

Richard III and Scotland

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Richard III was king of England for only two years, but he enjoyed a much longer career as duke of Gloucester. Understandably, therefore, much has been written about his time as duke, both as a means of making sense of his reign and as a worthy topic of study in its own right. In the 1470s Richard became established as the greatest man in northern England, and this provides the context for most interpretations of his adult life before 1483. With this being the case, it seems surprising that Richard's relations with England's northern neighbour have been comparatively neglected. Certainly this aspect of his career is all too often glossed over in conventional biographies, although it has received more detailed treatment in some academic works. This article provides an overview of Richard's role in Anglo-Scottish affairs, both as duke and king.

Evidently, England and Scotland endured a fractious relationship in the later Middle Ages (the two kingdoms were officially at war between 1333 and 1502), but there were extensive periods of truce. The 1470s was one such period, as the respective kings of England and Scotland, Edward IV and James III, both recognised the benefits of peace. From Edward's point of view, a quiet northern border would give him a free hand to pursue his ambitions on the continent, which culminated in his abortive invasion of France in 1475. For James, peace with the 'auld enemy' confirmed his kingdom's restoration to its ancient boundaries (as the Lancastrians had surrendered Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1461). In 1474 the two kings agreed to the renewal of an unusually long truce, which was supposed to last until 1519. This was to be accompanied in time by a marriage between James's eldest son (the future James IV) and Edward's daughter Cecily.

The peace policy was controversial, however, on both sides of the border. Anglophobic sentiments are virulently expressed, for example, in Blind Harry's *Wallace*: a contemporary poem which eulogises its hero's struggle against the English. Harry is an obscure figure, but it has been suggested that his work reflects the attitudes of his Scottish patrons, who were probably Border lords¹. Opposition was particularly associated with James's own brother, Alexander, duke of Albany, who eventually became estranged from the king. This hostility was mirrored in England, as many northern nobles saw Anglo-Scottish warfare as a natural aspect of their lives. Moreover, while as Warden of the West March he had an obligation to keep the peace, there are some indications that Richard himself was sceptical about the merits of an extended truce². Given that he spent formative years in the household of Warwick 'the Kingmaker', it seems possible that his own attitude towards Scotland was influenced by the values and traditions of the northern aristocracy (at least in part).

By the end of the 1470s the peace was breaking down. The Scots were particularly vexed by the problem of English piracy, and the failure of the English crown to make effective reparations. However, there were also some shocking breaches of the truce from the Scottish side – notably in 1479, when an English border official was killed at a cross-border meeting. This almost certainly occurred with the connivance of Albany, even though he was a March warden himself. In 1480

¹ Norman Macdougall, *James III*, Edinburgh, 2009, pp 159–60.

² See A. J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England during the Wars of the Roses*, Oxford, 1990, pp 233–5.

Edward IV's patience appears to have snapped; early in the year he sent an embassy to Scotland, demanding homage, the return of Berwick and the delivery of James's heir (to ensure that the projected marriage would still proceed). Unsurprisingly, none of Edward's demands were met, and another war became inevitable.

On the English side, Richard took on much of the burden of command, although the efforts of others should also be acknowledged; there was also a fierce war at sea, with Sir John Howard especially prominent. The emphasis on sea power was something of an innovation, anticipating English tactics in the Tudor period, but on land the war followed a more familiar pattern: there were a series of raids and counter-raids. In May 1482 Richard led a destructive incursion into south-west Scotland, and the town of Dumfries was put to the flames.

Richard's conduct of operations on the Border was conventional, although it has been argued that he exhibited a considerable flair for military organisation³. He also appears to have put in place an effective system for gathering intelligence, which provided advance warning of Scottish attacks; this ensured that no Scottish army was able to penetrate more than 20 miles into England. Richard's later defeat of 'Buckingham's Rebellion' was heavily dependent on the use of spies and more conventional surveillance, and it would seem that he had previously established a similar network in the north.

Anglo-Scottish conflict intensified in the summer of 1482. By this time the duke of Albany had fled Scotland, to avoid James III's wrath, and he spent some time in France. But he then sought refuge in England, which is rather ironic, given his previous opposition to the Anglo-Scottish peace. By the terms of the Treaty of Fotheringhay, in June, Edward IV agreed to support Albany in a bid to take the Scottish throne. In return, Albany agreed to swear homage to Edward as overlord, and also to give up large parts of southern Scotland. Extensive military preparations were already well advanced, and command of the ensuing expedition was delegated to Richard.

Richard's army was over 20,000 strong: this was one of the largest medieval English armies ever to have invaded Scotland. It included a strong contingent of mercenaries, and it was also well supplied with guns. This all sounds very impressive, but Richard was somewhat hampered by the fact that his forces were only granted wages for around four weeks. Presumably Edward expected Richard to engage the Scots and win a decisive battle, adopting the aggressive tactics that the Yorkists had used to such good effect in the Wars of the Roses. By contrast, in many earlier campaigns the Scots had made a virtue of avoiding battle – as well as exploiting the Scottish landscape and weather – yet for a while it seemed as though Edward would have his wish.

