

Taking a Long-term View: a Note on Richard III and Dublin

HOWARD B. CLARKE

On 14 June 1485, together with other measures, King Richard III remitted the sum of £49 6s 8d (74 marks) out of Dublin's annual fee-farm of 200 marks, to be expended on defensive works and on street paving, for a period of sixty years.¹ Within weeks of the battle of Bosworth, the most senior royal representative of the house of York was taking a very long-term view of the military and municipal affairs of Ireland's principal urban centre and the capital of his lordship there. Not long after his accession to the throne Richard had Ireland in his sights, endorsing an arrangement reached by his predecessor whereby Thomas Galmols would hold the office of master of the king's coinage in the cities of Dublin and Waterford.² At the end of August 1483 the new king confirmed Gerald FitzGerald (Gearóid Mór), the eighth earl of Kildare, as his deputy-lieutenant or chief governor of the English colony.³ Gerald's term of office, however, was fixed at one year only, for the king was intent on making a personal intervention once he had a firm grip on England itself.⁴ Kildare's appointment appears to have lapsed on the death of the king's son in March of the following year and for a number of months he held the older title of justiciar.⁵ Upon the nomination of John de la Pole, the Earl of Lincoln, as lieutenant in Ireland in late August 1484, Kildare resumed office as his deputy.⁶

¹ CPR 1476-85, p. 537; J.T. Gilbert and R.M. Gilbert, eds, *Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin, in the Possession of the Municipal Corporation of that City*, 19 vols, Dublin 1889-1944, vol. 1, p. 32. The city rent was being reduced by 37%. The stipulation of sixty years was the longest in an almost continuous series of long-term murage grants and deductions from the fee-farm starting in the mid-1330s, A. Thomas, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, 2 vols, Blackrock, Co. Dublin 1992, vol. 1, p. 155; vol. 2, p. 85.

² CPR 1476-85, p. 461.

³ J. Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, 2 vols, London 1861-63, vol. 1, p. 44. The lieutenant was the king's young son, Edward, recently created duke of Cornwall, prince of Wales and earl of Chester, CPR 1476-85, p. 403.

⁴ S.G. Ellis, *Tudor Ireland: Crown, Community and the Conflict of Cultures, 1470-1603*, London and New York 1985, p. 67.

⁵ T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin, F.J. Byrne and others, eds, *A New History of Ireland*, 9 vols, Oxford 1976-2005, vol. 9, p. 479 and n. 116.

⁶ Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 74-75.

There was another dimension to Earl Gerald's authority in and around Dublin: he was also a freeman of the city. Just over three weeks after Gerald had succeeded to the earldom in the spring of 1478, he was chosen for admission at a quarterly meeting of the common council.⁷ During the latter part of the reign of Edward IV and throughout that of Richard III, therefore, common interests were being shared by the house of York, a number of powerful Anglo-Irish magnates, and the city of Dublin. This political conjunction can be traced back to the appointment of Richard, Duke of York, as the (Lancastrian) king's lieutenant in Ireland on 9 December 1447.⁸ The ensuing years saw many signs of a siege mentality as the colony contracted ever further: the defences of Dublin were reinforced, military guilds were founded, and various attempts were made to discriminate against and even to expel the native Irish.⁹ The assumption of the English crown by Edward IV in March 1461 and the swearing in of Thomas FitzGerald (father of Gerald) as justiciar of Ireland two months later represented a dramatic and simultaneous triumph for the house of York in both England and Ireland. The disaster of Wakefield had been completely overturned. Shared interests were expressed clearly in a charter issued by the king at Woodstock in 1464, when an annual remittance of £30 of Dublin's fee-farm was conceded for a twelve-year term,

because the frontiers on the march adjacent to the city are to a great extent devastated and destroyed by the English rebels [disloyal Old English settlers] and Irish enemies. The city walls are decayed and weak, the liege subjects and inhabitants are unable to sustain the costs of repair, in consequence of the continuous burdens on them in daily defending the land and the people in the absence of the king's lieutenant; and thus the city may possibly be lost, if not aided by his majesty.¹⁰

⁷ C. Lennon and J. Murray, eds, *The Dublin City Franchise Roll, 1468-1512*, Dublin 1998, p. 12; Gilbert and Gilbert, *Calendar*, vol. 1, p. 355. The roll omits to state the category of admission, but it was presumably that of special grace in effect.

⁸ The choice of Queen Margaret and her party was determined by a desire to grant responsibility for the remaining English lands in France to the duke of Somerset, J.T. Gilbert, *History of the Viceroys of Ireland; with Notices of the Castle of Dublin and its Chief Occupants in Former Times*, Dublin 1865, p. 352; R.A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: the Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422-1461*, London 1981, pp. 419-20, 508, 674-76.

⁹ H.B. Clarke, 'Anglores ipsius Angli: the place of medieval Dubliners in English history' in H.B. Clarke, J. Prunty and M. Hennessy, eds, *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms*, Dublin 2004, pp. 57-61.

¹⁰ Gilbert and Gilbert, *Calendar*, vol. 1, pp. 31-32.

