

BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL
BLAKE MUSEUM



THE BATTLE OF SEDGEMOOR, (1685)



Photograph of part of the Diorama of the Battle

The scene in the foreground shows the King's troops pursuing the rebels over Bussex Rhyne, and Monmouth escaping to the right

The Battle of Sedgemoor was fought on 6 July 1685 and took place at Westonzoyland near Bridgwater in Somerset. It was the final battle of the Monmouth Rebellion and followed a series of skirmishes around south west England between the forces of James

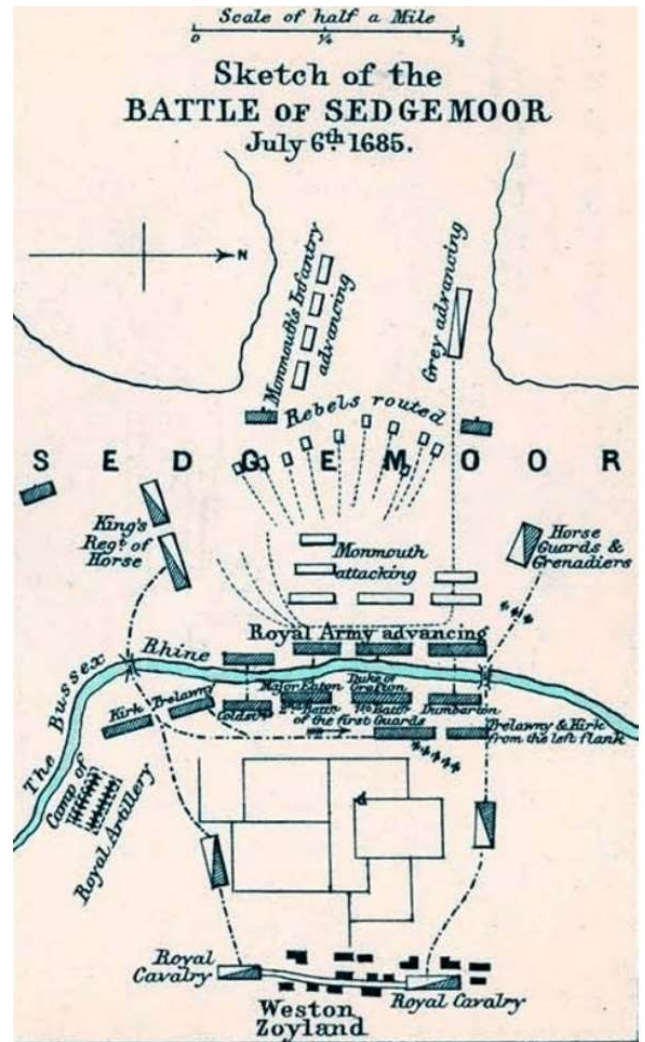
Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth and troops loyal to James II. Victory went to the royalists and about 500 prisoners fell into their hands. Monmouth escaped from the battlefield but was later captured and taken to London for trial and execution.

Background

It was the final battle of the Monmouth Rebellion between the troops of the rebel James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth who was attempting to seize the English throne from his uncle James II. James II had succeeded to the throne on the death of his brother Charles II on 2 February 1685; James Scott was Charles's illegitimate son. After Monmouth landed from the Netherlands at Lyme Regis in Dorset, there had been a series of marches and skirmishes throughout Dorset and Somerset. Eventually Monmouth's poorly equipped army was pushed back to the Somerset Levels, becoming hemmed in at Bridgwater on 3 July, and he ordered his troops to fortify the town. The force was made up of around 3,500, mostly nonconformist artisans and farm workers armed with farm tools (such as pitchforks). The royalist troops led by the 2nd Earl of Feversham and John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough were camped behind the Bussex Rhine at Westonzoyland.

The forces included 500 men of the 1st Regiment of Foot (Royal Scots), two battalions of the 1st or King's Royal Regiment of Guards (Grenadier Guards) led by Henry FitzRoy, 1st Duke of Grafton, 600 men of the Second Regiment of Guards and five companies of the Queen Consort's Regiment (Kings Own Royal Border Regiment). The Horse and Foot, the Royal Train of Artillery was camped along the road to Bridgwater. The Royal Cavalry, with seven troops, 420 men of the Earl of Oxfords, the King's Regiment of Horse (Blues and Royals), the King's Own Royal Dragoons and three troops of the King's Horse Guards.

