

Richard III and London

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(This paper is based on the Quincentenary Lecture given at Crosby Hall on 11 October 1983. Both versions draw on arguments developed more fully in the study of the reign on which I am now working.)

AS ITS TITLE SUGGESTS, the main concern of this paper is with Richard's relations with the city of London when he was King. However, it seemed appropriate to start by sketching in his earlier connections with the city, particularly as it is sometimes assumed that his accession, with its consequent long periods of residence in London and Westminster, had the effect of dropping him into an unfamiliar and alien environment. This view apparently derives from Kendall's biography of the King, where the author's interpretation of Richard's career hinges on a strongly stressed dichotomy between north and south, with Richard happy and successful in the former and, by implication, miserable and unsuccessful in the latter.¹ This view in general is too crude to be tenable, as Gloucester's active (and successful) pursuit of influence in East Anglia, for instance, indicates. As far as London itself is concerned, there is no evidence surviving which would allow us to assess Richard's personal opinion of the city, but at least it can be shown that he was no stranger there in 1483. As Duke of Gloucester he had a variety of dealings there and there is no reason to assume that his attitude to the city differed from that of other fifteenth-century noblemen. For them London was at times a place to be avoided: no one with any choice in the matter would wish to spend high summer there. But at other times it was equally definitely *the* place to be. One can already see signs of the social pull which London was to exert on the aristocracy in ensuing centuries. To a great extent this was still a consequence of the political pull of London. Residence in the city gave convenient access to the centres of justice and administration at Westminster, including parliament and the royal council. For much of the year also it gave access to the royal household and the person of the King. To the average nobleman a stay in London no doubt offered a way of combining business with pleasure in proportions now impossible to measure.

Our knowledge of Gloucester's ducal itinerary is too patchy to allow any assessment of what proportion of his time was spent in London. Not surprisingly, he is to be found there when his own political interests demanded it, such as during his dispute with Clarence over the Neville lands. Royal business must also have brought him to the city. But not all his visits

can be linked with matters of high politics. He was in London, for instance, in late November/early December 1476 and may have been preparing to spend Christmas there. His presence on that occasion is recorded by a series of warrants authorising payment on various ducal purchases of cloth and fur, evidence of another of London's attractions.² But the fifteenth-century nobility were not only interested in London as a shopping centre. Most dabbled in trade on their own account and thereby acquired other links with the mercantile community. At its simplest this might involve no more than buying part shares in a cargo, but other nobles possessed their own ships. John Lord Howard amassed a considerable fleet, which he lent to the King for the Scottish campaign of 1481. Gloucester also lent a ship on that occasion, the *Anne* of Fowey, and is recorded as owning at least one other ship.³ Details of his trading activities do not survive, but he may well have traded through London.

For Londoners the presence of such influential visitors in their midst was a mixed blessing. On the one hand they could offer useful contacts, and this consideration was uppermost in the guilds' practice of enrolling noblemen and the like as honorary members. In 1462 Gloucester and his brother Clarence were made members of the Tailors' Company. The same privilege might be extended to those whose usefulness derived from their proximity to important people. In 1475 the Mercers extended membership to William Hopton and described him as an esquire with the Duke of Gloucester, an explicit demonstration of where, in their eyes, his importance resided.⁴ At the same time, the guilds, like the city itself, resented outside interference. In 1473 a long standing dispute between two members of the Goldsmiths' Company came to Edward IV's attention. The King evidently feared that it might have political overtones and ordered Gloucester, as constable, to investigate. The wardens of the company, alarmed by the threatened intervention, took immediate action to try and persuade Gloucester to allow them to settle the affair internally. Their lobbying, including £2 to one of the Duke's servants, had the desired effect and Gloucester remitted the case to them.⁵

Gloucester thus had a range of direct contacts with the city. But he was also the beneficiary of more oblique connections. There were by this date close links between the city and the court. Such links worked in both directions. London merchants are often to be found associated with the royal household, most obviously as suppliers or craftsmen but also holding office within the mainstream of the household. Both Yorkist Kings had London merchants among their esquires of the body, although merchants are more usually to be found among the yeomen of the crown and chamber. Conversely, it was not uncommon for members of the gentry, including members of the royal household, to engage in trade. Thus men with whom Gloucester's dealings were primarily political or tenorial might also supply a link with London. One example is provided by Avery Cornburgh, a member of Edward IV's household with a flair for finance. In 1481 he handled much of the financial side of the expedition against the Scots, in which capacity he inevitably had dealings with Gloucester.⁶ The connection was to prove profitable for Cornburgh, Richard III was subsequently to keep him in his

household and make him under treasurer of the Exchequer. But alongside this flourishing career as a royal servant Cornburgh was an active merchant with London connections, whose dealings with Gloucester gave the latter another link with the citizens of London. The cumulative effect of such links meant that when Richard took the throne in 1483 he did so not as a stranger from the north but as someone who already knew, and was known by, the Londoners.