Richard was at Alnwick by 17 July, and in the following days the campaign was set in motion⁴. Lord Stanley and 4,000 men were detached to besiege Berwick, while two divisions under Richard and the earl of Northumberland advanced into Scotland proper⁵. The chronicle of Edward Hall includes the names of over 60 Scottish settlements burnt by the English, as King James gathered his forces and prepared to meet them.

³ Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 243.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the movements of the English forces, see Patricia Payne and Sandra Pendlington, 'The 1482 Invasion of Scotland', *The Court Journal*, 15, Spring 2015, pp 19-35.

⁵ In the light of later events at Bosworth (as well as earlier tensions between Richard and the Stanleys) it is striking that on this occasion the three magnates appear to have established an effective working relationship.

What happened next was almost farcical. A group of disaffected Scottish lords took advantage of their strength at the muster, and they arrested King James at Lauder. A number of James's favourites were hanged from the town's bridge. Most of the Scottish army was disbanded, and the king was imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. This placed Richard in a difficult position. He followed to Edinburgh with much of his own army – and took control of the city – but with supplies and money running short, he lacked the resources to consider besieging the castle. It also became clear that Albany was now keen to reach an accommodation with the Scottish lords, negating the stated aim of Richard's expedition.



The ruins of Berwick Castle.
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Richard decided to withdraw – although he first negotiated an agreement with the burgesses of Edinburgh, committing them to the repayment of Princess Cecily's dowry if the projected marriage did not go ahead. Richard was then able to complete the capture of Berwick with a reduced force (Lord Stanley had quickly taken the town, but the castle had continued in resistance), and it has remained in English hands ever since.

Shortly afterwards, Edward IV wrote to inform the Pope of the success at Berwick, praising Richard in extravagant terms. However, the second continuator of the *Crowland Chronicle* offered a somewhat different assessment of Richard's achievements, and what they meant to his brother:

King Edward was grieved at the frivolous expenditure of so much money, although the recapture of Berwick alleviated his grief for a time⁶.

The chronicler also referred to Berwick as a 'trifling gain, or more accurately loss', because he also resented the money that was spent on its defence.

Several modern historians have followed Crowland's lead, although we should be wary of giving too much weight to his testimony. Given he was considering events from much further south, it seems possible that he failed to appreciate the strategic and symbolic importance of Berwick. Moreover, it is no longer universally accepted that Crowland was a well informed insider at the heart of the Yorkist regime⁷. At any rate, it seems very clear that Richard himself anticipated a long-term role in the Anglo-Scottish border region, continuing the war with Scotland, and that Edward endorsed this.

In January 1483, Richard's wardenship of the West March became a hereditary office; he was also given effective control of the city of Carlisle, as well as all other royal rights and possessions in Cumberland. But more significantly, he was also granted any lands that he might be able to conquer in south-western Scotland, as far north as the Clyde, and these would be held as a hereditary palatinate: a quasi-independent principality⁸.

⁶ Nicholas Pronay and John Cox (eds), *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, London, 1986, p. 149.

⁷ For a persuasive argument that the second continuation was written, after all, by a monk of Crowland, see Alison Hanham, 'The Mysterious Affair at Crowland Abbey', *The Ricardian*, XVIII, 2008, pp 1–20.

⁸ The preamble to the Act of Parliament suggests that Richard had already begun the task of conquest, having 'subdued great parts of the west marches of Scotland . . . by the space of thirty miles and more'. Quoted in Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 243.



Richard III outside Edinburgh, from a painting by Gerry Hitch

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Richard's palatinate might conceivably be seen as a reward from Edward IV for good service, but it also surely reflected Richard's own ambitions – and these were ambitions that would have been widely understood in a late medieval context. Firstly, it is often forgotten that Richard's hold on some of his northern estates was precarious, so the grant raised the prospect of a more secure inheritance for Richard's heirs. Secondly, the Scottish war provided an opportunity to gain martial honour: it has been well established that Richard sought to embody the prevailing 'chivalric' virtues of the day⁹. In time, though, Richard would have needed to present himself as a cross-border lord, as well as an English warrior. In this respect, his devotion to the Scottish Saint Ninian might well have helped. It must be stressed, however, that Richard's interest in Ninian was relatively longstanding, and is unlikely to have been adopted with political gain in mind¹⁰.

All of this raises a number of interesting 'what if's, but of course Richard's plans were interrupted by the sudden death of Edward IV. As king, naturally Richard's perspective changed, but his attitude towards Scotland remained aggressive¹¹. By February 1484, having so far crushed any opposition to his rule, Richard was making serious plans to lead another invasion of Scotland. While this expedition never materialised, there was further conflict at sea. For much of the summer Richard was based at Scarborough, from where he supervised the activities of an English fleet. In early July his naval forces defeated the Scots off the Yorkshire coast.

