

**YORK CIVIC GOVERNMENT, SOCIETY AND
THE CROWN, 1461 - 1490:**

**THE EVIDENCE OF THE *YORK HOUSE*
*BOOKS***

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a detailed study of three aspects of crown/town relations in the *York House Books*. These aspects include a focus on the correspondence between the council and Richard, duke of Gloucester who would later become king, the city as a staging ground for war against the Scots, and its role in the Northern Rebellion of 1489. Because the *Books* were compiled between 1461-90 and encompass the reigns of Edwards IV and V, Richard III and Henry VII, the entries were written during a particularly turbulent period in English history and illuminate the difficult situation in which the civic council of York found itself when consistently siding with the losing dynasty.

Although much scholarship exists that utilizes these records, most use them piecemeal in conjunction with other sources to provide a more rounded approach to the study of specific periods and events. However, by using only the *House Books*, a more exclusive focus on the town and its agenda in negotiating relations with the crown is possible. This dissertation therefore centres on the *Books* themselves as a source for study of late medieval York.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of civic government in late medieval urban society has increased in popularity among historians in recent years. In particular, studies have focused on regional capitals and the larger, more influential cities of late medieval England.¹ In northern England, no city was more powerful or commanded more influence regionally than York. However, there is little in the way of scholarship solely dedicated to the politics that are revealed through York's best late medieval source, the *House Books*.² Instead, studies have taken a more rounded approach, balancing evidence from the *Books* with other sources.

Although this method allows for a more balanced picture of the politics and society of York in the later middle ages, it leaves unanswered important questions about what these records were and the perspective from which they were written. In addition to illuminating the relationship between late medieval York's civic government and its populace, the *House Books* also provide insight into the dynamic between crown and town. This study will use these records to explore the political picture of the town during one of England's most politically turbulent eras. As well as providing a view into the politics of civic government as headed by the civic élite, a disparity between the political

¹ C. D. Liddy, 'The rhetoric of the royal chamber in late medieval London, York and Coventry', *Urban History*, 29 (2002), 323-349; C. Barron, 'The Political Culture of Medieval London', in L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds.), *The Fifteenth Century IV* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 111-33; L. C. Attreed, *The King's Towns: Identity and Survival in late medieval English Boroughs*, (Oxford, 2001).

² R. B. Dobson (ed.), 'York city chamberlain's account rolls, 1396-1500', *Surtees Society*, 192 (1980), p. xiii; and R. B. Dobson, 'John Shirwood of York: a Common Clerk's will of 1473' in M. Aston and R. Horrox (eds.), *Much heaving and shoving: late-medieval gentry and their concerns, Essays for Colin Richmond* (Suffolk, 2005), p. 115.

ideals of that élite and the ideals of the normal citizen can also be discerned between its lines of text.³ Therefore, each section of this study aims to illuminate the attitudes of the common citizen as they relate to political and social issues, as well as those of the ruling oligarchy.

This paper examines York and by extension its influence on the north in the latter half of the fifteenth century and will rely entirely upon the first volumes of the *York House Books* as edited by Lorraine Attreed.⁴ The original manuscript is housed in the York City Archives. An earlier translation of selected and abridged extracts from these manuscripts was published by Angelo Raine, but the more recent and scholarly work by Attreed is used here.⁵ Attreed's edition dates the first six volumes from 1461-90, however the first volume, *Liber 1* (1461-65), is no longer extant.⁶ The entries comprising the other *Books* 2-6 originally covered 1461-90, although the surviving entries only start in 1475.⁷ Lamentable though the loss of the first *Book* is, surviving entries are widespread enough to illustrate the city's politics during the dynastic changes of the period.

The earliest of York's civic records, like those of London, survive from the latter half of the thirteenth century during the reign of Edward I, though there are great differences

³ J. I. Kermode, 'Obvious observations on the formation of oligarchies in late medieval English towns', in J. A. F. Thomson (ed.), *Towns and townspeople in the fifteenth century* (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 87-106.

