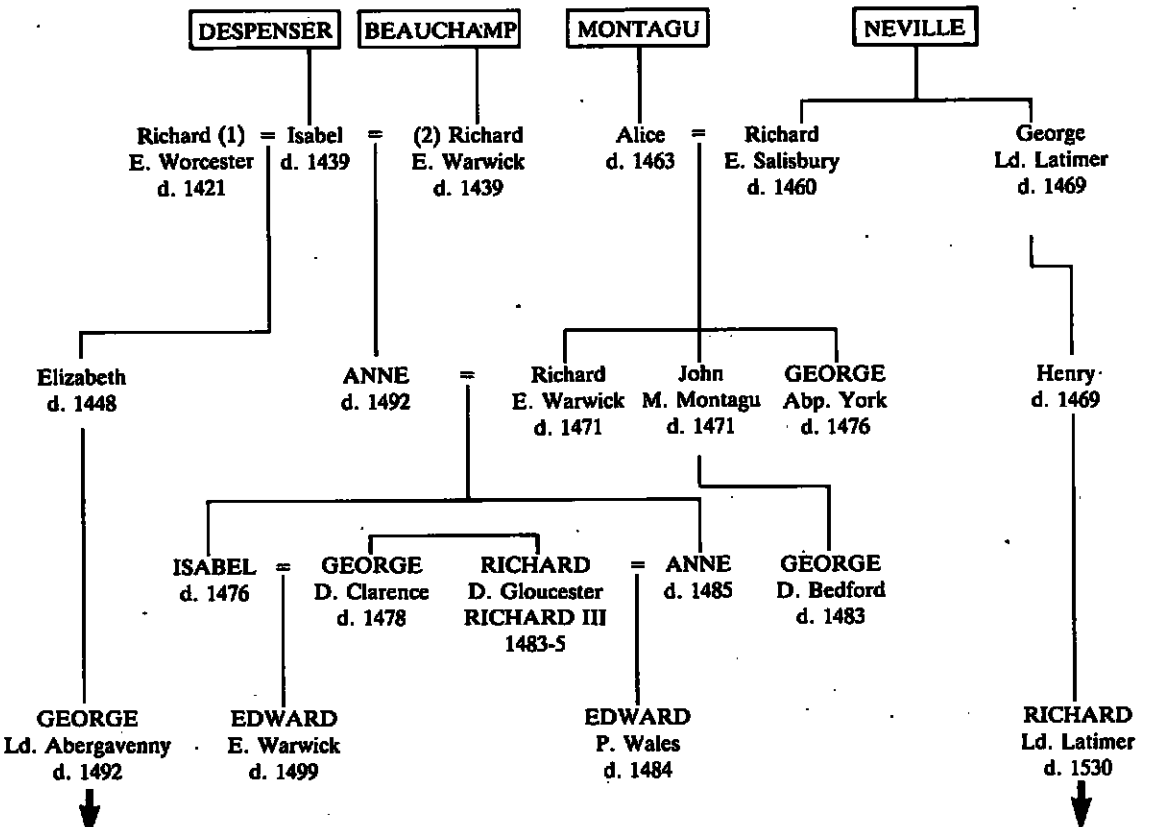
The Warwick Inheritance—Springboard to the Throne[1]

M. A. HICKS

RICHARD III's brief reign must be set against his longer career as Duke of Gloucester. He was aged thirty in 1483 and was presumably already set in his opinions and behaviour. Behind him lay a substantial military and political career in which to display kingly potential and to accrue the power to mount the throne. These thirty years had not, in all honesty, started auspiciously. Toothless or not, the nobility and connections were more than offset by his status as youngest son. He had the least prospect among four brothers of securing the resources essential to cut a figure in the world. His origins were turned to advantage only in 1461, when his eldest brother became king, he a royal duke, and substantial grants promised future prosperity and power. His endowment, however, took second place to Edward IV's overriding search for reconciliation with former foes, so that first the Beauforts, then the De Veres, and ultimately the Hungerfords retrieved their estates. In 1471 Richard had little to show for ten years of fraternal favour and his chances of doing better in future were obviously reduced by eleven further reversals of attainder in the parliament of 1472-5. There could have been rich pickings from the estates of unsuccessful supporters of the Readeption, but forfeitures were now recognised not to provide long-term security. Such hard-headed favourites as the Herberts and Lord Hastings had come to prefer the restoration of former traitors in return for a share of the proceeds, generally through marriage to their children. Richard was thus fully in tune with current thinking, when he set his heart on acquiring the Warwick Inheritance by marriage and made it, rather than his forfeited estates, the basis of his power and long-term planning.

