“Restore order. Come thyself, valiant Edward, and check the oppressors.” In what ways did the Yorkist kings court Welsh support and how crucial was maintaining this support to their hold on the English crown?

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“Restore order. Come thyself, valiant Edward, and check the oppressors.” In what ways did the Yorkist kings court Welsh support and how crucial was maintaining this support to their hold on the English crown?

A329 End of Module Assessment

Katie Dungate

May 2021

Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV (detail), showing multiple lines of legitimate British descent converging in Edward IV, encircled by Yorkist and Welsh symbols. In the margin, the white lion of March bears the arms of England and those of Brutus. Image ©Free Library of Philadelphia, available at https://openn.library.upenn.edu/Data/0023/lewis_e_201/data/web/9184_0006_web.jpg


Contents

Acknowledgements 2
Introduction 3

Chapter 1 8
Rubius draco, courting Welsh support

Chapter 2 13
William Herbert and the battle of Edgcote

Chapter 3 21
‘The most untrue creature living’ – Buckingham’s rebellion and the road to Bosworth

Conclusion 26

Bibliography 29

Appendix 1 34
House of York, their claims to Welsh descent and the English throne.

Appendix 2 35
Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV
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“Restore order. Come thyself, valiant Edward, and check the oppressors.”¹ In what ways did the Yorkist kings court Welsh support and how crucial was maintaining this support to their hold on the English crown?

The fifteenth century conflict known as the Wars of the Roses² was a struggle between two royal houses for control of the English throne. From the 1450s to 1480s, the House of York (as represented by Richard, duke of York, then his sons Edward and Richard) fought the House of Lancaster (as represented by Henry VI and later Henry Tudor) in some of British history’s bloodiest battles. The conflict is often described as a fight between the north and south of England, as a result the perception exists that Wales played little part until the advent of Henry Tudor as a viable claimant to the throne. The seminal work on Wales’s position, H.T. Evans’s *Wales and the Wars of the Roses*³, is over one hundred years old, suggesting that this opinion remains mostly unchallenged by modern scholarship. Henry Tudor, after all, flew the dragon of Cadwaladr on his banners and drew immense support from Wales because of his birth there. But what of the Yorkists kings?

For some modern historians the Wars and the House of York made little impression on Wales in the era before Bosworth. Geraint Jenkins, in *A Concise History of Wales*, barely references the conflict, stating that “Although the outcomes of dynastic disputes...resonated throughout Wales...these vicissitudes are not sufficiently important to detain us here.”⁴ Jenkins’s work may be a ‘concise’ history, but his own suggestion that the conflict resonated makes it curious that he does not expand further. Similarly, Deborah Fisher in her study of royal activity in Wales, skips virtually all of Edward

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IV’s reign, highlighting only his innovation of a Council for Wales in 1471, and dismisses Richard III as having no interest in Wales beyond bestowing a charter on a church in Cowbridge⁵.

This is not to say that all historians disregard Wales’s place in the strategies of the House of York. For example, Anne Sutton, in her consideration of the charters issued by Richard III, effectively refutes Fisher’s statement, demonstrating instead that Richard granted charters upon many Welsh towns including Llandovery, Cardiff, Tenby and Pembroke⁶. Sutton’s research indicates that by bestowing charters on key Lancastrian strongholds like Pembroke to, for instance, fortify their defences or begin a process that would raise them out of poverty⁷, Richard was as aware as any of his predecessors of the importance of Wales.

Debates and omissions such as this typify our understanding of the extent to which the Welsh were courted by the Yorkists, with the impression given that they were not embraced by them. This assumption perhaps stems from the perception that there is no Welsh primary source material with which to counter-act this argument. From a political stand-point this is true, with parliamentary papers naturally referring to Wales through the predominantly English eyes of the government. However, as many Welsh historians have highlighted, there is a wealth of contemporary Welsh poetry available. As Dr Enid Pierce Roberts forcefully argues: “No one can ever attempt to write an account of the history of the Wars of the Roses that approaches a complete survey, without first saturating himself in the works of the Welsh poets”⁸. Emyr Win Jones concurs in his 1985 reassessment of the battle of Bosworth from the Welsh perspective and is particularly stung by Paul

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⁷ Sutton, Richard III’s Charters, p. 139.
Murray Kendall’s phrase “…here and there in the Welsh valleys the harps of the bards were thrumming…”. Jones chooses to interpret ‘thrumming’ as the monotonous playing of unskilled hands, showing the limited value some historians place on Welsh poetry as source material9. H.T. Evans, whose research relies heavily on such sources, suggests that Welsh poetry is overlooked because (in 1915 when Evans was writing) it remained mostly untranslated and is considered literature, not objective statements of fact10. On this basis, it seems perverse that writers who ignore Welsh poetry quote readily from Thomas More’s ‘history’, which, as A.J. Pollard persuasively argues, was more morality tale than factual chronicle11. For all Evans’s and Jones’s bias as concerned Welshmen, their argument that Welsh poetry is of immense value is undeniable, especially for the immediacy of their production and alternative commentary they provide12. Further, Glanmor Williams suggests that the Yorkist king Edward IV’s campaigns in Wales were strengthened by his Welsh affinity being patrons of the bards, who then wove him into their prophecies as the redeemer of Wales13. In the twenty-first century there is a gradual rise in English writers referencing Welsh poems (in translation), considering anew Wales’s standpoint in the Wars of the Roses14.

