

James Statham was (probably) Late: Some New Evidence for the City of Exeter's Armed Contingent (not) at Bosworth

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In marked contrast to the campaigns of the Hundred Years' war, for which detailed muster rolls provide lists of names of even the rank and file of the armies that set out for France, for the battles of the Wars of the Roses the names of very few participants below gentry rank have been established.¹ To this, the battle of Bosworth is no exception. If anything, Henry VII's backdating of his accession to the day before the battle, thereby rendering anyone who had borne arms against him a traitor, served to further obscure the membership of Richard III's force: rewards subsequently granted by Henry to his own supporters provide the majority of the names of those known to have been present at the battle. What is known of King Richard's army can only be described in broader outline. We know of some of the more important men summoned by the king to attend with their retinues, and we also know that – as in other battles of the civil wars – various cities and towns were called upon to provide bodies of men, and did so.² Only on rare occasions it is possible to glimpse one or other of the individual members of these contingents: in 2011 John Alban brought to light the will of one of the lesser fighting men in the retinue of the duke of Norfolk,³ and an entry in the roll of the mayor's court of the city of Exeter in Devon (printed below) provides the name of a member of

¹ A list of known combatants was compiled by Dr Neil Younger under the auspices of the HLF-funded Bosworth Battlefield Project, but not included either in the printed final project report (Glen Foard and Anne Curry, *Bosworth 1485: A Battlefield Rediscovered*, Oxford 2013), or among the preliminary reports and documentation deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (The Battlefields Trust, *The Bosworth Battlefield Project* [data-set], York, Archaeology Data Service [distributor], 2013: <https://doi.org/10.5284/1019859>), among which see particularly Anne Curry and Janet Dickinson (with contributions by John McGavin and Michael Bletzer), 'Report on military history for the Bosworth Battlefield Association'. I am grateful to Professor Curry for letting me see a copy of Dr Younger's list.

² Lorraine Attreed, *The King's Towns: Identity and Survival in Late Medieval English Boroughs*, New York et al. 2001, pp. 186-89; Hannes Kleineke, 'Pe Kynges Cite: Exeter in the Wars of the Roses', in *The Fifteenth Century VII: Conflicts, Consequences and the Crown*, ed Linda Clark, Woodbridge 2007, pp. 137-56, at pp. 148-50; and also see Anthony Goodman, *The Wars of the Roses: The Soldiers' Experience*, Stroud 2005, pp. 115-20 for practices of arraying men.

³ John Alban, 'The will of a Norfolk Soldier at Bosworth', *The Ricardian*, vol. 22 (2012), pp. 1-7.

the small squad of men that the city dispatched to the battle, and a brief marginal annotation, perhaps, a second one.

The broad outline of Exeter's contribution to Richard III's army at Bosworth is known from the account of the city receiver. In a year when most of the civic community's resources were tied up in the rebuilding of the guildhall, the substantial sum of £31 was found to hire 16 soldiers. At a further cost of 27*s*, the soldiers were provided with jackets of woollen cloth, and at the company's departure, the mayor ordered the fighting men to be given Rumney wine.⁴

As on every Monday, Exeter's mayor's court met on 22 August 1485. The proceedings enrolled on that day give no indication that in Leicestershire the king was fighting for his life and crown. Nine weeks later, however, on 24 October, the court of Exeter heard a complaint from John Sangell, a local metal-worker.⁵ Two months earlier, so Sangell claimed, he had made an agreement with James Statham, one of the members of the Exeter company then about to set out to join the king's army, to lend him a pair of brigandines and a helmet, which he was to return if he should come home from the expedition alive, and without having been robbed of them.⁶ This agreement, according to Sangell, had been made at Exeter on 20 August.

