

A Rebel Manifesto of 1483

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As far as the very sparse records go to show, one of the earliest pieces of evidence for a widespread revolt in the southern parts of England in the autumn of 1483 is a letter that John Howard, now duke of Norfolk, wrote to John Paston III on 10 October to say that 'The Kentyssh men be up in the Weld, and sey that they wol com and robbe the cite, which I shall lett yf I may', so would Paston make him ready and bring six tall fellows in harness.¹ It is not known whether Paston responded to the call.

On 17 October Francis, Viscount Lovell, wrote to Sir William Stonor from Lincoln. The king had warned Stonor to attend upon his grace with all his company, and Lovell asked them to join his own troops under his cognisance, if Stonor was to profit from his friendship in time to come. Lovell's men were to meet at Banbury on Saturday 18 October, and Stonor should prepare to be with the king at Leicester on Monday 20th.²

In all probability Stonor had already committed himself to join his wife's stepfather, Sir William Norris, of Yattendon, Berks., who was a long-standing supporter of Edward IV, and one of those who had contributed forces to Edward on Edward's return to reclaim his throne in March 1471. At that time Norris had been captured by Warwick's troops and taken to London, where he received a verbal pardon from Henry VI on 8 April, shortly before Edward entered the city.³ But Stonor's defection from Richard III, whose coronation he had attended, was apparently not yet known on 23 October 1483, when Richard issued proclamations from Leicester against, among others, Norris, his brother John Norris, Sir George Browne, Sir Giles Daubeney and John Cheyney, who had 'assembled the people for the comfort of the great rebel, the late duke of Buckingham, and the bishops of Ely and Salisbury', and intended Richard's destruction.⁴

Richard did not, of course, say what had led these men to take up arms against their anointed sovereign. William Stonor left no record of his own motivation. Nor, it has always seemed, did any of the other dissidents who were to be executed, or attainted in 1484. Possible reasons for the involvement of the various leaders in the rising have been much debated. Rosemary Horrox, for example, devoted

¹ *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. N. Davis, 2 parts, Oxford 1971-1976, part 2, no. 799.

² *Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, ed. C. L. Kingsford, 2 vols, Royal Historical Society, Camden 3rd Ser., vols 29, 30, 1919, no. 333, from PRO, SC 1 46/102.

³ C. Ross, *Edward IV*, 1974, p. 164 and *Stonor Letters*, no. 115.

⁴ *CPR 1476-1485*, p. 171.

a scholarly chapter to the rebellion and its participants in her *Richard III: a Study of Service*. Towards the end of her discussion she observed mildly that 'There remained an underlying sense in many minds that Richard had acted improperly in seizing the throne'.⁵ Following that seizure, those who had, in their innocence, sworn allegiance to Edward V as their rightful king were required to renounce that oath in favour of one to his supplanter.⁶ Some of Edward IV's former servants were reluctant to do so. Sir William Stonor had risen in royal service to become a knight of the body to Edward IV. So had Sir George Browne, uncle by marriage to John Paston. In November 1479, when Paston was hoping to enter the king's service, he expected to receive help from Browne, who was one of those 'whyche wayte most upon the Kyng and lye nyghtly in hys chamber'.⁷ One piece of positive evidence that four years later Sir George Browne, for one, was prepared to risk his life in the cause of Edward V has been overlooked because its purport has gone unrecognised.

Sir George sent John Paston a coded message.⁸ Some early owner of the manuscript defaced it by adding his attempted explanation, 'This seems to be some Advice concerning J. Paston's Loyalty & seems to hint at something done by him contrary thereto'.

The first line reads:

Loyawlte Ayme.

The sense has been needlessly confused by subsequent editors. James Gairdner thought that *Ayme* meant 'beloved', and offered the eccentric translation, 'Honour bright, my good friend'.⁹ Norman Davis accordingly inserted an editorial accent over the e of *Ayme*. The far more obvious interpretation is that *Ayme* is Browne's spelling of the first person singular of the verb *aimer*, so that the meaning is 'loyalty I love'.

