

# SIMON DE MONTFORT



*From a window in St Andrews Church, Old Headington, Oxfordshire*

# THE EARLY DAYS

## Simon de Montfort was French.

He was born in 1208 in Montfort-L'Amaury

Simon was the third of four brothers: the eldest – Amaury – was the heir to the family titles and estates. Their parents were both formidable characters.

Their father, also called Simon, was lord of Montfort-L'Amaury – about 30 miles west of Paris and close to the border between France and English-held Normandy – and had strong connections with King Philip II of France. His was a fervently religious family. His brother Guy had gone with Philip (and King Richard of England) to Palestine on the Third Crusade in 1190. Simon senior had himself taken part in the Fourth Crusade, but left when the Crusaders diverted from their original aims in order to attack Constantinople.

Their mother was Alice de Montmorency, a grand-daughter of Baldwin Count of Hainault

## The English Connection

More significantly, Simon senior was the son of Amicia de Beaumont, daughter of Robert the 3rd Earl of Leicester and sister of Robert the 4th Earl, with large estates in England and Normandy. When the 4th Earl died in 1204, Amicia inherited half the estates and the claim to the earldom. On the death of Amicia, Simon senior's claim to the Earldom was recognised by King John, but he was unable to take possession (as he was a subject of the French King Louis VIII) and the estates were held by the King and then by Ranulph Earl of Chester.

## The Warrior

On his return from crusade, Simon senior led the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars in southern France in the 1210s, taking Alice and the children with him. He crushed the Cathars ruthlessly and successfully, and proceeded to conquer territories in Toulouse and Narbonne. Alice was equally militant, urging the imprisonment of Jews in Toulouse in 1217.

Simon was killed besieging Toulouse in 1218. His conquests were taken over by the French monarchy, and the family returned to Montfort-L'Amaury.

After Alice died in 1221, young Simon came into the care of his elder brother Amaury,

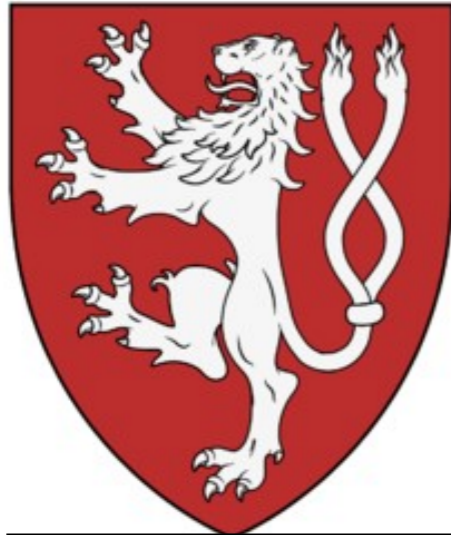


*Remains of the Castle at Montfort L'Amaury*



*The Albigensian Crusade  
Simon de Montfort senior to the fore*

# TO ENGLAND



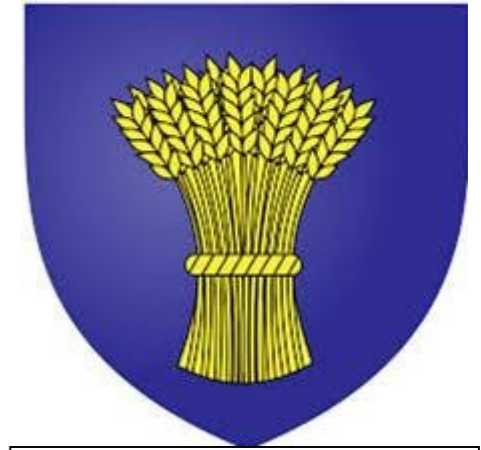
*Arms of Simon de Montfort*

The Albigensian Crusade, and the death of Simon senior, had meant that Simon's brother Amaury de Montfort had inherited large debts, and when Simon came of age in 1230 the brothers made a deal.

Simon gave up his inheritances in France, in exchange for Amaury's lands in England and his claim to the Earldom of Leicester. Armed with Amaury's commendation, Simon came to England in 1230 to negotiate with King Henry – and with Ranulf Earl of Chester, who was in possession of the Leicester estates.

