

The Civil War of 1459 to 1461 in the Welsh Marches: Part 1 The Rout of Ludford By Geoffrey Hodges

The civil war which brought the house of York to the throne in 1461 included two dramatic events in the middle March of Wales, which for various reasons have been somewhat ignored. The first of these, Ludford Bridge, was a rout, not a battle, because the Yorkists collapsed in the face of a vastly superior royal army, a catastrophe from which Richard, Duke of York, never really recovered. The second, Mortimer's Cross, which will be dealt with in a later article, was 'an obstinate, bloody and decisive battle', in the words of the monument at Kingsland; it was a victory for York's heir, Edward, Earl of March, without which Edward would hardly have attained the throne.

The political fortunes of Richard Plantagenet declined steadily during the 1450s. His first armed attempt to secure redress for his grievances, at Dartford in 1452, ended in humiliation because he had fatally over estimated his support among the peerage. The mental collapse of Henry VI in 1453 gave York his first brief protectorate, but then Queen Margaret produced an heir, Henry recovered his reason, and the Duke of Somerset, released from the Tower, resumed his control of court and government. York's alliance with the Neville Earls, Salisbury and Warwick, gave him victory at St Albans in 1455, and the satisfaction of killing Somerset; but the ensuing Yorkist regime was short-lived. The court party was greatly strengthened by the accession of the vengeful heirs of Somerset, Northumberland and Clifford, the other magnates killed at St Albans.

In 1456 the Queen was able to end York's second protectorate. That August the court was moved finally to Coventry, whence the Queen strengthened the already considerable Lancastrian hold over the Midlands, Cheshire and North Wales. It is possible, however, that the King initiated this move from London through his suspicion of York, who was actually in the north that summer on Henry's service, because the King of Scots had broken the truce. York may not therefore have personally ordered the invasion of South Wales by his marcher retainers which took place in August 1456, an event vital to any understanding of Ludford and Mortimer's Cross. Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, had been asserting his royal half-brother's authority in the area, and was 'at werre gretely' that summer with Gruffydd ap Nicholas, a turbulent esquire who had occupied various castles including Carmarthen.¹ York was constable of Carmarthen, and his retainers acted as if he was still protector, with or without his authority; in the process they captured Edmund Tudor, who died that autumn.²

The outcome was, first that York was forced to lease Aberystwyth and Carmarthen Castles to Edmund's brother Jasper, Earl of Pembroke, who took over in South Wales after Edmund's death.³ Secondly, Jasper was able to retain the services of Gruffydd, which vastly increased his influence. Thirdly, York's discomfited retainers now faced the wrath of the court party. They had been led by Sir William Herbert, son of a former steward of the Mortimer lands in Wales, Sir Walter Devereux of Weobley in Herefordshire, and his son Walter. There were also Herbert's Vaughan half-brothers, Roger of Tretower and Thomas of Eardisley, Thomas Monington of Sarnesfield and John Lingen of Sutton, besides others from Monmouth; the majority received a contemptuous pardon.⁴ Whether or not York had instigated the lawless action of his followers, his prestige undoubtedly received a severe blow in Wales and the Marches, whence he drew half his revenues.

The crisis of 1459 was precipitated by the action of the Queen and her advisers in calling a great council at Coventry in June, from which York, his sons and the Nevilles were pointedly excluded.⁵ The decision was a shrewd one, and seems to have been prompted by two considerations. First, the Herbert-Devereux-Vaughan affinity in the southern Marches were evidently thought unlikely to support York: rightly, as it turned out. They had been skilfully divided by the Queen's policy of pardoning the Herberts, Vaughans and many lesser men, while punishing the two Devereux, Lingen, Baskerville, Monington and others with recognisances and imprisonment, though they were eventually acquitted.⁶ Secondly, the Queen and her advisers had been less successful in their attempts to drive the earl of Warwick out of Calais, where he was captain; his successful piracies were a growing diplomatic embarrassment to the government, making him also dangerously popular in England, especially among the warlike men of Kent.⁷ Warwick was now, however, effectively drawn out of Calais to join the other Yorkist chiefs, all implicitly marked out as traitors by their exclusion from the great council.

