

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

BATTLES IN BRITAIN AND THEIR POLITICAL BACKGROUND, 1066-1746

William Seymour

Wordsworth, Ware (Herts): 1997

232 & 231 pages

Illustrated, maps

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William Seymour has produced the field guide to British battlefields for which military historians and battlefield trampers have been waiting. *Battles in Britain* is a detailed account of thirty-two major battles fought on British soil from the Norse invasion under King Harold Hadrada (September 1066) through to the second Jacobite insurrection (1746).

Every campaign, battle or action is skilfully analysed and the combat circumstances of each case are vividly recreated. Special attention is given to strategy, tactics and the principles of war – the professed focus of the book. The discussion is in most instances familiar: the use of interior lines by Harold Godwinson in 1066 and again by the Roundheads during the English Civil War; the successful usage of a Fabian strategy by the Scots in their wars against the English, and their often suffering defeat when pursuing a combat strategy. While most similar works stop here, Seymour goes further. He not only attempts to describe the emotions of the men (fear, boredom, weariness, despair, defiance and exhilaration), but also sets each battle against the political and historical background of the time. Seymour addresses not only the causes for each of the wars, but also the justness of each protagonist's resort to arms. This provision of context, and of the backdrop against which the campaigns and battles took place, is essential.

The text is well supplemented by battle plans and specially-commissioned aerial photographs onto which the position of troops during the battles have been superimposed. The result is a clarity that few such books attain. The reader, as a result, not only has a better impression of the geography (and the problems which each commander faced) but can also better orientate himself when visiting the actual battle site. Battlefield visitors will welcome the precise road directions with which each chapter commences. A table indicating which battles were fought in each county, complements this.

The seven centuries of military history covered in *Battles in Britain*, witnessed numerous and fundamental changes in both weapons and tactics. The development from the Saxon fyrd, equipped with spear and axe, through to the Hanoverian armies, supplied with cannon and flintlock hand weapons, is well described. Drawings illustrate these key developments.

Yet this attractive publication is not without its problems. *Battles in Britain* was to appear in two volumes, with the division falling after the battle of Pinkie Cleuch (1547). Due to financial stringency(?), the Wordsworth edition is published within one set of covers with – unfortunately – two contents pages, two prefaces and two indexes. These should have been combined and the pages numbered consecutively throughout. These indexes furthermore do not contain references to key subjects mentioned in the text (for example: logistics, siege warfare, strategy).

Military historians and, more particularly, the far-more-numerous military enthusiasts will welcome *Battles in Britain*. The book is a gift at R61-00.

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