

for those who had joined his cause during the dark days of Richard III's rule. Many of these men were entrusted with key positions at the centre of his government and Henry was said to be extremely reluctant to believe ill of them. The downside of this was that, after 1485, he was reluctant to admit new men to his fullest confidence, even after his original intimates began to die off.

This lack of trust was even more marked by events in the later 1490s. William Stanley's treason of 1495 and the south-western revolt of 1497, in particular, shook Henry's faith in his subjects' loyalty. Henry's growing fear of his subjects around this time was reflected in his retreat from the court into the newly constituted Privy Chamber, admission to which was carefully restricted to a small number of professional body-servants.

Such a level of distrust did not bode well for Robert Willoughby II. Indeed, the very wealth and position that he inherited from his father made him an obvious focus of Crown scrutiny. As Polydore Vergil noted, in his later years Henry 'began to treat his people with more harshness and severity . . . in order (as he himself asserted) to ensure they remained more thoroughly and entirely in obedience to him'. The main weapon that Henry employed in his new, harsher policy was finance. As the Spanish ambassador Pedro Ayala reported, the King had openly admitted that he wished to keep his subjects poor 'because riches would only make them haughty'.

So, how did Robert II, lacking any close personal bond with the King, fare?

1502 Took over many of his father's possessions (especially in Devon and Cornwall).

Forced to pay very large fines, e.g. £400 for livery of his lands, £600 to acquire some of his local offices.

1504 Lost land that his father had gained through the previous attainder of Henry Bodrugan. This land was returned to the Crown (to the Crown's profit of £47 19s 10d).

Forced to give a bond of £500 on condition that he keep the peace (probably because he had used excessive force to resolve a dispute).

1505 Brought before a court to prove his title to a manor in Cornwall. Brought before the Council Learned in the Law in order to prove his claim to some manors in Jersey which the King also claimed.

Robert II lost both of these actions.

1508 Paid £520 to repossess the former possessions of Henry Bodrugan.

So severely short of cash that he was forced to take a loan of £2,000 from the Crown. A condition of this loan was that the Crown could recall it at two months' notice.

Having driven Robert into a position of near-bankruptcy, the Crown now had him at its financial mercy. Any suggestion of disloyalty or unacceptable behaviour would immediately place him in financial jeopardy, without the Crown having to trouble itself with proving anything in a court of law.

At the same time, however, the Crown could still rely on Robert II to exert political control in the name of the Crown in the south-west. This was particularly true as Robert was allowed to serve as a JP (in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire) and was appointed to several commissions in the area.

TALKING POINT

How valuable is the history of one family to a historian? What are the pluses and minuses?

ACTIVITY

- 1 Whom did Henry VII trust most and why?
- 2 Did Henry VII's sense of security increase or decrease as his reign went on? Why?
- 3 How did Henry VII control Robert II?
- 4 How was Robert II useful to Henry VII?
- 5 What lessons can be learned from the history of this one family? Think about:
 - personal advancement
 - personal links to the King
 - the King's control of the nobles.

Check your answer to question 5 by looking at Lockett's own conclusion, which is reproduced on page 322.