

Research Notes and Queries

Byron's Lost Epic!

Gwen Beaumont writes:-

With reference to the article on 'Byron's Lost Epic: Some Speculations on *Bosworth Field* (1807)' by Natalie Jane Prior (*The Ricardian*, Vol. IX, No. 121, June 1993, pp. 426-429), Byron was not only interested in history generally but also in that of his Byron ancestors, as instanced by his poem *On Leaving Newstead Abbey*, written in 1803 at age fifteen, in which he refers to his forebears in the Crusades, and at the battles of Crecy and Marston Moor. He would obviously have been stimulated by the part taken by his own family in the Battle of Bosworth, when John Byron, whose Lancashire estates were within the sphere of the Stanleys, supported the cause of Henry Tudor.

There was a legend that John Byron and Sir Gervase Clifton supported opposing sides, but each had promised to safeguard the other's estate in the event of forfeiture. By the sixteenth century the Beaumont, Byron and Clifton families were related by marriage, and Sir John Beaumont (elder brother of Sir Francis Beaumont, the dramatist, 1584-1616) used the legend as the basis for a poem in which Byron shields the dying Clifton, who reminds him of his promise. In actual fact, Clifton lived until 1491, and held various offices under Henry VII. John Byron's support of Henry Tudor was rewarded, a month after the battle, with the life office of Constable of Nottingham Castle and Steward and Keeper of Sherwood Forest, etc., and later in 1485 he was appointed Sheriff of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire for the year 1486. Before Whitsuntide 1486 he received his deferred knighthood on Henry VII's journey to York, during a tour of his kingdom. (These details and part of Beaumont's poem are given in *The House of Byron* by V. W. Walker, London 1988, pp. 16-17).

As a matter of interest, in 1825 Walter Scott received a letter from William Capon (architectural draughtsman to the then Duke of York) suggesting that Scott should write about Richard III, and offering to supply some information. Capon mentioned that he had known Lord Orford (Horace Walpole), author of *Historic Doubts*.... However, Scott was at that time too busy with Richard I and *The Talisman*, and so Capon's idea joined several others which Scott never had sufficient time to pursue. (*Sir Walter's Post-Bag*, selected by Wilfred Partington, London 1932, pp. 211-212.).