The Duke of York summoned his supporters to Ludlow, where he had been awaiting developments with his two eldest sons: Edward, Earl of March, and Edmund, Earl of Rutland. Both had spent several years at Ludlow, so were doubtless well known in the area by the people as a whole, and especially by York's retainers.⁸ Walter Devereux the younger was, however, the only leader of the 1456 affair definitely known to have come to York's aid at Ludlow. Though the duke had some support from the northern Marches, his political fortunes had clearly been reduced to a parlous state, by the Queen and Jasper Tudor, in the very area which was the heartland of his power.⁹

The Neville Earls only reached Ludlow with considerable difficulty, owing to the activities of the large forces raised by the Queen. Warwick came from Calais with troops of the garrison (the best professional soldiers in the realm), under Andrew Trollope, master porter of Calais, an esquire of long experience in France, and 'a very subtle man of war' in the opinion of Jean de Waurin.¹⁰ There were few recruits from Warwick's Midland estates, and Warwick narrowly escaped an ambush laid by the Duke of Somerset near Coventry.¹¹

Salisbury came from Middleham Castle with a small but tough retinue, many of them hardened fighting men from the West March toward Scotland, of which he was warden. The Queen made a determined attempt to stop him. She herself waited at Eccleshall in Staffordshire with her main army, and relied on a force of Cheshire men under Lord Audley to go against Salisbury. The young prince in person, as Earl of Chester, had issued Audley's men with the Lancastrian livery badge of the White Swan. Audley threw his army in Salisbury's way, and was defeated at Blore Heath near Market Drayton on 23 September 1459, he himself and many Cheshire men being killed. The Yorkist losses were considerable, two of Salisbury's sons being left as prisoners; Salisbury and his troops avoided the main royal army and reached Ludlow¹²

Once united, the Yorkist leaders and their retinues advanced to Worcester, where they took the sacrament in the cathedral, sending its prior to the King with the inevitable list of grievances, which was as usual ignored, whether or not King Henry, who accompanied the royal army, was allowed to see it.¹³ The answer was a pardon, from which Salisbury was pointedly excluded, probably because he had shed the blood of the king's lieges who had been slain at Blore Heath;¹⁴ they had also worn the livery of the White Swan, of which Henry was very proud. He used to grant it not only to his servants, but also, in the course of diplomacy, to eminent foreigners like the Mantuan knights.¹⁵

Henry may well have been angry at this affront, and there seems to have been a determined mood among the royalists. The Yorkists declined battle on the road to Kidderminster and fell back on Tewkesbury, hoping perhaps that a long and tortuous march might shake off the greatly superior royal army, or encourage it to break up; 'the kyng was mo thenn xxx MI of harneysyd men, by-syde nakyd men that were compellyd for to come with the kynge.'¹⁶ Gregory's exaggerated figures, typical of contemporary chroniclers, do at least show that the royal army included large numbers both of fee'd retainers and of arrayed men.

The royalists tramped ominously after the retreating Yorkists through Ledbury and Leominster, about a day behind them. The King was later praised in the Coventry act of attainder for 'not sparyng for eny ympedymnt or difficulte of wey, nor of intemporance of wedders'; during a campaign of thirty days he 'logged in bare feld somtyme two nyghtes togider with all youre Host in the colde season of the yere.' On the last lap to Ludlow, 'albe the ympedymnt of the weyes and streitnesse, and by lette of waters, it was nygh evyn' on 12 October before the royal positions were taken up on the Ludford meadows, banners displayed and tents pitched.¹⁷

The 'lette of waters' could mean flooding of the river Lugg, which would have affected either of the routes from Leominster to Ludlow. The B4361 route through Richards Castle crosses the grain of the country, with a switchback course which under medieval conditions could have been made very awkward in several places by minor streams in spate. The A49 is a likelier route for the royalists to have taken, as it has a more level course, but as well as the Lugg near Leominster, the Teme could have flooded it near Brimfield.

