

THE YORKISTS: The History of a Dynasty. Anne Crawford. 2007. Hambledon Continuum, London, £19.99. ISBN 1-85285-351-4.

This book is an overview of the Yorkist dynasty, straying into Henry VII's reign to include Elizabeth of York. It is an excellent text book for A Level students. The Yorkists are initially put into their context. Chapters then cover individuals although a chapter is dedicated to the influential Neville and Woodville families. It is shrewdly pointed out that, although the Nevilles could initiate Edward IV's policies in his 'first' reign, the Woodvilles could only support them in his 'second' reign.

Dr Crawford's view of the main Yorkist men is conventional. She sees Richard, Duke of York as 'a reasonably competent peer' who failed because he 'could not rise above faction' and lacked insight and judgement. She accuses York of not accepting the olive branch when offered but this is unfair. He did accept it but was denied his rightful place in government. Much of the book is devoted to Edward IV and he is admired despite his shortcomings. He is likened to Charles II: 'Both were sensual cynics, intelligent but lazy, and both were prepared to take large financial handouts from France to maintain their thrones and their independence from taxation.' Conventionally pious, he was not averse to acting against the laws of inheritance when necessary. He had restored peace to the country by 1483 and had re-established the authority and financial autonomy of the crown. Clarence is glossed over as arrogant and greedy although he is credited with some brain and being more than Warwick's puppet.

Dr Crawford's opinion of Richard of Gloucester is positive. She considers him a complex, intelligent and genuinely pious man yet paradoxically she seems convinced that he was a child murderer. Despite accusing him of being grasping in the scramble for the Beauchamp lands in the early 1470s, she does concede that Gloucester was probably no worse than others of his day; a refreshing comment. Indeed Dr Crawford is at pains to point out that Gloucester was a loyal and reliable member of the family; politically strong but a good lord and extravagant, generous benefactor. However, I do wonder if this is just setting the scene to emphasise the unexpected *volte face* in April to June 1483. She blames unwelcome Woodville influence over the new king as a cause for the crisis yet asserts that the Woodville plot was merely a smokescreen for Gloucester's personal ambitions. She believes that Richard was proactively plotting although she hints at Buckingham's influence over the duke. Interestingly though, Dr Crawford sees Antony Woodville, Earl Rivers, too as a ruthless businessman instead of the benign uncle as he is often portrayed. Dr Crawford is correct in stating that there were unprecedented reasons for this usurpation, however, I dispute her assertion that bastardy did not prevent Edward V from being king. She cites William I as the precedent but William became king by conquest, not through natural inheritance. She also attacks Gloucester for stripping young Richard of York of his titles but the dukedom of Norfolk was never rightfully Richard's after Anne Mowbray's death.

Richard III is credited with having the makings of a good king but his reign was overshadowed by the usurpation. Dr Crawford rightly asserts that the 1483 rebellion came about due to loyalty to Edward IV from the southern gentry. The infill of northerners into their posts did little to help Richard's reputation. She takes a sensitive approach to Richard's personal life. She suggests that Richard and Anne must have been close for it to have caused a sensation when the king stopped sharing her bed in an age when kings and queens regularly slept apart. However, that suspicion fell on Richard regarding Anne's death highlighted the mistrust that the king had provoked. Dr Crawford points out the lack of response to Richard's call to arms against Tudor but, as Paul Murray Kendall highlighted in his biography of Richard, it was the same for Henry Tudor before the Battle of Stoke and, unlike Richard, Henry was married with a son.

Yorkist women are portrayed as strong and taking a role in politics. Cecily actively supported her husband and had a good relationship with Edward both before and after his marriage. Elizabeth Woodville is congratulated on having a successful marriage and being the ideal queen. Dr Crawford, however, seems to toss off the bad reputation Elizabeth acquired due to her twisting of inheritance laws to benefit her family. Of Edward's sisters, Anne and Margaret were both women to be reckoned with: Anne divorced her first husband and Margaret ran Burgundy in her husband's absence and stood firm against Louis XI.

Two issues surrounding Edward IV are treated as appendices. Dr Crawford refutes Dr Michael K. Jones' theory regarding Edward's illegitimacy. Rumours circulating about Edward's illegitimacy she links with Warwick and says Cecily did not collude with Warwick and Clarence at Coventry but tried to affect a reconciliation. Indeed, she points out Cecily's self-description as Edward's mother in her will. The important issue of Edward IV's possible pre-contract of marriage to Eleanor Butler is discussed more

briefly. Dr Crawford sees it as unlikely because neither Eleanor nor her family protested when Edward announced his marriage nor again in 1483. However, just how many influential family members did Eleanor have by 1464? Also, why did Stillington too not protest at that time? Maybe neither of them felt confident enough to stand against a powerful and popular king? Dr Crawford's second suggestion that Edward could have gone to the Pope on the quiet to obtain the necessary paperwork to legalise his marriage to Elizabeth is also unlikely. Eleanor herself died not long after the marriage and Edward did not have a male heir to protect until later. This is an issue which really needed exploring and I was disappointed in its superficial treatment.

Overall, I came away feeling that the York family were complex and paradoxical. The women worked to keep the family together, effecting more than one reconciliation but the disharmony between the men caused the downfall of the House of York with the alleged final betrayal by Richard of Gloucester completing that downfall. As Dr Crawford concluded, Henry Tudor did not win the throne of England; the House of York lost it.

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