

The Barons War 1264 - 1267

Alan Easton

The Lance and Longbow Society

Introduction

This booklet brings together in one handy reference a series of articles originally published in 'Hobilar', (Journal of the Lance and Longbow Society).

The Barons War in the mid 13th century makes absorbing reading. The period April 1264 to December 1266 saw two major battles, (Lewes and Evesham), numerous skirmishes, sieges, assaults on towns, assaults on castles and strategic manoeuvres worthy of Hannibal or Napoleon. Spies, hero's, villains, tantalising 'what ifs', treachery, riveting political machinations; the Barons War has them all.

Furthermore, the conflict has some significance. Militarily, the war marks the high point of the mounted mailed knight as a fighting force. From this period onward plate armour was to become more and more prevalent, the longbow more and more the master of the battlefield. Politically, the war marks an important step in the development of English democracy. Was the King to rule without restraint? Or was he to be governed by some form of council? The first 'truly' representative parliament is attributed to the period of Simon de Montfort's rule.

There are some excellent modern in-depth accounts of both major battles but from a military viewpoint there is no single 'start to finish' account of the war. This is why I wrote the articles for 'Hobilar'. The articles were the result of an information gathering exercise. I have brought nothing new to the history apart from a few personal observations and I have only included what is interesting to me, e.g. the political aspects of the story have been greatly simplified. Nevertheless, I think the exercise has been worthwhile. I hope it encourages others to find out more. There is always more to learn!

My sincere thanks goes to the Society's cartographer, Derek Stone, whose beautiful maps adorn these pages. I would also like to acknowledge David Lanchester whose help and encouragement has made this publication possible.

Alan Easton

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Maps: Please note that there is some duplication of map numbers caused by the originals appearing in ‘Hobilar’, the Journal of the Lance & Longbow Society, over four instalments. This should not cause a problem as in all cases it is clear to which part of the text each map applies.

Front Cover: The picture is from the French Maciejowski Bible. Although it does not depict the Barons War, it is exactly of the period in question and depicts very accurately the combatants appearance in the mid 13th Century.

http://www.medievaltymes.com/courtyard/maciejowski_images_35.htm

Chapter 1

The Build Up to War

Wherever the army of the King and Edward went, this way or that, three dreadful allies rode with them - plunder, burning and slaughter. Every shire into which they came trembled and shuddered like a reed in the western gale. There was no peace in the realm: all was wiped out by slaughter, fire, rapine and plunder, and lamentation, grief and horror filled the air. (Flores Historiarum)

The background to the war was rooted in the unpopularity of the King, Henry III¹ who seems to have antagonised everybody. Earls, barons, knights, the clergy, even the lesser folk had their grievances.

Henry had many faults but one in particular aroused the resentment of the 'English' Barons. This was Henry's favouritism towards 'foreigners' upon whom he lavished titles, land and money. These foreigners included Queen Eleanor's relations² and Henry's half-brothers, the Lusignans³. This second group were particularly disliked. Apart from being showered with titles and gifts they enjoyed the king's protection and acted as if they were above the law.

A number of barons decided that constitutional reform was needed to deal with what they saw as the King's misrule. At the Westminster parliament in April 1258 an overwhelming majority of barons demanded that foreigners be expelled from court and that the King agree to a reform of government. Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester⁴ and Henry's brother in law⁵, was among the disaffected barons.

The barons, led by Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford and Roger Bigod, the Earl Marshal and Earl of Norfolk, succeeded in imposing the 'Provisions of Oxford' upon the King at a specially convened parliament in June 1258.

Amongst other things, the Provisions required the King to be governed by a council of fifteen whose members would be chosen by a committee⁶. All those

1 Arms – see appendix 3, notes on colour plates, 1A.

2 Henry married Eleanor of Provence in 1236. Her arms are given by Blaauw as '*Or, four pallets Gules*'.

3 Henry's mother Isabella remarried Hugh X of Lusignan, Count de La Marche four years after the death of King John.

4 Arms - see plate 1B.

5 Simon had married Eleanor, Henry's sister, in 1238. It is ironic that Simon de Montfort was himself a foreigner! He was French and had come to England in 1230 to claim his father's inheritance, the Honour of Leicester, which was granted to him in 1231.

6 Supporters of the reforms dominated the committee.

Chapter 2

Northampton and Lewes

On 13th March Henry issued a summons for his forces to meet at Oxford on the 30th. Oxford was a natural mustering point with good roads from lands Henry controlled in the north, west and south. It was also a good base for attacking de Montfort's strongholds. On the day the summons was issued, John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey²⁶, set out for Ryegate and Rochester to defend his estates. Rochester protected the main road from Dover to London. It was a major royalist stronghold in the middle of an area controlled by de Montfort and interfered with their communications.

De Montfort had three areas to defend; the Cinque Ports, London and the East midlands. The latter was their chief source of power and recruitment. Simon de Montfort divided his troops into three. One force, with himself and Gilbert de Clare in command, would stay at London to protect the Cinque Ports and encourage the Londoners. A second force, led by his son Simon, was to hold Northampton. Finally, a third force, led by his son Henry, was to protect Kenilworth castle.