The modern main road into Ludlow descends immediately west of Ludford House to the bridge over the Teme; originally it seems to have run to the right, across the meadows, to the end of Ludford village street. Here the Yorkists, 'beyng in the same Feldes the same day and place [as the king], traiterously raunged in Bataill, fortefyde their chosen ground, their Cartes with Gones sette before their Batailles, made their Escarmysshes, laid their Embushmentes there, sodenly to have taken the avauntage of youre Host.'¹⁸ In this relatively gentle countryside, it is not easy to see how they could have surprised the royal army if its scurriers (scouts) had done their duty well. The 'grete depe dyche ...fortefyde ...with gonnys, cartys and stakys' mentioned by Gregory was unlikely to have been the work of a day, and was more likely prepared well in advance; but undoubtedly the duke of York's 'party was over weke'.¹⁹ How weak must be a matter of conjecture, but it might be reasonable to suppose that York had only half as many as the king: the retinues of himself, his sons, the two Nevilles and two minor barons. The king probably had with him the dukes of Buckingham, Somerset and Exeter, the earls of Shrewsbury, Devon, Wiltshire, Northumberland and Arundel, Viscount Beaumont, and Barons Egremont, Fitzhugh, Neville, Ross, Dudley and the new Lord Audley, maybe others as well.²⁰ Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke, seems not to have reached Ludford in time; but he may well have prevented other Welsh Yorkists from going to Ludlow, and also probably pursued the fugitives afterwards through Wales. He brought his retinue to Coventry for the parliament there in November.²¹ Buckingham may well have been in command, as he had been at St Albans in 1455, and was to be at Northampton in July 1460; he was the third magnate in the realm, and presumably brought a large retinue.

The banners of the King and of all these lords may have been visible that afternoon to the Yorkist vanguard in their redoubt on the Ludford meadows. The position of the 'grete depe dyche' may some day be revealed by aerial photography, but the lie of the land suggests that it was south of Ludford House, perhaps along a farm track past some modern houses. From here the land falls away very gently to the south, and also to the east towards the Teme, giving York's guns a good field of fire. The guns were discharged, apparently at random, into the gathering darkness, as if to keep up Yorkist morale. The signs are that this was low. To fight against an anointed king in person, as had inadvertently happened at St Albans, was treason, which to the medieval mind was tantamount to sacrilege. The Coventry parliament was later told that rumours of the king's death were spread, and even that masses were said for his soul.²²

In medieval history it is often difficult to be sure of when things happened, whether they really occurred as described, or in what order. Artistically it would be most satisfying if we could be sure that it was now, when dusk was gathering, that Andrew Trollope with most of the Calais troops slipped out of their place in the vanguard at Ludford and went over to the king. Gregory says that Trollope deserted near Coventry, seeing 'that the Erle of Warwyke was goyng unto the Duke of

Yorke and not unto the kynge'. Waurin says that it happened at Ludford, as a result of a letter which Trollope had from Somerset. Fabyan and Hall both agree that since Trollope knew all the plans of the Yorkists, the latter felt that the matter was now hopeless; Fabyan says that a council of war was held then and there.²³ The troops would probably refuse to fight, and even if they fought the result would be annihilation. Consequently the councillors may well have urged York and the Earls to fly, as the only means of preserving their part'. If this advice was given it was sound, and instantly followed. 'Aboute mydnyght ...they stale away oute of the Felde, under colour they wold have refreshed theym awhile in the Toune of Ludlowe, levying their Standardes and Baners in their bataill directly ayenst youre Feld, fledde oute of the Toune unarmed, with fewe persones into Wales'.²⁴

Whatever route they took, they divided into two parties: Edward, Earl of March made the momentous decision to accompany his uncle Salisbury and cousin Warwick to Calais, rather than to go with his father and brother Rutland to Dublin. York and Rutland escaped through Wales, but were evidently closely pursued, perhaps by Jasper's men, as they found it necessary to break down the bridges after they had crossed.²⁵ The three Earls reached Calais safely, whence under Warwick's leadership they launched their brilliantly successful counter-offensive the following summer, culminating in the capture of Henry VI after the battle of Northampton on 10 July 1460.²⁶

