The titles of books are often misleading – none more so than those that suggest that they are just about battles. David Baldwin's is no exception and this book, like others of its ilk, takes in the whole story of the lead up to the 1487 'rebellion' – which includes an initial chapter that summarises the vicissitudes of the Wars of the Roses – the course of the rebellion and its aftermath. It could hardly be otherwise given how little we really know about the course of most medieval battles and consequently how little there is that can be said with certainty. The battle of Stoke is very much a case in point. The sources, which Baldwin analyses in chapter ten 'How do we know?', do not proffer a great deal. What we can say though is that the battle appears to have lasted no more than an hour or so, and seems to have involved an uncomplicated sequence of moves.

Of course this is not the first time this story has been told. In particular Michael Bennett published a full length study *Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke* in 1987. It is wise then that Baldwin anticipates the obvious question as to 'why a new assessment is needed … twenty years later' (p. xv) and provides his explanation. Although that is not altogether convincing, this story that climaxex in the last battle of the Wars of the Roses remains a good one, and Baldwin tells it well and enthusiastically.

The reader who has been immersed in books on the politics and wars of the period will inevitably find particular themes and ideas some of which will stimulate more than others. Baldwin’s comparison of Stoke with Bosworth is well made, and perhaps he could have explored this even further. He notes that Henry Tudor’s invasion in 1485 was a very considerable gamble that, on balance, at the time must have seemed unlikely to succeed. That it did lent a greater significance to the invasion he in turn faced in 1487. In both battles, the opening move seems to have been made by the rebel forces and large elements of the royal army were never engaged. Had Henry arrived at Stoke in time to take part in the battle, no doubt he would have looked to his own personal safety in what ensued: a discussion on the merits of such sensible circumspection versus Richard’s brave impatience would have been interesting. Baldwin makes a good point of underscoring the part played by the earl of Oxford and his retinue, emphasising the benefit of experience they would have had from Bosworth. Though Baldwin also pays due note to Schwartz’s contingent of Swiss and German mercenaries, it would have been fascinating to see some attempt to compare their rôle with the foreign contingents in Henry’s forces in 1485. This is nitpicking however, and due credit must be given to Baldwin’s efforts to reconstruct this simple battle in some detail. Inescapably this requires much theorising, such as we find on page 62 in the discussion on the barrage of missiles most likely encountered by the advancing rebel forces in the opening move. As Baldwin notes, that the rebels took the step of exposing themselves to that disadvantage was because they realised that they could not hope to improve their position and that their best chance lay in defeating their opponents piecemeal.

In supplementing the fragmentary information to be derived from the written sources, Baldwin combines knowledge of fifteenth century warfare, a detailed grasp of local topography and what A.H. Burne labelled ‘inherent military probability’. He notes alternative deployments and strategies and gives judgement on their likelihood. Ultimately however, it is transparent that the outcome seems to have never been in doubt. The usual difficulties we have with reports of numbers as ever makes it difficult to know how many were engaged on each side and how many were casualties, but Baldwin’s estimates appear to be as sensible as any. He is equally competent on non military matters. He is efficient in drawing out certain local rivalries that led some to fight on one side or the other, and through that shows that most were not moved to risk the peril of battle for a cause as amorphous as loyalty for its own sake to York or Tudor. At the same time however, he gives special emphasis to the part played by Lord Lovel who, exceptionally, does emerge as one moved by higher considerations than mere self interest.

The book is equipped with a number of drawings and diagrams and eight pages of black and white photographs. It includes appendices providing lists of the names of those on each side, on Simnel’s Irish coinage, and on the matter of the grave pit unearthed in 1982. Notes and references and a select bibliography follow. In conclusion, Baldwin has woven his story into an attractive read without losing its academic basis, and is to be congratulated for it.

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