He was given the title to Leicester in August 1231 (although not yet the rank of earl) thanks to the generosity of King Henry – and to the compensation he paid to Amaury and to Ranulf which saddled him with a debt which was to plague him for most of his life.

*Ranulf was an old man of 61 in 1231, Earl of Chester and Earl of Lincoln. He had had a long career, having fought for King John against the rebels in 1217, and in the 5th Crusade in 1219-20. He died in 1232.*



*Arms of Ranulf of Chester*



*Bishop Robert Grosseteste  
from. St Paul's Parish Church,  
Morton, Near Gainsborough*

He soon showed his religious zeal, expelling the Jews from Leicester in 1231-2.

He also first came across the great theologian Robert Grosseteste, then archdeacon of Leicester (later to be Bishop of Lincoln), who became his close friend and mentor. Grosseteste also introduced Simon to Adam Marsh, a prominent Franciscan monk, and Walter de Cantilupe, Bishop of Worcester.

*The story of Walter de Cantilupe is shown on the display in the west end of this church.*

He also found a deep resentment among the English barons at the King's extravagance and his squandering of money on his French relations.

Simon was welcomed by King Henry, and grew increasingly prominent in the court.

Henry himself was becoming unpopular with the English barons, through his demands for money and breaches of the terms of Magna Carta. However Simon remained loyal, at the expense of his own popularity. He was confirmed as Earl in 1237 and travelled to Scotland with Henry to negotiate a treaty with Alexander II

Simon shared in Henry's unpopularity with the other barons.

# SIMON THE ROYALIST – AND A BIG MISTAKE

In January 1238, Simon married Henry's sister Eleanor of England.

*This came as a surprise to everyone, not least Henry's brother Richard of Cornwall, Gilbert Marshal, Earl of Pembroke (the brother of Eleanor's deceased first husband William) and Edmund Rich, the Archbishop of Canterbury, before whom Eleanor had made a vow of chastity when William died in 1231.*

Simon went to Rome in March, to seek the Pope's approval of their marriage, and returned as the King's closest supporter.

He was confirmed as Earl of Leicester the next year.



*Eleanor of England*



Simon was deeply in debt.

The pledge of money he had made to Ranulf of Chester was transferred to Peter Mauclerc, Count of Brittany, and combined with other debts arising from Simon's French affairs (possibly a debt to his brother Amaury). This combined debt had transferred to Thomas of Savoy (an uncle of Queen Eleanor), who was pressing for payment through the Pope.

Simon named King Henry as security for his debt, *without consulting Henry first!*

Henry was furious.

He accused Simon of acting in bad faith and had him excommunicated. And he accused him of seducing Eleanor.

And he levied large amounts of money from Simon's estates to pay Thomas.

Simon fled to France.

# SIMON THE CRUSADER – AND A RETURN TO FAVOUR

After a brief reconciliation with Henry, Simon set out in 1240 for his part in the “Barons’ Crusade”.

Simon’s venture had been preceded the year before by a crusade led by King Theobald of Navarre. This began as a disaster, leading to the loss of Jerusalem to the Muslims – and the capture of Simon’s brother Amaury de Montfort in an unauthorised venture in Gaza – but later took advantage of a civil war among the Muslim forces to recapture Jerusalem and other territory.

Simon came in 1240 with a large army led by his brother-in law Richard (Duke of Cornwall and King of Germany). There was no fighting – but much diplomacy, resulting in the return of Amaury in an exchange of prisoners. The main beneficiary was the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick, to whom Richard gave Jerusalem.

The map here shows the extent of the gains.

*The Moslems recaptured and sacked Jerusalem in 1244 – after the crusaders had left.*



On his return from the Crusade to Burgundy, Simon found King Henry in need of his help. Henry was fighting to recover Poitou from Louis IX and losing. Simon joined him in a rearguard action back to Bordeaux, with both nursing grievances.

They returned to England as allies. Simon stayed with Henry’s court and avoided the groups of barons who were pressing for more representation in parliament and an end to Henry’s ventures in France and the consequent taxes.