Ludlow had suffered the indignities of a sack by the triumphant royalists after the lord's flight. 'The mysrewle of the kynges galentys at Ludlowe,' writes Gregory, 'whenn they hadde drokyn i-nowe of wyne that was in tavernys and in other placys, they fulle ungoodely smote owte the heddis of the pypys and hoggys hedys of wyne, that men wente wete-schode in wyne, and thenn they robbyd the towne, and bare a-waye beddyng, clothe, and othyr stuffe, and defoulyd many wymmen'.²⁷

Gregory also says that many knights and esquires, including Walter Devereux (who is, significantly, the only one named, though confused with his father), came in their shirts, and carrying halters, to submit to the King and were granted their lives. But the Coventry parliament attainted them, along with all the other rebel leaders. According to the Yorkist 'English Chronicler', this meant York, Salisbury and Alice his Countess, Warwick, March, Rutland, three barons, nine knights and fourteen esquires.²⁸ Though York and the four Earls had escaped, the courtiers could now help themselves freely to the forfeited lands; the resulting issues of patents give us a very fair idea of which peers contributed to the rout of Ludford, the last triumph of the house of Lancaster.²⁹

The Duchess of York shared in her lord's humiliation; it is uncertain whether or not she was at Ludlow, but she had to submit to the king, and went to live with the Duke of Buckingham and his Duchess, who was her sister. Gregory says that 'she was kept fulle straye and many a grete rebuke', but was allowed to keep some of her husband's manors, including several in Herefordshire, so was not considered guilty of rebellion, like her sister-in-law the Countess of Salisbury. The *English Chronicle*, describing the punitive measures taken after the Coventry parliament met, says in the same sentence that 'the toun of Ludlow ...was robbed to the bare walles, and the noble duches of York vnmanly and cruelly was entreted and spoyled.' It is not at all certain that this happened at Ludlow, and one would have thought it more likely for York to have sent Duchess Cecily with George, Richard and the three girls to Fotheringhay, since things could well become dangerous at Ludlow.³⁰

Ludford Bridge was a disaster from which it is hard to see that Richard, Duke of York ever really recovered. The impression remains that it ruined his prestige and political credibility, which must have suffered anyway from the continuous failures of the 1450s. Nowhere can this eclipse have been more serious than in the Welsh Marches, his political heartland, which he had so signally failed to defend. It is significant that his heir Edward, Earl of March, apparently saw no future in accompanying York to Dublin; in Calais he was able to help Warwick, now the effective leader of the Yorkist party, with the extraordinary coup of the following summer which gave them control of king and government. York's regal progress by way of the Welsh Marches to London in September 1460 may have been encouraged, as Jean de Waurin says, by the seigneurs du pays de Galles urging him to take the throne; certainly by this time Herbert, Devereux and other Anglo-Welsh Yorkists were active in the service of the new government. But the reaction of his closest supporters in London to his attempted seizure of the throne was so unfavourable that he had to acquiesce in the role of heir apparent to Henry VI. This may be called a triumph in a way, but his general conduct suggests that his sense of political reality had finally deserted him. The fatal journey to Wakefield looks almost like a last gesture of despair which was bound to end in disaster.³¹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ralph A. Griffiths. *The Reign of King Henry VI* (London 1981), p.779, quoting *Paston Letters* vol. 2 (Oxford 1971), p.148; I am much indebted to Professor Griffiths for his advice and help. as well as for the wealth of detail in his book. The account and comments of Dr. Bertram Wolffe are also most valuable here. *Henry VI* (London 1981). pp.303-5, quoting R. L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster* (London 1966), pp. 178-82,228-30. Furthermore, there is the authoritative account by Dr. R. S. Thomas in 'The political career, estates, and "connection". of Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke and Duke of Bedford (d.1495)', (Wales [Swanseal Ph.D. thesis, 1971), pp.166-74.
2. Griffiths, pp.779-80.
3. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1452-61*, p.340.
4. *ibid.*, p.367.
5. G. L. and M. A. Harriss (eds.), John Benet's Chronicle, in *Camden Miscellany* vol. 24 (Camden Society, Fourth Series vol. 9, 1972), p.223.