Sangell's claims bear closer scrutiny. The agreement, as he set it out in court, appears to have constituted a straightforward loan of a helmet and a pair of brigandines, ostensibly without any *quid pro quo*. While the smith's statement, made in a court of law, were clearly *ex parte*, and might thus not relate all the facts, the basic claims are perhaps not as unlikely as they might seem. Repeatedly pressed for military support in the successive battles of the Wars of the Roses, fifteenth-century urban authorities did not always find it easy to raise fighting men locally, and on more than one occasion of a hasty royal summons of armed men the leading men of a city or town had to agree each to find and

⁴ Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter City Archives, Exeter receiver's account 2 Ric. III-1 Hen VII; Kleineke, 'De Kynges Cite', p. 149.

⁵ John Davy *alias* Sangell (or Sengell, Sentgell), was admitted to the freedom of Exeter in September 1469, having served his apprenticeship with Richard Ree. He served as alderman of the eastern city quarter in 1480-81, and in the following year was among the jurors electing the mayor, stewards and council of 24. He is not known to have held any city office during Richard III's reign, although he was once again chosen alderman in 1486-87, and repeatedly participated in the elections of the senior city officers in the 1480s. *Exeter Freeman*, ed. M.M. Rowe and A.M. Jackson, Exeter, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, extra ser. vol 1 (1973), p. 53; Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter Mayor's Court rolls, 20 Edw. IV-5 Hen. VII.

⁶ For contemporaries' expectations of plunder taken from defeated or killed opponents, see Goodman, *Wars of the Roses*, p. 177.

pay for a soldier 'to fight in their place'.⁷ It is not clear whether this was the case at Exeter in 1485: while a minor member of the city's ruling elite, Sangall was not of sufficient status to be expected to pay for a fighting man himself. It is, however, possible that he himself had been charged to ride to Bosworth, and had hired Statham to extract himself from this duty. Statham himself was an obscure individual who was defied identification, but he may have not been a complete outsider, as he was evidently expected to return to Devon after the campaign.⁸

Perhaps even more interesting is the date on which the agreement was said to have been made. According to Sangell, Statham had still been at Exeter on 20 August, when they had agreed the loan. If the Exeter company did not leave the city until that day, it could hardly have reached Bosworth in time for the battle two days later, even at a hard gallop, and presumably turned back when the news of the king's defeat and death became known.

More circumstantial evidence may suggest that a second identifiable member of the Exeter band sent to Bosworth was one William Lytell. On 15 August 1485, Thomas Blancheflour, executor of the will of John Blancheflour, appeared in the Exeter mayor's court to recover an unspecified debt from Lytell, who failed to appear. The court ordered Lytell's arrest, but at an uncertain point after the court roll was drawn up it was annotated '*in servicio Regis*' ('in the King's service'). There is no further evidence of the nature of the service that Lytell provided to the king, but in the light of the dating of the record, it is not unreasonable to suggest that he may have sought to avoid his creditor by agreeing to join the city's armed band heading to the midlands.⁹

It is impossible to be certain how typical the Exeter example was of what happened elsewhere in England in the days before Bosworth, but it stands to reason that in many places armed men had to be found and dispatched in considerable haste, even if royal commands to start preparing for the defence of the realm had been received earlier.¹⁰ Richard III received news of Henry Tudor's landing on 11 August in Nottinghamshire, and his messages

⁷ Attreed, *The King's Towns*, pp. 187, 199-200. In the case of Bosworth, there may have been an additional problem in that the campaign fell in the harvest season when much otherwise free manpower was tied up: Goodman, *Wars of the Roses*, p. 188.

⁸ He may have been a member of the prolific midlands family of that name, and if so, perhaps found his way to Exeter in the entourage of Richard III's chosen lieutenant in the south-west, John, Lord Scrope of Bolton: S.P.H. Statham, *The Descent of the Family of Statham*, London 1925; Rosemary Horrox, *Richard III: A Study of Service*, Cambridge 1989, p. 204.

⁹ Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter City Archives, Exeter Mayor's Court roll 2 Ric. III-1 Hen VII, rot. 35d.