What is clear from Welsh and English sources is that Wales did not suddenly wake up in August 1485 and commit to battle just because Henry Tudor had Welsh blood in his veins. A similar, though as Victoria Flood scathingly states, “…remote descent...” from Gladys Ddu, daughter of Llewelyn Fawr15

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applies to the House of York through their Mortimer bloodline (see Appendix 1)\(^\text{16}\). Flood’s article focuses on the Welsh prophetic literature surrounding Henry Tudor. In the process she downplays the Yorkist connections to the Welsh princes to emphasise her point about the superiority of Henry’s claims as the Welsh *mab darogan* (Son of Prophecy), reclaimer of the throne on behalf of the enslaved Britons. This point is questioned by the research of Jonathan Hughes and Alison Allen. Hughes states that Edward IV’s upbringing in the Welsh Marches steeped him in Welsh culture and deeply underscored his genealogical connection with Wales which later generated his belief that the *mab darogan* prophecies were directly referencing him\(^\text{17}\). Allen similarly considers Edward IV’s use of these prophecies, but researches them in terms of political capital he made from twinning the legitimacy of his lineage with ‘British history’ prophecies. She argues that Edward’s prophetic status was evidenced by the legitimacy of his Welsh-British lineage, which worked effectively enough to persuade the ‘right’ people, by which Allen means the noble and merchant classes, to join Edward’s cause\(^\text{18}\).

Ultimately, the Yorkist kings would not have been successful without a loyal affinity behind them; not for nothing did Richard III adopt the motto ‘loyalty binds me’\(^\text{19}\). Michael Hicks and D.A.L. Morgan each examine the power vested in the nobility, arguing this created ‘overmighty subjects’\(^\text{20}\) who

\(^\text{16}\) They could also claim kinship with Owain Glyn Dŵr, through their great-uncle’s marriage to Catherine, his daughter – Lewis, M., (2016), *Richard Duke of York: King by Right*, Amberley Publishing Stroud, UK, p. 32.


then played a central part in the success or failure of the crown. The ‘overmighty subject’, when they remained loyal, was a good way of keeping the king strong; when they did not, their manpower could unseat the monarch. As Morgan surmises “…the change of dynasty was the work of the nobility, however reluctant, however divided, and however over-persuaded in a struggle to survive”\textsuperscript{21}. This point can be applied to Wales, where the role of the nobility is fascinating. H.T. Evans, for example, barely contains his proto-nationalist pride when celebrating the Welsh-born William Herbert, earl of Pembroke’s career, rightly highlighting “…that he appeared on the stage of politics when there existed a virulent prejudice against Welshmen”\textsuperscript{22}. Although G.A. Williams questions Herbert’s motivation, accusing him of having one eye on the throne himself\textsuperscript{23}, his effectiveness is undeniably based as much on his Welshness as his strategic prowess. By way of contrast, historians examining the 1483 rebellion of Henry Stafford, duke of Buckingham, against Richard III generally agree it failed because he was “…unpopular with his tenants and made no appeal to Welsh national identity”\textsuperscript{24}. Charles Ross suggests that the resistance of Welsh people to their ‘alien overlord’\textsuperscript{25} Buckingham, holds the key to understanding why Richard III was unsuccessful in 1485; an argument to which James Ross adds supports because “the close identification of magnate power and royal authority” was more palatable when a native-born individual was placed in charge\textsuperscript{26}.

Through an examination of oral and visual culture, this dissertation will consider how the Yorkists courted Welsh support. Can a distinctly Welsh theme be identified in Yorkist propaganda, what drove this and to what extent was it successful? There is little doubt that the Welsh played a key part at Bosworth in 1485, but what about the era before that? Through comparison of the careers of William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, and Henry Stafford, duke of Buckingham, the question of what the support of Welsh people meant to the Yorkist hold of the throne will be considered. To what extent did Welsh support or resistance have powerful consequences for the Yorkist kings? By seeking to resolve these questions, this dissertation aims to present a more complex relationship between Wales and the House of York.

Chapter 1 - Rubius draco, courting Welsh support

Prophetic literature was very popular in the medieval period. Heard as much in the local tavern as the courts of kings, mystical predictions were sources of entertainment and instruction. In Wales, as the Croyland Chronicle notes in 1486:

“The truth is, that...throughout Wales, there is a celebrated and famous prophecy, to the effect that, having expelled the English, the remains of the Britons are once more to obtain the sovereignty of England, as being the proper citizens thereof. This prophecy, which is stated in the chronicles of the Britons to have been pronounced by an angel in the time of king Cadwallader, in their credulity, receives from them universal belief.”

These Britons, pushed to the margins by the Saxons, were interpreted as being represented by the Welsh people therefore holding a deep cultural resonance for them. Helped by the works of

27 Croyland Chronicle, (1486), in Riley. HT. [ed], (1854/1908), Ingulph’s chronicle of the abbey of Croyland with the continuations by Peter of Blois and anonymous writers, George Bell and Sons, London, p. 446 [Online]. Available at https://archive.org/details/ingulphschronic03petegoog/page/n6/mode/2up (accessed 01/05/2021).
Geoffrey of Monmouth\textsuperscript{28}, the Prophecy of Merlin also found a dedicated audience in Wales. Merlin, witnessing a fight between a red dragon and a white dragon, identifies the red dragon as the native Britons, who, although defeated by the invading Saxons (the white dragon), would ultimately prevail\textsuperscript{29}. Welsh people turned to prophecy as a means of keeping the flame of independence alive, with messianic figures promoted across the generations. When a persuasive candidate arrived, the Welsh would put their whole faith behind them because of the emotional power prophecy fulfilment held for them.