Further down on the page comes the two lines, in very large lettering:

Be 3owre Howne
G. BROWNE K.

And then,

Hyt schal newyr Cum Howte For Me.

At first sight, Browne's brief missive consists of an innocuous, if oddly disjointed, statement that 'I love loyalty. For my part, it shall never be revealed'.

⁵ R. Horrox, *Richard III: A Study of Service*, Cambridge 1989, p. 176.

⁶ *British Library Harleian Manuscript 433*, ed. R. Horrox and P.W. Hammond, 4 vols, London and Upminster 1979-1983, vol. 3, pp. 28-31.

⁷ *Paston L&P*, no. 383.

⁸ *Paston L&P*, no. 800, from BL Additional MS 34889, f. 72.

⁹ *Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner, 6 vols, London 1904, no. 694.

In fifteenth-century English, as now, 'to come out' commonly meant 'become known; be made public'. Writing to John Paston I about 1450, the vicar of Sporle besought Paston to keep quiet about the matters discussed in his letter, 'that it be not proved they should come out by me'.¹⁰ And when Sir John Fastolf had it in mind to buy some land he asked Thomas Howes to send some trusty man to discover what it was worth and of whom it was held, 'But beware that ye come not out', presumably meaning 'do not openly reveal your interest'.¹¹

Correspondents often feared that a letter might fall into the wrong hands, so Sir George Browne may have deliberately coded his message so that it appeared to be nothing more than a promise to keep some undisclosed secret. But his elaborate presentation would, of itself, indicate that the message bore much greater significance, and in the context of his prominent reference to loyalty, his 'It shall never come out for me' invites closer scrutiny. A fire or a lamp could, and can, 'go out', and an implement or piece of machinery 'give out', or 'fail; break down'. 'To wear out' could mean 'expire, run out': John Paston told his brother in November 1472 that their mother wanted a new licence from the bishop of Norwich to keep the reserved sacrament in her chapel. 'I gat a lycence of hym for a yere, and it is nyghe woryn ough'.¹² 'To come out' could similarly mean 'to come to an end; expire, run out'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary* quote, as their only noted instance in print, 'The trewes commeth oute at October nexte'.¹³

So to an alert recipient Browne was conveying the message that, as far as he was concerned, 'It', that is, his fidelity to Edward IV and his disinherited children, would never be extinguished, and he was inviting Paston to take up arms in the same cause. Paston's cousin, Browne's stepson, Sir Edward Poynings, did so, and was attainted in 1484. Anne Sutton has long since proposed that Browne's *Loyawlte Ayme* had reference to Richard's *Loyawlte Me Lie*, which occurs first in 1483: 'the letter seems to sum up [Browne's] hostility' to Richard.¹⁴ If Browne's message was a sardonic riposte to Richard's chosen motto, it would be interesting to know whether it represents a slogan that was widely adopted by dissidents. Were similar messages received by others besides the unresponsive Paston? Sir George Browne paid for his loyalty with his life, being captured, possibly at Maidstone, and executed in London. He had been accompanied in Kent by Walter Robert of Cranbrook, who

¹⁰ *Paston L&P*, part 2, no. 470.

¹¹ *Paston L&P*, part 3, ed. R. Beadle and C. Richmond, Early English Text Society, SS 22 (2005), no. 1015.

¹² *Paston L&P*, no. 357.

¹³ John Daus, trans., *A Famous Cronicle of Oure Time called Sleidanus Commentaries*, London 1560, p. 241b.

¹⁴ *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1985-87), p. 75, and A.F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs, *Richard III's Books*, Stroud 1997, p. 271 and n. 25.

was accused of harbouring rebels in his house as late as 10 February 1484.¹⁵ What is certain is that Browne, at least, had remained unconvinced by the allegations that Edward's children were illegitimate.

¹⁵ J. Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third*, Cambridge 1898, repr., London 1972, p. 159.