In a little over a hundred pages the present booklet contains forty-seven short ‘sections’ with titles ranging from ‘Henry Tudor’s Camp’, and ‘St Armel’, to ‘Richard’s Route from Leicester’ and ‘The Translation of the Bosworth Well’. Much of the information provided is of local origin, and the author expresses his gratitude to ‘a large team of friends’; he also acknowledges his huge debt to Michael Jones’ *Bosworth 1485*. The aim of the booklet is to preserve the local traditions and stories for future use.

A large part of the information is fascinating, though of a ‘mythical’ nature: tales of King Richard sitting by the fire in a local farmhouse, yet another ‘King Richard’s bed’, a ‘dustbin lid’ which turned out to be ‘King Richard’s buckler’ (present location unknown), and a ‘Dining Table Field’ where Henry Tudor and his men had their meal before the battle. As the author says, none of these items proves anything on its own, but they do make an impressive collection, as a case study of rumours and tales sprung up around one historical event, if nothing else.

The author is very chatty: ‘Last week I had a letter … ’, ‘When I saw it … my heart sank’, and he is very willing to speculate and theorise openly, though perhaps not much more than some professional historians do in a more subtle manner. To take one example: among the more interesting items presented by Austin is a quantity of glass fragments, originating from the stained glass windows of Merevale Church – whether the abbey is meant is not clear – and later preserved at Merevale Hall, the manorial building constructed within part of the abbey. The abbey, according to some, including Austin, is the location of Henry Tudor’s pre-battle camp, the evidence being that it is virtually the only place in England that received compensation for damage done to its crops and fields during Henry’s march to Bosworth. A few of the glass fragments pieced together show – according to the digitally enhanced photograph included in the book – three squares of massed pikemen as well as other ranks of soldiers. Experts have dated the glass, on the basis of the firearms and other military details, to after 1640. In the 1640s the abbey lands, which had been granted in tail male to Walter Devereux in 1540, were in the possession of their last Devereux owner, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, nominal commander of the parliamentary forces in the Civil War until he ignominiously abandoned his troops in 1644. The author of the present booklet engagingly admits that this information about the date of the glass reached him some time after he had already connected the pike formations in the glass to the Swiss-trained pikemen, first mentioned by Michael Jones in his 2002 book on Bosworth, who are supposed to have played such a crucial role in the outcome of the battle. Austin is honestly disconcerted by the new 1640 evidence: ‘Where this leaves us, I am not quite sure’ he writes, but happily adds that ‘It may just be an anachronism, and the Battle of Bosworth was the intended subject’.

Indeed, it may be, it may even be an imaginative representation of the battle of Jericho, for it is unlikely that the owners of Merevale Hall would be interested in a battle that took place 150 years earlier and about which they had no more information than we do. This is how legends are born if the soil of credulity is fertile enough: a little disinformation, a fanciful interpretation, some colourful details in inexpert hands and a new myth is flowering; it will take long years and many words to eradicate. It has to be said again to warn future scholars, local researchers and novelists there is no evidence for the presence of pikemen at Bosworth!

Chattiness, a tendency to speculate and general editorial messiness apart, this little book will give Ricardians several hours of enjoyment and amazement. There are various entertaining and arresting theories that deserve to be contradicted or followed up in a more organised and critical way. There are also almost as many endnotes as there are sections, and a bibliography and an index; ten black and white illustrations support the author’s stories.

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