This connection was not lost on the opposing sides of the Wars of the Roses. Henry Tudor is most commonly associated with the role as fulfiller of Welsh prophecies\textsuperscript{30} but what is sometimes overlooked is that the allure of Welsh prophecy was harnessed as much by Edward IV as it was by Henry Tudor. In the 1460s, a blending of prophetic literature with 'legitimate' British genealogy was used extensively by Edward IV, with approximately thirty such pedigrees produced, fifteen of which specifically highlighted his descent from Cadwaladr and, another Welsh hero, King Arthur\textsuperscript{31}. This suggests that Edward’s upbringing in Ludlow, surrounded by Marcher and Welsh heritage, made him keenly aware that such imagery was key to courting support of the Welsh gentry and the manpower they would bring with them. Pedigree rolls, in particular, should be “...taken out of the library and placed in the great cathedrals and baronial halls...”\textsuperscript{32} of society. These rolls were intended for public display so the message of Yorkist legitimacy could be widely proclaimed, even if it did need “doctors

\textsuperscript{28} In particular his \textit{Historia Regum Britanniae}.
\textsuperscript{30} See for example Williams, GA., \textit{The Bardic Road to Bosworth} and Jones, WG., (1918), \textit{Welsh Nationalism and Henry Tudor}, The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorian, London [Online]. Available at https://archive.org/details/welshnationalism00joneuoft (accessed 06/05/2021).
and clerks” to explain the more obscure references. The most compelling example of this is *Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV*, a 3-foot-long manuscript possibly commissioned by Edward soon after his accession in 1461 (see Appendix 2). It brings together Edward’s descent, real and imagined, from the time of creation, through the early kings such as Cadwaladr and Alfred, via mythical kings such as Arthur, into his Mortimer and Plantagenet bloodlines. The roll is copiously illustrated with heraldic shields and beasts associated with British and Welsh history, a juxtaposition which proclaims Edward as fulfilling Welsh prophecies on two fronts: through his victory over the Lancastrians and as the actual descendant of the Welsh prince Llewelyn Fawr. This happy genetic circumstance allows Edward to appeal directly to his Welsh followers, in particular by referencing the Prophecy of Merlin. At the point where the line of Cadwaladr meets that of the Mortimers, themselves owners of large tracts of land in Wales since the Norman conquest, there are two separate circles in which sit a red dragon and a white dragon. Here, Merlin’s words are transmuted into Edward’s pedigree, where, somewhat counter-intuitively to those familiar with the white rose of York, the red dragon represents Edward’s pure British-Welsh line and the white dragon the corrupted foreign blood of the Lancastrians.

Evidence for the effectiveness of the early Yorkist publicity campaign can be inferred from the poetry of the Welsh bards. For all that G.A. Williams categorically states that “Edward IV, never mind Richard III, did not excite overmuch enthusiasm amongst the Welsh bards”, this is not borne out by the surviving evidence. In the decade from 1461, the bards wove Edward IV seamlessly into Welsh poetry; arguably showing that Edward’s campaigns to cast himself as fulfiller of prophecy, heir of

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33 As one Hansa merchant wrote to his principal in November 1468, quoted in Hughes, *Arthurian Myths*, p. 117.
36 Williams, GA., *Bardic Road to Bosworth*, p. 11.
Cadwaladr, Arthur and princes of Gwynedd were verified by Welsh poets and gentry alike. The poems were written in Welsh, and performed in the great halls of the nobility and the taverns of the lower orders, gaining a wide Welsh audience. Although there is no indication that Edward himself understood Welsh, his uchelwyr or Welsh landed class supporters did and they may have suggested to the king “...how attractive this poetry would be to his Welsh subjects...”\(^37\), as well as using it to advertise their own prudent choice in supporting Edward IV\(^38\). Edward is captured in multiple poems between 1461-1470 with Lewys Glyn Cothi hailing Edward as “royal Welshman”\(^39\), and “our Edward”\(^40\), while at other times Edward is “the great bull” referring to his Mortimer blood\(^41\). Perhaps the most powerful example of the Welsh identifying Edward as their redeemer comes from Guto’r Glyn’s 1473 poem \textit{To urge Edward IV to restore order in Wales}, in which he cries “Restore order. Come thyself, valiant Edward, and check the oppressors”\(^42\). Although possibly a barbed criticism of Edward’s plans for war with France while the realm remained in a state of disruption after the readeption crisis of 1470-1\(^43\), it is interesting that Guto’r still looks to Edward as the one who can bring order back to society in Wales. Other poets had, by this point, rejected Edward in favour of Jasper Tudor, with Dafydd Llwyd announcing boldly: “Edward, I now become a supporter of an eagle from Anglesey”\(^44\). It is possible that Guto’r had no patron at this time, because his liege-lord William Herbert has been executed in 1469, therefore this may be a work of independent thought, representative of the residual goodwill parts of Wales continued to hold for Edward IV, suggesting that his propaganda campaigns had been effective in bringing the Welsh on-side.


\(^{38}\) Williams, GA., \textit{Bardic Road to Bosworth}, p. 17, fn 47.


\(^{43}\) Lewis, BJ., (2013) English notes for Glynn, G., (c.1473), ‘To urge Edward IV to restore order in Wales’.

\(^{44}\) Williams, GA., \textit{Bardic Road to Bosworth}, p. 22.
However, the bards were predominantly bringing their in-house cultural arsenal to bear in support of whomsoever appeared most likely to enable Wales’s liberation. At heart, the bards were keen for Wales to become independent from England once more, therefore their concern is to promote that ideal. As such there is a ready transference of prophetic symbols between the royal Houses. The red and white dragons switch between Edward IV and Henry VI and Jasper Tudor, and later Richard III and Henry Tudor. For example, Robin Ddu, in his poem lamenting Owen Tudor’s execution after Mortimer’s Cross in 1461, transfers the red dragon to Jasper Tudor:

The dishonourable white dragon has triumphed,

But the red dragon will yet win the field.