1

Citizens of Dublin and their Yorkist overlords were in full accord, at least outwardly. England's Irish question had become, to a significant extent, a Dublin one.¹¹

The recently published statute rolls of the Irish parliament contain a number of illustrations of the effectiveness of this convergence of mutual interest during the reign of Richard III. Impacting on the city of Dublin itself were provisions made in the first of two convocations of parliament (meeting at Dublin and subsequently at Naas in 1484) for a major reform of the Irish coinage, including a new design and measures against counterfeiters. These last were necessitated in part by the activities of the former master of the mint in Ireland, Germyn Lynch, a colourful character originally from Galway who was also a member of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in London.¹² Significantly it was decided that henceforth the profits of the mint would go to the king's deputy in Ireland, who was then none other than Gerald FitzGerald acting as justiciar.¹³ His 'town' of Maynooth was granted market rights and customs comparable to those enjoyed by the mayor and bailiffs of the city of Dublin.¹⁴ The second parliament (meeting variously at Dublin and at Trim in 1485) concerned itself, amongst other things, with a problem facing the new archbishop of Dublin, Walter FitzSimons, who was licensed to appoint Irish clergy to benefices within his gift where Englishmen were unable or unwilling to minister to the native Gaelic, and presumably Gaelic-speaking, population.¹⁵ Longstanding socio-political realities were at last being recognised. Meanwhile subsidies, building materials and labour were to be procured for the earl of Kildare's new castle at Castledermot (Co. Kildare). When completed, as if in anticipation of Tudor plantation programmes, English settlers were to be recruited in an effort to recolonise neighbouring Co. Carlow.¹⁶

It could be argued, therefore, that Yorkist policies in relation to Dublin and other parts of colonial Ireland were being actively pursued during the reign of Richard III. To take another example, the 1485 parliament was much concerned with regulations governing the election and powers of chief

¹¹ The main FitzGerald stronghold was Maynooth Castle, only 18 miles due west of Dublin. A. Horner, 'Maynooth' in A. Simms, H.B. Clarke and R. Gillespie, eds, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, vol. 2, Dublin 2005, separately paginated, pp. 1-2, 9 and fig. 1.

¹² P. Connolly, ed., *Statute Rolls of the Irish Parliament, Richard III – Henry VIII*, Dublin 2002, pp. 20-23; T. O'Neill, 'A fifteenth-century entrepreneur: Germyn Lynch, fl. 1441-1483' in J. Bradley, ed., *Settlement and Society in Medieval Ireland: Studies presented to Francis Xavier Martin, o.s.a.*, Kilkenny 1988, pp. 421-28.

¹³ Connolly, *Statute Rolls*, pp. 16-19. Gerald is referred to as 'le bon seigneur Gerot de Kildare depute lieutenaut Dirland'.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-73.

governors, admittedly in the interest of Gerald FitzGerald and his supporters.¹⁷ The king of England had had first-hand experience of representing a monarch in a distant and turbulent marcher region, when acting as his brother's lieutenant in the far north.¹⁸ Accordingly it comes as no surprise that the final throw of the Yorkist dice was initiated in the Dublin area and overseen in Christ Church Cathedral in the centre of the city by Earl Gerald, Archbishop Walter, the mayor Janico Marks (Marcus and variants) and a host of fellow travellers, who promoted the charade that they had 'found' and crowned the rightful heir to the English throne in the person of Lambert Simnel.¹⁹ Members of the house of York – Duke Richard, King Edward and King Richard – had earned for themselves, rightly or wrongly, a sympathetic and near-universal response across the Irish Sea. Kings and magnates were routinely self-serving individuals, none more so than that most recent upstart, Henry Tudor, a man of French and of Welsh descent whose claim to the throne was predicated on little more than a forceful assertion: he said that he was king, and that that was that! These events did not escape the attention of the Gaelic world beyond what would soon be designated as the Pale: both the coronation in Dublin and the battle of Stoke were duly recorded in the *Annals of Ulster*.²⁰ Meanwhile, in the heart of England, that doughty Warwickshire man, John Rous, was busy switching allegiances and creating an outlandish vision of Richard III as a tyrant incited by Antichrist.²¹ The late king's own vision for Dublin in 1485 had looked forward in time to the mid-1540s, by when the humanist historians Polydore Vergil (1534) and Sir Thomas More (1543) had copperfastened his reputation, almost beyond redemption, as part of the national myth.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 50-53, 60-63.

¹⁸ See, for example, C. Ross, *Richard III*, London 1981, pp. 44-59; D. Seward, *Richard III, England's Black Legend*, London 1983, pp. 71-89; P.W. Hammond and A.F. Sutton, *Richard III: the Road to Bosworth Field*, London 1985, pp. 60-91; A.J. Pollard, ed., *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*, Stroud and New York 1996.

¹⁹ Discussed in colourful and somewhat unorthodox detail in F.X. Martin, 'The crowning of a king at Dublin, 24 May 1487', *Hermathena*, no. 144 (1988), pp. 7-34, based on a lecture given in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, on 24 May 1987. See also M. Bennett, *Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke*, Gloucester and New York 1987.

²⁰ W.M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, eds, *Annála Uladh, Annals of Ulster ... : a Chronicle of Irish Affairs, 431 to 1541*, 4 vols, 2nd edn, Dublin 1998, vol. 3, pp. 314-19. The latter report begins as follows: 'Battle was given between the two kings that were in Saxon-land this time – that is, the king that was a Welshman and the young man whom we mentioned before, who was called king in the town of Áth Cliath [Dublin] – and the battle went against that young man'.

²¹ A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 2 vols, London and Henley 1974-82, vol. 2, pp. 315-17.