The Warwick Inheritance was well worth the effort, for it was large enough to make its holder one of the two or three outstanding English magnates. Like all great estates, it was the result of a long process of accumulation, as profitable marriages and royal favours were repeated generation after generation. Of the four principal ingredients, the Beauchamp earldom of Warwick dated back to 1088, the Neville fortunes to 1131, and the rise of the Despensers and Montagus to the thirteenth century. Again and again marriages were arranged and entails devised to extend and


DESPENSER
BEAUCHAMP
MONTAGU
NEVILLE
Richard (1) E. Worcester d. 1421
= Isabel d. 1439
= (2) Richard E. Warwick d. 1439
Alice d. 1463
= Richard E. Salisbury d. 1460
George Ld. Latimer d. 1469
Elizabeth d. 1448
ANNE d. 1492
=
Richard E. Warwick d. 1471
John M. Montagu d. 1471
GEORGE Abp. York d. 1476
Henry d. 1469
ISABEL d. 1476
=
GEORGE D. Clarence d. 1478
RICHARD D. Gloucester RICHARD III 1483-5
=
ANNE d. 1485
GEORGE D. Bedford d. 1483
GEORGE Ld. Abergavenny d. 1492
EDWARD E. Warwick d. 1499
EDWARD P. Wales d. 1484
RICHARD Ld. Latimer d. 1530

maintain intact the inheritances for heirs yet unborn. At length, however, fertility flagged, there were only daughters, and all four inheritances were united by Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Salisbury, commonly known as Warwick the Kingmaker.

Logical and inevitable though it all seems, medieval land-law often blurred issues and fomented discord rather than ensuring certainty. Might as well as right contributed to Warwick's wealth. His Neville pedigree was ancient, but his own junior branch had advanced only by disinheriting their seniors, the Nevilles of Raby, Earls of Westmorland. Warwick's father Salisbury, the principal beneficiary of this, had legitimately acquired the Montagu possessions via his wife Alice Montagu, with the exception of those entailed in the male line which had escheated in 1429, were sold to Cardinal Beaufort and given by him to St. Cross Hospital, Winchester. In 1461 the Countess Alice recovered them by fraud. Warwick's own wife Anne Beauchamp, although the youngest daughter of a former earl, inherited the whole Beauchamp estate quite legally as sole whole-sister of her brother. As coheiress with another sister, she was entitled to a half-share of their mother's Despenser estates: Warwick acquired the other half by the simple expedient of securing the custody during the minority of the coheir, George Neville of Abergavenny, and refusing to relinquish it on his majority. Influence, brute force and fraud accounted for almost half of the whole Warwick Inheritance.

Those wronged waited patiently to make their claims good, but for forty years Salisbury and Warwick were politically powerful enough to thwart them. Both Earls, however, certainly appreciated the danger that one day the tables might be turned and they might lose what they regarded as their right. They wisely exploited their opponents' despair to achieve settlements, yielding some properties for a secure title in the rest: thus in 1443, after ten years of futile endeavour, Ralph II, Earl of Westmorland (d.1484) was persuaded to abandon his claims,[2] and in 1466 Warwick bought off the three Beauchamp sisters-in-law with nine manors. But other issues remained unresolved: only Westmorland himself, not his brother and heir, was a party to the 1443 settlement; the grievances of St. Cross Hospital could only be ignored while its Beaufort patrons were in eclipse; and only the *implementation* of the rights of George Neville of Abergavenny had been shelved — the crown had accepted their justice. During the 1460s, when Warwick was at the height of his power and several of his rivals were tainted with treason, he could settle only one dispute satisfactorily. Warwick could resist such threats, but could his heirs?

