

Lewes town map

Battle of Lewes

Battlefield Walk



- 1 Lewes Castle** built by the De Warenne family, loyal supporters of the monarchy since the lands were granted to them by William the Conqueror after the Battle of Hastings in 1066.
- 2 The High Street** inhabited by many Lewesians who were injured or killed when their houses were set ablaze during the Battle of Lewes. Escape routes from the walled town were few, one being over the **bridge (3)**. Parts of the medieval town wall still exist at **Westgate Street (4)**.
- 5 Lewes Priory** King Henry III's supporters were celebrating the feast of St Pancras here on 14 May 1264.
- 6 Probable site of mill** at epicentre of battle (see Black Horse pub).
- 7 Official battlefield site** on Landport Bottom.
- 8 Anne of Cleves House** C15, Sussex Past Museum.

Visit Lewes Castle to find out more about the Battle of Lewes and life in medieval times.
 Find us on Facebook at Lewes Battle
 or visit our websites www.battleoflewes.wordpress.com and www.sussexpast.co.uk.



Simon de Montfort's forces sheltered in Warningore Wood before going up to Black Cap and over Mount Harry where they could not be seen by the royal army.

Who? King Henry III, his son Prince Edward, Simon de Montfort and the rebel barons.

Why? Henry had reluctantly agreed to The Provisions of Oxford installed in 1258 by a group of barons led by Simon de Montfort. They forced him to accept a new form of government in which power was placed in the hands of a council of twenty-four members, twelve selected by the crown, twelve by the barons. Henry reneged on this accord and conflict broke out culminating in the Battle of Lewes.

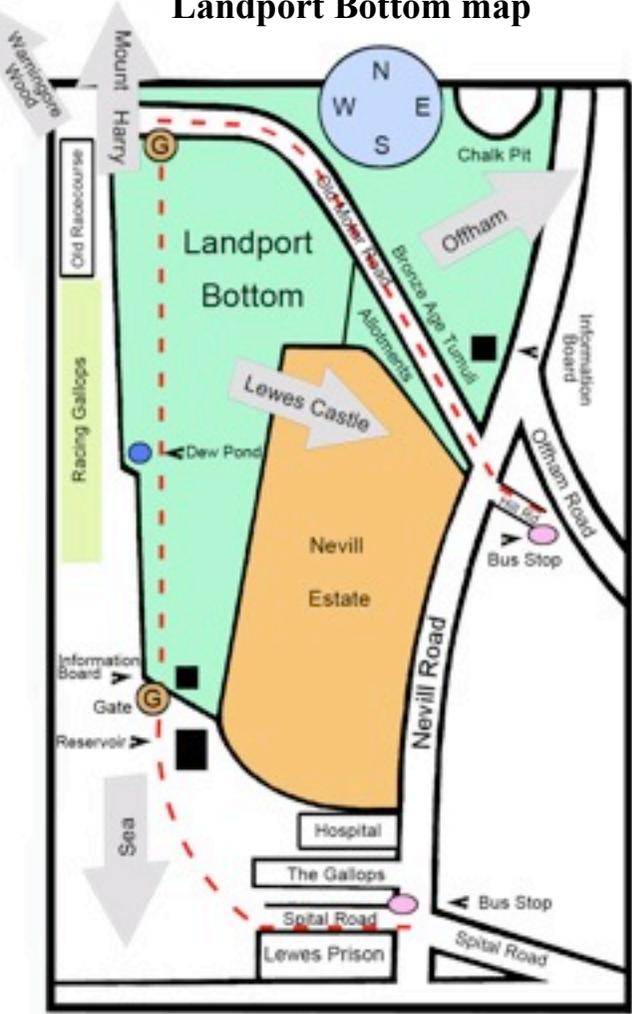
How? The battle happened in three phases 1) encounter between Prince Edward's cavalry and baronial army's left flank of apprentices from London 2) main clash between the remainder of the rival armies 3) fighting in the streets of Lewes and around the castle.

Where? The battlefield of Landport Bottom is bounded by Lewes Prison, Cuckoo Bottom, Mount Harry, Offham, the River Ouse and Lewes Castle.

The Earl's knights were for the most part striplings, novices in arms they knew too little of war. Now girt with his sword the tender youth stands at dawn in battle accustoming himself to arms; what wonder if a recruit so raw be fearful [...] Soon the Londoners were routed, for Edward thirsted for their blood because they had insulted his mother and he chased them for four miles, slaughtering them most grievously.

'Carmen de Bello Lewensi',

Landport Bottom map



Directions: Walk up Spital Road past prison wall to Heath House. Continue to Heath Stables. Ignore gate and take path to right up diagonal slope marked by post with red top. Head towards green-fenced electricity sub-station. Keep shrubs to left. Proceed up path ahead past house on right. Stay on main path until fenced reservoir

De Montfort's inexperienced young Londoners, mainly apprentices, were outnumbered by Edward's cavalry in the first phase. Riding up from Lewes Castle he pursued them as far as Offham Chalk Pit and to the river Ouse where many drowned trying to escape. In 1810 in Offham, road construction uncovered hundreds of skeletons believed to be these troops killed by the Prince's horsemen. When Edward returned to the main battlefield, however, he found the battle, which had gone into the second phase, was lost and De Montfort had all but won.

The third phase of the battle was the rout where the king's forces retreated to the strongholds of the castle and the Priory past what is now the prison, Western Road and the High Street. St Anne's Church was nearly 200 years old in 1264 and it is thought that the mill in which Henry's brother Richard was reputed to have taken shelter was near the site of the Black Horse pub. As the two sides descended from the downs, soldiers from the castle shot volleys of flaming arrows onto the thatched roofs of the houses below in order to prevent De Montfort's troops from taking defensive positions. Townsfolk were forced to flee and Simon de Montfort claimed a principled victory marked by Henry's signature on the Mise of Lewes agreeing to continue negotiations for a parliament.

With sea to the south, Lewes and the weald to the east, and downs all around, Landport Bottom not only gives us a spectacular panorama but also many insights into ancient, recent and contemporary history. Bronze Age tumuli were built here 4,500 years ago, a famous reservoir commemorated in Offham