

Towton 1461

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Text by Christopher Gravett; illustrated by Graham Turner

Review by Rob Morgan

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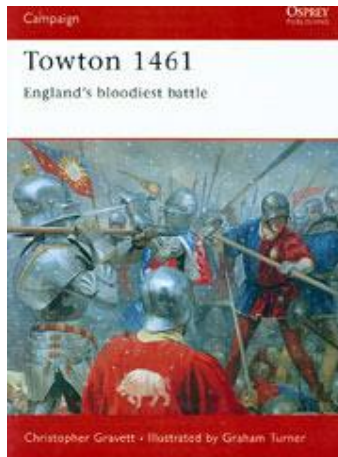
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The bloodiest battle ever fought in the British isles, Towton was one of the great disasters of the Wars of the Roses, at least for the House of Lancaster. It remains a source of fascination for the historian and archaeologist, on a par with the great battle at Visby exactly a century earlier. Towton took place on a bitter



Palm Sunday on which Edward IV defeated the Lancastrians under the Duke of Somerset, and massacred many of the survivors.

This Osprey Campaign title has the standard features of the 98-page booklets: explanatory maps, birds-eye view maps of the battle, and some useful full colour plates. The accompanying photographs are also very good, and the text more than adequately explains the three decisive stages of this day-long fight. In wargames terms, though the battle provides sound reading for any medievalist,

Towton has a number of features which make it less than satisfactory as a table-top encounter. The weather conditions clearly affected the ability of the armies to operate and for the individual soldiers to wield their weapons with utmost effectiveness. The effects of severe weather on medieval weaponry and handling them is something which would be worth study. The field of Towton was virtually a bows and bills encounter, and the presence of guns and

ordnance which had an influence on later Wars of the Roses battles, is little recorded. Possibly because of the harsh weather?

This was a battle which lasted from nine in the morning until nightfall. The first stage, a Lancastrian advance, was halted by a mass archery attack, influenced by the snow and wind. The second, more substantial, phase was a massive *melee*, in which the Lancastrians first dominated, but with the arrival of fresh Yorkist troops, they began to crumble and broke. The birds-eye maps, incidentally, provide an excellent indicator of this stage of the battle. The final rout became a series of skirmishes, of last-stands and flight pursued by hordes of mounted Yorkists. This, as a battle, is worth close study. It has all the failings and fortune any medieval commander could expect to encounter. But it's not in any sense up to play as a solo game. The campaign of Towton, for such it was, is another matter, of course. On the day before the main battle, there was a small encounter between forces at Ferrybridge, ten miles south of Towton, which caused the Lancastrians to retreat. This has solo potential, as does the skirmish at Dinting Dale later that day, in which Lord Clifford fell.

The implications of King Edward's victory were immense. In the aftermath, the Tudors were defeated in Wales, raiding along the Scots border became a serious problem, and a raft of castles fell into Yorkist hands. The rightful King Henry VI was captured and sent to the Tower. This is a well written volume. Chris Gravett, the author, is a curator at the Royal Armouries, well known for his writing on Bosworth 1485. He makes what to many has long seemed a very complex campaign, and the oddest of battles and outcomes, simple and easy to follow. He ends with a guide to the battlefield today, always very useful.

A good read.