



Bosworth Battlefield Survey

From August 2005 to July 2008 the Battlefields Trust is undertaking a major new study of Bosworth battlefield, on behalf of Leicestershire County Council. The project is pushing the boundaries of battlefield studies in an attempt to resolve many of the long standing questions surrounding the battle of Bosworth. The investigation is part of the revitalisation scheme for the site, and is being resourced largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Trust's project officer, Glenn Foard, is leading a team of national experts from the fields of military history, landscape history and battlefield archaeology in this study. A small group of volunteers as well as several staff from Leicestershire County Council are also working with us, playing a key role in the investigation. On site coordination is provided by Richard Mackinder, who is based at the Battlefield Visitor Centre.

UPDATE ON THE BOSWORTH PROJECT: SUMMER 2007

The Battle of Bosworth was first recorded in the York City Records the day after the battle, where it was called the 'Field of Redemore'. The battle saw the defeat and death of Richard III, the last English king to die on the battlefield, and the birth of the Tudor dynasty. According to tradition the crowning of Henry Tudor as Henry VII took place on Crown Hill in Stoke Golding.

Towards the end of 2005 Leicestershire County Council was awarded a grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund to investigate the numerous theories as to where the battle was fought, to ensure that the new visitor experience provided the most accurate information about the battle. To do this a team of experts were brought together under the direction of Glenn Foard of the Battlefield Trust, a specialist in battlefield archaeology, to attempt to accurately locate the site. The project runs over three years.

What we know so far

When the Battlefield centre opened in 1977 the accepted theory, as refined for LCC by the historian Danny Williams, was that the battle took place where you can see the standards flying today, on Ambion Hill.

The new research indicates that this is incorrect. All interpretations depend on locating Redmore, and on finding the site of the marsh which Henry used to protect the flank of his army as he attacked Richard. The evidence collected by the team has shown the marsh could never have existed on Ambion Hill. Instead they have narrowed the search down to an area within the medieval manor and chapelry of Dadlington, though we now know that the extent of Dadlington then was somewhat larger than today's parish.



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How do we know this?

The medieval landscape

The medieval landscape has been mapped using evidence from both ground and aerial survey, showing land use as it probably was in around 1300. This map shows which areas were ploughed in the typical strip field system of the period and those which were meadow, pasture or settlements. Marsh could only have existed in the meadows.

In parallel to this the soil itself has also been studied. This work has been done to compliment works already published by the Soil Survey of England and Wales by Cranfield University. It involved taking a series of 10cm plugs of soil down to a depth of as much as 1 metre from hundreds of locations across the area. Different types of soil indicate where a marsh could and couldn't have existed. In just two locations, both in Dadlington's former meadow land, this augering has also found peat deposits, which are now being subjected to further analysis to establish when they were open marshland.

Historic Documents

Historic maps have been reviewed and areas with relevant names such as fen or marsh have been plotted. Two of these correspond closely to the peat deposits found in the soil survey.

Other documents in local and national archives are also being studied. Those from the mid 17th century and earlier are predominantly written in Latin with each individual document having to be read, translated and then interpreted. This is a challenging task but is producing important new evidence as some of these documents are being studied for the first time.

Sadly our study area has proved to be a poorly documented landscape, possibly due to a lack of monastic or other great estates. However we have had one lucky break: many of the records of the medieval manorial court for Dadlington do survive. These 'court rolls' and other documents show that 'Redmore' lay within the land of Dadlington. The team are also reviewing other well known sources, one of which refers to Henry VIII supporting the establishment of a chantry at Dadlington to pray for the souls of those killed in the battle.

These documents prove that the battle must have taken place partly or wholly within Dadlington, supporting an existing hypothesis first developed by Peter Foss.

Metal Detecting Survey

Guided by this evidence a systematic archaeological survey using metal detectors is under way. This survey has recovered some objects which may relate to the battle but it has so far failed to find the density of artefacts that have been recovered from the Towton battlefield. At Towton, a battle fought just 24 years before Bosworth, an impressive array of medieval battle related artefacts have been discovered, including over 200 arrow heads. But it is not just at Bosworth that problems have arisen in the archaeological survey. Other medieval battlefields like Bannockburn and Shrewsbury have also so far failed to yield evidence similar to that from Towton.



This raises two questions:

- Are we looking in the right place ?
- Or is Towton unusual?

The Next Step

We need to discover why so many battle related artefacts survive at Towton. Are there perhaps special conditions, of soil chemistry, land use history etc on that site which are not repeated at Bosworth and other medieval battlefields?

To answer this question we have carried out analysis of the soils at Towton to compare them to soils at Bosworth. This does suggest the conditions are very special at Towton, but it does not seem to provide the whole answer. So, we now also need to repeat our metal detecting survey methods on sample areas of another accurately located medieval battlefield. The team will therefore be working Flodden, the last big medieval battle to take place in England, to see if the pattern there looks like that from Towton or if it is far more like that we have seen where we have been working at Bosworth.

Conclusion

The archaeological survey here at Bosworth still has another year to run. It has brought together specialists from many disciplines and has taken expert advice from battlefield archaeologists working in various other countries. The current project has narrowed down the search for the battlefield to very specific areas of Dadlington and its immediate environs. We have proven where the battle could not have been fought, what we aim to do over the next year is to prove exactly where it was fought.

The project has proven an unexpectedly difficult challenge, for it has shown that some of the accepted assumptions about the archaeology of medieval battles may not be correct. It is forcing battlefield archaeologists to rethink the validity of Towton as a benchmark for the study of medieval battlefields. For this reason, whatever the final results of the project, it is already clear that it will have an important impact on the future development of battlefield studies in Europe.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Recommended reading from UK Battlefields Resource Centre website is listed below:

Only a few of the many books on Bosworth are listed here. By far the most useful for the story of the battle is that by Bennett, which also gives transcripts of most of the original sources. For a more colourful, well illustrated and shorter account see Gravett. Goodman's account is brief but is very useful because it is set within an excellent study of military practice in the 15th century.



However all of these, and most other accounts of the battle, are hopelessly inaccurate in their placing of the events within the landscape, and their interpretation of the battle is significantly affected by this failure. Although Bennett in later editions accepted Foss's interpretation as to where the battle was fought, he did not rework his account in the light of this. Foss's slim volume provides a brief discussion of the events of the battle and is essential reading. However what is needed is a major reworking of the story of the battle taking fully into account the basic facts of the historic terrain as we now understand. But this must await the implementation of a new field investigation of the historic landscape of the battlefield and of the archaeology of the battle being planned by Leicestershire County Council.

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- Wright, K. S. (2002) *The Field of Bosworth*, Kingsway Publishing, Leicester.

Websites

Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre <http://www.bosworthbattlefield.com/index.htm>

UK Battlefields Resource Centre (Battlefields Trust)

<http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/warsoftheroses/battlepageview.asp?pageid=824>