¹⁰ The master and community of Wells may have been a step ahead, since on 25 July they received the account of the collectors they had appointed a year earlier to raise funds '*pro soldaribus*': Wells City Archives, Wells Convocation act books, 1450-1553, pp. 140, 146.

commanding his subjects to attend him with their armed retainers had reached the duke of Norfolk in Suffolk by 14 August, and the city of York by the following day.¹¹ In the light of the urgency of the matter, there is no reason to suppose that the king's orders took much longer to reach the south and south-west. This would mean that the citizens of Exeter took less than a week to find and equip their band of fighters, and yet, if John Sangell's dates were accurate, dispatched them too late. Even the citizens of York, more than well-disposed to King Richard, prevaricated and engaged in a further exchange of messengers with their sovereign before sending their contingent of eighty men on 19 August. There thus has to be a question over just how many of the soldiers sent to join Richard's army from further afield actually made it to Bosworth in time.¹² The respective size of the armies that met at Bosworth remains a matter for debate unlikely ever to be conclusively resolved, but we may at least suggest that the representation of the towns in the king's host was patchy.¹³

Appendix:

Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter City Mayor's Court roll 1-2 Henry VII, rot. 4d.

Jacobus Statham summonitus fuit ad respondendum Johanni Sangell de placito quod teneat ei convencionem inter eos factam de uno pare de brygandynes et una galea vocata 'a salett' secundum concuetudinem etc. Et unde idem Johannes per Ricardum Duke, attornatum suum, dicit quod cum predictus Jacobus vicesimo die Augusti anno regni domini Ricardi nuper Regis Anglie tercio hic apud Exoniam infra iurisdiccione[m] presentis curie convenisset cum prefato Johanne de et super predictis brigandynys et galea dicto Jacobo premanibus deliberatis modo et forma subsequentibus, videlicet quod si idem Jacobus in spoliatus post eiusdem Jacobi devillacionem reveniret, quod tunc idem Jacobus dictum parem de brygandynys et galeam prefato Johanni reliberaret. Et licet postmodum dictus Jacobus ut unus excercitus civitatis Exonie predicte devillavit et in spoliatus revenit, predictos brygandyns et galeam predicto Johanni non reliberavit, set illa ei hucusque reliberare contradixit et adhuc contradicit, et sic convencionem predictam non tenuit nec perimplevit, set infregit, unde dicit quod deterioratus est. Et dampnum habet ad valenciam quinque marcarum. Et unde producit sectam etc.

¹¹ Charles Ross, *Richard III*, London 1981, pp. 213-14.

¹² Attreed, *The King's Towns*, p. 200.

¹³ For a recent discussion of the problem and the sources, see Foard and Curry, *Bosworth 1485*, pp. 38-40, where there is also some discussion of the more recent debate. An older, but thorough discussion is found in Ross, *Richard III*, pp. 210-25, esp. p. 223.

Translation:

James Statham was summoned to answer John Sangell in a plea that he should keep the agreement made between them for a pair of brigandines and a helmet called 'a salett', according to custom etc. And the same John says through Richard Duke, his attorney, that whereas the aforesaid James on 20 August 3 Richard [III] here at Exeter within the jurisdiction of the present court agreed with the aforesaid John of and over the aforesaid brigandines and helmet, delivered to the hands of the said James, in the following manner and form, that is to say that of the same James should return unplundered after the departure of the same James from the city [of Exeter], that then the same James should return the said pair of brigandines and the helmet to the aforesaid John. And whereas afterwards And although soon afterwards the said James left the city as one of the army of the aforesaid city of Exeter and returned unplundered, he did not return the aforesaid brigandines and the helmet to the aforesaid John, but refused hitherto to return them to him, and refuses now, and so he did not keep or fulfil the aforesaid agreement, but broke it, whereby he says he has been damaged and has damages to the value of five marks. And over this he brings a suit etc.