For several years, he was keeping his head down.

Simon profited from staying in the King’s favour, however distantly. He was given custody of Kenilworth castle in 1244. In Leicester and Kenilworth he formed links with neighbours including Walter de Cantilupe, Peter de Montfort (no relation), The Despenser family and that of Earl Ranulf – which were to be invaluable later.

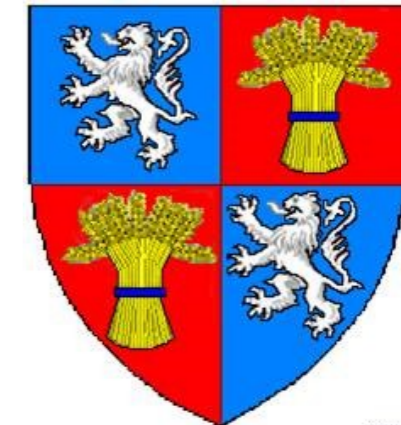
Simon’s main worry – as ever – was financial. Most of his income was through the inheritances of his wife Eleanor and would cease abruptly if she were to die.

# FROM ROYALIST TO REBEL

Henry was King of England and also Duke of Gascony. This was important as it was – since the loss of Poitou – the last slice of his inheritance in France from his grandparents Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. But by 1248 Gascony was in trouble. The Kings of Castile and Aragon, the King of Navarre was making incursions, the truce with France was about to expire, and the local barons were ready to join forces with anyone who might profit them.

Henry appointed Simon his lieutenant there in 1248, with a military mission to reassert control.

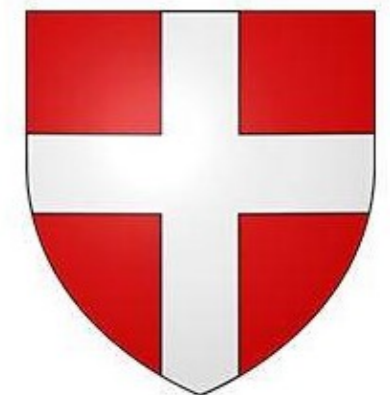
Simon renewed the treaty with France, and came to an agreement with Navarre. He then turned to re-asserting the King's rights against the barons, with a combination of high-handedness and ruthlessness. The complaints – and the costs – mounted up before Simon was recalled to England in 1252 and put on a form of trial for his action. The trial was inconclusive but Simon was sacked.



*Arms of the Duchy of Gascony*

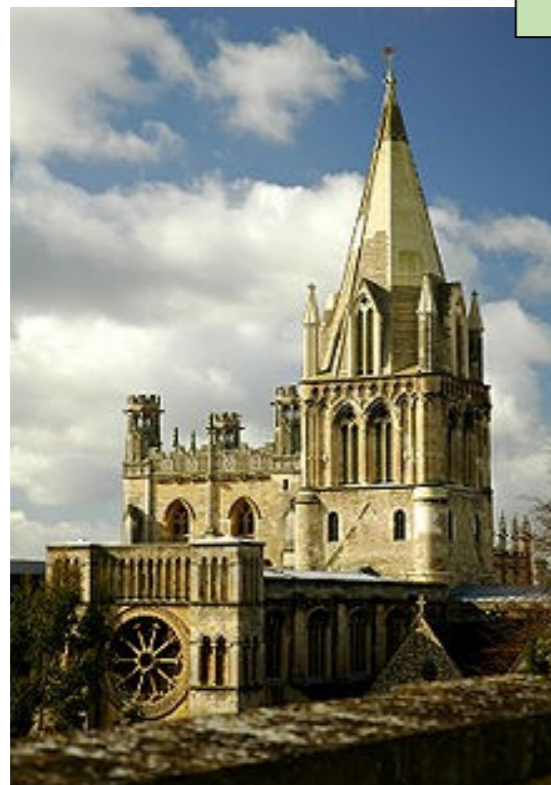
Henry himself led an expedition to Gascony in 1253 – much more expensively than Simon's –, but it bogged down and he called for Simon to return to him there. He was back in favour with the King.

