

THE BATTLE OF SOUTHWELL (A note by Harold Brooke, Honorary Librarian)

We have all heard about the Battle of Hastings, Agincourt, Culoden, etc. etc., but what about the Battle of Southwell?

I came across the following account in a book entitled "History of the Kings" by Symeon of Durham, 616 AD - 1129 AD and continued from 1129 to 1154 by John Hexham, both of whom were monks in the latter half of the 12th century. It is therefore to John, Prior of Hexham that this account is attributed, as the event took place in 1143.

"William Painel, commander of the soldiers in Nottingham, marched a troop of soldiers to Southwell, with the intent to break down the wall wherewith the enclosures of the church of St Mary were protected, and to carry off the spoil. A great assemblage of the province, who had rushed thither for the defence of the place, acted courageously. There also fell by an arrow shot, one of the soldiers of the enemy, who was speaking in a boastful manner against that place. So this William went to the empress, in order that when he returned with a large force of soldiers, he might storm the place.; but, behold! In the darkness of the night, by the contrivance of two youths who had charge of the mills, the soldiers of William Peverel scaled the rock on which the citadel was built and obtained possession of the town and expelled from Nottingham all those who were in favour of the empress".

The empress referred to was Matilda, as this happened during the disturbances between Stephen and Matilda, and she had, in 1142, deprived William Peverel of the castle at Nottingham and placed in it, as warden, William Painel, with his troops. So, fortunately for Southwell, Peverel, no doubt being miffed at losing the castle decided to attack it whilst Painel was busy getting up a team to have another go at Southwell Minster.

This account also throws up some interesting questions – had the Minster been completed at this time? What was the wall referred to? How much spoil would there have been? Why attack the Minster?

Bibliography: Castellarium Ang;icanum – Kings Vol.II. Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia. Historia Regum. Vol.II. The Church Historians of England Vol. IV Part I. Oxford History of England – Poole, Vol III.