⁴ *The York House Books 1461-1490*, ed. L.C. Attreed, (2 vols., Stroud, 1991). This edition's inclusion of previously unavailable material renders it the most suitable for this study of the *House Books*.

⁵ *York Civic Records*, ed. A. Raine, (Wakefield, 1945).

⁶ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xvi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. xvi.

between the extant records in each city, with more and earlier texts surviving in the capital.⁸ Comparing the almost contemporaneous *Liber Albus*, London's civic custumal of 1419, gives an example of this difference.⁹ Though it also serves to present an ideal political image of the city, the *Liber Albus* may be characterized as a compilation of London's laws, rather than comprising a varied range of civic matters like York's *House Books*.¹⁰ It is also more sophisticated in arrangement as the clerks compiling the information were seemingly more practiced at deliberately arranging records than those working on the *Books*.¹¹ This marked difference, as Attreed suggests, is perhaps due to their rearrangement at a later date or possibly indicative of a higher level of skill or manipulation, and is suggestive of the greater ability of those geographically closer to the crown to conduct the compilation of their civic record.¹² Thus the context in which the *House Books* as civic records need to be understood is not merely temporal but geographic, and specifically as emulating, in a less sophisticated format, an example of the capital. It indicates that communication with royal government through the device of civic records was subject to precedents in both language and style, particularly in reinforcing civic authority, which impacts on how the *Books* need to be read.¹³

⁸ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. xii-xiii; Dobson (ed.), 'York city chamberlain's account rolls', p. xx. The husgabel roll of c. 1284 is the earliest survival of a York municipal record.

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. xiii.

¹⁰ H. Carrel, 'Food, drink and public order in the London *Liber Albus*', *Urban History*, 33 (2006), p. 176.

¹¹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. xiii.

¹³ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. xv-xvi; and Carrel, 'Food, drink and public order in the London *Liber Albus*', p. 194.

The scope of entries in the *House Books* is highly varied, ranging from disputes over fishgarths to records of correspondence with the royal government.¹⁴ They are a compilation of matters that were of concern to the civic government, a record for their own reference, and a chronicle of notable occurrences within and relating to the city. Moreover, a key point to note about the *Books* is that they were not written according to strict guidelines. Whereas the entries follow a particular format in noting the civic officials at the time of the meeting, and many take the form of minutes of meetings, they are not all written in this manner, nor in the same language. Of the 40 entries transcribed within this study, only three were written in Latin in the original record, the rest having been entered in English. The writing of the majority of the record in the vernacular rendered it more accessible, but the ability to read was still a skill practiced by a minority, hence the audience to whom the *Books* were directed was even more select. Furthermore, the proliferation of Latin in the record suggests the discriminating nature of the audience, Latin being the traditional language of the *literati*, and the official language of government.¹⁵ Other than the differences in language within the *Books*, the historical record suggests that they were rearranged by later editors, rendering their original method of organization beyond recognition. The entries as they exist today do not make any chronological or thematic sense, but are presented haphazardly, perhaps due to a format that was known only to the medieval compilers or to an unrecorded arrangement by later editors.

¹⁴ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xiii.

¹⁵ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (Oxford, 1993), p. 185; Excepting court proceedings which in 1362 was decreed by Parliament to be conducted in English, as opposed to French, see J. H. Fisher, 'A Language Policy for Lancastrian England', *PMLA*, 107 (1992), p. 1169.