*But Henry himself was increasingly unpopular. He lavished gifts to his favourites – including Simon but principally his wayward half-brothers from Lusignan and his in-laws from Savoy. He undertook expensive foreign ventures, including continuing fighting in Gascony – and a scheme to have his son installed as King of Sicily through large payments to the Pope.*



*Arms of the Duchies of Lusignan and Savoy*

Simon served Henry as a diplomat abroad, in Scotland and in France, where his work led eventually to the Treaty of Paris in 1259. But in England he grew more distant, disputing with the Lusignans over money.



*Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford  
The Church of St. Frideswide's Priory*

Matters came to a head in April 1258 with the start of a reform movement, headed by a group of seven nobles including Simon and the earls of Gloucester and Norfolk. They cited Henry's breaches of Magna Carta, his favouritism to the Lusignans, and his excessive taxation.

In June the barons met at a Parliament at St Frideswide's Priory in Oxford, amidst a wider gathering of lesser barons and knights, and together compiled the "Petition of the Barons" (a collection of grievances). With a committee of 24 (combining reformers and royalists) they also compiled the "Provisions of Oxford" – essentially a draft constitution which included a new council of 15 to oversee royal ministers, appoint officials, and mitigate the excesses of the King.

Simon, newly returned from France – and with an unrivalled reputation as a soldier – was in the forefront of the movement.

But his support for the reforms was hesitant, partly because he feared that the other barons might renege on their commitments. He returned to France, to ensure peace with Louis and also to attend to his own businesses.

The Provisions were extended and rationalised by the Provisions of Westminster in October 1258, but Simon played little part in this.

# COMMITMENT

Throughout 1260, 1261 and 1262, the Provisions of Oxford and Westminster remained in force, although the reforming barons disputed with each other, and were reluctant to apply to themselves the constraints that they were imposing on the King.

Simon remained committed to the reforms – although he spent much time affirming his inheritance rights, and those of his wife Eleanor, in both England and France. He had a firm ally in King Louis.

King Henry and the royalists worked to dilute or ignore the Provisions, and lost the support of the minor nobles by continuing to favour foreigners. Prince Edward used (and rewarded) a foreign mercenary army against the Welsh in 1263 and enraged Londoners by a raid on their valuables in the depository at New Temple.



Simon returned to England for good in April 1263.

Many people of foreign descent left the country – including Queen Eleanor, who stayed in France until after the battle of Evesham, and many of her relations.

Henry worked to persuade the barons to return to his side, noting Simon's own French origins, and applied to King Louis for a judgement on the validity of the provisions.

At a conference with the two sides at Amiens in December 1263, Louis declared the Provisions invalid.

The Mise of Amiens might have ended the hostilities, although some – including the Londoners – refused to accept it.

Then began the Second Barons' War

Henry began to attack Simon's supported in Kent and the Midlands, while Simon himself was laid up in Kenilworth with a broken leg. Simon retaliated by seeking an alliance with Prince Llewellyn of Wales and sending an army (with his son "Young Simon") to attack the royalist Roger Mortimer in the Marches. The London mob sacked royalist property, including the manor of Prince Edward in Isleworth



Roger Mortimer

# WAR

The first large battle was at Northampton on 5 April 1264, where Henry captured the city (and Young Simon). He then moved to Leicester, Nottingham and Lincoln.

Simon was now confined to London and Kent. Henry was closing in, relieving Rochester, capturing Tonbridge and then moving to Winchelsea.

Simon retaliated with an abortive attack on Rochester, but then retreated to London.

Meanwhile some reinforcements arrived with Simon's son Henry.

Simon was a skilled general.

He decided to risk everything on one pitched battle, and moved from London to Lewes. King Henry came with his brother Richard and his son Edward.

The Battle of Lewes was fought in 14 May 1264.

