

*Decisive Battles of the English Civil War*, Malcolm Wanklyn, (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2006; pp.x + 246. £19.99).

Malcolm Wanklyn is a professor on a mission. His in the middle of a series of three books which set to put the war back into the English Civil War. There is mileage on this, it is some years since a comprehensive study of the fighting was produced although there have been a number of studies of major battle produced over the past decade or so; sieges at Gloucester, battles at Preston, Naseby and Marston Moor have been covered using new documents and battlefield archaeology. Professor Wanklyn has looked at all of these and set their findings into the context of his own extensive exploration of the landscape and document evidence of the battles he singles out for study: he has in the is book picked seven: Edgehill, First Newbury, Cheriton, Marston Moor, Second Newbury, Naseby and Preston. They are all on English soil and are primarily, with the exception of Preston and Marston Moor English (and Welsh) soldiers pitched against each other, so perhaps we could also suggest that Professor Wanklyn is putting the English back into the war too.

The list is contentious in itself: but many apparent omissions, Newark 1644, Cropredy Bridge, 1644, Lostwithiel 1644 for example, though apparently dramatic the following morning had their impact overshadowed by later fights: often those in this book. Professor Wanklyn does stray beyond the purely military definition of decisive, Newbury 2 as an example was decisive because of the political fall-out rather than the military results which were in the end quite small: a garrison reinforced and satellite garrisons stabilised for the winter are not gains comparable with the results of Cheriton or Naseby. The book is ordered in a unique manner; after setting out some general principles to be adhered to and discussing the nature of the various types of source material to be used, the book devoted two chapters to each battle; one discussed the particular source material

and the second gives a narrative on the battle using those sources. This is an approach that works. It is never afraid of pointing up deficiencies in the evidence base and in the narrative to be derived from it. Professor Wanklyn makes it clear when he is speculating on the course of the fighting because of confusion or omission in the evidence, and this makes the book very useful.

I have a couple of criticisms of the work which do not detract from the work as a whole, but do perhaps limit its impact. The early part of book, chapters 1-3 come across often as a lecture on the failings of others, which whether justified or not could have been less hectoring in tone; they are certainly not as enjoyable as the chapters that deal with the battles themselves and so the real meat of the book is not inhibited. The second one relates to the maps. The discussion in the text is really good when discussing the landscape and the often reconfigured battle plans: the text is very rich at these points but the maps are not. In some books this disparity is not problematic, but because one of the strengths of the work is Thus undermined, the disparity appears greater.

This is an important book, it presents a cogent and useful reassessment of the chosen battles which will in the fullness of time be set into the context of the three books Professor Wanklyn plans for the series. The discussions are convincing and clear and the narrative structure carefully established within each battle. The interpretations are of course not definitive, but they point up flaws in previous narratives as well as their strengths. It deserves inclusion in scholarly lists and also to have a wider readership too.

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