



Suggestions for using the Battle of Lewes Role Play

Suggested props:

Monks costumes - from Lewes Priory Trust School's Chest

Crown - for the King

Sword - for the King to surrender at the end of the battle

White braid - for the Barons' soldiers to attach to themselves

The Role Play can be used in any setting, even at the Priory site, but if you choose to act it outside be aware of the weather conditions. You may need a megaphone if it is windy!

It is a good idea to sort out the characters in advance and talk to the students about their roles so participants are well aware of who they are playing and what they will be expected to do. You can set up four main areas in which the action takes place: the Priory, the Castle, the Barons' Camp and the Battlefield.

All the scene cards give the characters needed in the scene in red and the place where the scene takes place. We suggest that someone (usually the teacher) is given the role of narrator and reads the details of the scene to the class before the scene is acted out by the participants.

Please give us feedback on your performance
education@lewespriory.org.uk

Scene 1



The Chapter House

At the Priory, 12th May 1264

Monks, messenger

The monks are gathered for their daily meeting. They are talking about all the preparations needed for the feast of St Pancras. 12th May is a very important day for the Priory as it is a special feast day. It is the feast day of the patron saint of the Priory (St Pancras) and many important visitors have already arrived at the Priory to celebrate this feast.

- The meeting is interrupted by a messenger who announces that the King and his large army of both foot soldiers and soldiers on horseback are arriving unexpectedly.
- The king must be greeted by the Prior and the king and many of his soldiers and their horses will stay at the Priory
- The monks discuss how they will manage this.

Scene 2



Fletching

The barons' camp north of Lewes

All the barons and their soldiers

Simon de Montfort and the barons are camped outside Fletching. They are talking about the battle that will take place and why they need to win it. Simon is a very strong leader and makes sure that everyone knows they are to follow his orders.

- He divides the army into 4 sections - the right and left wings, the middle and the reserves.
 1. Right wing, Henry and Guy De Montfort
 2. Left wing, Nicholas de Segrave
 3. Middle section, Gilbert de Clare
 4. Reserves, Simon de Montfort
- The barons decide to sew white crosses on their clothes so that they can recognise who is on their side.
- They set off before dawn to reach Offham Hill which is a good place for them to start the battle.
- They are religious men, and when they look out from the hill and see the bell tower of the Priory they stop for a moment and kneel down in prayer.

Scene 3



The Feast of St Pancras

At the Priory, 12th May 1264

The King, Prince Edward, Richard of Almaine, Sir Alan de la Zouch, the King's soldiers and the monks

- The King's party arrives and makes lots of demands on the monks. Everyone needs feeding and they need to find places for people to sleep. All the horses need looking after.
- The soldiers eat lots of the monks' food and drink their beer and wine. They do not respect the Priory but because Henry is King the Prior can't do much to control them.
- He can only politely request that Henry keeps an eye on the behaviour of his soldiers.

The special feast of St Pancras is ruined by the bad behaviour of the King's party.

Scene 4a



The day of the Battle

At the Priory, 14th May 1264

The King, Richard of Almaine, Sir Alan de la Zouch, the king's soldiers and monks

- The King's party at the Priory are slow to get ready as they have been eating and drinking too much.
- The monks look on disapprovingly and clear up the mess left by the soldiers.

Scene 4b



The day of the Battle

At the Castle, 14th May 1264

Prince Edward, Prince Henry, John de Warrenne, soldiers, and watchman

- Prince Edward sends a soldier as a look-out to the top of the Downs to keep an eye on the barons' camp.
- Everyone at the castle gets ready for the battle.
- The look-out falls asleep and is unable to warn the king of the approaching barons' army.

Scene 4c



The day of the Battle

Near Offham Hill, 14th May 1264

Simon de Montfort, Henry de Montfort, Guy de Montfort, Nicholas de Segrave, Gilbert De Clare, John Fitz-John and their soldiers

- The barons' party awake early and march to the top of Offham Hill. This is a good place from which to see what is happening in Lewes.
- Nicholas de Segrave and his soldiers on the left wing reach the top before the others who are still struggling up the hill.

Meanwhile at the castle:

Prince Edward, John de Warenne and a watchman

- The watchman stationed at the castle sees the Baron's army coming and raises the alarm.
- Prince Edward and John de Warenne rush up the tower and see that what he said is true.

Prologue

Why the king and the barons argued

The barons were fed up with King Henry III spending all the country's money on himself. They had gathered together an army of supporters to persuade the king to change his ways by negotiation or force.

