

Wonders in Heaven Over Central England

by Greg Jones

Edgehill, England, in the heart of leafy Warwickshire, commands an unbroken view of the surrounding countryside. It is also a particularly beautiful spot from which to enjoy one of nature's most sublime gifts: a blazing sunset.

Yet sunsets are not the only wonder in the heavens that have been witnessed from this scenic location. Back in the winter of 1642, a little past midnight, a phenomenon appeared in the heavens that perhaps the best computer graphics programmers would not be able to rival.

On December 23, 1642, several shepherds in the surrounding area claimed to have witnessed a ghostly reenactment of the Battle of Edgehill projected onto the heavens above them. The account was recorded in a document entitled, in part, "A Great Wonder in Heaven."

The Battle of Edgehill

To set the scene, a little history of the battle may help. Those familiar with the history of the English Civil War (1640–60)

will perhaps recall that the Battle of Edgehill marked the first major conflict bringing the opposing Parliamentary and Royalist factions together in bloody combat.

Two months before the battle, Charles I had mustered his men in Nottingham. He would have liked to march straight for London to reclaim the capital. He knew, however, that the Parliamentary army under the Earl of Essex, a force twice the size of his own, was in his path. Charles therefore marched first to Shrewsbury to pick up reinforcements. From Shrewsbury, he traveled south through Birmingham, Solihull, and Kenilworth before he was intercepted at Edgehill by the Earl of Essex.

The battle of Edgehill was a cumbersome and bloody affair fought mainly by amateur volunteers. The battle raged for about three hours until nightfall forced an end to the conflict, which ended in stalemate. Both sides sustained heavy losses and both sides claimed victory. Altogether, about 4,000 perished on that day. If any victory could justly be claimed, it per-

A Wonder in Heaven

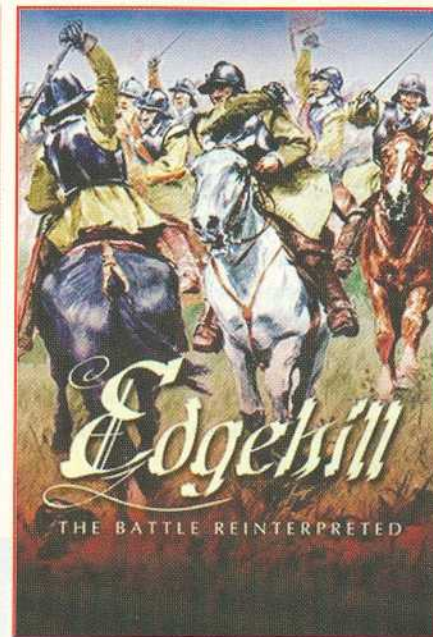
Three months after the battle, and after others had seen the ghostly spectacle, the whole experience was recorded in the document mentioned earlier printed by Thomas Jackson, a London printer, and titled, in part, "A Wonder in Heaven, shewing late apparitions and prodigious noyes of war and battels, seen on Edgehill near Keinton in Warwickshire."

When certain townspeople from Keinton heard about the ethereal battle, their curiosity was understandably aroused and they were eager to witness this incredible phenomenon for themselves. So along with Wood and Marshall, a substantial number of villagers traveled to Edgehill—and they were not disappointed.

On the following night, with eyes heavenward, they witnessed the same spectral battle in the skies above. According to the official record, it "appeared in the same tumultuous warlike manner, the same two adverse armies fighting with as much spite and spleen as formerly."

It appeared consecutively several nights thereafter, interrupted by an interval of some weeks before this "Wonder in Heaven" was seen again. This time it was "with much greater tumult, fighting in the manner afore mentioned for foure hours and then vanished..." The scene appeared in the sky thereafter a few nights in succession.