Regardless of the original organization of the *Books*, by the late medieval period the keeping of a civic record would have been important and the norm among regional capitals in England. First, any city may have wished to keep a record of official proceedings in order to return to them for reference at a later date.¹⁶ Secondly, copies of letters sent to and received from royal government may have been included for reference, to demonstrate and hold on to any granted autonomies, and also to maintain a dialogue with their sovereign.¹⁷ Furthermore, the practice of negotiating and confirming a city's liberties was customary upon the accession of a new monarch, an aspect of local government which would have increased in frequency, and possibly importance, during the Wars of the Roses.¹⁸ Thirdly, not only would these records reflect meetings, legislations and customs past, they may also have served as documentation for guidance in the future.¹⁹ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a record such as the *House Books* may have been kept to portray the city to the best possible advantage. If this was the case, civic officials would have presented the text to their own particular specification, demonstrating only what best suited their agenda and not the exact occurrences of civic council meetings. York's *A/Y* or *Memorandum Book*, begun a century earlier, probably provided the fundamental model for the *House Books*, as it contains entries regarding

¹⁶ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 92.

¹⁷ B. Chevalier, 'The *bonnes villes* and the King's Council in Fifteenth-Century France', in J. R. L. Highfield and R. Jeffs (eds.) *The Crown and Local Communities in England and in France in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1981), p. 111.

¹⁸ C. D. Liddy, 'Urban Conflict in Late Fourteenth-Century England: The Case of York in 1380-1', *English Historical Review*, 118 (2003), p. 13.

¹⁹ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 92.

accounts of important events as well as information concerning civic procedures.²⁰ A fundamental difference between the records is that only the later record includes entries on municipal activities.²¹ Compiled in the latter part of the fourteenth century, the *Memorandum Book* was York's first attempt at a record of the official acts and decisions made by the mayor and civic government.²² However, despite both records' originating in the same city, the *Memorandum Book* has a narrower focus on the town's finances, and appears to have been used for the specific purpose of making the civic government more efficient.²³ Even though the *Memorandum Book* represents some form of predecessor to the *House Books*, both having a preoccupation with fiscal matters, the records are also quite different. These differences serve to highlight the value of the *House Books* as a source of information on later medieval civic government.

The social and political context of York in these years must be explained as fully as possible in order to interpret the fragile political situation the *Books* reveal. The civic élite of late medieval York has attracted much scholarly attention in the last few decades.²⁴ Within this work, a clear argument emerges between those who believe an

²⁰ M. Stevens and M. Dorrell, 'The "Ordo Paginarium" Gathering of the York "A/Y Memorandum Book"', *Modern Philology*, 72 (1974), p. 45.

²¹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xii; S. R. Rees Jones, 'York's Civic Administration, 1354-1464', in S. R. Rees Jones (ed.) *The Government of Medieval York: Essays in commemoration of the 1396 Royal Charter* (York, 1997), p. 115.

²² Dobson (ed.), 'York city chamberlain's account rolls', p. xxi.

²³ Liddy, 'Urban Conflict in Late Fourteenth-Century England', p. 13.

²⁴ Kermode. 'Obvious observations on the formation of oligarchies', pp. 87-106; J. I. Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley, and Hull in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1988); C. D. Liddy, *Urban Communities and the Crown: Relations Between Bristol, York and the Royal Government, 1350-1400*, (York, 1999); C. Carpenter, 'The Formation of Urban Élités: Civic Officials in Late-Medieval York 1476-1525' (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of York, 2000).

oligarchic form of government existed in the city, and those who believe such a description is too simplistic.²⁵ Both sides of this debate have enhanced our understanding of the functioning of the city, and its relationship to and with royal government. The consensus suggests, as stated above, that the city government was run by a merchant oligarchy that determined the social and economic principles of the town's administration. This oligarchy comprised a small group of successful and influential men with interests not only in the city but nationwide and, as merchants, internationally as well. At the local level, members of this oligarchy generally followed a pathway to civic power: first entering the Freedom of the City; next serving as chamberlain or bailiff, and finally being elected to the mayoralty.²⁶ Nationally, members of this group of civic élite would often also hold office as Members of Parliament for the city, for example William Holbeck, who served as mayor on five separate occasions from 1449-1472.²⁷ Internationally, the merchant élite would have an interest in maintaining trade links with the continent, an example being the two York merchants and aldermen who had been chosen to rule Calais in 1363 by the Company of the Staple.²⁸ Through various means, this group maintained a circle of exclusivity around positions of status and power in late

²⁵ For arguments supporting the oligarchy see for example H. C. Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns', *Past and Present* 121 (1988), pp. 29-48; M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 95-119; and D. Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 92-110. For an argument against the widespread characterization of a late-medieval urban oligarchy see for example S. Reynolds, 'Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought', *Urban History Yearbook* (1982), pp. 14-23.