Warwick was not just the first but the last to unite all four inheritances. He had only daughters, Isabel and Anne Neville, to inherit the Beauchamp, Despenser and Montagu estates. They would need powerful husbands to fend off their rivals and to advance them as Warwick evidently thought appropriate. He had in his gift the valuable marriage of an important ward, Francis, Lord Lovell, but — apparently considering him unworthy of his daughters — married him to a niece. The spouse selected for his eldest daughter Isabel was George, Duke of Clarence, younger brother of the king, who obviously met both requirements. So too did Richard, Duke of Gloucester, if Warwick ever seriously contemplated him as partner for Anne,

although Anne's actual first husband — Henry VI's son and heir — was yet more ambitious. Warwick's daughters could not however inherit the Neville estates, which were entailed in the male line: the course of succession ran to Warwick's brother John, ultimately Marquis Montagu, to his son George Neville, Duke of Bedford and his issue, to Warwick's celibate brother the archbishop of York, and thereafter in turn to the Latimer and Abergavenny branches of the house of Neville. As Bedford was heir to the patrimonial estates and bearer of the family name, Warwick was interested in his future and was furious when his betrothal to the Duke of Exeter's heiress broke down.

In the short-run such rival claims proved academic, as Warwick and Montagu died traitors in battle and their forfeited estates became the spoils of victory. In distributing them Edward IV's hands were tied, since he could not overlook the interests of his brother of Clarence, whose recent support had contributed to the recovery of his throne. To Clarence he granted all the Beauchamp, Despenser and Montagu lands—all, in fact, to which his Duchess could have laid hereditary claim. The rest, the northern lordships of Middleham, Sheriff Hutton and Penrith, were granted to Gloucester, who immediately took up residence there and the associated responsibility for the West March towards Scotland. Gloucester also took over the Neville retinue, which had shared in Warwick's successive and ultimately unsuccessful military adventures of 1469-71 and was therefore in a bad state—depleted by death, fearful of attainder for treason, and seeing in their new lord an enemy, who had defeated them. It was in Gloucester's interest to rebuild the retinue and to earn its trust—thus to oppose any punishment for past political offences — and certainly he continued to employ those closely associated with Warwick's treasons. As we know, he was conspicuously successful, earning the committed loyalty of his retainers and within a decade ranging all the northern nobility and their clients behind him in the most powerful magnate connection in England.[3] It must have been a help to him that he knew the area and some of the people from his spell in Warwick's care in the 1460s. He cannot then have been regarded as a future lord, however, even if marriage was mooted between him and Anne Neville, since these tail male properties were destined for young Bedford, the son of John Neville, Marquis Montagu.

These northern estates provided a power-base and a large income—at least double those of Henry VI's Tudor half-brothers, for example—but for Gloucester they were insufficient. He wanted at least a share of the rest of the Warwick Inheritance and with this in mind first exploited the claims of Warwick's daughter, Anne Neville, and then those of the widowed Countess of Warwick herself. Their rights had been ignored in the initial share-out. The course of the struggle and the unscrupulous conduct of the brothers has been fully discussed elsewhere. In the final settlement of 1474-5, the whole Warwick Inheritance—except perhaps the Beauchamp trust lands—were thrown into the melting pot and divided equally. Clarence clung to the West Midlands heartlands and Gloucester secured the northern estates—now attractively supplemented by Barnard Castle—and the Welsh marcher lordships of Glamorgan, Abergavenny and the rest. These were not now to be held by royal grant, but by hereditary right, since Gloucester had now

married Anne Neville and both Dukes had fathered children. This hereditary title, however, was adequate only after parliament had overcome formidable legal obstacles by barring the rights of others: the Beauchamp, Despenser and Montagu properties were to be held as though the Countess of Warwick was legally dead; the Neville lands were to be held by the Dukes and their issue so long as there were male heirs of the Marquis Montagu living. Any prior claims—such as George Neville of Abergavenny to Glamorgan—were unaffected. It is remarkable that such an unusual parliamentary settlement should have made no amends to such claimants.

Richard's gains fell far short of his highest bids—for the whole Warwick Inheritance in 1473 and for the Neville lands plus half the rest in 1471—but these may have been mere bargaining ploys. He did greatly expand his holdings at Clarence's expense, but he did not get all he wanted. He was certainly dissatisfied with territorial provisions in Rutland and wanted a share of the Beauchamp trust lands. To safeguard the reversionary interests of the sisters should one die childless, the act of 1474 had prohibited any alienations of land during the Countess of Warwick's lifetime. Evidently Gloucester found this restriction irksome: had he, one wonders, sought Clarence's consent for such alienations and been thwarted? In the parliament of 1478 at which Clarence was attainted, Richard was allowed to vary this provision by founding two colleges and by exchanging the marcher lordship of Elfael for that of Ogmore, conveniently contiguous to his great lordship of Glamorgan. Later on he alienated property to St. George's Chapel, Windsor as well. With the Beauchamp coheirs he participated in suits in Chancery to secure a share of the Beauchamp trust estate, which had been created by Earl Richard Beauchamp (d.1439) for the performance of his last will, but which had been enjoyed latterly by Clarence himself.