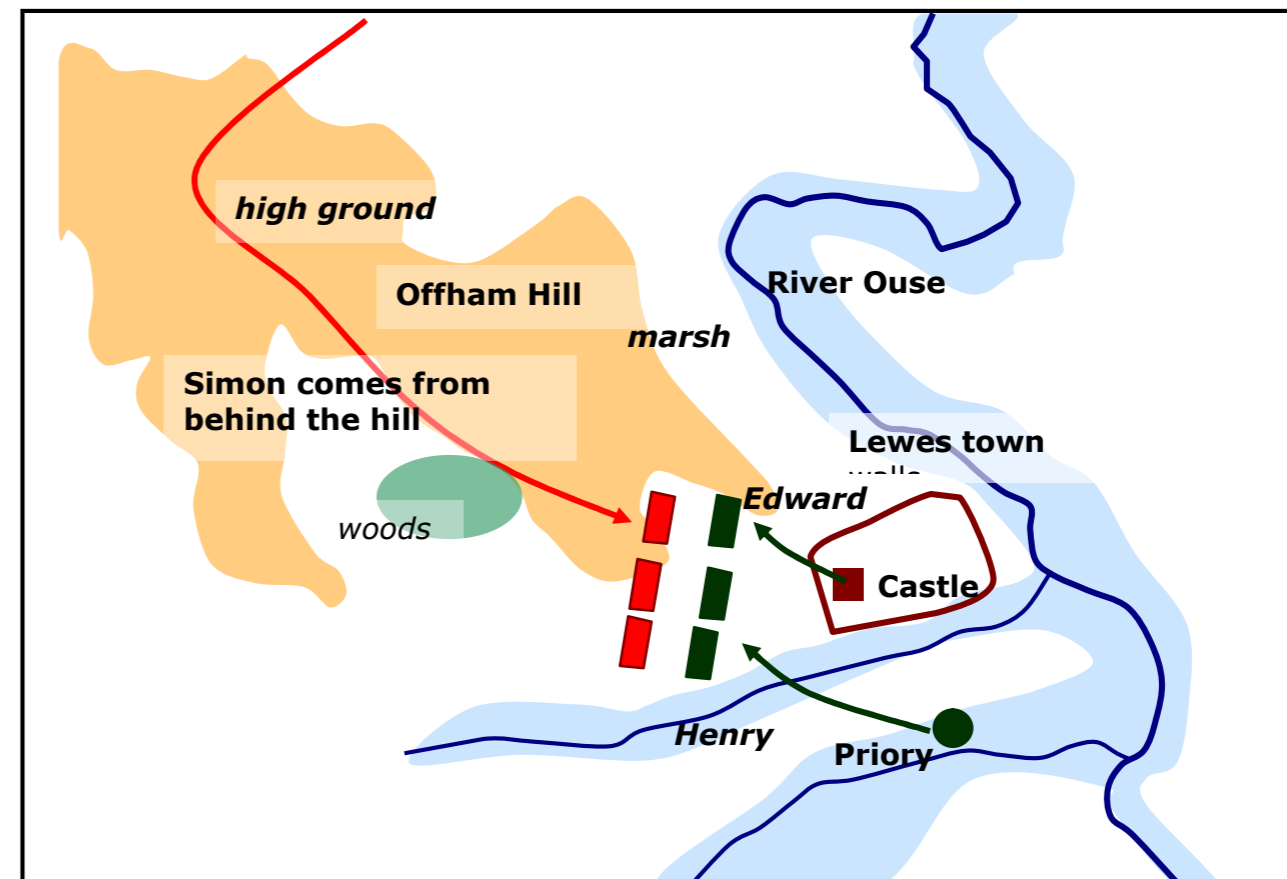
Simon had a small army, but more sight of the events.

Prince Edward led a charge onto the Londoners on Simon's left flank, scattered them, and chased them so far away he was unable to return in time to do anything else. Simon charged downhill at the centre to Prince Richard and on his right to King Henry.

The royalists were routed. Henry and Edward retreated to the priory, while Richard fled to a nearby windmill.

Simon had a complete victory. H.

In the "Mise of Lewes" Henry was forced to agree to all the terms of the Provisions. He returned to London in close confinement, and called for an end to the hostilities.





# PARLIAMENT

Simon had the victory – and the King under his control – but his regime was not seen as legitimate.