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The events leading up to Richard's accession in 1483 were played out almost entirely within London itself, although there is no indication that the city played a direct role in the crisis. Most writers have seen Gloucester's seizure of power as a matter of high politics, with the Londoners merely called in to endorse a *fait accompli*. Even the London chroniclers take this line, in marked contrast to their efforts earlier in the middle ages to present the city as a king maker. This modesty could, of course, be explained as political common sense. By the time the London chronicles reached their present form Richard had been deposed and no one was going to rush to claim the credit for his accession. But Mancini, the only author without the benefit of hindsight in this respect, maintains the same silence. Although he was sufficiently interested in London to devote his final chapter to a description of the city, he ascribes to London no role in events beyond acknowledging Richard's accession, and his earlier comments leave the reader in no doubt that in Mancini's view the city acquiesced because it had no choice.⁷ This essentially passive role is at first sight surprising. The Mayor during these months, Edmund Shaw, is generally seen as a supporter of Gloucester, an interpretation resting partly on the financial support which he later gave to Richard III but mainly on his kinship with Ralph Shaw, whose sermon at Paul's Cross was the first public statement of the claimed bastardy of Edward IV's children. For the final days of the crisis, Gloucester may also have had the backing of the city's recorder. That office had been held at Edward IV's death by Humphrey Starky, whose appointment as chief baron of the exchequer in mid June forced the city to find a replacement. Their choice was a Lincolnshire lawyer, Thomas Fitzwilliam of Mablethorpe, who took office on 19 June.⁸ This was at the height of the political crisis and it would not be surprising if, as Tudor writers claim, Fitzwilliam trod very warily in his early days in office.⁹ However, it should also be recognised that Fitzwilliam had existing links with Gloucester. He had been retained as an apprentice at law by the duchy of Lancaster in November 1478, an office which must have brought him into contact with Gloucester in the latter's capacity of chief steward of the duchy of Lancaster in the north, particularly as Gloucester's responsibilities as steward included the duchy lands in Fitzwilliam's home county. The lawyer may also have had more personal links with Gloucester through his wife Margaret Harrington, perhaps a kinswoman of one of the Duke's leading northern followers, Sir James Harrington of Brierley (Yorks).¹⁰ Fitzwilliam's apparent association with Gloucester makes his selection in 1483 particularly interesting. It suggests that the city may have been anxious to choose a man acceptable to Gloucester, itself an indication of

Gloucester's political pre-eminence by this date.

There is no way of telling whether Shaw or, later, Fitzwilliam attempted to influence the city on Gloucester's behalf. The Journal of the city common council gives no indication of the debates which presumably lay behind the minuted decisions. On the analogy of other towns, however, the city fathers probably kept their private inclinations carefully distinct from their public statements. Medieval towns could not afford to be on other than good terms with the *de facto* ruler, which meant that political pragmatism was the golden rule in urban affairs. Given these assumptions, the chroniclers' picture of the Londoners waiting to see what happened rather than attempting to shape events is probably broadly correct. However, this is not to deny them all interest in the outcome. The Londoners certainly did not want to see a slide into civil war, which reinforced their pragmatism by inclining them to back whoever looked strong enough to preserve the *status quo*. Throughout May and June this was undoubtedly Gloucester, who was indeed careful to represent himself as the best hope for the stable continuance of the Yorkist regime. Whatever Londoners' private opinions of the Duke it was at least obvious, once he had gained control of the Prince of Wales, that his power could not be challenged without recourse to force, and they, like the Yorkist establishment in general, shied away from this option. This is clearly demonstrated by events at the very beginning of May, when news of the arrest of Rivers and his associates reached London. The Woodvilles remaining in the city attempted to whip up armed resistance, and their failure must reflect the attitude of the city as well as that of the political establishment. London's rulers might not want to identify themselves too closely with Gloucester, at least until his accession seemed inevitable, but nor were they prepared to countenance anything which might undermine his position, and this tacit acquiescence was probably as valuable to Richard, in the circumstances, as outright support.