The Duke eventually led his untrained and ill-equipped troops out of Bridgwater at around 10:00 pm to undertake a night-time attack on the King's army. They were guided



by Richard Godfrey, the servant of a local farmer, along the old Bristol road towards Bawdrip. With their limited cavalry in the vanguard they turned south along Bradney Lane and Marsh Lane, and came to the open moor with its deep and dangerous rhynes. There was a delay while the rhyne was crossed and the first men across startled a royalist patrol. A shot was fired and a horseman from the patrol galloped off to report to Feversham. Lord Grey, 1st Earl of Tankerville led the rebel cavalry forward and they were engaged by the King's Regiment of Horse which alerted the rest of the royalist forces. The superior training of the regular army and their horses routed the rebel forces by outflanking them.

Capture and aftermath

Monmouth escaped the battlefield with Grey

and headed for the southern coast, disguised as peasants. They were captured near Ringwood, Hampshire. He was taken to the Tower of London, where he was, after several blows of the axe, beheaded. After the battle about 500 of Monmouth's troops were captured and imprisoned in St Mary's Parish Church in Westonzoyland, while others were hunted and shot in the ditches where they were hiding. More were hung from gibbets erected along the roadside. The royalist troops were rewarded with Feversham being made a Knight of the Garter, Churchill promoted to Major-General and Henry Shires of the artillery receiving a Knighthood. Other soldiers, particularly those that had been wounded, received allowances ranging from £5 to £80. Some of the wounded were amongst the first to be treated at the newly opened Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

The Bloody Assizes

These were a series of trials started at Winchester on 25 August 1685 in the aftermath of the Battle of Sedgemoor, which ended the Monmouth Rebellion in England. There were five judges— Sir William Montague, Sir Robert Wright, Sir Creswell Levinz and Sir Henry Pollexfen, led by Lord Chief Justice George Jeffreys, 1st Baron Jeffreys. Over 1,000 rebels were in prison awaiting the trials, which started in Winchester on 26 August. From Winchester the court proceeded through the West Country to Salisbury, Dorchester, and on to Taunton, before finishing up at Wells, Somerset on 23 September. More than 1,400 prisoners were dealt with and although most were sentenced to death, fewer than 300 were hanged or hung, drawn and quartered. The Taunton Assize took place in the Great Hall of Taunton Castle (now the home of the Museum of Somerset). Of more than 500 prisoners brought before the court on the

18/19 September, 144 were hanged and their remains displayed around the county to ensure people understood the fate of those who rebelled against the king. Some 800–850 men were transported to the West Indies where they were worth more alive than dead, as a source of cheap labour. Others were imprisoned to await further trial, although many did not live long enough, succumbing to 'Gaol Fever' or Typhus, James II was overthrown in a *coup d'état* three years later, in the Glorious Revolution.

After the Glorious Revolution, Jeffreys was imprisoned in the Tower of London, where he died in 1689. The Battle of Sedgemoor is often referred to as the last battle fought on English soil, but this depends on the definition of a battle, for which there are different interpretations. Other contenders for the title of last English battle include: the Battle of Preston (1715) in Lancashire, which was fought on 14 November 1715, during the First Jacobite Rebellion, and the Second Jacobite Rebellion's Clifton Moor Skirmish, near Penrith, Cumbria, on 18 December 1745. The Battle of Culloden fought on Drumossie Moor to the north east of Inverness on 16 April 1746 was the last pitched battle fought on British soil.

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The Diorama

The 1,700 flat cast-lead figures were repainted between 1952 and 1954 by the Revd J. R. Powell. The model landscape and the painted background were made by a professional model-maker. Each regiment of about 50 figures comprises musketeers, pikemen, drummers and officers. Each cavalry unit comprises about 30 figures. The scene in the foreground shows the King's troops

pursuing the rebels over Bussex Rhyne, and Monmouth escaping to the right. The diorama was first displayed in what is now the Exhibition room of the Museum, between 1956 and 2010, when it was loaned to the Battle of Sedgemoor Visitors' Centre at Weston-zoyland Church. It was returned to the museum in 2015, and installed in a new case here in 2016. On the sides and back of the case are a series of panels telling the story of the Monmouth Rebellion

Blake Museum is run by Bridgwater Town Council and managed by volunteers from The Friends of Blake Museum

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