

## **Yorkshire Battles - Zoom talk 12 May 2021**

At our May meeting we were very fortunate to have Josh Flint from the Local and Family History Library and Leodis give a presentation via Zoom on Yorkshire Battles. The History group were joined by members of the wider Garforth, Kippax and District u3a for this interesting talk.

Josh advised that the talk was based upon information available in the Local and Family History Research Guide which features hi-lights from the existing Leeds libraries stock and covers over 30 battles.

Link to the Research Guide

<https://secretlibraryleeds.net/>

Leed libraries are fortunate that they hold letters, posters, pamphlets and local newspapers in addition to the chronicles, histories and government documents held by other libraries.

### **The Battle of Wakefield**

The War of the Roses began around 1450 and, in 1453 when Henry VI had a mental breakdown and was in a catatonic state for over a year, there was conflict between Henry's wife Margaret of Anjou who believed that she should act as Protector during Henry's illness following the procedure used in France and Richard, Duke of York who believed that he should have the role following the English tradition of the most powerful nobleman taking over until the King recovered. After almost a year Richard became protector but very soon afterwards Henry VI recovered and took back the reigns of power.

Henry suffered with recurring illness and was a weak King. The bad blood between him, his wife Margaret and Richard Duke of York continued. In 1460 Richard was at Sandal Castle in Wakefield for the Christmas period. On 30 December a large contingent of Lancastrian forces arrived at the castle and, for some reason, Richard left the relative safety of the castle with a small group of Yorkist forces. Richard was overpowered and killed.

Details of the battle were very poorly recorded and the oldest Leeds chronicle held by Leeds libraries covers the period 1459 to 1486. This is the only known contemporary chronicle and was written by unknown scribes. Only one sentence mentions the battle so details in later writings may not be based on fact.

The next known document is the Union of the Houses of Lancaster and York by Edward Hall in 1550. Hall was very pro Tudor so his account could be one sided. His opinion was that Richard, Duke of York, went out of Sandal Castle to meet the Lancastrians because he wanted to defend his honour.

In the Chronicles of the Kings of England by Richard Baker in 1679 the assumption is made that the Duke of York 'had too much courage and honour' to stay in the castle with the women and children rather than go out to meet the Lancastrian forces.

A Complete History of England and the Lives of all the Kings and Queens Volume 2. Samuel Daniel, who wrote the history of Henry VI, was a staunch Protestant, and he assumed that the Lancastrians were dressed as Yorkists and fooled Richard causing him to leave to castle to meet supposedly friendly troops.

The next documentary evidence is William Shakespeare's Henry VI Part III. This is a dramatisation and there is no evidence that Richard was presented to Margaret of Anjou and given a cloth stained with the blood of his son, Edmund Earl of Rutland before being executed. This appears to have been written for dramatic effect.

Another book in the libraries collection written by Stanfield in 1891 includes photographs of the battle site. Stanfield asserts that Richard Duke of York was lured out of the castle by the Lancastrians as he did not want to besmirch his honour and allow his followers to be cut to pieces by the larger enemy force.

Similar descriptions are echoed by Wagstaffe in his entry for the Battle of Sandal Castle in his work *Yorkshire Battlefields*.

Further reading is available in the Secret Library online, see link above.

### **The Battle of Marston Moor**

The battle of Marston Moor took place in 1644 during the English Civil War.

The background to the English Civil War was that Charles I believed in the divine right of kings and would not accept any limits to his authority. He alienated parliament as they were trying to limit his power. Parliament has to be opened by the monarch and cannot act without being opened. Charles would refuse to open parliament and at one time this carried on for 11 years. He would only recall parliament when he wanted something, such as to raise taxes. He promised that if he recalled parliament and they raised taxes to give him more income he would open parliament once a year. After being granted a raise in taxes he then refused to reopen parliament. This caused chaos across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

The Parliamentarians rebelled against Charles and, as the centre of their power was in London, Charles moved his court away to the North.

The parliamentarian Lord Fairfax laid siege to Royalist York for nearly 3 months. York was relieved by Royalist Prince Rupert on 1 July. The following day, 2 July 1644, Prince Rupert and William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle and their armies met with the Parliamentary forces led by the Earl of Manchester, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Ferdinand Fairfax and Sir Thomas Fairfax at Marston Moor, a short distance from York. The Royalists outnumbered the Parliamentarians but it was a close battle.

A major source of English Civil War material available at Leeds library is the Wing Collection which comprises over 800 items, leaflets, letters and pamphlets, printed between 1640 and 1700. These document events, politics, religious debates and social life throughout the turbulent period of the English Civil War. Donald Wing was Associate Librarian to Yale University between 1939 and 1970 and rather than using the Dewey system to classify texts by subject he used date. This means that a full picture of a particular period can be obtained. Many of the items are from the Fairfax family and the Battles of Marston Moor, Seacroft Moor, Leeds, Selby and the sieges of Pontefract and Hull are included.

In the 1906 book, *Oliver Cromwell and the Campaigns of Edgehill, Marston Moor and Naseby*, the author lauds Cromwell for his brilliant strategy in turning the Parliamentary forces on the left flank after beating the Royalists and returning behind the central vanguard of the Royalist troops trapping them between two enemy forces. The Royalists, in contrast, having bested the Parliamentary right flank chased the retreating army leaving their central troops undermanned.

Other useful information is included in the Gascoigne Collection donated in 1968 by Sir Albert Gascoigne in memory of his father Colonel Frederick Gascoigne. This comprises almost 3000 books covering mainly military and naval history collected by the Colonel.

One of the pamphlets in the Wing Collection relates to the trial of King Charles I. This shows the indecision about what to do with the King and ultimately concluded in his execution.

This was a very interesting talk and we are very grateful to Josh Flint for his time and effort.