

**THE BATTLE OF STOKE FIELD.** David E. Roberts. Newark & Sherwood District Council, 1987. 70 pages. £2.70.

**THE SECRET BATTLE.** Alan Wilkinson. Midas of Nottingham, 1987. 84 .pages. £7.50.

**A POCKET HISTORY OF EAST STOKE.** Frank A. A. Cotton. Newark & Sherwood District Council, 1987. 23 pages. £1.25.

**THE BATTLE OF EAST STOKE 1487.** M. W. Bishop. Nottinghamshire County Council, 1987. 18 pages. 75p.

**LAMBERT SIMNEL AND THE BATTLE OF STOKE.** Michael Bennett. Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., Gloucester, 1987. 157 pages. £14.95.

The quincentenary of the Battle of Stoke-by-Newark has been commemorated by a full length study by Dr Michael Bennett of the University of Tasmania and by several booklets written by historians resident in the locality. Dr Bennett naturally paints the story of this, the most serious rebellion against Henry VII, on the broadest canvas, but the authors of the booklets display an intimate knowledge of the topography of the region which makes their contributions complementary rather than subsidiary to the longer book.

David Roberts' *The Battle of Stoke Field* is a closely argued and profusely illustrated booklet, commissioned as part of the commemorative programme arranged by a committee of the villagers of East Stoke. Mr Roberts has made a careful study of both contemporary and more recent accounts of the engagement and has sought to clarify the king's movements by reference to the unpublished accounts of the royal household: but his conclusions have led him to accept the scenario suggested by the writings of Polydore Vergil, that Henry Tudor marched to Newark on the day preceding the battle and then retraced his footsteps southwards (towards Stoke village) so that he approached the rebel army from the north. The main objection to this theory is that the herald who accompanied the royal forces states specifically that the King spent the night of Friday 15 June near Radcliffe, some 10 miles south of the battlefield, but this Mr Roberts dismisses as a 'lapse of memory' on the part of the unidentified author when he subsequently prepared his report. But Vergil, who may have thought that Stoke village lay to the north of Newark, was writing some twenty years after the events he was describing, and it is hard to believe that Henry was so poorly served with intelligence as to his enemy's whereabouts that he marched his army frantically backwards and forwards, a view endorsed by Edward Hall's comment that the King 'was in hys (Lincoln's) bosome and knewe every houre what the Erle did'.

Alan Wilkinson has written an unashamedly popular history of the Simnel rebellion, one which gives free rein to the imagination by putting speeches into the mouths of the leading participants and in furnishing such details as the chroniclers left unsaid. His approach is particularly effective in his vivid account of the battle, but is sometimes marred by comments which are either simplistic or unnecessary: it is most unlikely, for example, that the plot was ever 'all a giggle, really', and we could take it for granted that the encamping Yorkists 'loosened their codpieces' and 'irrigated' Bramham Moor. Mr Wilkinson contributes the interesting suggestion (derived from his knowledge of local tradition) that the rebel forces made their way from Piel Castle into Lancashire through underground passages, a device which allowed them to emerge several miles to the rear of any Tudor forces guarding the coastline; but the burden of his argument, that the considerable support which, he believes, the rebels found in England was minimised by the Tudors as a matter of policy (hence the title), has only a slight basis in fact.

Frank Cotton has written a thematic history of Stoke village, one designed (as he readily admits) to appeal primarily to those who have neither the time nor the inclination to study the subject in detail, but which is entertaining and informative nevertheless. Mr. Cotton deals with the origins of the village, the Roman occupation, the medieval Hospital of St Leonard, the church (where he recognises that the scarred stonework may owe as much to generations of cemetery-keepers as to John of Lincoln's billmen), and, of course, the battle, and finds space for chapters on 'noteworthy persons' and the preservation of the parish registers. His booklet is an excellent way to approach the history of the village, and the same may be said of M.W. Bishop's account of the battle, which although by far the shortest of the several alternatives, is eminently readable, and has the great merit of presenting the evidence in a simple yet scholarly way. Mr Bishop supports his statements with very full references, and his summary can be recommended to those who, again, have only limited time at their disposal, or who would like to familiarise themselves with the outline (and not a little of the detail) of the rebellion before grappling with the contentions of the longer books.

Dr Michael Bennett's *Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke* is conceived on the lines of his well-known study of the Battle of Bosworth, and includes a general survey of the Wars of the Roses (explained in terms of the life of the Yorkist matriarch, Duchess Cecily), a valuable appendix of extracts from sources (some of which have not previously appeared in translation), and chapters which investigate the origins and recount the course of the rebellion and assess the aftermath. Dr Bennett has utilised little-known works (notably the *Chroniques de Jersey* which illuminate the career of Richard Harleston, the former governor of the island turned rebel), and has checked the originals of the standard printed sources, an exercise which has led him to discover what is not apparent from Leland's transcript of the Tudor herald's report of the rebellion, that the boy known to history as Lambert Simnel was at one point in his life called John. The implication is clearly that the unusual name was itself a pseudonym, and Dr

Bennett adds to the mystery by suggesting that there may have been two priests called Simons, a William, who at the beginning of 1487 confessed in convocation that he had taken Simnel to Ireland, and a Richard, who was captured with his protégé after Stoke. But questions are more easily raised than answered, and in spite of his considerable efforts to uncover 'new' material Dr. Bennett is still obliged to rely mainly on the traditional - and often contradictory - accounts of the Herald, Molinet and Vergil, accounts which leave him 'for the most part ... crawling on the ground, groping in the gloom for safe footholds, and exploring every nook and cranny for possible leads.' This paucity of firm evidence may have been instrumental in dissuading earlier writers from attempting a full-length study of the rebellion, and they would certainly have been influenced by the consideration that Stoke, unlike Bosworth, changed nothing. Dr Bennett argues forcefully that the crisis helped Henry Tudor 'assess the quality of his ministers and servants' and, further, that the campaign caused him to 'establish constructive relations with the leaders of many local communities' and shaped his approach to the problems of finance, law-enforcement, and administration: but it is surely likely that these developments would have taken place anyway given time, Henry's long experience of adversity, and the continuing unrest.

The book is tastefully and profusely illustrated and contains some valuable analysis, most notably Dr Bennett's discussion of the practical difficulties which would have confronted the Yorkist leaders in forging their 'mongrel' English, Irish and Continental forces into a unified army. Their weaponry and tactics were hardly compatible, and although Martin Schwarz, the mercenary captain, was a seasoned warrior, Lincoln and his principal lieutenants had only limited experience of combat, and then rarely from positions of command. This last point cannot be disputed, but Dr Bennett might have added that, with one or two notable exceptions, Henry Tudor and his officers had similarly grown to maturity in the years since Tewkesbury and knew no more of warfare at first hand. It is, perhaps, one of the disappointments of the book that there is no in-depth discussion of the loyalties and connections of the 150 and more peers, knights, and gentlemen who are known to have fought in the battle, and readers of the local booklets may be surprised that Dr Bennett does not consider the possibility that the Earl of Lincoln might, very reasonably, have crossed the Trent at any one of three places other than Fiskerton, or justify his acceptance of the traditional location of the battlefield to the south-west of Stoke. But it would be wrong to give the impression that the work is materially flawed by what are essentially differences of emphasis: on the contrary it is well and interestingly written and will deservedly become the standard account of the rebellion until we are somewhat closer to AD 2487.

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