

Book Reviews

THE WARS OF THE ROSES: A CONCISE HISTORY, by Charles Ross. Thames and Hudson, 1976. £4.95.

Another book by Dr Ross so soon after his *Edward IV* (1974) is a most welcome event. It is a slighter book than the latter, and could in a sense be described as an appendix to it, since it is both a concise description of the civil war and the events leading up to it, and a more detailed discussion of two aspects of the period. There are the military aspects of the war and its impact on politics and society.

The first chapter is merely a brief description of the Wars of the Roses in historical tradition, with an interesting discussion of how they came to bear that title. Then follow two chapters giving a brief and clear account of the complicated story of these wars. Dr Ross concludes that the origins of the fighting lay in the incapacity of Henry VI, although economic and other factors played their part. In this he follows a now accepted view. His account of Richard's assumption of the throne is perhaps not entirely fair to Richard. He admits that Richard was probably not the villain of Shakespeare, but views his actions with the deepest suspicion, dismissing the story that the sons of Edward IV were bastards as specious. There is more to be said for it than that, even if Dr Ross does not believe it to be true. Further, while it is undoubtedly true that many believed the Princes to be dead in Richard's own lifetime, it seems disputable whether this caused any massive movement against him. Those in a position to be able to cause such movements are surely more likely to have been antagonistic because of his dispossession of his nephews. This action was alarming to a property based nobility, irrespective of whether or not they believed he had murdered the Princes.

Following this is a chapter on the military aspects of the Wars. Very little has been written recently on this, and Dr Ross makes some interesting comments on the numbers involved in the various battles, and on generalship in the Wars. He makes the very relevant point that there was little scope for imaginative or resourceful generalship, and very little was shown, except perhaps in Edward IV's campaign in 1471. The author goes on to make the very true remark that the reputation of Richard of Gloucester as a general has been considerably over-inflated. His experience of battle was limited, and his only experience of overall command in a pitched battle was at Bosworth. Descriptions are given of the battles of 1471, and of Bosworth. It is unfortunate that in the latter Dr Ross uncritically follows Dr Williams in assigning 1000 knights to Richard for his final charge. I have shown, I believe, that this number is highly unlikely (see for example the Introduction to the Society's booklet *The Battle of Bosworth*).

Finally, Dr Ross has a chapter describing the impact of these Wars on all classes of society, and on artistic development. He shows that they had, in fact, surprisingly little effect.

The book as a whole is very attractively produced. It is profusely illustrated, many of the pictures not being familiar. One very refreshing difference from many recent illustrated books is that the sources of all the pictures are

given. It is unfortunate that the plan of this series forbade Dr Ross giving references to his text also. One picture caption is not correct: the effigy on p.105 is of John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, not of his son the Earl of Lincoln. There is a useful (if brief) bibliography, and an index. Altogether a most interesting and useful book. The above criticisms are not intended to detract seriously from this usefulness.

PETER HAMMOND

BATTLES IN BRITAIN, VOL. 1: 1066-1547, VOL. 2: 1642-1746, by William Seymour. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1975. £3.75 (paperback), £6.50 (hardback).

On seeing the title of this book one might feel that it represents just another in the current rash of books on battles. This would be to do it an injustice, since it is better than most, if not all, of its recent predecessors.

Between them these two volumes cover all the major and most of the minor battles fought on British soil since Stamford Bridge in 1066. Each battle description is preceded by a short discussion of the political situation leading up to it, putting the battle into its proper perspective. The battle accounts themselves are very full and detailed, the author having studied the battlefield and the primary and secondary sources of information. The two civil wars have a special introductory chapter each. There is also a description of each battlefield as it is now, and how it may be found.

Both volumes are illustrated with contemporary pictures, useful drawings of weapons and armour, and maps. The latter consist of line drawings and aerial photographs of the battle sites. The photographs have superimposed upon them the positions of the rival armies, but are not as useful as they could have been, since the over-large superimposed blocks cover rather too much ground. Both volumes have indexes and comprehensive bibliographies.

The battles of the Wars of the Roses are included in Volume One. The introductory chapter, giving an outline of the political events leading up to and during the battles, is somewhat breathless and confused and some unfamiliarity with the period is shown in this chapter and in those on the battles themselves. More useful to members is a list of virtually every battle of these Wars in chronological order, with brief details of each. Fifteenth century battles covered in detail are 2nd St Albans, Towton, Barnet, Tewkesbury and Bosworth. Alternative possibilities are given where something is not clear from the sources, although in some instances it is not clear why. For example, the author places the Duke of Somerset in command of Warwick's centre at Barnet when most historians deny even his presence at the battle. Similarly, at Bosworth he places the opposing forces in such a way that Oxford's division stand in the marsh at the foot of Ambion Hill. He seems not to know of Dr Williams' work showing how extensive this marsh was.

However, despite its faults, this is a useful book which, if not the needed replacement for Col. Burne's two books, can nevertheless be recommended.

PETER HAMMOND

A New Novel

THE WOODVILLE, by S. R. Bridge. Robert Hale, March, 1976. £3.

This unimaginative novel follows the life of Elizabeth Woodville from the death of her beloved first husband in 1461 to her marriage to Edward IV. She is content to ignore his infidelities since their love for one another always brings them together again. The book ends with the birth of Elizabeth's son in sanctuary and Edward's triumphant recovery of his kingdom, in 1471.