

8 The Reign of Edward V April–June 1483

Richard, Duke of Gloucester, gave loyal and devoted service to Edward IV. He brought effective law and order to the north and led the English forces in the war with Scotland (1480–2). He occupied Edinburgh and captured Berwick for the last time. To help Gloucester conduct the war, Edward had appointed him lieutenant-general in the north in May 1480, and as a reward for his service, he and his heirs were granted in January 1483 a great palatine comprising Cumberland and Westmorland and any adjacent parts of Scotland they might care to conquer. In this way Edward consciously built up his youngest brother into the most powerful northern baron in the middle ages. Surprisingly, Gloucester's rise did not unduly alienate the other leading nobles in the region – the Earl of Northumberland and Thomas, Lord Stanley. His general predominance in the area was reflected in the large number of private disputes submitted to his jurisdiction.

The Woodvilles were jealous of Gloucester, but above all they feared his power. Gloucester probably resented their influence over the King and at court. He seldom came to London and was in the north when Edward fell ill at Easter 1483. The King died on Wednesday 9 April. Edward was aware of the divisions his policies had created within the nobility, but he had not counted on his premature death while his son was still a minor. He attempted a death-bed reconciliation between Hastings and Dorset, but although they went through a show of mutual affection, it counted for nothing. Edward's premature death removed all restraint and a ruthless power struggle ensued which ultimately destroyed the Yorkist dynasty. Many weaker and less successful kings secured the safe succession of their sons, but Edward IV failed in this crucial test of medieval kingship.

Edward's will has not survived but it would seem certain that Gloucester, the only remaining adult male in the royal line, was made Protector. There was no real alternative, as the nobility were not prepared to accept the Woodvilles. Equally the Woodvilles were not going to allow anyone to wrest control of the princes from them.

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They were determined to maintain their position by overthrowing the provisions of the will. The family were well positioned to do just that. Rivers was at Ludlow with the young King and possessed the power to raise an army in Wales. The rest of the family were in London where Dorset, as deputy Constable of the Tower, controlled the treasure. The Woodvilles were also strongly represented on the Council, which they hoped to use to defeat Gloucester's claim to power in a minority government. They very nearly succeeded. The Council proceeded to reject the will, preferring that, as in 1422, power should reside in a Minority Council with Gloucester as chief councillor [doc. 24]. There was another important precedent from the reign of Henry VI. Humphrey of Gloucester's protectorate had ended at Henry's coronation. Therefore the Woodvilles wished to crown Edward V as quickly as possible. Without waiting for the arrival of Gloucester, the Council set an early date for the coronation, Sunday 4 May.

However, opposition to the naked ambition of the Woodvilles was beginning to appear. Its inspiration was Lord Hastings. He and his friends argued that by blood the Woodvilles were unfitted to make such important decisions. There followed a furious row in the Council, with Hastings and his supporters opposing the Woodville plan to bring the King to London with an army. It was finally agreed that the escort should be limited to 2,000 men. Meanwhile Dorset was using the royal treasure to equip a fleet under Sir Edward Woodville.

No official letter seems to have been sent to Gloucester telling him of his brother's death. It appears to have been Hastings who informed him and urged him to come to London to protect his rights under the will [doc. 24]. Gloucester was not without support. It came from families who had suffered from the rise of the Woodvilles and Edward IV's arbitrary disregard for the rights of inheritance (see p. 41). Gloucester probably did not learn of Edward's death until some ten days after it took place. He wrote letters of condolence to the Queen and another to the Council, expressing his willingness to undertake the protectorate. This seems to have put the Woodvilles off their guard and they dropped their emphasis on the urgency of getting the King to London as quickly as possible. Rivers certainly seems to have believed in Gloucester's good intentions, for he arranged to meet him with the King on their way to the capital.

After a solemn memorial service for the dead King at York, where the northern nobility swore an oath of allegiance to Edward V, Gloucester set off for London with a large retinue. He arrived at

Northampton on 29 April where he met by arrangement the Duke of Buckingham with a force of some 300 men [doc. 24]. Rivers and the King were fourteen miles nearer the capital at Stony Stratford. In order to greet Gloucester, Rivers and his nephew Sir Richard Grey rode back to Northampton. Gloucester entertained his guests that evening and arrested them on the following morning. He and Buckingham then moved on to Stony Stratford where they took possession of the young King. Sir Thomas Vaughan and other principal members of the royal household were arrested and sent with Rivers and Grey to Gloucester's strongholds in the north. The news of events at Stony Stratford threw the Woodvilles in London into utter confusion. Dorset tried to raise an army but failed and then fled to join the Queen and her other son Richard, Duke of York, in sanctuary at Westminster. With them went the remainder of the treasure; indeed the sanctuary wall had to be enlarged to get it all in.

Against a background of rumour, unease and suspicion, Gloucester, Buckingham and Edward V entered London on 4 May [doc. 24]. The Council immediately confirmed Gloucester's position as Protector and accorded him greater powers than his father had exercised in his protectorates in the 1450s. However, Gloucester was unable to persuade the Council that Rivers and his associates should be attainted for treason, though he went ahead and treated their lands as forfeit. This was a clear sign that the Council would only back Gloucester as long as he promoted the succession of Edward V. A new date, Sunday 22 June, was set for the coronation. This posed a real problem for Gloucester, as his protectorate was thus limited to a period of weeks. The accession of a king, educated and influenced by the Woodvilles, would inevitably lead to a revival of Woodville power.

