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Extract from:
'The Wars of the Roses'
by Trevor Royle
pages 240 to 242

This was followed in May 1459 by the removal from the Tower of three thousand bows and sheaves of arrows, and at the same time the court moved back to Kenilworth and Coventry, where a meeting of the council was summoned to take place on 24th June. Fearing for their personal safety, York, Salisbury and Warwick refused to attend and were duly indicted as the Lancastrian magnates prepared their forces at Coventry 'defensibly arrayed'. The Yorkists, too, were making preparations. York, Salisbury and Warwick all had well-armed and experienced retainers but they were scattered around the country and it would take time for them to assemble at Ludlow, where York waited with his sons Edward, Earl of March, and Edmund, Earl of Rutland

The Calais garrison, which included a force of six hundred experienced soldiers under the command of Sir Andrew Trollope, Master Porter of Calais and 'a very subtle man of war', arrived in Kent and after entering London on 21st September headed north; at the same time Salisbury's forces left Middleham in Yorkshire and marched across the Pennines towards the Yorkist heartlands. The news reached the Queen while she was recruiting in Cheshire and the decision was taken to send a force under the command of Lord Audley, a trusted Lancastrian supporter, to intercept Salisbury while the royal family took shelter in Eccleshall Castle in Staffordshire- It was a sensible move as the Yorkist forces were still fractured and the Lancastrians outnumbered them two to one. The two forces duly collided on the barren, rolling countryside of Blore Heath near Market Drayton in Shropshire. Finding his way blocked by the Lancastrian forces when he saw their banners and standards behind the crest of a ridge, Salisbury deployed his forces on rising ground to the east of Hempmill Brook where his left flank was protected by woods and his right was guarded by a line –of supply wagons. It was a good defensive position as Audley's foot soldiers and cavalry would have to contend with the rising ground which had become sodden and heavy after days of rain and they would be forced to negotiate the high sides of the strong flowing Hempmill Brook. As the Yorkist forces got into position there was the customary attempt at negotiation but this ended when Audley refused free passage to Salisbury and the trumpets were sounded for battle. First into action were Audley's knights and men-at-arms. They attacked across the brook where they came under heavy fire from Salisbury's archers, who, wrote de Waurin, 'began to shoot so intensely that it was frightful, and so violently that everything in range suffered'. With the Lancastrians unable to make any progress and falling under the sustained fire of Salisbury's battle hardened archers, many of them veterans from the wars in France, the Yorkist knights and men-at-arms counter-attacked and began slaughtering their floundering opponents. A second Lancastrian assault met the same fate and all was lost when Audley was killed leading a third charge, which, like its predecessors, was beaten back with a huge loss of life. Realising that the battle was lost, men began fleeing for their lives and were hotly pursued by Salisbury's men, who quickly showed that they

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were not prepared to give any quarter Around two thousand Lancastrians died on the battlefield, others while being pursued, and according to local legend the waters of Hempmill Brook ran red with blood for three days after the fighting. It was a massive victory but it was not decisive. The bulk of the Royalist army was encamped at Eccleshall, ten miles away, and Salisbury still had to get his forces to Ludlow and safety. He was also pained by the fact that his two sons, Sir John and Sir Thomas Neville; Warwick's brothers, had been taken prisoner while pursuing the enemy and faced the possibility of instant execution.' Realising that he had no option but to press on. Salisbury set out that same night, the battle had lasted the better part of the afternoon, and he left some artillery pieces in the care of a friendly Augustinian friar who agreed to make use of them to give the impression that the Yorkist forces were still on Blore Heath. The ruse worked and when the Royalist forces arrived the next morning they found the area empty.

Today the main road from Market Drayton to Newcastle-under-Lyme crosses the site of the battle, which lies on private & farmland. A cross, erected in 1765 is supposed to mark the spot where Audley fell and a more recent stone marks the site of the Lancastrian positions. There are other memorials. Legend has it that Queen Margaret watched the battle from the spire of St Mary's Church in nearby Mucklestone, before fleeing when she realised that Audley was being defeated. It is said that she employed a blacksmith, William Skelhorn, to reverse the shoes on her horse to disguise the route of her escape but this seems unlikely as she was probably with the rest of her forces at Eccleshall. Nevertheless, the anvil from the smithy stands in the churchyard at Mucklestone to commemorate what would have been an inspired escape.

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