

A Local Dispute and the Politics of 1483: Two Reactions

Miss Isolde Wigram writes:

Dr. Moreton, in his brief article¹ on the dispute between Roger Townshend and Earl Rivers, takes a view of Richard of Gloucester's actions in April 1483 which ignores the evidence that the Woodville family were preparing for a *coup*. At the first Council meeting after Edward IV's death the Queen was insistent that her brother Rivers should bring the young King to London from Ludlow with a strong force, but was compelled to agree to 2000 only; and the early date of 4 May for the coronation was set, in order to prevent Gloucester becoming, or continuing as, Protector.² By the 30 April Sir Edward Woodville was commanding the Channel with a fleet, ostensibly to repulse French raiders, and was fortified with a good share of the late King's treasure thoughtfully provided by his nephew the Marquess of Dorset who was Deputy Constable of the Tower.³ Both Mancini and Crowland assume that Lord Hastings was soon in communication with Gloucester, and it was presumably his information which led to the King's letter to the Chancellor of 2 May, obviously drafted by Gloucester, issuing instructions for the safeguarding of the Great Seal, which the Chancellor had conveyed to the Queen, and of the royal treasure.⁴ When the waggonloads of extra arms in the King's baggage train had been revealed at his entry into London on 4 May, there can be little doubt about the intentions of the Queen's family, even if Mancini did not think so.⁵ All these facts are well known and hardly need drawing to the attention of anyone.

Mancini may indeed have been writing from hindsight about Gloucester's relations with the Woodvilles, but there seems no reason to doubt his statements that Dorset, Lord Richard Grey and Sir Edward Woodville 'had to endure the imputation brought against them by all, of causing the death of the Duke of Clarence'⁶ and 'All who favoured the Queen's family voted for this proposal [a council of regency] as they were afraid that, if Richard took unto himself the crown or even governed alone, they, who bore the blame of Clarence's death, would suffer death or at least be ejected from their high estate . . .'⁷ Mancini further reports that Hastings *advised* Gloucester to take the young King under his protection and authority and to seize 'before they were alive to the danger those of the King's followers who were not in agreement with this policy . . .'⁸ This looks like hindsight indeed, but it is generally accepted that Hastings kept Gloucester informed of events in London and moreover urged him to come south with a strong force — advice which Gloucester disregarded. Mancini certainly seems to have got the impression that Gloucester as Protector would avenge Clarence's death on the Woodvilles, and whether or not this was true, they acted

to safeguard their position and Gloucester, as a responsible leader and a soldier, reacted to moves already made by them. Incidentally Mancini specifically mentions Dorset, Lord Richard Grey and Sir Edward Woodville as being 'promoters and companions' of the late King's vices, and Gloucester's statement to his nephew that there was a danger that these men would do the same with him is thereby all the more justified.⁹

It may well be that Gloucester had no quarrel with Rivers personally, and his reputation as a just arbiter in disputes in Yorkshire may have prompted Rivers to lay his dispute with Townshend before Gloucester's council for judgment. According to the Second Continuator of the Crowland Chronicle, Gloucester also had a good knowledge of the law, as he demonstrated when arguing his case against Clarence for a share of the Warwick inheritance,¹⁰ while his first act as king was an exhortation to the judges to administer justice impartially, saying that he considered it was a king's chief duty to administer the law.¹¹ In any case, it seems extremely unlikely that Gloucester and Rivers would have fallen foul of each other over minor issues, and while Edward IV was alive and apparently in good health there would have been nothing special about the *date* of the Rivers/Townshend dispute even if contemporaries had noted any incipient enmity. If Edward had been ailing, Rivers would have stayed in London or gone to Ludlow, not Norfolk, depending on his motives and his relationship with Gloucester. It is therefore only with hindsight that Rivers' movements at this time may seem crucial, and Dr. Moreton's 'some notes' prove nothing about the relationship between Rivers and Gloucester. However, in avoiding the planned meeting between Gloucester and the young King at Northampton and sending the latter on ahead towards London for an immediate coronation, Rivers showed that he was involved in the Woodvilles' intrigues to deprive Gloucester of the Protectorship and to hang on to the reins of power by force.

Mrs. Marlous Thöne writes:

Dr. Moreton describes the actions of two persons in two situations. From their actions he draws conclusions about their relationship and attitude. In my opinion this is not possible.

In the first situation the country is at peace. The King is alive and his brother Richard is the second man in the country. Two people have disagreements as neighbouring landlords. They cannot come to an agreement and decide to place the dispute before Duke Richard's Council for arbitration. One of the two landlords is Lord Rivers, brother of the Queen, and Duke Richard is the King's brother. Their personal relationship is not important, nor is their relationship to either the King or the Queen. It is a matter of business and law.

The situation does not tell us anything about how Rivers and Richard regarded each other. Could Rivers have chosen another council for arbitration? If so, it shows that Rivers may have trusted the Duke or his Council to judge fairly. If not, then he had no choice if he wanted the conflict to be settled and it does not tell us whether he liked Richard or not.

In the second situation the King is dead. His son, a minor, is his heir. This was a potentially dangerous state of affairs and one of crisis, at the least. Rivers

and Richard play different roles in this situation. Their personal relationship is again not important, but their relationship to King and Queen is. They now belong to two rival groups. After Edward IV died, the Queen immediately ordered her brother to bring her son to London. She started plotting to take control and to exclude the nobility from the administration. According to Mancini, Hastings had reported the happenings in London to Richard.¹² So when Richard met Rivers the struggle for power had already started in London. Richard may have defined the situation as war: he made his decisions and acted. Rivers was a Woodville, of the Queen's 'faction,' and as such, an enemy. Whether he and Richard liked each other is not important under those circumstances.

If Rivers was really surprised when he was arrested, and not just pretending to be, it only tells us that his definition of the situation was different. In a 'state of war' Richard had no choice but to act instantly. He could not afford to await 'the tensions that would have developed between him and Edward V's domineering maternal relatives'.¹³ He would have been very stupid indeed if he had waited to see what would happen to him in London.

What Richard did to Rivers has happened throughout history in similar situations: during the Second World War Germans living in Dutch colonies were put in camps, as were all the Japanese in the United States. They were just ordinary people living in another country, but after the outbreak of the war they were considered enemies and treated as such.

In my opinion the two situations described by Dr. Moreton do not tell us anything about the personal relationship between Earl Rivers and Richard, Duke of Gloucester: the roles they had to play in each were basically different.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. C. Moreton, A Local Dispute and the Politics of 1483: Roger Townshend, Earl Rivers and the Duke of Gloucester, *The Ricardian*, vol. 8, no. 107 (1989), pp.305-7.
2. Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III*, ed. C. A. J. Armstrong, 2nd edn., Oxford 1969, pp.74-7, and *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486*, ed. Pronay and Cox, Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, London 1986, p.155.
3. Mancini, p.81.
4. Mancini, p.119, n.59.
5. Mancini, p.83.
6. Mancini, p.67.
7. Mancini, p.71.
8. Mancini, p.73.
9. Mancini, pp.66 and 77.
10. *Crowland Chronicle*, p.133.
11. *The Chronicle of Richard Grafton*, ed. H. Ellis, London 1812, p.113.
12. K. Dockray, *Richard III, A Reader in History*, Gloucester 1988, pp.58-60. P. W. Hammond and Anne F. Sutton, *Richard III: the Road to Bosworth Field*, London 1985, p.28.
13. Moreton (see n.1), p.306.