A Parliament was summoned, and met in London in June 1264. . Notable was the presence of the mayor of London and knights from the counties around the country, although some – notably the barons from the Welsh Marches – stayed away.

The parliament sealed an Ordinance (later incorporated as the Peace of Canterbury) in the name of the King, the earls, bishops and others.

The Ordinance revived the Provisions of Oxford and set up a governing council – effectively increasing Simon's authority.

Immediately after the Parliament, Simon had to mount an expedition to end unrest from Roger Mortimer and others in the Welsh Marches.

The marchers attacked again in October around Hereford and Gloucester, in an attempt to rescue Prince Edward from Simon's captivity. This failed, and they were moved to the more secure Kenilworth.

In January 1265 – at the height of his power – Simon convened the famous Hilary Parliament at Westminster.

Those summoned included 25 earls and barons (mainly those sympathetic to Simon: surprisingly few), 120 bishops and abbots, and also – the great innovation – representatives of the towns and boroughs, effectively creating the House of Commons.

Its main purpose was to secure the terms for a long-term peace. It perpetuated the Council to which the King was effectively subordinate; it discussed the conditions for the release of Prince Edward from Simon's custody – and it also arranged the distribution of the estates and castles which had been captured in the wars.

In an elaborate ceremony at Westminster Hall in March 1265, Henry and Edward swore to abide by the new government, to forgive their captors, and not to bring foreigners into the court.

Simon looked to Louis, for endorsement of the Mise of Lewes. Negotiations lasted for months – July to October 1264, but Louis rejected the Provisions outright, citing the Mise of Amiens.

The papal legate was refused entry to England for fear that he would give inconvenient instructions.

Meanwhile Queen Eleanor in France was adding to the chaos. With the help of King Louis, she assembled a large army in Flanders, with the intention of invading England and restoring the fortunes of the royalist exiles including the Lusignan and Savoyards. Simon assembled a force on the 12th of August 1264, largely driven by nationalism, to guard against the "aliens".



Westminster Hall

# THE ROAD TO EVESHAM

Simon and his sons were becoming increasingly unpopular, and his erstwhile allies were changing sides. One of the last to desert – and the most significant – was Gilbert de Clare.



Gilbert de Clare

Simon went to Gloucester – west of the River Severn – to settle with Gilbert, but Gilbert, with his brother Thomas, collaborated in Prince Edward's dramatic escape from Simon's custody on 28 May – to join the royalist forces in the Welsh Marches.

Simon was suddenly vulnerable.

He tried to come back across the Severn, moving from Hereford to Newport and back

Young Simon was in Hampshire, when he received the call to come to his father's aid, but delayed to ensure that his mother was safe in Dover. He then raised troops in London and came to Kenilworth.

Edward led a lightning raid from Worcester to Kenilworth to defeat Young Simon's forces.

Simon eventually crossed the Severn at Kempsey and his forces, tired and hungry and still holding Henry captive, came to Evesham in the evening of 3 August. Here they rested for the night and delayed in the morning while Henry, with Simon, heard mass from Walter de Canteloupe.

Meanwhile Edward, with Gilbert de Clare, Roger Mortimer and the other royalists, came to Evesham from the north. They drew up at Greenhill, with a force at Bengeworth to prevent any retreat.

There was no escape for Simon, who charged up Greenhill to his death.

*"Such was the murder of Evesham, for battle it was none"*

Simon was killed alongside many of his allies. His body was dismembered and Mortimer sent his head back to Wigmore as a trophy.