6. CPR 1452-61, pp.360, 367, 594 (for pardons); *Calendar of Close Rolls 1454-61*. pp.222-4, for recognisances imposed on the Devereux etc. See also J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Biographies of the members of the Commons House 1439-1509* (London 1936) for further details; Sir Walter Devereux died in 1459, but his son was at Ludford, destined for a long career in the service of the house of York until, as Lord Ferrers of Chartley, he fell at Bosworth fighting for Richard III.
7. P. M. Kendall, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (London 1957), pp.35-42.
8. C. L. Kingsford. *The Chronicles of London* (London 1905), pp.169-70; F. W. D. Brie (ed.), *The Brut, or The Chronicles of England*, vol. 2 (Early English Texts Society, OS. 136, 1908), pp.526-7.
9. *Rolls of Parliament*, vol. 5, pp.345-351, gives the act of attainder passed at Coventry after Ludford, a full though biased account of the campaign, and the names of those attainted; these can also be found in J. S. Davies (ed.), *An English Chronicle* (Camden Society. vol. 64, 1856), p.84.
10. W. and E. L. C. P. Hardy (eds.), *Jean de Waurin, Chronicles* (Rolls Series, 1864-91), vol. 6, p.325.
11. J. Gairdner (ed.), *Gregory's Chronicle*, (Camden Society, New Series vol. 17, 1876), pp.21J4-5.
12. *ibid.*, p.204.
13. Anthony Goodman, *The Wars of the Roses* (London 1981), p.29. This article owes much to Dr. Goodman's meticulous account of the campaign, pp.25-31, also to H. T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (Cambridge 1915), ch. 5. 'The Campaign of Ludford'.
14. Goodman, p.29.
15. D. Chambers and J. Martineau (eds.), *Splendours of the Gonzaga* (London 1981) - catalogue of the exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, pp.105-7; in England the Swan was originally the device of the Bohuns, coming to the house of Lancaster through Mary Bohun, wife of Henry of Bolingbroke. It seems to have been the real Lancastrian device, rather than the Red Rose.
16. Gregory, *op. cit.* n.II, p.205.
17. *Rolls of Parliament*, vol. 5, p.348.
18. *ibid.*
19. Gregory, p.205.
20. *CPR 1452-61*, pp.532, 537-9, 546-7, 594 and 597; *CCR 1454-61*, pp.411 and 415 contain details of rewards given to nobles for service against the Yorkist nobles. On p.237, n.57, Goodman quotes Richmond in *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, vol. 21 (1977), p.74, listing ten barons besides two dukes, five earls and one viscount as receiving rewards. The Duke of Somerset does not feature in the patent rolls, but he was at Coleshill near Coventry when he nearly ambushed Warwick, and his presence at Ludford is at least highly probable. All this suggests a large royal army, 12-15,000 strong perhaps, with the Yorkists half as numerous. In *The Wars of the Roses* (London 1981), John Gillingham points out on p.45 that an army of 10,000 men in those days, with several thousand non-combatant followers, 'would be like one of the kingdom's major cities on the move.'
21. *Paston Letters* (ed. J. Gairdner, Edinburgh 1910), vol. I, pp.499-500.
22. *Rolls of Parliament*, vol. 5, p.348.
23. Gregory, pp.204-5; Waurin, vol. 6, p.276; Fabian, *Chronicles* (ed. H. Ellis, London 1811). p.634-5; Hall, *Chronicle* (ed. H. Ellis, London 1809), p.241.
24. *Rolls of Parliament*, vol. 5, p.349.
25. Gregory, *op. cit.* n.II, p.205.
26. *English Chronicle*, *op. cit.* n.9, pp.94-8.
27. Gregory, p.207.
28. *ibid.*, pp.206-7; *Rolls of Parliament*, vol. 5, p.350; *English Chronicle*, p.84.
29. See note 20 above.
30. *CPR 1452-61*, p.542; *Paston Letters*, vol. I, p.500. Rocking, writing from Coventry on 7 December 1459, says that the Duchess had arrived, doubtless to ask for pardon; Gregory.p.207; *English Chronicle*, p.83.
31. Waurin, vol. 6, pp.311-15; *English Chronicle*, pp.99-107, gives the text of the Act of Accord, between Henry VI and Richard of York.

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