When word of this apparitional battle reached the ears of King Charles, who had retreated to Oxford, such was his cu-

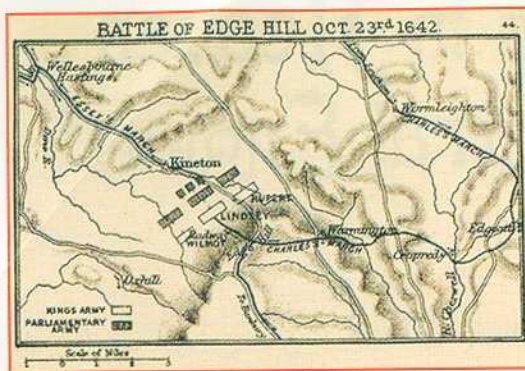


Cover of *Edgehill: The Battle Reinterpreted* (Leo Cooper Ltd., 2004).

riosity that he dispatched six of his most trustworthy and reliable men to investigate.

King's Men Investigate

Amazingly, the aerial battle was still being fought when the royal investigators arrived. With a curious mix of fear and wonder, three of these reputable individuals recognized several of the phantom soldiers. Among them was Sir Edmund Verney, the royal standard-bearer who met his end at the hands of the Roundheads. These men swore under oath to the king that they had actually witnessed these things.



victory could justly be claimed, it perhaps went in the direction of the Royalists simply because the way to London was left open for them.

But King Charles, thoroughly appalled by the bloodshed and carnage that he had witnessed at Edgehill, felt entirely incapable of concentrating on military strategy and traveled instead to Oxford to set up his headquarters there.

Two months after the bloody battle, several shepherds out watching their flocks witnessed strange events in the heavens above them, above the very spot where the battle had been fought.

The unnerving experience began with the far-off roll of drums drifting over the fields and hills, accompanied by the sounds of metal on metal, gunshots, and cannons, the general battle sounds of the day, at first all very distant.

The sounds grew louder and louder until they built into a crescendo, and suddenly a ghostly reenactment of the battle burst upon them dramatized in some ethereal way in the sky above.

Incorporeal Slaughter

In their own words, which have been captured in old English in the previously mentioned document, “on the sudden appeared in the aye the same incorporeal soldiers that made those clamours, and immediately with ensignes displayed, drummes beating, musquets going off, canons discharged, horses neygh-

ing” which along with all else were quite visible. All of this was observed in the night sky, somewhere between Edgehill and the site of the battle.

The spectacular atmospheric display lasted about the same length of time as the physical battle: three hours. It reached a finale when the king’s army appeared to fly to one extremity of the heavens while the other side remained in triumph, accompanied by the sounds of trumpets, joy, and conquest, and then vanished into the cold night sky.

Adding to the harrowing reality of what was witnessed, the document described how the shepherds could hear “the noise of soldiers giving out their last groans.” It proved so terrifying that the witnesses fled to the nearby village of Kington some three miles away. There, the shepherds woke up William Wood, a justice of the peace, who in turn woke his neighbor, the Rev. Samuel Marshal, and to these, the shepherds repeated on oath a description of the whole fantastic performance.

Jackson’s pamphlet concludes, “What this doth portend, God only knows, and time perhaps will discover.” Indeed, 363 years have passed since the battle and its subsequent spectral reenactment in the skies above Edgehill, but the passage of time has shed little light on this “Wonder in Heaven.” Sightings reported since then have been but distant echoes of the dramatic display witnessed in 1642.

Many who visit the site, including those who know nothing of its reputation, comment on a heavy, shadowy feeling that seems to pervade the area.

It seems more than coincidental that

a huge, modern-day ammunitions depot has been built on the very spot of the battle and subsequent ethereal reenactment in the skies. Does the area pulsate with some dark energy, attracting the sanguinary and warlike? Perhaps time and time alone will tell.

Greg Jones is a part-time freelance writer who has had a number of articles published concerning local history, particularly those with an air of supernatural mystery.



Pilots Share Haunted Tales

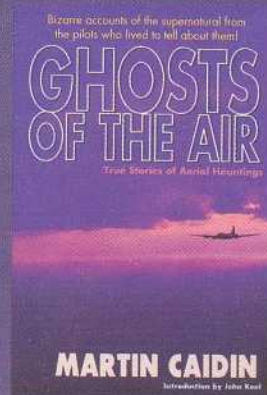
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