²⁶ C. D. Liddy, 'William Frost, the City of York and Scrope's Rebellion of 1405', in P. J. P. Goldberg (ed.), *Richard Scrope: Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr* (Donington, 2007), pp. 79-80.

²⁷ Dobson (ed.), 'York city chamberlain's account rolls', pp. 207-213.

²⁸ J. N. Bartlett, 'The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 12 (1959), pp. 20, 23-24.

medieval York, a circle that prohibited the advancement of those of lower status, creating a system that has become known to historians as ‘Bastard Feudalism’.²⁹

The term ‘Bastard Feudalism’, as explained by K. B. McFarlane, is a modern idea which provides a framework to explain the relationship between the aristocracy and those of inferior social status regarding the exchange of influence, manpower, money and patronage.³⁰ It was the natural evolution of a much older system whereby lords raised manpower via their feudal tenants. Gradually, this developed into a military dependency upon magnates’ household knights who would be available to a lord for a variety of purposes.³¹ By the late medieval period, feudal tenants and household knights had largely been replaced by those who held power in urban centres, and by extension the oligarchies of the greater towns who held the civic reins.³²

By the latter half of the fifteenth century, the economic situation of much of northern England had critically deteriorated, leading to the growing impotence of the élite to

²⁹ K. B. McFarlane, ‘Bastard Feudalism’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xx (1947), pp. 161-180.

³⁰ McFarlane, ‘Bastard Feudalism’, pp. 161-180; and M. A. Hicks, *Bastard Feudalism*, (London, 1995), pp. 1-4.

³¹ McFarlane, ‘Bastard Feudalism’, pp. 22-24.

³² Scholarship surrounding ‘Bastard Feudalism’ is varied. See for example, McFarlane, ‘Bastard Feudalism’, pp. 161-180; P. R. Coss, ‘From feudalism to bastard feudalism’ in N. Fryde and P. Monnet (eds.) *The Presence of Feudalism*, (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 79-107; M. A. Hicks, ‘Bastard feudalism, overmighty subjects and idols of the multitude during the Wars of the Roses’, *History* 85 (2000) pp. 386-403; and Hicks, *Bastard Feudalism*. For a full discussion of the revisionist thinking on Bastard Feudalism see for example P. R. Coss, ‘Bastard Feudalism Revised’, *Past and Present* 125 (1989), pp. 27-64; D. Crouch and D. A. Carpenter, ‘Bastard Feudalism Revised’, *Past and Present* 131 (1991), pp. 165-89; and P. R. Coss, ‘Bastard Feudalism Revised: A Reply’, *Past and Present* 131 (1991), pp. 190-203.

control the populace.³³ During the preceding century England had minted less and less coinage, resulting in the debasement of currency.³⁴ With less money to be had, merchants needed to find other means to finance their trade. In an attempt to retain their position as merchants and stimulate a stagnant economy, extensions of credit became the accepted currency of trade, to the extent that 75 per cent of a merchant's dealings could be based on it.³⁵ However, while York merchants were placing themselves in further debt in order to finance transactions, London firmly established itself as the hub of overseas trade. As London's fortunes rose, York's fell, resulting in the considerable loss of status as a trading city, an economic base, and a political rival to London.³⁶

The dichotomy between these two cities, York and London, extended beyond trading rivalries and into the political sphere. During the Wars of the Roses, the south and London were generally in favour of the Yorkist cause whilst the north and York supported the Lancastrians. Indeed, York itself was the political base for Henry VI when in March 1461 his forces were heavily defeated at the battle of Towton, reversing the fortunes of the Yorkist defeat near Wakefield on 30 December 1460. Following the battle of Wakefield, the severed heads of the Yorkist leadership had been displayed upon

³³ J. I. Kermode, 'Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century: Some Lessons from Yorkshire', *The Business History Review* Vol. 65, Financial Services (1991), pp. 475-501; J. I. Kermode, 'Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 35 (1982), pp. 179-198.