Richard was first and foremost a great northern magnate, whose power was based on his wife's hereditary estates in Yorkshire, County Durham and Cumberland, in particular on his four lordships of Middleham, Sheriff Hutton, Barnard Castle and Penrith. He steadily extended his possessions, adding the castles of Skipton-on-Craven, Scarborough, Helmsley and Richmond and, in 1483, his crowning glory—a new county palatine of Cumberland and hereditary wardenship of the West March.[4] These last were his reward for his spell as lieutenant of the north and commander-in-chief against the Scots. By 1483 everyone who mattered in northern England belonged to his retinue, ready to fight the Scots or—as it proved—to usurp the English crown. The core of his northern hegemony always remained, however, his wife's estates in Cleveland and Richmondshire, where he planned in 1478 to found two collegiate churches near his castles of Middleham and Barnard. He had strengthened his title in 1478 by securing a quitclaim from Ralph, Lord Neville, heir apparent to the earldom of Westmoreland, but his tenure depended in the last resort on the survival of George Neville, Duke of Bedford, who died in 1483. His death placed a term on Richard's supremacy in the north.

Richard held the Neville lordships of Middleham, Sheriff Hutton and Penrith only so long as the Marquis Montagu had heirs living. George was the Marquis' only son. On his death without male issue, the succession would

pass not to Richard's own son but to the young Lord Latimer. It follows that it was to Richard's advantage that George lived long enough either to have a son of his own or until Richard had bought out Latimer's claim. Top priority was to prevent George from securing recognition for his rights and the reversal of the 1475 act by pleading his case personally before the Lords. Accordingly the 1478 parliament degraded him not just from his dukedom of Bedford but also from the peerage—presumably his father's barony and marquisate of Montagu. He was degraded because he lacked the resources necessary to support such a rank, an argument that was quite unfounded. His mother's inheritance was certainly sufficiently valuable to tempt fathers-in-law powerful enough to speculate on recovering his Neville inheritance. Richard's next step followed logically in 1480, when he was granted George's wardship and marriage, thus ensuring that nobody else could exploit his claims until his majority. This still left Richard with a painful dilemma. Should he try to marry George off, giving him the chance to increase the number of male heirs of the Marquis Montagu and hence of strengthening Richard's own title? The chosen spouse would have to be of equal rank, so that George was not disparaged, and politically impotent—but even so such a move might easily go wrong. Alternatively, should he leave George unmarried until his majority, thus risking a marriage thereafter aimed at disobliging himself? And should he not, in any case, seek to buy out the reversionary rights of the Latimer branch of the Nevilles? He regarded this seriously enough to secure a quitclaim in 1480 from Katherine Dudley, Lord Latimer's aunt, who could never have inherited, but he would have to wait until 1490 when Latimer came of age and could release his rights. Obviously he would only do so if George was still living. Whatever course Richard adopted—and we do not know whether he reached any decision—George Neville had to stay alive. His death on 4 May 1483 was a disaster.

At a stroke Richard's title to the Neville lordships was changed from hereditary to life only. When he died, he would be succeeded not by his son, but by Latimer. Long before his death he could expect his retainers to be cultivating the reversionary interest. Admittedly his son could inherit his other northern possessions, most notably Barnard Castle, and no doubt Richard could reduce his losses by insisting on a revision of the original partition, which had turned out so badly for him. But his northern power-base would be lost. If he was to continue to dominate the region, he would have to do so from his county palatine or other estates. Thirteen years of painful consolidation was jeopardised. Here is yet another reason for insecurity and resort to force. Six weeks later Richard was King and everything was adjusted in his favour. He now controlled the whole Warwick Inheritance in right of himself, his wife and Clarence's son Edward, Earl of Warwick, now—like Lord Latimer—his ward.