This subversion of the symbols of prophecy is indicative of their nature; their deliberate vagueness moulded to suit the situation. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than with how the bards depict Richard III, as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. Although often accused of having little interest in Wales, there are glimpses that he, to use Richard’s wonderful extended metaphor, “turned the gaze of his inward eye” towards Wales. His engagement, however, took a very different tack to that of his brother. From what survives, there seems to be little appeal by Richard to Welsh prophetic culture – which Matthew Lewis suggests Richard’s piety precluded him from engaging with because it conflicted with the teachings of the Church. Instead, Richard errs on the side of strategic and political engagement, such as responding to petitions for money from Welsh towns to repair damaged defences and address poverty, helping the poor of Glamorgan by

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45 Williams, G., Renewal and Reformation, p. 197.
46 Evans, HT., Wales and the Wars of the Roses, p. 153 fn 44.
47 Jones, EW., Bosworth Welsh Perspective, p. 18.
49 Lewis, M and Dungate, K., (2021), Personal e-mail correspondence between Katie Dungate and Matthew Lewis, 24 May 2021.
attempting to root out corrupt officials and assigning his Welsh supporters to key local offices to secure the region for the crown\textsuperscript{50}. None of these actions ignited Welsh passions as much as weaving the king into their prophetic tales did, which meant Richard “…could not carry the part, he would not fit the breach where Edward stood”\textsuperscript{51}. Although sharing the same bloodlines as Edward IV, Richard III was pitched against a Welsh-born claimant in Henry Tudor, who was able to use this heritage to his advantage more successfully.

It is difficult to ignore that the iconography Edward IV employed throughout his reign takes much of its inspiration from Welsh prophetic literature, proving persuasive enough for him to be accepted as both a Welshman and reclaimer of the Britons’ rightful inheritance. He had the cultural understanding to pointedly cultivate the services of the Welsh landed classes, and through them the bards who then brought Edward’s message to the people. This meant he received the valuable Welsh assistance at Mortimer’s Cross and Towton that helped him to fulfil the Son of Prophecy role he cast for himself. Richard III’s normal winning gambit of promoting order and justice for the ordinary person, did not chime directly enough with the prophetic culture that drove the Welsh people, enabling Henry Tudor to take on the mantle that Richard appears not to have countenanced as an option.

\section*{Chapter 2 – William Herbert and the battle of Edgcote}

Capturing hearts and minds is one thing, maintaining them to the right degree is another matter entirely. In both Edward IV’s and Richard III’s reigns, the loyalty of their nobility was the fragile


\footnotesize \textsuperscript{51} Llwyd, D., quoted in Skidmore, \textit{Richard III}, p. 367.
thread that held the crown securely on their heads. In Wales, affinity networks were built along clan lines, which some suggest determined which side they took in the Wars of the Roses, with old scores settled amongst Welsh and Marcher families under the banner of York or Lancaster. This rivalry, both internal and external to Wales, forms an interesting backdrop to the support gained or withheld from the House of York.

In Edward IV’s reign, William Herbert, first earl of Pembroke, is a key figure in any consideration of what the Yorkists did to cultivate Welsh support and how decisive it was to their cause. In a praise poem by the Welsh bard Guto’r Glyn, the close relationship between William Herbert and Edward IV by 1468 is clearly evident:

“Edward and Herbert the tall column
as one together do hard work.
He is his limb and his elbow,
his hand and his foot when he gives battle.
In the council the decision goes
in every matter according to the tall man’s opinion,
a bold lord with sword and dart
and keeper of Edward’s peace.”

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52 For example, Santiuste, D., (2010), Edward IV and the Wars of the Roses, Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley, Yorkshire, p.36 and Jones, WG., Welsh Nationalism and Henry Tudor, p. 4.
Although presented with poetic flourish, the implication made by Guto’r is that William Herbert is the foundation stone of Edward’s government, literally an extension of the king’s body, who knows his mind enough to act wisely to maintain peace on the king’s behalf.

Born in Raglan in around 1423, William Herbert was the son of two prominent Welsh gentry families. By 1461, he was a veteran of war, having fought on behalf of Henry VI in France for many years. Although well rewarded by that king, his allegiance switched to the Yorkists possibly because of his placement in the Yorkists’ Welsh lands. H.T. Evans suggests that the accession of Edward as king was entirely due to Herbert’s support at Mortimer’s Cross and Towton in 1461: “The Earl of March, be it remembered, was only a lad of eighteen. As yet he had seen little active warfare...His chief lieutenant, Sir William Herbert...was a man of considerable experience in warfare on the battlefields...and endowed with military talents of the highest order”. On balance, Evans’s summation is probably correct. Herbert’s undoubted military nous and large Welsh retinue, drawn from Yorkist land-holdings in the March and Wales, certainly helped win this “Welshman’s battle” for the House of York. From this point onwards, Herbert and his affinity can be argued as crucial to Edward IV’s strong position in Wales.