⁹ Michael Jones has written extensively about this aspect of Richard's life. For his most recent discussion of Richard's military career, which includes a revision of some of his earlier arguments, see Philippa Langley and Michael Jones, *The King's Grave: the search for Richard III*, London, 2013, especially pp 190–6.

¹⁰ Sandra Pendlington, 'Richard III and St Ninian', *Ricardian Bulletin*, December 2016, pp 56–8.

¹¹ For a fuller account of Anglo-Scottish relations in Richard's reign see Alexander Grant, 'Richard III and Scotland', in *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*, ed. A. J. Pollard, Stroud, 1996, pp 126–47.

On this occasion Crowland was more complimentary, describing the English naval victory as a 'remarkable success'¹², although this was offset by other developments. By this point the Scots and French had renewed the 'Auld Alliance', restating the longstanding connection between England's traditional enemies, and Richard's position was weakened by the death of his son. This was the political context for the Anglo-Scottish negotiations at Nottingham in September 1484, at which a three-year truce was agreed. There were also renewed plans for a dynastic marriage, between the future James IV and Richard's niece Anne de la Pole.

The Nottingham settlement also encompassed other matters. The level of detail in the agreement – concerning the operation of border courts and so on – is perhaps reflective of Richard's own experience in northern England. Provision was made for ongoing discussions about local issues, such as fishing rights on the River Esk, demonstrating that Richard could sometimes adopt a more constructive approach to Anglo-Scottish affairs¹³. By this time, too, James III had reasserted control in Scotland, having survived the crisis of 1482, and he continued to prefer diplomacy to war; he offered conciliatory words throughout Richard's reign – in spite of his chagrin at the loss of Berwick. Nevertheless, one might well imagine that he expected Richard to revive his military schemes in time – as did the French, who by this point were giving shelter to Henry Tudor.

Scotland remained officially neutral when Tudor invaded England in 1485, although there does also appear to have been a large contingent of Scots in Tudor's army – even if they were fighting without the explicit endorsement of their king. According to the chronicler Pitscottie, writing in the sixteenth century, one of the Scots at Bosworth was a highlander called Macgregor¹⁴. During the night before the battle, it is said that Macgregor somehow managed to steal Richard's crown, but he was quickly captured and brought before the king.

Richard sternly asked Macgregor how he had dared to carry out such an act. Macgregor responded that when he was a boy, his mother had foretold that one day he would be hanged. With that being the case, he had concluded that he might as well be hanged for doing something memorable! Apparently this caused great amusement on the part of Richard and his lords, and he granted Macgregor an immediate pardon.

As is the case with most of Pitscottie's anecdotes, we should probably take this story with a pinch of salt. Even so, it may be that readers of the *Bulletin* will appreciate a source that depicts Richard in good spirits on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth, as opposed to the haunted and beleaguered figure that is encountered in more traditional accounts.

What then was the significance of Richard's role in Anglo-Scottish affairs? First, while few modern writers would seriously argue otherwise, it certainly gives the lie to the Shakespearian notion that Richard coveted the English throne before 1483; whereas we cannot be certain that he would have been successful in his endeavours, it was surely in the far north of England – and also in southern Scotland – that Richard saw a long-term future for himself and his heirs. Moreover, as Sean Cunningham has recently argued, in the Scottish wars of the early 1480s Richard gained valuable

¹² *Crowland Chronicle*, p. 173.

¹³ It has also been argued that Richard saw the agreement as a means of maintaining his own power in the north, rather than delegating authority to border magnates. Grant, 'Richard III and Scotland', pp 143–5.

¹⁴ Discussed in Norman Macdougall, 'Richard III and James III, Contemporary Monarch, Parallel Mythologies', in *Richard III: loyalty, lordship and law*, ed. P. W. Hammond, London, 2000, 2nd edn, p. 198.

experience of independent command (quickly adapting his strategy when necessary), as well as enhancing his reputation as a leader of men: this must be seen as a vital factor in the events that followed Edward IV's death, irrespective of Richard's motives¹⁵.

Writing 30 years later, it is striking that the northern Lord Dacre still saw Richard's conduct in the Anglo-Scottish Borders as an example to be followed – even when he was addressing a Tudor king. In October 1513 he outlined his plan to lead a foray into Scottish Teviotdale, stressing that Richard and the earl of Northumberland had considered a similar raid to be a 'great enterprise'¹⁶. Finally, therefore, we are reminded that even if Richard had never been given cause or opportunity to take the English throne, his name would still be remembered by historians today.

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¹⁵ Sean Cunningham, 'The Yorkists at War: military leadership in the English war with Scotland 1480–82', in *The Yorkist Age*, ed. Hannes Kleineke and Christian Steer, Donnington, 2013, especially pp 193–4.

¹⁶ 'Henry VIII: October 1513, 11–20', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 1, 1509–1514*, ed. J. S. Brewer, London, 1920, pp 1046–55. British History Online, www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol1/pp1046-1055 [accessed 31 March 2017].