

Interim report on the progress of the Barnet Battlefield Survey

December 2016

The Barnet Battlefield Survey is an archaeological investigation into the 1471 Battle of Barnet. It aims to define more accurately the site of the battle, as well as gaining further insight into how it unfolded, including the use of artillery and firearms. Experts believe that the battle saw the first mass battlefield use of hand guns in Britain. The Survey is being managed by Dr Glenn Foard (University of Huddersfield), who recently located the site of the Battle of Bosworth where Richard III was killed. The Barnet investigation, which is using the same pioneering approach applied at Bosworth to provide a technical analysis of the battlefield, is a seminal study which will provide a benchmark for future battlefield investigation.

The Barnet Battlefield Survey is able to take place thanks to a grant from the Hadley Trust. The project was officially launched by Glenn Foard at the Spring Meeting of the Hertfordshire Association for Local History in May 2015. He was joined at the launch by Sam Wilson (battlefield archaeologist, University of Huddersfield), Dr Tracey Partida (landscape archaeologist) and Dr Gillian Gear (Barnet Museum).

Sam Wilson from Huddersfield University is the Project Archaeologist for the Barnet Battlefield Survey and has been directing the day to day conduct of the investigation. He is currently working on a PhD on late medieval firearms. He has experience of battlefield archaeology at sites such as Bosworth and Waterloo and has directed other battlefield investigations in the UK. He is also a Trustee of The Battlefields Trust.



Launch of the Barnet Battlefield Survey, from left: Tracey Partida, Glenn Foard, Sam Wilson, Gillian Gear



Sam Wilson with other archaeologists at a Waterloo dig

The Battle of Barnet

The Battle of Barnet was fought in 1471, near the end of the Wars of the Roses, an English civil war between the noble houses of York and Lancaster over who should be king. The battle saw the death of the Earl of Warwick (the 'Kingmaker'), arguably the most significant individual in the conflict. His death confirmed Edward IV's position as king, and paved the way for Edward's final defeat of the Lancastrians at the Battle of Tewkesbury a few weeks later.

An English Heritage report says: "there is no disputing that Barnet is one of the most important battles of the Wars of the Roses." Furthermore, "compared with many other medieval battles the contemporary sources provide us with a good idea of what actually happened once battle was joined. This increases its significance." (English Heritage Battlefield Report: Barnet 1471, 1995). The site has been registered by English Heritage, and in fact is the only Registered Battlefield in London. There is however dispute about the true location of the battlefield, with evidence suggesting the site registered by English Heritage is not correct. It was this problem that formed the catalyst for the current project.

Metal detecting

After some in-depth preparatory research, looking at maps and contemporary sources, etc, Sam Wilson started field work in autumn 2015. In September 2015 a training weekend for metal

detectorists was held, run by Sam and Glenn Foard. After this, Sam started regular metal detecting with a small group of local volunteers, as well as some experienced battlefield archaeologists who had worked on Wars of the Roses sites at Bosworth and Towton, and a team from Grunwald (an early fifteenth century battle) in Poland. Over the course of the autumn 2015 to autumn 2016, the metal detectorists have worked extremely hard in some challenging conditions and have covered a huge area of landscape.

Geophysics

Another archaeological technique being used in the Barnet Battlefield Survey is geophysics, which uses instruments to penetrate beneath the ground in order to identify potential buried archaeological remains. In the spring of 2016, Sam brought in Dom Barker of Southampton University to undertake a geophysical survey of the potential site of a chapel thought to be where the dead from the battle may be buried. It was relatively common practice that after medieval battles a chapel would be built on or near a battle site to commemorate the dead, or at the very least a chantry set up at an existing chapel nearby. Sixteenth century accounts record this happening at Barnet, possibly with a mass grave nearby. New research by local historian Brian Warren suggests this building was on what is now the Wrotham Park estate, near to the old moat, some of which still survives.

The area was surveyed using magnetometry, which measures and maps subtle changes in the earth's magnetic field, which allows traces of past activity and disturbance to be detected. There were possible below ground remains identified but their form was unclear and will require excavation to determine their exact nature. It is also possible that modern disturbance and background noise may be masking some features. Sam would like to do more geophysics in this area in 2017, using resistivity as well as magnetometry. Resistivity measures the electrical resistance of features under the ground. For example stone would provide greater resistance, while organic materials might conduct electricity more easily than the surrounding soil. Resistivity takes longer than magnetometry, but produces results with a higher resolution.

Test-pitting

In May 2016 a team of volunteers helped Sam with test-pitting in the area that used to be Kitts End Hamlet (near Kitts End Lane) to try and establish how old the settlement was. Small pits, half a metre square were dug in a line every 5 metres. They found lots of fragments of pottery and tile, and the pottery was quite unabraded, showing that it hadn't moved around much in the soil. These artefacts have been dated by a pottery expert at a commercial archaeological unit as covering the whole medieval period (eleventh to fifteenth century), which indicates that the settlement was in existence at the time of the Battle of Barnet and had been so for a number of centuries beforehand.