Northampton was the most important town in the midlands. It was a rich and prosperous trading and administrative centre. By placing a large force there de Montfort protected his powerbase in the East midlands against royalist attacks from Oxford. Northampton offered a strong defensive position with large walls and a castle. It had both the space and supplies to sustain a large army and an extensive road network that meant any army based there could respond very rapidly or quickly launch an offensive.

Movement in the midlands was restricted by the Fens to the east and, less significantly, the Cherwell valley in the west. These restrictions determined where the Romans built their road network. Two Roman roads ran north from London. One, Watling Street, led to the Northwest and North Wales via Towcester. The other, Ermine Street, led to the Northeast via Huntingdon and was liable to flooding along the river Nene below Wellingborough. Over the years the Roman roads had been improved and in some cases completely re-routed; yet they still determined the movement of armies over long distances. As a result, most northerly traffic passed through a gap about 20 miles wide. Northampton lies seven miles from Watling Street in the middle of this very gap. See map on page 14.

Kenilworth was ideally placed to threaten communications between the North, South and Welsh marches but it could not help de Montfort defend the West Midlands nor London as it was a day's march from the latter.

26 Arms - see plate 2B.

Chapter 3

The Evesham Campaign

Both sides were low on supplies so de Montfort quickly moved onto Battle (17th May) and Rochester (25th May). Orders were issued to release the prisoners taken at Northampton and for royal castles to be placed in de Montfort's hands. By late May Simon was in London where some of the Northampton prisoners were exchanged with those taken at Lewes. Further orders were issued: arms could not be borne without a license; each county was to appoint wardens. On 23rd June a council confirmed de Montfort's actions since Lewes.

The situation looked good for Simon but he did have problems. In early July he and Gilbert de Clare led a short campaign against Roger Mortimer and Roger Leybourne who refused to attend a parliament in London and release prisoners taken at Northampton. In an alliance with Llywelyn, de Montfort and de Clare took the castles of Hay, Hereford and Ludlow. Mortimer and Leybourne made terms at Montgomery. They had to hand over prisoners and royal castles they held, and also provide hostages for their continued good conduct.

By now Prince Edward was imprisoned at Wallingford castle and in July Warren of Bassingbourne attempted a rescue. With the help of some Marcher barons he stormed the castle and entered the inner ward before being repulsed by the garrison using some engines of war. The castle garrison threatened to give Edward to the royalist's: by mangonel!

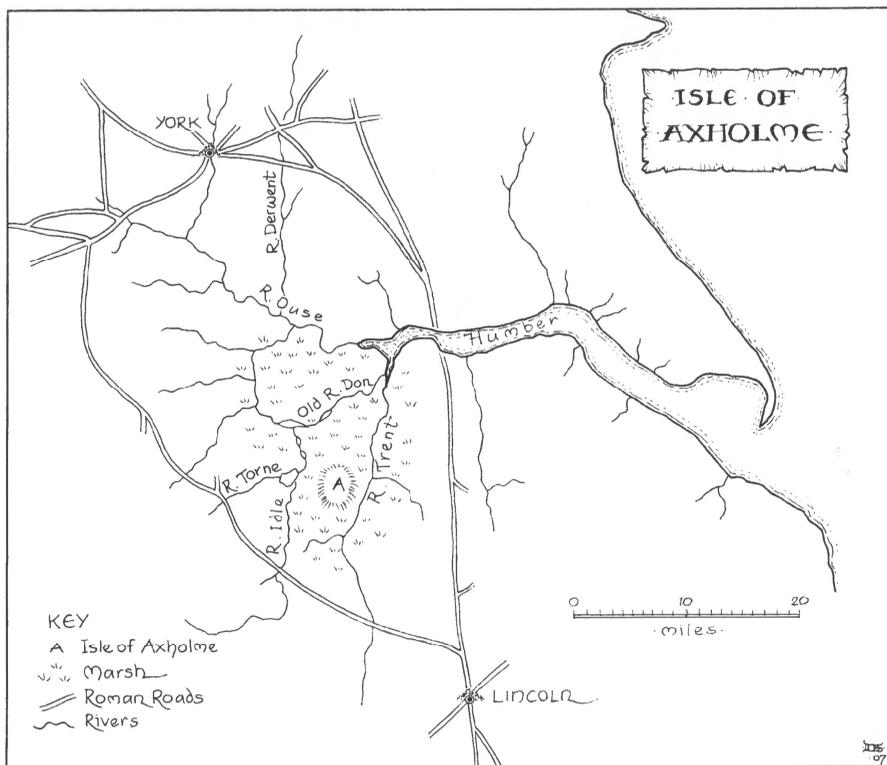
Meanwhile, a mercenary force, recruited from Brittany, Gascony and Spain assembled at Bruges and Damme in Flanders. Paid for by Henry's Queen and her son Edmund they were joined by many fleeing after Lewes. De Montfort reacted quickly to this threat of invasion. On 8th July, before leaving London for the Marches, he called out the feudal host. They assembled on Barham Down in early August. By early September desertions from the host were a cause of concern, but equally the threat of invasion was fading. The force in Flanders dispersed first, when the Queen ran out of money.