To give the king a final chance to make peace the barons sent a message to him on 10th May 1264 suggesting that they all meet to discuss a peaceful settlement, but Henry refused to talk to them.

Background

Monks at the Priory

The life of the monks at the Priory was strictly controlled. They had to attend at least 8 services in the church throughout the day and night. They also had to stay in silence for long periods throughout the day.

They were only allowed to speak at their daily meeting in the chapter house and at other times they communicated using a special sign language. They lived, for most of the time, without much contact with the outside world. The rules were relaxed, to some extent, on the feast day of St Pancras when important people would come to the Priory to celebrate the feast.



Scene 5



The fighting starts

At the Castle then to the battlefield

Prince Edward, John de Warenne, soldiers, messenger, Nicholas de Segrave and his soldiers

- Prince Edward sends a messenger to the king at the Priory telling him to get ready for the fight.
- Prince Edward is impatient to start the battle and so gathers his knights and foot soldiers and sets off up the hill towards the barons' army.
- Prince Edward's knights on horseback attack Nicholas de Segrave's soldiers.
- Segrave's soldiers run away.
- Prince Edward's knights and soldiers chase after them.

This means that Prince Edward misses most of the battle.

Scene 6



The King joins the fight

At the Priory and then the battlefield

King and his soldiers, Barons (except Segrave) and their soldiers

- The King is still trying to assemble his soldiers. There is lots of confusion with orders being shouted.
- When they are finally ready the king's army starts going up the hill to meet the barons.
- The barons' army charges down.
- When the armies meet there are cries of "traitor" from both sides.
- Fighting with swords, arrows and lances then follows. Some soldiers on both sides are killed but others escape by running away.

Scene 7



The surrender of Richard of Almaine, the King's brother

At the battlefield and a windmill nearby

Richard of Almaine and his soldiers, Gilbert de Clare and his soldiers

- Henry's brother Richard is surrounded by enemies and about to be captured.
- He runs off, with some of his knights, to hide in a nearby windmill.
- Here he is surrounded by the barons' soldiers and eventually surrenders to Gilbert de Clare.

Scene 8



Simon de Montfort joins the Battle

At the battlefield

Simon de Montfort and his soldiers, the King and his soldiers, John de Warenne and his soldiers, Sir Alan de la Zouch

- Simon de Montfort calls his reserve troops to the battle and they attack the king's army which is soon in trouble.
- Sir Alan de la Zouch disguises himself as a monk and runs back to the Priory to hide.
- The king's army is losing. Some retreat to the castle and some to the Priory.
- John de Warenne and 300 of his knights on horseback run away to the east.

Scene 9



The King retreats

At the Priory and the River Ouse
The monks, King Henry, the king's soldiers

- The monks at the Priory open their gate for the king and his retreating army, but those who cannot squeeze in surrender to the Barons' soldiers.
- Some try to cross the river to escape but are caught in the mud and drowned.
- Others swarm over the bridge but are forced off into the river to drown.

Most of the 2700 who were killed were foot soldiers. Knights were captured and a ransom was paid for their release.

Scene 10



Prince Edward returns

At the Priory, 14th May 1264
Prince Edward, the baron's soldiers and the king's soldiers

- Prince Edward and his knights return to find the battle lost. He rejoins his father at the Priory.
- The barons' men fire flaming arrows into the Priory which set some of the roofs on fire.

Meanwhile at the castle:
King's soldiers

- The king's men fire flame-tipped arrows from the castle into the town which set buildings in the town on fire and cause a great deal of damage.

Scene 11



The surrender

The Priory, 15th May 1264
The king's party, the barons' party and the monks

The King is defeated.

- The barons visit him at the Priory where the king surrenders to Gilbert de Clare by handing him his sword.
- The king is made to set his seal to a treaty, the Mise of Lewes.

The Mise of Lewes

There are no copies of this treaty left today, but we think that it took some power away from the king and led to the setting up of a parliament to approve the king's actions.

The parliament was made up of elected knights from the shires throughout the country.

The battle is commemorated in 'The Song of Lewes' written by an unknown churchman in Latin.

Background



How battles were fought in 13th century

There is no gunpowder in England at the time of the battle so there are no guns. The fighting is done with lances, spears, swords, axes, maces, bows and arrows.

All who can afford it wear chain mail as protection. Tough leather (which blunted the knives) is used by those who can't afford chain mail. Soldiers also carry shields made of wood re-inforced with leather and decorated with their coat of arms.