Such acquiescence represents the city's official response. It inevitably conceals a wide range of attitudes to the new King among individual Londoners, and there were elements within the city opposed to Richard's accession. At some point after the King's departure from the city on his progress a conspiracy against him was uncovered.¹¹ The conspirators had planned to rescue the Princes from the Tower under cover of confusion caused by fires started in the city. The names of only four of those involved are known, but these suggest that the plot was not quite such a forlorn hope as it may appear. One of those executed for his part in the plot had held office in the royal wardrobe in the Tower. Another, John Smith, had been groom of Edward IV's stirrup.¹² This household element gave the scheme some feasibility. Richard III had taken over his brother's household virtually intact and it was to be one of the weaknesses of his position in these early months that opposition to him by former servants of Edward IV came from within his own household and not just from men whom he had already recognised as hostile. The description of the conspirators suggests that the wardrobe official at least, Stephen Ireland, was still in office at the time the scheme was unmasked.¹³ But support for the conspiracy did not only come from former servants of the dead King. Also involved was Robert Russe, described as

serjeant of London. He was probably one of the civic officers, although no firm identification has yet been made. The fourth named figure was William Davy, a pardoner of Hounslow, whose role may well have been to disseminate the rebels' intentions—a role played by mobile clergy in other medieval insurrections.

The conspiracy apparently came to nothing, with the four known participants tried at Westminster and executed. It was, however, a foretaste of the more serious opposition to come. In October 1483, while Richard was travelling south through Lincolnshire, word reached him of the disaffection of his former ally the Duke of Buckingham. Accounts of Buckingham's rebellion normally draw heavily on the details preserved in the act of attainder passed against the rebels in the parliament of January 1484.¹⁴ The act divides the named rebels among a number of centres and assigns a date to each rising, usually 18 October. This formalised version of events has generally been followed without question, but other surviving material suggests that the act is a serious over-simplification of the rebellion. In particular, the sectors adopted by the act conceal outbreaks of trouble elsewhere, and one of these omitted centres is London itself. The nearest centres included in the act are those in Kent and Surrey: Maidstone, Rochester, Gravesend and Guildford. Other sources, however, point to trouble within the city itself. The Croyland Chronicler, our best source for the reign, puts London at the head of his list of areas affected by the rebellion.¹⁵ More interestingly, the act itself includes a number of men described as 'of London'. In most cases their primary lands and interests lay elsewhere and their description as of London therefore suggests that they were active in the city in the course of the rising and earned the description in that way. Of the eight men so described, four had interests primarily in East Anglia (another apparently disaffected area omitted by the act). Of these, three form a group. At their head is William Brandon junior, whose father owned a house in Southwark although the family's main interests lay in Essex. Another 'London' rebel is the Brandon associate, William Loveday, and the third (who escaped attainder) is Robert Brews, who had links with the other leading East Anglian rebel family, the Wingfields. All this group were listed in the Kent sector of the rebellion, where the Brandons and Wingfields did indeed have connections, and it is tempting to speculate that rebels on both banks of the Thames (Essex and Kent) planned to converge on London. John, Duke of Norfolk, in charge in London in the absence of the King, obviously expected something of the sort and his immediate reaction on hearing of the Kentish rising was not only to fortify London but to send men to guard the Thames crossing.¹⁶ The group of 'London' rebels with interests in East Anglia but included among the Kent rebels look like the core of that aspect of the rising.

At least two other 'London' rebels were members of the royal household: Richard Potter and William Strode. Their inclusion points to disaffection among the royal servants in the capital, although the act again assigns both to Kent. However, although the act thus gives oblique evidence of trouble in London it is striking that the men around whom the trouble apparently centred were not, on the whole, Londoners themselves, certainly

none was a leading citizen. This picture is not seriously modified if one includes men known to have been involved but who escaped attainder. The Surrey rebel Ralph Tykhill of Bletchingley may have had London connections. Thomas Ramme, who was sent to incite Tudor to invade and was subsequently executed at Exeter, was perhaps the London draper of that name.¹⁷ There is no indication that a significant number of citizens was involved, and this receives implicit support from the silence of the London chroniclers. Trouble in the city did not have a distinctively urban flavour but probably focused on former servants of Edward IV who used the city as a base.

