

# The Battle of Towton, 1461:

Here Comes the War:  
Conflict Archaeology & the Human Past (2017-2018)  
B073641



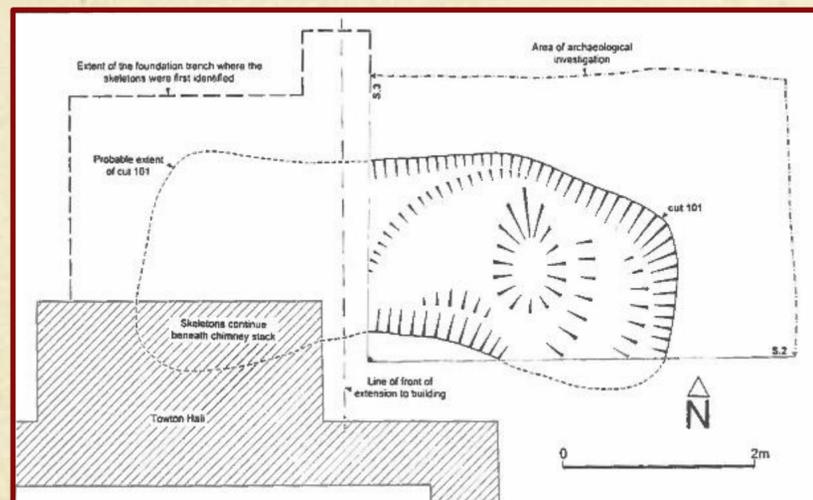
## How a Mass Grave Revealed the Reality of the Wars of the Roses

### The Excavation

In 1996, a mass grave in proximity to the Towton Town Hall was discovered during construction works. It revealed the remains of at least **43 individuals**. Radiocarbon dates confirmed the remains to be from the battle.

Historical documentation shows that the mass grave is within the known location of the battlefield.

The remains were buried in a Christian east-west fashion suggesting an amount of care.



Extent of the grave pit. It is likely the grave cut continues beyond the excavation and underneath the foundations of the Town Hall.  
(West Yorkshire Archaeology Service)

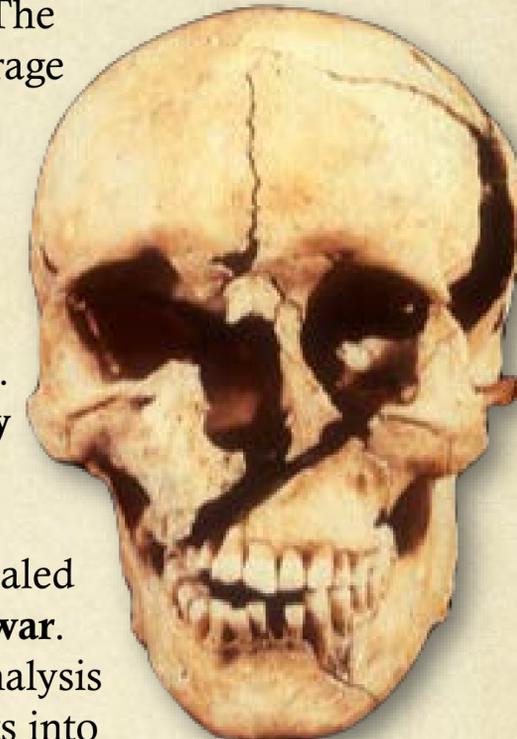


View of overlapping burials in situ.  
(Bradford University)



### The Realities of War

The cause of death appears to be **sharp force trauma**, particularly to the cranium. The surviving crania have on average four different instances of trauma. This suggests a **brutal reality** to medieval warfare. Injuries to the back of the cranium suggest the victim was attempting to flee. This questions the **legitimacy of medieval chivalry**.



The excavation revealed the **physicality of war**. The osteological analysis gave unique insights into the identities of **the common medieval soldier**. This is important to the study of conflict because written historical sources about these men are nearly non-existent.

Towton 25, anterior and posterior view. These injuries were inflicted most likely by a poleaxe. The injury to the occipital bone would have been inflicted while the victim was not facing his attacker.  
(Bradford University)

### The Remains

The remains displayed good health with limited signs of infectious disease.

However, many exhibited osteoarthritis in the vertebral column and hypertrophy to the upper limbs. The hypertrophy is **consistent with archery** and supported by historical documents requiring practice with the longbow.

A few displayed **healed trauma** consistent with earlier participation in conflict. However, the majority of the remains did not, suggesting this was not a battle between professional armies.

### The Battle

**Date:**  
29 March 1461  
**Location:**  
Towton, West Yorkshire  
**Involved Sides:**  
York and Lancaster  
**Combined Casualties:**  
28,000  
**Result:**  
Yorkist Victory

### The Common Soldier

Analysis revealed an average profile:  
**Sex:**  
Male  
**Age:**  
30 (Ranging 16-50)  
**Stature:**  
171.6 cm  
**Common Pathologies:**  
Osteoarthritis & Hypertrophy  
**Common Trauma:**  
Sharp Force Cranial Injuries

**Further Reading**  
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