In early October, Roger Mortimer and Roger Leybourne rose up yet again. They laid siege to de Clare's castle at Hanley, sacked Hereford on 10th November and captured the castles of Gloucester, Bridgnorth and Marlborough.

In response de Montfort summoned the feudal host to Oxford on the 25th November. The marcher barons destroyed the bridges over the Severn in an attempt to hinder de Montfort but it was Llywelyn approaching from the west that forced them to surrender at Worcester in mid December. Mortimer and Leybourne were to be exiled to Ireland for a year and a day. On their return they were to be

Chapter 4 The Disinherited

Evesham should have ended the rebellion but Henry imposed such harsh penalties on those who sided with Simon that it made no sense for them to submit. Henry stripped them of all their lands and possessions. They became known as the disinherited and it took another two years before they were subdued. During this period so many rebels and outlaws roamed the countryside that Henry advised foreign merchants not to travel inland because he could not guarantee their safety.



By the end of October 1265 Edward had secured London and Dover. In November he marched with an army of recruits from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire against young Simon de Montfort⁷² who had left Kenilworth to help organise resistance on the Isle of Axholme in Lincolnshire. See map on page 40⁷³. Edward started to build

72 With him were Baldwin Wake and John de Eyville.

73 The Isle of Axholme sat almost half way between Lincoln and York and was bounded by

Hinckley. When viewing the reverse side of a banner its entire design reverses and this same rule also applies to a horse's housing.

Supporters of Simon de Montfort are indicated (M) while Royalist supporters are indicated (R). When both appear it indicates that the individual fought at Lewes under Simon de Montfort and at Evesham under Prince Edward.

Pennons - These were about 12 – 18 inches in length and either triangular or forked. They were not always charged with a heraldic device.

Plates 1A & B – The Main Protagonists

1A. The King's standard is illustrated as a square to differentiate it from a normal banner. No one knows the shape or form this standard took and it is quite possible it was in the form of a 'windsock' usually associated with armies of an earlier period. It is very rare to find a dragon used on a coat of arms in this period and the dragon illustrated is based on the one in Boutell's Heraldry, (plate VII page 84).

King Henry III – *Gules, three lions passant guardant Or.*

Prince Edward – It was only in the 15th century that the 'marks of cadency', (used to denote the various sons), became standardised. Until then the most common marks were: eldest son – a label, second son – a crescent, third son – a molet. Edward is variously accredited with a label of 3 or 5.

1B. Earl of Chester – *Azure, three garbs Or.* This title was held by both Prince Edward and Simon de Montfort. Prince Edward held the title until it was given to Simon by Henry III under duress at the end of 1264. The illustration shows how the banner might have appeared, but it is by no means clear how arms were depicted on banners and the pictorial evidence is conflicting.

Simon de Montfort – See under 'Banners' above. Simon de Montfort's sons – As their father with the following marks of cadence: Henry (label), Simon the Younger (crescent) and Guy (molet).

Plates 2A & B – The Principle Commanders at Lewes

2A. Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford (M) – *Quarterly Gules and Or with a mullet (5) Argent in the quarter.*

Although an earl, Robert is not credited as being one of the commanders at the battle of Lewes, either because of youth or inexperience. Carpenter places him in the Montfortian left division led by Nicholas de Segrave and Henry de Hastings. Robert was witness to the ordinance of June 1264, a document that effectively

The Lance and Longbow Society

The Lance and Longbow Society is the World's premier medieval interest society for the amateur historian, wargamer, re-enactor and herald, in fact, anyone who is interested in things medieval.

Formed in 1991, the aim of the society is to promote a historical and wargaming interest in the Middle Ages, the actual period covered is from the early 11th century into the early sixteenth century, which saw the decline of the mounted knight. The Lance and Longbow Society also produces a bi-monthly issue of its highly praised journal *Hobilar*, and a Newsletter, *Scourer*.

For further information visit; <http://www.lanceandlongbow.com> or contact: David Lanchester, 9 Willow Close, Ruskington, Lincolnshire, NG34 9GD. Tel: 01526 830537. Email: landsoc@aol.com

The Simon de Montfort Society

"The object of the Society shall be to advance the education of the public in the life and times of Simon de Montfort and particularly, but not exclusively, his connection with Evesham and his part in reforming the government of England." If you are interested in this very colourful character, the history of the area around his last battle, or in the history of the thirteenth century in general, then you might like to join the Evesham based Simon de Montfort Society. The Lion Magazine, which comes out three times a year, contains articles on Churches and battle sites, etc., topics of interest to social and political historians plus details of all the meeting dates and events.

For further information visit; <http://www.simondemontfort.org> or contact: Kerry Moreton, 2 Yew Tree Court, High Street, Broadway, Worcestershire WR12 7AJ. Tel: 01386 858261.

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