Buckingham's rebellion was repressed without difficulty (indeed it would be more accurate to say that it dissolved) and in late November Richard III returned to London and a civic welcome. From this point discussion of his relations with the city hinges on one subject—money. There was nothing unusual in this. Most medieval kings suffered from what in modern jargon would be called cash-flow problems, which they met by resorting to loans. Such problems were naturally most acute at times of extraordinary expenditure, notably in wartime, but were also a regular part of ordinary royal finance. Whereas the former might necessitate a nationwide search for loans, kings normally looked closer to home. Most recorded loans to the Yorkist Kings were made by two groups: their own financial agents (such as the Exchequer staff or customers) and the inhabitants of London. It is impossible to calculate the total raised by Richard III from London and its citizens. Two loans negotiated through the city itself are recorded in its Journal. In August 1484 the city acted as organiser of a loan of £2400 (£100 from twenty-four aldermen) secured against jewels and plate. In the following June, with the threat of imminent invasion, the city granted £2000 for the defence of the kingdom, the sum to be levied as a fifteenth on the city's inhabitants.¹⁸ Loans from individuals are more patchily recorded. The *Great Chronicle* provides some examples and others are recorded in government sources but the latter are incomplete. The relevant Exchequer records, the receipt rolls, do not survive for the whole reign and there is also the possibility that some loans were paid directly into the chamber, for which no accounts survive.¹⁹ On the basis of the extant material, the biggest private lender was Edmund Shaw, whose personal loans totalled £500. Others also contributed. In April 1485 Richard Rawson lent £54.4.2. A mercer, Rawson had contacts with the royal household (which he had supplied with cloth in the previous reign) and with the Exchequer, where the clerk of the pipe, Nicholas Lathell, acted as one of his executors. Rawson's family connections were with Yorkshire, where his brother Henry (of Bessacar Grange) held office within the duchy of Lancaster honour of Pontefract.²⁰

Such private loans were not, of course, made for no return. Although interest was theoretically prohibited by the church, it was normally taken, but concealed. Thus an apparent loan of £100 might represent an actual loan of, say, £60, with the difference being the interest. For the lender, the advantage of this arrangement was that he could sue at law for the repayment of the loan and interest while appearing only to sue for his loan. The disadvantage for historians is that, in the nature of things, it is impossible (without other

evidence) to discover the relative proportions of loan and interest.²¹ There is therefore no way of telling how much Richard III was having to pay for his loans, in other words whether or not he was considered a good investment by the London merchants. Interest was not, however, the only carrot held in front of potential lenders. The crown's need of money meant that lenders were well placed to benefit from royal favour. This could take tangible forms, such as a licence to trade on favourable terms, or it might be something which has left no overt trace in the records, such as a lucrative contract to supply the royal household. The possibilities are demonstrated by the rewards reaped by Edmund Shaw, which included a licence to import gold and precious stones without paying duty and the advowson of a prebend in St. Stephen's, Westminster.²² It was not, however, only individuals who could benefit in this way. The importance of London itself as a source of money helps to explain Richard III's grant of Southwark to the city, with a promise of £10,000 towards the cost of walling it.²³

For Richard III, therefore, London was primarily a money market. But how did London regard Richard III? No explicit evidence survives, such as the encomium which the city of York was moved to put on record, but one should not necessarily assume from that that London was unimpressed. It is probably fairer to suggest that London was merely rather blasé about its special relationship with the kings of England. By Richard's reign the links between London and the court were very close on all levels and royal activity in the city was taken for granted. London would have been upset if Richard had failed to offer favours to its residents or had looked elsewhere for household supplies, but was not unduly grateful when he fulfilled such expectations. For York, by contrast, close links with a reigning monarch were something of a novelty and the city was no doubt acutely conscious that Richard's death meant leaner times ahead. As for the individual citizens of London, it has already been suggested that their views span a wide range. However, after 1483 there was apparently no open hostility to the King within the city, a rule proved by the one recorded exception. On 10 July 1484 William Collingbourne and John Turberville in Portsoken ward sent Thomas Yate to incite Tudor to invade England. Eight days later, in the parish of St. Gregory in Faringdon ward, they prepared bills and writings in rhyme and ballads of seditious language and pinned them on the doors of St. Paul's.²⁴ One of the bills has gained a certain immortality, but the longer compositions implied by the word 'ballads' seem to have vanished without trace. It is not surprising that Collingbourne and Turberville chose the largest city in the country to stage their display, but there is no indication of any local support for their efforts. Collingbourne was from Wiltshire, Turberville from Dorset and it was probably there that the real centre of the conspiracy lay: Tudor, after all, was to be invited to land at Poole. As far as the Londoners were concerned, their recorded energies seem to have gone rather on preserving their harmonious and profitable relationship with the King.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. P. M. Kendall, *Richard III* (London 1955), p.127.