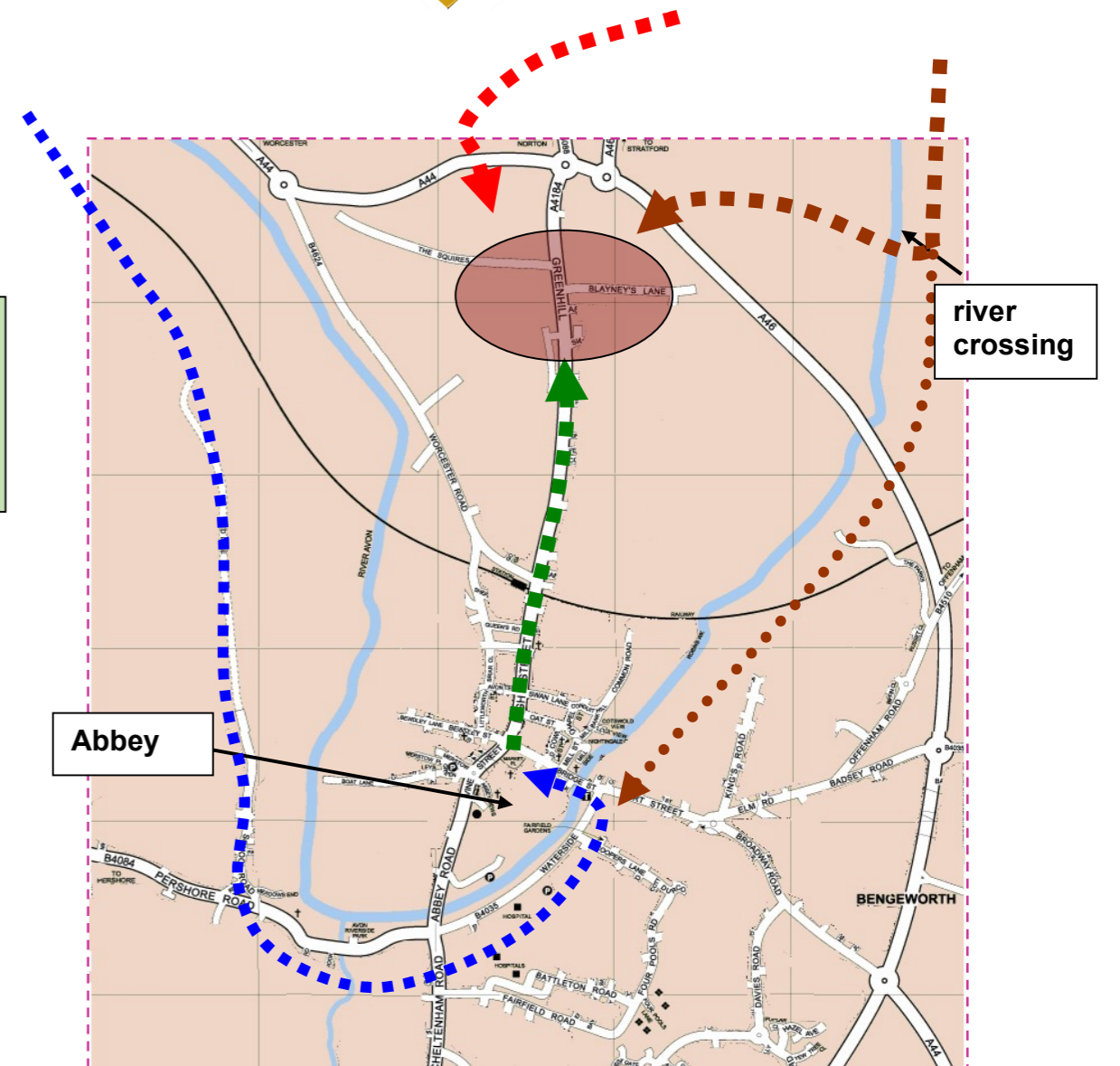
His troops were slaughtered as they tried to flee to cross the river as what is still called Dead Man's Ait.

The monks of Evesham buried Simon's torso, and the bodies of Henry de Monfort and of Hugh le Despenser, near the high altar of Evesham Abbey.

King Henry declared that all lands seized from de Montfort's supporters would never be returned, and invested his son Edmund with the earldom of Leicester.

Young Simon retired in mourning to Kenilworth.

Walter de Cantilupe had returned to Blockley before the battle; he died six months later



- ⋯ Simon de Montfort comes to Evesham via Cropthorne
- ⋯ Simon de Montfort advances up Greenhill
- ⋯ Gilbert de Clare comes to Greenhill from Dunnington
- ⋯ Edward and Mortimer come from Cleeve Prior via Offenham
- ⋯ Some of Mortimer's men cut off the retreat