Edward’s gratitude was expressed immediately. Starting in May 1461 with a knighthood and “...grant for life...of the offices of chief justice and chamberlain of South Wales...” progressing in March 1465 to the creation of the lordship of Raglan with “...all royal rights, prerogatives and customs belonging to royal lordships...”, reaching its zenith in November 1468 when Herbert was made earl of

55 Griffith, Herbert, William, first earl of Pembroke (c. 1423–1469), ONDB.
56 Evans, HT., William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, p. 148.
57 Evans, HT., William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, p. 152.
58 Evans, HT., William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, p. 154.
Pembroke⁵⁹, making him the first Welshman to be raised to the peerage⁶⁰. This meant that “By 1468 there were few lordships or counties in Wales and the marches (except Glamorgan) of which he was not either lord or chief official...”⁶¹. Not for nothing did Lewis Glyn Cothi dub him the ‘master-lock in Wales’ and ‘the great ear of Wales in London’⁶², becoming, in Charles Ross’s words, the virtual viceroy of Wales⁶³ and trusted member of the Yorkist fold. Such was the faith that Edward bestowed in Herbert, that he felt confident enough to leave the chillingly termed ‘cleansing’ of Wales to Herbert and his Welsh affinity while he addressed rebellions in England⁶⁴. Herbert’s “striking and fighting non-stop” saw the final Lancastrian stronghold, Harlech Castle, fall in August 1468, “a blow struck against disobedience” that saw the allegiance of Wales turn more Yorkist than Lancastrian⁶⁵.

When considering Herbert’s rise through the prism of how the Yorkists cultivated Welsh support, it is important to remember the continued existence of the 1402 Penal Laws. These laws were passed by Henry IV in order to curtail Welsh power after the Owain Glyn Dŵr’s uprisings⁶⁶. Under this edict, Welshmen were forbidden to “be armed nor bear defensible armour” against English forces, “have castle, fortress nor house defensive of his own”, marry English women, own land or be appointed to any Office in England, or Wales itself⁶⁷. The fact that Herbert bore arms and raised men against Edward’s enemies, was given castles in Wales and lands in Dorset, Devon and Somerset, was


⁶⁰ Williams, G., Renewal and Reformation, p. 190.

⁶¹ Griffith, Herbert, William, first earl of Pembroke (c. 1423–1469), ONDB.

⁶² Quoted in Williams, G., Renewal and Reformation, p. 196.

⁶³ Ross, C., Edward IV, p. 117.

⁶⁴ Williams, G., Renewal and Reformation, p. 190.


appointed to the House of Lords and made a Knight of the Order of St George, and arranged for his eldest son to marry Mary Woodville, the queen’s sister, in 1465 is remarkable against this legislative back-drop. Unlike Henry VII, Edward IV does not appear to have insisted Herbert renounce his Welsh identity to exploit a loophole in the 1402 laws suggesting a realisation that he could better maintain their allegiance by allowing Welshmen to keep their identity. Alongside this appears to be an understanding of the power being Welsh could have on Edward’s public profile in the Wales. For all Edward’s propaganda campaign might outline his descent from Cadwaladr, Herbert’s pure Welsh blood and extensive Cymric connections handed Edward IV’s government an equally powerful strategic weapon in the Welsh propaganda war. Herbert was used to counter-balance Jasper Tudor, the thorn in the Yorkist’s side throughout the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. Jasper’s Tudor blood frequently cast a spell over the Welsh, particularly in the south where his seat at Pembroke often proved a safe haven from which his military campaigns through Wales and England were launched.

Herbert’s promotion through the ranks, and the powers Edward devolved to him and his affinity, transmitted a positive image to the Welsh people of Edward as a monarch who supported Welshmen taking high office and did not automatically imprint Englishness onto the country. Edward’s faith was rewarded as Herbert and his supporters gradually pushed the Lancastrians into smaller pockets of Wales or, in Jasper Tudor’s case, into exile on the continent.

Herbert’s execution in July 1469 after the battle of Edgcote is the turning point from which the deterioration of Welsh support for the Yorkists can be traced. Edgcote is often overlooked, sitting as it does between the bloodiest battles of the Wars of the Roses but it has a twofold resonance

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71 Recent reassessment of evidence suggests that the traditionally spelling Edgcote should be amended to Edgcote. See Evans, G., (2019), *The Battle of Edgcote 1469: Re-evaluating the evidence*, Northamptonshire Battlefields Society.
72 Towton in 1461 and Tewkesbury in 1471.
for Wales and Welsh support that should be more widely considered. Firstly, the battle was an unmitigated disaster for Herbert’s forces, as they were defeated by an army of northern rebels led by ‘Robin of Redesdale’. The rebels had been stirred up by Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, and George, duke of Clarence (brother of the king) who weeks earlier had accused Herbert, and others, of being one of those who “…bi theire insaciat covetise…” worked to estrange the king from “…the grete lords of their blood [i.e. Warwick and Clarence] from theire secrete counseile…”73. The bards tell us that Herbert was betrayed by the Earl of Devon, who withdrew his troops in a fit of pique leaving the Welsh force seriously under-supported74. Herbert’s troops were decimated; he and his younger brother were “without any opportunity of ransom, beheaded at Northampton”75 on the orders of the earl of Warwick, who no doubt took great pleasure in Herbert’s Icarus-like fall. The ‘master-lock’ of Wales was unpicked and Edward’s strong position crumbled as he became Warwick’s prisoner from August to September 1469. Once back in control, Edward attempted to plug the power-vacuum in south Wales by commissioning his seventeen-year-old brother, Richard duke of Gloucester, to “…reduce and subdue the King’s castles of Carmardyn and Cardycan…[which] rebels have entered into and from which they raid the adjacent parts…”76. Richard brought the castles back into Edward’s hands77 and was rewarded with the Office of Chief Justice and Chamberlain of south Wales, followed by overseer of oyer and terminer courts in Wales78. This uneasy peace, however, was short lived.

