

THE FIRST BATTLE OF ST ALBANS, 1455. Andrew Boardman. 2006. Tempus, Stroud, £17.99.
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This book is the first to be devoted in its entirety to the first battle at St Albans, the battle beginning the Wars of the Roses. It consists of a long introduction setting the political scene, a brief discussion of the main sources, an account of the battle itself and the aftermath. The long introduction is devoted to explaining the reasons behind the growing animosity between the dukes of York and Somerset which had been growing since the replacement of York by Somerset as the commander of the English forces in France. Boardman also describes the feud between the Percys and the Nevilles which had the effect of driving the latter into the Yorkist camp. The battle thus represents as much a settling of scores between families as a fight between forces representing opposing political viewpoints. Events are described throughout from the Yorkist point of view with Somerset's and the royalist point of view being treated as the unreasonable one. To some extent this is inevitable given the lack of sources written from the Lancastrian viewpoint but it does have the effect of creating sympathy for the Lancastrian view of things, perhaps not the intention of the author.

The sources for the battle are more numerous than for most battles of the wars of the Roses and are mostly very informative, again unlike most of these battles. Boardman takes his analysis of the sources from the article by C.A.J. Armstrong on the battle and the more recent one by Michael Hicks (*Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 33, 1960; *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 44, 2000). However his brief summaries apparently assume his readers will read the articles if they want to understand the full significance of the different sources and he does not appear to have noticed the new version of the 'Stow Relation', one of the sources, published after Armstrong wrote his article, (in 'John Benet's Chronicle', ed G.L. Harriss and M.A. Harriss, *Camden Miscellany*, vol. 24, Camden Society, series 4, vol. 9, 1972).

The events leading up to the actual battle and then the battle itself are dealt with in great detail. The first battle of St Albans is one of those battles when there were long negotiations beforehand to try to avoid having a battle. In one sense negotiations had been going on for weeks, even before both groups had gathered their troops and set off for their confrontation. One particularly interesting point about these negotiations is that they were conducted between the protagonists using heralds and pursuivants as messengers much as had been done in the French wars. York used Mowbray Herald, the herald of the Duke of Norfolk. The duke was not there and had not yet publicly sided with York (and did not do so until 1461) so the fact that his herald was being used by York is perhaps a sign that even as early as 1455 he was supporting York. This intriguing point is not mentioned by Boardman, at least I did not notice it as I read the book and the very poor index does not allow it to be checked. It is touched on by Armstrong.

The battle itself was unlike most of the others in these wars, except, not surprisingly, the second battle of St Albans. The Yorkists were camped outside the town and the Lancastrians were barricaded inside. Apparently before negotiations were properly over fighting had started and it appears that the earl of Warwick, commanding with his father the earl of Salisbury a large part of York's army, was the leader who was first to push his way into the town. He was speedily followed by Sir Robert Ogle whose men fired volleys of arrows at point blank range into the royalist troops massed in the Market Place. That the royalists were taken by surprise is seen by the reports that they received many injuries on the hands and face and were thus not all fully armed. The king himself was injured slightly. This aspect of a surprise attack while negotiations were underway was covered up by subsequent 'official' Yorkist accounts, a point brought out by Boardman. The whole battle lasted no more than two hours and there were probably less than 100 killed.

The book is illustrated by some excellent maps showing different stages of the battle and by some black and white illustrations, although I do wonder why these include a picture of Richard III, who was not there. Translations of three of the major sources are included in appendices. The author has read the sources and thought carefully about the battle. Unfortunately his style frequently obscures his meaning and the book would have benefited from editorial intervention. As an account of the battle it adds some useful detail to the account by Armstrong but it by no means replaces it.

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