

Arthur and the Anglo-Saxon Wars
Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 154 (1984; numerous reprints)
Text by David Nicolle; colour plates by Angus McBride

Review by Rob Morgan

When Rome left Britain, the following centuries created a fascinating chapter in history. Often regarded as little more than a period wrongly known as 'The Dark Ages,' or hijacked by Anglo-Germanic historians as a mythical golden age which created England, this was some seven hundred years of astonishing, complex and utterly fascinating history and war for this group of islands. Given the limitations of what's available, at least in the English language, Nicolle makes a decent stab at a very broad subject indeed. His opening time-line's competent enough, and the map on page 5 is fairly accurate (though the Ordnance Survey's larger 'Britain in the Dark Ages' map's an essential for dealing with this period), apart from Ireland, the Scottish highlands, Cornwall and Wales. His opening section, 'The Arthurian Age,' deals decently well with the post-Roman weapons and fortifications likely to be found, and his short sub-section on 'The Pagan English' is interesting, though when he deals with the Welsh, Irish and Scots the limitations of sources in a single language begin to appear. He seems on safer ground with 'Britain and the Vikings,' though again, the mythical creeps in, I felt, with some reluctance. Welsh sources are for example, bardic and lyrical, rather than straightforward text and record, and many historians have trouble dealing with this sort of material.

The entire book is written as though it was an introduction, rather than an attempt to fully deal with what, after all, are a large number of warrior peoples, Romans, Picts, Irish, Welsh, Scandinavians, the hotch potch of Angles, Saxons, as well as those from Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, and other invaders or mercenary migrants. A huge task, and he limits his time line and text to end at 1066 with the defeat of Hardrada and the victory of William the Bastard at Hastings. It is a decent introduction to weapons, if not to differing forms of warfare, and readable.

The elements, races and tribes and nations (of sorts) covered in the book have in large part been dealt with by other titles in the Osprey series: The Picts neatly by Warrior 50, and their fortifications in Fortress 52 -- both extremely useful titles. While the inhabitants fighting over England appear variously in titles such as Men-at-Arms 65 'Saxon, Viking and Norman' (a delightful text by Terry Wise, and one to read in conjunction with this book) and Warrior 5 on the Thegns; Vikings of course now have several titles in the series, including Warrior 3, and the valuable 'Longship' title, and even the fortifications of Wessex are covered in Fortress 80.

There are still significant gaps in the wargame-related literature of the period from AD 400 to 1066, of course, and hopefully these will be dealt with as time passes. So, except as a broad introductory text, this title on Arthur and the various wars of that long period is not best value for the wargamer who already knows something of those distant times.

What gives the book its value is Angus McBride's excellent plates. Plate A deals with the last Roman troops, which would have been a recognisable set of troop types long

after AD 400 of course, and Plate B provides detail of the warriors of the Angles and Saxons, as well as a savage looking Mercian. Plate C2 is superb as a painting guide, and although Iøve never been able to master the art of painting plaid in 15mm scale, Angus McBride provides examples of it in his Plates D and E on the Picts and Irish.

In wargames terms, anyone planning a force of Picts or Vikings, or Anglo-Saxons will have little trouble finding them in most scales. But one point needs to be mentioned, the size of forces fielded. The old Irish proverb is that more than 36 men on a raiding expedition became an army, no more than 20 were needed for a good raiding force. The same source indicated that it took 100 men to make and win a battle. Welsh warrior households typically consisted of 50 men, while Anglo-Saxon armies might be larger, between 80-200 strong, and continental armies larger still, around 250+ men. You don't need to break the bank to fight a campaign in these centuries!

I think 15mm is the best option for this long period. So take a look at Peter Pig's 15mm Range 9, Viking figures. All you'd need, including some mounted men, and a few warrior monks, also a smaller range of Saxons, which will serve in several of the local warbands from about 750 AD onwards. If you take a look at the Pieces of Eight range, the spear-armed natives, with a little conversion skill, adding a cloak here, a loincloth there, will make a basic tribal warrior group.

The Corvus Belli 15mm Roman range will provide a few late, or left behind Roman troops. Mick Yarrow actually produces an Arthurian range of figures, including Picts for the period from AD 450 to about 600, maybe a little later than that. The armoured cavalry warriors are very good indeed, while there's also a range of early invaders, Jutes, Saxons, etc., all suitable for a low-cost warband. Vikings too.

That's it!