74 Evans, HT., Wales and the Wars of the Roses, p. 104.
75 Riley. HT. [ed], Croyland Chronicle, p. 446.
77 Penn, Brother’s York, p. 223.
78 Kendall, PM., Richard III, p. 79.
It is important to note that the consequences of Edgcote also reverberated beyond the upper echelons of power. For the Welsh people, it represents a watershed moment in their support for the Yorkist’s cause. Contemporary reports of battles vary in estimation of numbers, as a result of not being written by eye-witnesses. For example, *Warkworth’s Chronicle* states that 43,000 turned out for Herbert’s army which Graham Evans’s logical reassessment suggests is too large and is possibly a transcription error. Instead, a figure of 6,000 Welshmen seems more reasonable from the available evidence. What is clearer is that the number of Welsh casualties was huge. Modern comparisons of contemporary reports place the number of Welshmen killed as between 2 - 4,000, a significant percentage. In real-terms this meant around 350 Welsh families lost members of their household.

With this in mind, it is little wonder that the Welsh bards, who provide a valuable insight into Welsh perception of Edgcote, say “...vengeance on fair Wales / was exacted at Banbury at great cost...”\(^\text{82}\), a genocide, a national catastrophe and, because of subsequent weeks of ‘savage weather’, an apocalypse. It is not to be under-estimated how integral this sense of devastation was to the security of the Yorkist crown. Guto’r Glyn sums it up best when he says:

> “I was killed, I and my nation too...”\(^\text{84}\)

Although the bards called on:

> “Blessed Edward...

> May you incite anger in the Welsh because of the injustice...

> seek vengeance for William”\(^\text{85}\)

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83 Penn, *Brother’s York*, p. 216.
it seems the anger in Wales was directed *towards* Edward. For the Welsh, Edward had let them
down, betraying them and their countrymen. As the Croyland Chronicler observed
unsympathetically in 1486:

> Accordingly, the present opportunity [Edgcote] seeming to be propitious, they [the
Welsh] imagined that now the long-wished-for hour had arrived, and used every
possible exertion to promote its fulfilment. However, by the providence of God, it
turned out otherwise, and they remain for the present disappointed of the
fulfilment of their desires.”

For all the earl of Warwick’s actions in raising rebellion against Edward in 1469 may savour of a
jealous former mentor, he recognised the security Herbert’s vice-regal powers in Wales afforded
Edward. With Herbert gone, the king no longer had a physical Welsh weapon to bolster his own
ideological ‘Welshness’, tipping the balance in the Lancastrians’ favour to such an extent that
Edward lost the crown in 1470. Edward’s return to the throne in 1471 was achieved without the
level of Welsh support he had relied upon for the past decade; indicative of the scarification the
battle had caused to the Welsh people. Their *mab darogan* had failed them, resulting in the mass
slaughter of many of their people and William Herbert, the man who symbolised their hopes of
freedom for Wales. From this point onwards, Wales bubbled with disorder and unrest as the Yorkist
and Lancastrian power-balance shifted, simmering through the 1470s before boiling over in reaction
to the transfer of power to Richard III in 1483.

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86 Riley. HT. [ed], *Croyland Chronicle*, p. 446-7.
87 Only Sir Roger Kynaston brought Welsh forces to Edward’s cause at Barnet in 1471, Williams, G., *Renewal and
Reformation*, p. 208.
88 Riley. HT. [ed], *Croyland Chronicle*, p. 446-7.
Chapter 3 – ‘The most untrue creature living’89 – Buckingham’s rebellion and the road to Bosworth

While anointing William Herbert as virtual viceroy of Wales90 worked to Edward IV’s advantage, the same faith placed in the Duke of Buckingham by Richard III backfired. From April 1483, Richard copiously rewarded Buckingham with grants of land and offices, predominantly in Wales, surpassing even Herbert’s holdings91. With these grants came the right known as ‘bastard feudalism’, which permitted nobles the power to raise men from their estates, ostensibly for the king’s defence. This concept has been examined at length by Michael Hicks, who feels the power-balance between landowner and tenant is a key concept: “Bastard feudalism had a role in every scenario. Manpower was needed...Yet they could not be taken for granted...”92. When reviewing the actions of the Welsh in the period 1483-1485, this notion arguably proved decisive for Richard III and the Yorkist cause.

The latitude Buckingham’s grants gave him is clear from a letter sent by Edward Plumpton in October 1483. Written as tensions were rising, he says: “[Buckingham] has so many men, as it is said here, that he is able to go where he will...”93 A sense of dangerous entitlement pervades Buckingham’s reputation here, whereby his force of numbers will be obeyed. Although he was easily persuaded by Margaret Beaufort to rise in a joint rebellion against Richard III intended to place her son on the throne94, Buckingham’s Welsh tenants proved not so easily swayed. Polydore Vergil states that “…as a sore and hard dealing man, [Buckingham] had brought [them] to the field agaynst

90 Ross, C., Edward IV, p. 117.
92 Hicks, Overmighty Subjects, p. 391.
ther wills, and without any lust to fight for him...”95. Unlike Herbert in the previous regime, Buckingham was an ‘imported’ English lord who received rents from the Welsh tenantry but turned a blind-eye to the lawlessness caused by their absenteeism from those estates. This generated a festering resentment in his Welsh tenants, just waiting the right moment to break into open defiance. Although not immediate, for Buckingham did lead a sizeable force from Brecknock towards the Welsh border, the rot set in when the weather turned against them96. With their hearts not completely aligned to his cause, Buckingham’s army abandoned him, causing his arm of the rebellion to collapse. In this instance, the active resistance of a portion of the Welsh people had proved decisive for Richard III, contributing to the sequential collapse of the various arms of the plot against him. It appears that when weighing up their options, Welshmen decided to follow their hearts and act in Wales’s best interests by resisting an ‘alien overlord’ who was dragging them further into a conflict which had already cost them so much.

