

## TALKING POINT

Was Henry right to use Acts of Attainder against opponents from Bosworth? They had, after all, only been showing loyalty to the man whom they saw as their rightful king. The Crowland Chronicler at the time deplored Henry's attainting of those loyal to Richard III:

'Oh God! What assurance from this time forth are our Kings to have that in the day of battle they will not be deprived of the assistance of even their own subjects when summoned at the dread mandate of the sovereign?'

In a modern context, are we right to pursue in the courts those people who have followed the policies of dictators?

## FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes on how the history of the Willoughby de Broke family shows:

- a) Henry's loyalty to those who had fought with him in 1485
- b) Henry's policy towards those new to power.

**Case study: The Willoughby de Broke family**

The following case study is adapted from the article 'The rise and fall of a noble dynasty: Henry VII and the Lords Willoughby de Broke' by Dominic Lockett, which appeared in *Historical Research* (October 1996).

Over the years leading up to the battle of Bosworth, the Willoughby de Broke family accumulated substantial estates in the south-west of England. The story of the family's subsequent history reveals much about Henry VII and his relationship with his nobility.

**Robert Willoughby**

Robert Willoughby de Broke was the first baron of the family. The following is a history of his service from 1470 to 1502.

- 1452 Born.
- 1470 Commissioned by Edward IV to raise troops against the Dukes of Clarence and Warwick.
- 1472 Commissioned by Edward IV to raise troops against France.
- 1478 Appointed sheriff of Cornwall.
- 1480 Appointed sheriff of Devon.
- 1483 One of the key leaders of Buckingham's revolt against Richard III. Fled to Brittany with his brother William to join Henry Tudor.
- 1484 Richard III passed an Act of Attainder against him (and others). His lands were taken away from him and distributed among Richard's supporters. Followed Henry Tudor to France.
- 1485 Joined in Henry's invasion of England, fighting at Bosworth. August: Entrusted with the arrest of the Earl of Warwick. August–October: Gained a seat in the King's Council; took his seat in the House of Lords; became JP for Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Wiltshire. Became steward of the Crown's gold/silver mines in Devon and Cornwall. Became steward of the Duchess of York's Wiltshire possessions.
- 1486 Accompanied Henry in his tour round England. Part of the King's household.
- 1493 Became steward of the Warwick and Salisbury lands in Wiltshire.
- 1494 Became steward of the Duchy of Lancaster manors.
- 1502 Died.

**Robert Willoughby II**

The case of Robert Willoughby demonstrates that in the late fifteenth century opportunities existed for rapid personal promotion. However, the subsequent history of the Willoughby family only serves to indicate that, for so long as Henry VII was king, sustaining such advances was a lot more difficult. Why?

Much of the answer lies in how Henry's personality developed in the years after 1485. Throughout his life, Henry retained a special place in his affections

## ACTIVITY

- 1 What evidence is there of Robert Willoughby de Broke's political loyalties from 1470 to 1483?
- 2 Put forward possible reasons why Robert may have decided to resist Richard III.
- 3 What evidence is there of his loyalty to Henry VII?
- 4 What conclusions can you reach about how Henry treated Robert from August 1485 to 1494?
- 5 Complete this sentence: 'Robert died on 28 September 1502. His career exemplifies [shows]...'

Check your own answers against extracts from the Lockett article which are reproduced on page 322.

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 £320 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.