Gloucester seems to have initially thought of extending the protectorate beyond the coronation (56, p. 75). Meanwhile he consolidated his position by exercising the powers of appointment and patronage vested in him by virtue of his office. The greatest beneficiary was Buckingham, who was made Chief Justice and Chamberlain in both north and south Wales for life and given the authority to array men in the west country. He was also granted control of all the royal castles and lordships in Wales and the Marches. In this way Buckingham came to exercise an even greater authority in Wales than Herbert had during the first reign of Edward IV. Other beneficiaries included the Earl of Northumberland and Lord Howard. It is also clear that former officials and

servants of Edward IV benefited. They of course remained loyal to Edward V but their co-operation with the Protector is sufficient to prove that there was no general belief, at this point in time, that Gloucester aimed to take the throne. The only group to suffer were the Woodvilles and their associates.

By the beginning of June, contemporary observers were in little doubt that Gloucester was planning to take the crown [doc. 24]. There seems no real evidence to dispute this. Gloucester, like his brother Edward IV, had shown himself to be ruthless in the defence of his interests and power. They had both ridden roughshod over the right of inheritance in the past, and Gloucester was prepared to do so again to preserve his position in the face of an uncertain future under a Woodville-indoctrinated king. Since Edward V was now twelve, Gloucester's protectorate, even if it was extended, could not possibly last longer than three or four years. He would then be exposed to the revenge of the Woodvilles, a family not renowned for compassion. It was in order to avert this threat that Gloucester seized the throne.

In early June Gloucester ordered military reinforcements to be sent urgently to him from the north, but in the event they did not reach London until July, by which time everything was over barring the coronation. Gloucester, Buckingham and Howard evidently had sufficient men to control the city, a crucial factor in the coming days. It seems unlikely that Hastings, suspecting Gloucester's intentions, had been in contact with the Woodvilles. Gloucester probably invented the story to justify his actions, for Hastings was bound to oppose his designs on the crown. On 13 June Gloucester acted and took his enemies completely by surprise. At the famous Council meeting held in the Tower he arrested Hastings, Lord Stanley and John Morton, Bishop of Ely, on charges of treason against the Protector and the government. Hastings was immediately beheaded, Morton imprisoned and Stanley later released [doc. 24].

The events of 13 June spread fear and dismay in the capital. Gloucester now moved rapidly to the crown. On 16 June the Archbishop of Canterbury, backed by a large number of armed men, persuaded the Queen to allow the Duke of York to leave sanctuary at Westminster for his brother's coronation. York joined his elder brother in the Tower. With both princes in his power, Gloucester presented his own claim. On 22 June, the day originally set for Edward V's coronation, Dr Ralph Shaw preached the rightful title of Gloucester to the crown at St Paul's Cross. He was followed two days later by Buckingham, who eloquently addressed the mayor and

citizens of London on the same theme [doc. 24]. The nature of Gloucester's claim has been the subject of some debate. According to one account Edward IV was declared to have been a bastard – which does not say much for Gloucester's regard for his mother – while the other sources record that Edward's sons were pronounced illegitimate due to his pre-contract of marriage to Lady Eleanor Butler. Both claims are highly implausible and can be dismissed as mere propaganda to justify Gloucester's usurpation. The only other possible claimant was Clarence's son and heir, but he was firmly under Gloucester's control and excluded from the succession on the grounds of his father's attainder for treason.

Meanwhile orders had been sent north for the execution of Rivers, Grey and Vaughan. They were duly beheaded at Pontefract on 25 June. On the same day representatives of the three estates met at Westminster and examined the charges against Edward IV and then, largely out of fear, petitioned Gloucester to take the throne. After token hesitation, he accepted and the reign of Richard III commenced on 26 June 1483.

9 The Reign of Richard III 1483–1485

Richard was crowned on 6 July 1483. It was an ostentatious coronation but it heralded a short and unhappy reign. He had the best of intentions and proved to be an energetic and efficient king. His first act on taking the throne was to deliver a strict lecture to his judges in Westminster Hall on the impartial administration of justice to all his subjects. This of course was also good propaganda, drawing attention to the rather lax rule of Edward's later years. However, for all his attempts at 'good governance', Richard never escaped from the circumstances of his usurpation.

In mid-July Richard set off on a triumphal progress to present himself to his subjects. With an impressive entourage he passed along the Thames valley, up through the midlands and on to the north. According to the Bishop of St Davids he was greeted enthusiastically everywhere along his route, but the Bishop had close ties with Richard and was hardly impartial [doc. 25]. At the end of August Richard entered York in triumph, where his son and heir Edward was invested as Prince of Wales. In the middle of September the King began his journey back to London. When he reached Lincoln he received information from his effective intelligence network that the south and west was about to rebel under the Duke of Buckingham.

The origins of the rebellion are rather obscure but it seems a movement grew up in the south-east during August to rescue the princes before it was too late. The inspiration behind this movement probably came from the surviving Woodvilles. By September the dissent had spread, but in view of the widespread rumours of the death of the princes, the aim of the rebellion had turned into putting Henry Tudor on the throne. This was obviously the result of pressure from the other prime movers in the conspiracy, Margaret Beaufort and Bishop Morton. It was the latter, held in captivity by Buckingham, who involved the Duke in the rebellion, probably by exploiting his greed and distant claim to the throne. The principal conspirators were joined by substantial gentry in all the southern counties from Kent to Cornwall. Woodville influences and connec-