2. Public Record Office, Duchy of Lancaster Accounts, DL 29/637/10360A. The relevant section has been printed in the *Ricardian* no. 83 (1983).
3. PRO, Tellers' Rolls, E405/69; C. F. Richmond, English Naval Power in the Fifteenth Century, *History* 52 (1967), p.11n.
4. C. M. Clode, *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Taylors* (London 1875), p.157; J. M. Imray, 'Les Boncs Gentcs de la Mercerye de Londres' in *Studies in London History presented to Philip Edmund Jones* ed. A. E. J. Hollaender and William Kellaway (London 1969), p.166.
5. T. F. Reddaway, *The Early History of the Goldsmiths' Company* (1975), p.152.
6. *Household Books of John Duke of Norfolk and Thomas Earl of Surrey* ed. J. Payne Collier (Roxburghe Club 1844), p.4.
7. Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III* ed. C. A. J. Armstrong (Oxford 1969), pp.95, 97.
8. Corporation of London Record Office, Journal 9, f.26v.
9. Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. R. S. Sylvester (New Haven 1963), p.75.
10. PRO Minutes of the duchy council, DL 5/1 f.6. The recorder is undoubtedly the Lincolnshire Thomas Fitzwilliam who died 1497 and he is also to be identified with the namesake of Lincolnshire pedigrees who is there (erroneously) said to have died in 1494: *Lincolnshire Pedigrees* vol. 1, ed. A. R. Maddison (Harleian Society 1902), p.357; W. E. Hampton, *Memorials of the Wars of the Roses* (Upminster 1979), no. 172. The difficulty lies in fitting his wife, described by Maddison as Margaret, daughter of Sir James Harrington, into a Harrington pedigree. The obvious solution, that she was the daughter of Richard's retainer, is possible but perhaps unlikely given that she had a grandson aged ten in 1497: *Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem, Henry VII*, vol. 2, no. 2.
11. The details which follow all come from John Stow, *Annals* (London 1592), p.762. There are some problems in dating his account. He implies that the conspirators were seized soon after the coronation, certainly before Buckingham's rebellion, and their arrest and trial then would make sense of Richard's famous letter to his chancellor referring to men arrested for an enterprise: PRO, Signet Warrants, C81/1392/1 (29 July 1483). On the other hand, Stow also claims that they sent writings into Brittany to the Earls of Richmond and Pembroke, an activity which would seem to belong to a somewhat later date (and to square rather badly with attempts to rescue the Princes). In spite of these problems Stow's account deserves to be taken seriously, not least because his phrasing implies that he drew his material from the indictment.
12. Smith is the only one of the four who can be definitely identified. Described by Stow as groom of the stirrup, he appears in the stable accounts of 21-22 Edward IV as a groom of the stable: PRO, Exchequer Accounts Various, E101/107/15.
13. Ireland is untraced. He was probably not keeper of the wardrobe in the Tower, an office which seems to have been held by John Wharff. He may have been one of the two grooms of the Tower wardrobe's strength: R. Horrox and P. Hammond, *British Library Harleian Ms. 433* (4 vols, 1979-83), vol. 1, p.153, vol. 3, p.192.
14. *Rotuli Parliamentorum* VI, pp.245-50.
15. *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum* I, ed. W. Fulman (Oxford, 1684), p.568.
16. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. N. Davis (2 vols, Oxford 1971-6), vol. 2, no. 799; C. D. Ross, *Richard III* (London 1981), p.116.
17. Tykhill: Horrox & Hammond, vol. 2, p.48; *Inq.p.m. Henry VII*, vol. 3, no. 61. Ramm: *The Great Chronicle of London* ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (London 1938), p.235; *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History* ed. H. Ellis (Camden Society 29, 1844), p.196; *Calendar of Close Rolls 1468-76*, nos. 642, 1246, 1248.
18. CLRO, Journal 9, ff.56, 78v. There is room for some doubt whether the latter was intended to be a loan or a gift.
19. PRO, Exchequer Receipt Rolls, E401/950-954.
20. PRO, E401/952; DL 29/526/8390; *Wardrobe Accounts of Edward IV*, ed. N. H. Nicolas (London 1830), p.116; *North Country Wills*, ed. J. W. Clay (Surtees Society 1908), pp.57-8; Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Michigan 1948), appendix A sub Rawson.
21. The definitive discussion of the problem is still K. B. McFarlane, 'Loans to the Lancastrian Kings: the problem of inducement', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 9 (1947), now reprinted in *England in the Fifteenth Century: collected essays* (1981).
22. Horrox & Hammond, vol. 1, p.276, vol. 2, pp.207-8.
23. Anne F. Sutton, 'Richard III, the City of London and Southwark', *Ricardian*, no. 48, March 1975. I am most grateful to Miss Sutton for allowing me to see a revised version of this paper.
24. PRO, King's Bench Ancient Indictments, KB9/952/9. The salient points of the indictment were abstracted by R. Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* vol. 3 (London 1808), pp.422-3.