Richard's accession owed much to the skilful use of force—to seize Edward V, to dispatch his enemies, to overawe London—in which his northern retinue played a central role. Richard III, even more than Edward IV and Henry VI in 1470, owed his throne to the momentary dominance of a faction. Even more than them, he desperately needed to widen the basis of his support to survive. He had to draw on the allegiance normally due to a

king and on the horror of rebellion against constituted authority. He was lavish in his patronage, particularly after the Woodville inspired rising of autumn 1483, and recognised many claims designed by his brother—those of Buckingham, Howard and Berkeley, and Northumberland to the De Bohun, Mowbray and De Brian inheritances respectively, for instance. Similarly George Neville, now Lord Abergavenny put forward his Despenser claim, receiving—not Glamorgan—but three East Anglian manors instead.[5] The Beauchamp coheirs sued once more for the enfeoffed lands without satisfaction, although one of them—Lord Lisle—seized Chaddesley Corbett (Worcs.) and Kibworth Beauchamp (Leics.). If Lord Latimer's title to the Neville estate was advanced, it received no satisfaction. By conceding such demands, Richard could have added to his support, but at the unacceptable price of diminishing the Warwick Inheritance, still essential as the source of his personal power. His northern retainers, his Warwick affinity, provided the essential personnel—perhaps the only reliable manpower—for the government of the localities. The connection between inheritance and men was put to Richard brutally clearly by Catesby and Ratcliffe, his cat and rat, in a slightly different context:

> 'all the people of the north, in whom he placed the greatest reliance, would rise in rebellion against him and impute to him the death of the queen, the daughter and one of the heirs of the earl of Warwick, through which he had first gained his present high position.'[6]

Richard did not kill her—she apparently died naturally—and he did not lose the support of Warwick retainers like Ratcliffe and Catesby. Like Warwick himself, however, he found their backing not enough.

Throughout his reign Richard knew that the Neville estates would ultimately devolve on Lord Latimer. With the death of his only son in 1484, he knew also that the rest of the Warwick Inheritance—the Beauchamp, Despenser and Montagu lands— would pass to his nephew Edward, Earl of Warwick, son of Clarence and Isabel Neville. King Richard and Queen Anne showed little respect for Warwick's rights under the 1474 act, casually granting parts away, including no less than £329-worth to Queens' College, Cambridge. They did not, however, satisfy rival claimants, none of whom received much sympathy from Henry VII either. Latimer never secured his Neville lands, which Henry—quite unjustly— held to have been forfeited by Richard, who only had a life estate. In 1489 the 1474 act was revoked to enable the Countess of Warwick to release her Beauchamp and Despenser heritage to the crown, to the loss of her grandchildren. In 1492 the King's mother, Margaret Beaufort, heir to the generous patron of St. Cross Hospital, recovered the lands fraudulently acquired by Alice Montagu in 1461, but not for the Hospital but herself. The balance of power had moved sharply against the young Earl of Warwick, now stripped of all but an attenuated Montagu inheritance, which itself was forfeited on his execution in 1499. It was restored to his sister Margaret, Countess of Salisbury in 1513, again forfeited in 1541, and had a chequered career thereafter. By then the Warwick Inheritance of the Kingmaker, Clarence, Richard III and this article had long ceased to exist.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Unless otherwise stated, this article is based on my *False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence* (Gloucester, 1980), summarised in The Middle Brother: 'False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence', *The Ricardian*, no. 72 (1981), pp.302-10; Descent, Partition and Extinction: The 'Warwick Inheritance', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 52 (1979), pp.116-28; The Beauchamp Trust, 1439-87, *ibid*, vol. 54 (1981), pp.136-49; The Neville earldom of Salisbury 1429-71, *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine*, vols. 72/73, pp.141-7.
2. J. Petre, The Nevills of Brancepeth and Raby 1425-1499. Part I 1425-1469: Nevill v Nevill, *The Ricardian*, no. 75 (1981), p.426.
3. M. A. Hicks, Dynastic Change and Northern Society: The Career of the Fourth Earl of Northumberland 1470-89, *Northern History*, vol. 14 (1978), pp.82-3, 89.
4. C. D. Ross, *Richard III* (London, 1982), pp.25-6.
5. *British Library Harleian Manuscript 433*, ed. P. W. Hammond and R. Horrox (Gloucester, 1980), vol. 2, p.108.
6. *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1854), p.499.