

**THE BATTLES OF ST ALBANS.** Peter Burley, Michael Elliott and Harvey Watson. 2007. Battleground Series – Wars of the Roses. Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 47 Church St., Barnsley, South Yorkshire, £14.99 (pbk).

ISBN 9-7818-4415569-9.

This book covers the two battles fought in or around St Albans in 1455 and 1461. The first of these is usually taken to be the start of the Wars of the Roses. The battles are described competently and in detail, the second in greater detail than the first since the second is a complicated battle taking place in and around St Albans, unlike the first which takes place on the edge and in the centre of the town. The problems, such as why the second battle was fought at St Albans at all, the tactics of the earl of Warwick (the Yorkist commander) and the identification of the actual ground over which the battle was fought are dealt with separately. Here there is a problem since the maps illustrating the second battle are not really adequate for such a complicated engagement. The text needs careful reading to understand the authors' explanations of exactly what happened and a good clear map would have been a help. The first battle is much better served in this respect. There is a summary of the events leading up to each battle and the aftermath to each, taking events up to the battle of Towton, the end of the first phase of the Wars of the Roses.

After the battle descriptions there are chapters describing St Albans at the time of the battle and as it is now with tours of the battle sites. This is a regular feature of the books in this series and is a good idea. It is often difficult to read the events of the past from what a battlefield looks like now without some help. The last chapter is entitled 'Weapons, Armour and Armies of the Wars'. This seems out of place in a book which is part of a series on the Wars of the Roses since each book in the series can hardly have such a general chapter and discussion of important points about the weaponry, such as the handguns used, and about raising the armies, belongs in the main text. As an Appendix there is a potentially very useful list of names 'mentioned in the ... sources as associated with the battles'. Unfortunately virtually none of the sources are identified in this list which rather negates its use for a historian.

The book is well illustrated with good modern pictures of the battlefields and also contains many pictures of battle re-enactors and their weapons. These latter do not add a great deal to the reader's understanding of events. There are four colour plates, the centre one a splendid full page spread of Graham Turner's picture of the first battle of St Albans. The other two plates would have been better used for larger reproductions of the coloured battle maps which are printed, very small, on the back cover.

In all, this book contains good brief descriptions of the two battles fought at St Albans in the fifteenth century together with a description of how the course of the battles can be followed in the modern town and environs. The authors have used a good range of sources although there are no footnotes, a feature of this series.

PETER HAMMOND

First published in *The Ricardian* Vol. 18 2008.

© Richard III Society

This document is not to be reproduced without the permission of the Society