. But a visit is still worthwhile, for one gains a very good feeling for the scale of the rivers and can understand how great a barrier they will have represented. Also one can appreciate the low lying nature of the landscape, the extent of

the floodplain and the degree to which the very slight changes in the height will have led to great differences in land use: from meadow on the floodplain to the strip cultivation of the hedgeless open fields on the slightly higher and drier ground. What must be treated with care is anything which suggests more than the most general location of the events, for so much remains to be discovered as to exactly where on the land to the west of the Swale the action actually took place.

## **Access**

The battlefield, as currently interpreted, lies close to the confluence of the rivers Ure and Swale, in the angle between the two. There is no road bridge across either river at Myton, but there is a 19<sup>th</sup> century bridge which gives pedestrian access over the Swale from the village itself, enabling access to the battlefield from the east. However, perhaps more satisfying as a walk, and certainly much easier in terms of vehicle access from the A1, is an approach from the west, on the north side of the Ure, from Boroughbridge. An approach from the west has the added advantage of enabling the visit to be complemented by an exploration of the Boroughbridge battlefield. This is the approach and walk that is described here. It is also possible to reach the battlefield on foot from Boroughbridge, but this is a long trek and Myton village has no pub or shop to provide refreshments en route.

### ***Approach by road***

If travelling by road from Boroughbridge, cross the river Ure at the north end of the town and immediately north of the bridge, at the roundabout, turn right towards Milby. Then, after 400 metres, turn right again to Milby. Go through the village and 700m beyond, where the road takes a sharp left turn, take the narrow road on the right to Ellenthorpe. Follow this road for 1700m, past the turnings to Ellenthorpe Hall and Lodge and, just before Clott House Farm, opposite a 20<sup>th</sup> century brick house on the left hand side, there is a wide verge on the right hand side where it is possible to park several cars.

### ***The walk***

*2.5 miles (3 miles if Myton village and church are also included)*

*The terrain is easy and the paths are well trodden and easily followed.*

Follow the track straight on through Clott Hill Farm. Alongside the path on the right, just before the house and then again just beyond it, where the path passes on the south side of the Clott Hill Farm barns, are small paddocks where earthwork ridge and furrow survives. This is a tiny fragment of evidence for the medieval open fields of Ellenthorpe which are likely to have extended across much of not all of the land above the floodplain. To the north of the path were the open fields of Milby.

The path leads on between arable fields on the south, running alongside a hedge on the north side. As the path bears slightly to the right it drops down onto the floodplain of the Swale. Here the hedge on the left now sits upon a high flood defence bank. At the end of the field the path then rises up over another such bank, which continues southward, forming the western boundary of Myton Pastures. This is the best vantage point to look over the presumed western part of the battlefield. The slightly higher ground of Coney

Hill, on which the Clot Hill Farm sits, is clearly visible, rising up from the floodplain. This is the site of the Scottish deployment suggested in the English Heritage report.

The path now crosses a tiny modern bridge over the drainage ditch. You are now in Myton parish with the high flood bank on your left marking the northern edge of Myton Pastures. Just past the trees on your right and you see that today, thanks to modern drainage, the Pastures is largely arable and encompassed on three sides by a narrow plantations of trees.

From here turn right and follow down the western side of the Pastures. Half way to the river you pass through a gate into a small area of preserved meadow which takes you down to the flood bank which runs alongside the river bank eastward to the present Myton bridge. Just over half way along the riverbank, where the river meanders slightly, is believed to be the approximate site of the medieval bridge, but the navigation works and construction of flood defence banks have undoubtedly transformed the character of the rivers and riverbanks. On the left the preserved meadow widens out to encompass the earthwork depression which appears to be an abandoned river channel running parallel to the modern channel. At the eastern end of the field a stile leads into a narrow lane. The best views back across Myton Pastures are from the walk along the flood bank beside the river and from here, next to the bridge.

The recently restored 19<sup>th</sup> century cast iron bridge, which replaced a ferry which was a few metres downstream, leads over the river into Myton village. This is only a short diversion, though one which adds little to one's appreciation of the battle. Over the bridge the lane runs on a causeway but on the left one can see how the ground rises up onto the gravel terrace where the medieval village sits. Past a couple of modern houses and the lane turns sharp left into the main street of Myton, a pleasant mix of mainly modern and 19<sup>th</sup> century brick houses with a few earlier buildings. St Mary's Church, which is normally open during the day, lies towards this east end of the main street. It is a medieval building, but heavily restored in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and contains nothing relating to the battle. (If approaching the battlefield from the village, the main street at Myton is wide and there is plenty of room to park, especially at the eastern entrance to the village.<sup>29</sup> )

Return to Myton bridge and follow the lane northward, straight across the Pastures to the northern belt of trees then left alongside the trees to cross back over the floodbank and back to Clot Hill Farm.

### *Access information*

#### Rights of Way

As depicted on the Ordnance survey Explorer mapping.

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<sup>29</sup> The car parking identified in the English Heritage report, apparently in a field on the south side of the main street, does not now appear to exist.

### Countryside Stewardship

This gives free access to the narrow strip of preserved meadow on the south and west sides of Myton Pastures.

<http://countrywalks.defra.gov.uk/>

### Open Country or Common Land

None

## **Monuments**

There is no monument to the battle.

## **Interpretation on site**

There is no on site interpretation.

## **Other locations to visit**

No locations have been identified in the vicinity with interpretation on the battle.

### *Museums*

### *Tourist Information Centres*

Boroughbridge.

### *Nearby battlefields*

Boroughbridge: 2 miles; Marston Moor 10 miles; Northallerton: 20 miles; Stamford Bridge 20 miles.

### *Other nearby sites of historic military interest*

None identified

## ***Further reading: Battlefield guides***

None of the battlefield guides consulted include Myton.

## **Acknowledgements**

Digital text for the contemporary accounts is courtesy of English Heritage.

## **Abbreviations**

NYCC: North Yorkshire County Council

PRO: Public Record Office  
SMR: Sites & Monuments Record  
RO: Record Office

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