Yet as Hicks rightly says, this support could not be taken for granted. The fall of Richard III is usually attributed solely to the rumours released during the 1483 rebellions that he had murdered his nephews97. However, this is too simplistic an explanation to cover the Welsh perspective, diminishing the key role they played in Richard’s downfall at Bosworth in August 1485. Instead, there are three strands of argument that together form the case for Wales’s decisive role in Richard III’s fall: the transfer of the crown to Richard in 1483, his personal affinity and the power of the poets.

Taking a step back to 1471, after William Herbert’s defeat Edward IV recognised the need to secure his Welsh and Marcher lands. These lands were key Yorkist recruiting ground, therefore would

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remain prime targets and sources of disorder unless he secured his defences. His solution was to invest his son as Prince of Wales and install him at the head of a Council to which the Crown delegated its responsibilities in Wales. Here, Edward is calling upon his own upbringing in the Marcher lands, where an understanding of Welsh traditions and the eternal hope of independence would have been absorbed by the young man. A generous assessment of Edward IV’s motives would credit him with presenting his son as an olive branch, an apology for Edgcote and evidence of a king who listened to his people as he was petitioned directly by the Welsh people to address the rising lawlessness in Wales. Investiture of his son with the ancient title of Prince of Wales and sending him to live in Ludlow was a symbolic tying not only of Wales to the Crown but also the Crown to Wales by “...giving his son the same exposure and education that had stood him in good stead”.

The hope would be that this immersion in Welsh culture and governance would later bear fruit in a grateful Welsh affinity backing Prince Edward when he succeeded his father as king. However, the crown’s diversion to Richard III in 1483 triggered the Council’s gradual dilution as Buckingham was granted these privileges instead. Although Richard invested his own son as Prince of Wales in August 1483, he did this on the basis that of all the “…provinces subject to us none requires separate and immediate rule under us as much as the principality of Wales, because of its remote position and because of the language and customs of the people, remote from those of other areas...”.

This imperious tone and keeping his Prince to his Yorkshire heartlands, suggests that Richard underestimated the symbolic and practical role the title held for the Welsh. The ‘snatching’ of

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99 Cunningham, A Yorkist Legacy, p. 121.


101 Lewis, M and Dungate, K., (2021), Personal e-mail correspondence between Katie Dungate and Matthew Lewis, 24 May 2021.

102 Cunningham, A Yorkist Legacy, pp. 124-5.


104 Kendall, PM., Richard III, p. 258.
‘their’ king and the sense of independence and justice the Council represented began the fracturing of Welsh networks that gave Henry Tudor’s supporters the opportunity to begin chipping away at Yorkist defences.

It is undeniable that negative propaganda and long memories were incredibly powerful in the era leading up to Bosworth. For the Welsh, it can be argued that the memories of Edgcote were still fresh and traumatic enough to convince Welsh leaders that Henry Tudor’s cause would allow them to reap revenge on the ‘northernmen’ whom they blamed for the slaughter of 1469. As A.J. Pollard has suggested for southern England’s negative opinion of their king105, where Richard is accused of ‘tyranny’ because of his ‘plantation’ of his northern supporters in key southern positions, Richard’s favouring of these ‘northernmen’ may be crucial to understanding the transference of Welsh support to Henry Tudor. According to Edward Hall’s chronicle, “…the which battle [Edgcote] ever since has been, and yet is a continual grudge between the Northernmen and the Welshmen”106. Although written in the sixteenth century, Hall’s claim is not without foundation. In the immediate aftermath of the battle, the Welsh bards universally advocate vengeance against the northern troops who inflicted such tragedy on their countrymen:

“Let us all go to avenge our nation
in the teeth of the Northerners at once…”107

“Let there not be a single good night

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For the owner of a bow yonder in Yorkshire[
...]

Should I come to his old hiding-place

I will never ransom a man from the North.”

With this national hatred in mind, it is perhaps not too much of a leap to suggest that Richard’s known association with the north, the seat of much of his power and influence, would naturally alienate a Welsh people deeply scarred by their last contact with them. A sense of distrust may have pervaded Wales that Richard would unleash his ‘northernmen’ on them at any point.

The traditional assumption then that Henry Tudor received no support on his arrival and march through Wales in August 1485 is readily refutable when Welsh perspective is examined. The Welsh people had been emotionally prepared for his arrival by current events and, more especially, by the bards who were instrumental in Henry’s victory:

We look forward to the coming of Henry;

Our nation puts its trust in him.