Landscape archaeology

Landscape archaeologist Dr Tracey Partida undertook a survey of the historic landscape to find out what the area would have been like in the fifteenth century and how this related to the landscape features mentioned in the primary sources about the battle. This involved in-depth archival work looking through hundreds of original documents and maps which detailed changes to the Barnet landscape over the medieval and post medieval period. This work has formed the most comprehensive study of the battlefield landscape undertaken to date.



Sam Wilson metal detecting in Barnet

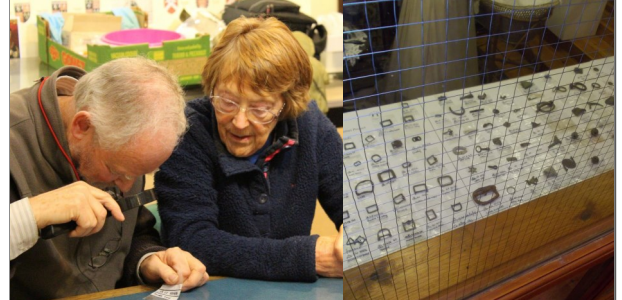


Sam Wilson with Dom Barker during the geophysical survey

Finds processing and analysis

Since the metal detecting started, finds processing sessions have been taking place at Barnet Museum. Sam trained Museum volunteers to clean, bag and register the finds. These volunteers have in turn taught members of the local community. So far over 40 people have been involved, ranging in age from 8 to over 80, including two sessions with groups of sixth form students from Dame Alice Owen's School. As the finds are cleaned they are displayed at the Museum, and have generated a lot of interest.

Once the finds have been cleaned, Sam has analysed them, with some being sent off to specialists. Sam has also analysed metal detected finds that may relate to the battle which have been handed into the museum over the years. These include three large lead artillery projectiles, which show marks of having been fired, and were undoubtedly used in the battle, as well as a number of late fifteenth century artefacts (ie from the same time period as the battle).



Top & bottom left: finds processing at Barnet Museum
Bottom right: finds on display at Barnet Museum

Community

The archaeological survey has generated great interest in the local community. Lots of visitors to the Museum ask about it, and there has been considerable interest online via twitter and facebook and through the websites of Barnet Museum and Barnet Society. Sam has put videos about the investigation on youtube, and some students from Barnet College have made some films about the battle. The project was also been featured in the BBC4 series 'Digging for Britain', presented by Prof. Alice Roberts.

In the summers of 2015 and 2016 Barnet Museum hosted a group of medieval re-enactors, who demonstrated medieval life and fighting techniques, and these displays were very popular, with a packed audience watching. Sam introduced both the displays with an introduction to / update on the archaeology.

Sam has given a number of talks locally, including for the Hadley Wood Association and at the Hertfordshire Association for Local History's annual Symposium. He has also been into local primary schools to talk to the children about the battle.



Top: Sam Wilson with Prof. Alice Roberts on 'Digging for Britain'

Bottom left: filming for 'Digging for Britain'

Bottom right: re-enactors at Barnet Museum

Conclusions so far and next stage

The first stage of metal detecting was completed in autumn 2016. The last few weeks of work were the most significant as this was the first time that Sam and his team were able to access the fields that he felt were the most likely battle site (based on the landscape archaeology work), which had previously had crops in. Although it isn't yet possible to say whether the battlefield has been located, the detecting in these fields uncovered a number of medieval objects which are possibly battlefield-related, such as

harness mounts, strap ends, badges and spurs. This is by far the greatest concentration of medieval finds so far and is consistent with finds from other Wars of the Roses battlefields, such as Bosworth and Towton. So far no artillery rounds have been found. Although we know that there was artillery and handgunners at the battle (and that three artillery rounds have already be found in the area), it may be that the guns were not actually used that much during the battle due to the heavy fog that day, or simply that the team is yet to look in the right area – the field where two of the rounds were found was not able to be surveyed during the 2016 season.

The archaeological investigation has also found a variety of coins, buckles, badges and spurs covering a wide chronological sweep, which have greatly enhanced Barnet Museum’s collection, and our ability to understand, explain and recreate Barnet’s past. Some of the most interesting find include a halfpenny of Henry V and a cap of a Civil War soldier’s powder flask.



Some of the objects found by the metal detectorists (clockwise from top left): spur, mount, part of a purse bar, Henry V halfpenny

The next phase of fieldwork investigation is planned for the summer of 2017, with more metal detecting in the area that produced the battlefield-related finds, and more geophysics at the possible chapel site.

In the meantime, the painstaking process of finds analysis is underway which will start to reveal the details of exactly what the team have recovered and how they fit into the historic Barnet landscape and the possible battlefield site. This will help to determine the targets for next summer’s fieldwork. Initially Sam will look through all the finds, and then they will be passed on to finds experts for analysis and reporting.

The Battle of Barnet Project

The Barnet Battlefield Survey is part of the Battle of Barnet Project, which aims to not only find out more about the battle, but also to inspire the local community. The Project has just received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop a variety of elements, including resources for local schools, a Medieval Festival, community archaeology, a heritage trail, a new Battle of Barnet exhibition at Barnet Museum and much more. This community part of the Project is due to start in early 2017 and continue throughout 2018. The Battle of Barnet Project is a partnership between Barnet Museum, Barnet Society and the Battlefields Trust, with the support of Huddersfield University.



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