As alluded to in Chapter 1, Richard’s disengagement with the prophetic literature of Wales left him vulnerable to the type of negative prophetic propaganda deployed so effectively against the Lancastrians by his brother Edward. Although not unsupported in Wales, anti-Ricardian and anti-English imagery stoked the fire of resistance, with at least thirty-five bards having been identified as writing in support of Henry Tudor’s claim, creating “…for the first time in Welsh history, [someone

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112 The Vaughans, Richard Williams, James Tyrrell and William Herbert junior to name a few to remain loyal, Williams, G., *Renewal and Reformation*, p. 220.
who was acceptable to the whole land”\(^\text{114}\). In a direct reference to Richard’s heraldic beast, one work states: “And the Hog will return to the land, ravaging Cymru in hatred, with destruction in every town…”\(^\text{115}\), intending to strike fear into the hearts of the Welsh people. Richard III’s attempted fight back, painting Henry as a foreigner with no experience, bent of the destruction of *England*, would not have sat well in Wales\(^\text{116}\). The praise poems for Henry emphasise his Welshness, “The Tewdwr of thy nation, of the stamp of the fathers of our hosts like lions or wolves…”\(^\text{117}\). Richard, on the other hand, is described variously as ‘a pale leg, vain overseer’, ‘a servile boar’, ‘the little caterpillar of London’, ‘a little ape, the magpie’s lover’\(^\text{118}\) and, worst of all, the deceitful Mordred to Henry’s virtuous Arthur\(^\text{119}\). When combined with the evidence placed before them of Richard’s stealing of the crown from ‘their’ king, Edward V, and his northern bias, a powerful argument was formed. An argument strong enough for the Welsh people to take Henry Tudor’s cause to heart in their desire for peace and their people’s independence. A decision which proved decisive for the House of York as it paved the way for Henry Tudor to meet and defeat Richard III at Bosworth in August 1485.

**Conclusion**

It is not too much to say that the cultivation and loss of Welsh support proved decisive at several points during the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. The support of the Welsh people, gentry and commoner alike, was crucial, not only in terms of the military advantage that represented but for their ability to maintain a Yorkist king on the throne. In 1483, the Duke of Buckingham discovered to his cost the power of Welsh resistance; his tenants’ abandonment of him caused his downfall and

\(^{114}\) Jones, WG., *Welsh Nationalism and Henry Tudor*, p. 36.

\(^{115}\) Jones, WG., *Welsh Nationalism and Henry Tudor*, p. 36.

\(^{116}\) Cunningham, *A Yorkist Legacy*, p. 120.


\(^{119}\) Williams, GA., *Bardic Road to Bosworth*, p. 24.
maintained Richard III’s place as king, albeit briefly. On the other hand, William Herbert’s career demonstrates a level of trust and mutual respect that meant Edward IV had a secure ‘master-lock’ on Wales, enabling him to concentrate on the rest of his realm. Herbert’s execution and the slaughter of thousands of Welshmen at the hands of ‘northernmen’ at the battle of Edgcote are under-rated but decisive events in the Yorkist kings maintaining their hold of the crown. These events scarred the Welsh people deeply enough in the short-term to cause Edward IV’s brief fall from grace in 1470, and still resonated powerfully enough sixteen years later to contribute to Richard III’s downfall in 1485, his perceived ‘northern’ bias making him an irreconcilable figure in Welsh popular imagination.

Edward IV fully understood the power of Welsh culture in capturing the hearts of the Welsh people, perhaps embedded in him during his childhood in the Marches. He actively aligned himself with the prophecies and great princes of Wales’s past, before strongly linking himself with Wales’s future as their prophesied *mab daragon*, his accession promising the restoration of ‘British’ rule. Richard III’s seeming unwillingness to engage with Welsh culture may stem as much from his upbringing in northern England as his religious piety. His ‘Englishness’ compared to Edward IV’s ‘Britishness’, and Henry Tudor’s ‘Welshness’ later on, was an important factor in determining to what extent the Welsh were willing to commit to Richard III’s cause. His lack of cultural empathy, snatching of ‘their’ king (Edward V) and gradual dilution of the semi-autonomous Council for Wales did not win him the hearts of the Welsh people.

Although neither Edward IV or Richard III is known to have understood the Welsh language; their Welsh gentry did and their patronage of the bards greatly enhanced or damaged the appeal of the Yorkist kings to the Welsh. For all the bards were writing at the behest of patrons, and perhaps with more of an eye on the ultimate prize of Wales’s independence, the sentiments expressed within
them are a barometer of Welsh opinion from which it is possible to determine the health of the
Yorkist crown. Edward IV is woven deeply into the poetry, arguably showing an acceptance of him as
a ‘Welsh’ king. Richard III is cast as the antithesis not only of Edward IV but of Henry Tudor also,
which successfully undermined the House of York’s position in Wales. Arriving on the crest of a
prophetic poetry wave, Henry Tudor swept the emotional advantage from under Richard. The Welsh
support that could have stopped Tudor’s passage through Wales into England was denied, ultimately
leading to Richard’s death, and the fall of the House of York, at Bosworth in August 1485.
Bibliography

Primary sources


Secondary sources


Appendix 1: House of York, their claims to Welsh descent (on the left) and the English throne (on the right). NB this genealogy has been simplified for clarity.

Appendix 2: *Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV*, c.1461-4, ink and pigment on parchment, Philadelphia Free Library.


Figure 1: Edward IV in full armour at the head of the genealogy roll. His horse wears a coat of heraldic symbols for England, Scotland, Castile with a central escutcheon showing three crowns of Brutus.

Figure 2: Six ancient kings, from left to right Cadwallo [Cadwaladr] of Britain, Obertus of Clare, Radalphy of France, King Alfred of Saxon England and Rollo of Normandy.
Figure 3: The lines of Cadwaladr and Mortimer join together in Roger Mortimer. The White dragon and the Red dragon represent the British and Saxon lines, inferring that Edward, as the direct descendant of this union, is the prophesied redeemer of the Britons.

Figure 4: Marginal banners showing the arms of King Arthur
Figure 5: Banners (from left to right) of Llewelyn ap Gruffyd, Prince of Wales, Brutus, Cadwaladr, Princes of Powis and Prince of Wales.