³⁴ P. Nightingale, 'Monetary Contraction and Mercantile Credit in Later Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 43 (1990), p. 561.

³⁵ M. Postan, 'Credit in Medieval Trade', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 1. (1928), p. 242.

³⁶ Kermode, 'Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century', pp. 475-501.

the city gates, including those of Edward IV's father and brother.³⁷ Towton, however was not only a decisive victory for the Yorkists, it almost wiped out the entirety of Lancastrian leadership, bringing years of conflict and war to a temporary close.³⁸ The city's first test in this swift dynastic change came when the victor, Edward IV, rode through Mickelgate Bar as a conquering monarch.³⁹

Although Edward reigned relatively peaceably for nearly the next decade, the Yorkist claim would be challenged again with the Readeption of Henry VI in 1470-71.⁴⁰

Although short-lived, this change in king threatened Edward IV's legitimacy to rule as the debate between Henry VI's hereditary authority and Edward IV's authority by conquest had never been fully settled. Twelve years later, political instability would again test York's ability to cope with swift change. Following Edward IV's death in 1483, his son Edward V's accession would be quickly halted by his uncle, Richard, duke of Gloucester. During Edward IV's reign, Richard was allowed widespread control over northern England, and became popular with much of York as one of their strongest supporters among the royal government. After usurping the throne in 1483, Richard III continued to be one of York's benefactors and the reception he received as king in the town amounted

³⁷ H. Castor, *Blood & Roses: The Paston family and the Wars of the Roses*, (London, 2005), p. 140.

³⁸ A. W. Boardman, *The Battle of Towton*, (Stroud, 1996), p. 147; A. J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509*, (Harlow, 2000), p. 159. Boardman's description of the Lancastrian's rout and demise is fully detailed and Pollard explains how battles continued sporadically until 1464.

³⁹ Boardman, *The Battle of Towton*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ D. Seward, *The Wars of the Roses*, (London, 1995), pp. 210-11.

to a second coronation,⁴¹ unrivalled in pomp and splendour up to that time.⁴² Richard's reign was not to last, however, and in 1485 he was defeated at the battle of Bosworth by Henry Tudor, later crowned Henry VII.

Henry VII's accession was yet another dynastic change by conquest. It was also another test of York's ability to shift politically, similar to the situation following the battle of Towton in 1461. Like at Towton, York had supported the losing opposition, and similar to the predicament of the 1460s, York found itself walking a political tightrope in order to remain within the reigning dynasty's good graces and as a politically and economically viable regional capital.

However, the instability of the political situation extended much further in York than simply who was the current ruler. Dynastic changes meant changes in leadership from the top down. From the beginning of Lancastrian rule in 1399, York found it difficult to negotiate wholly amicable relations with the crown.⁴³ Although the city was adamantly supportive of Henry IV at first, a strong anti-Lancastrian sentiment developed in the city by 1405, possibly due to factionalism and resentment within the city council. The citizens of York were roused to open rebellion by Archbishop Richard Scrope against the

⁴¹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xxi; Edward Hall, *Chronicle: or The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and York*, ed. H. Ellis (London, 1809); and *The Fabric Rolls and Documents of York Minster: or a Defence of 'The History of the Metropolitan Church of St. Peter, York,'* ed. J. Raine, *Surtees Society*, xxxv (1859), pp. 210-12.

⁴² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 291-92. This entry is a list of those who contributed to the royal gift for the 'king and queyn at thar furst cumyng to thys cite,' and is one small example of the lavish welcome they received after acceding the throne.

⁴³ Liddy, 'William Frost, the City of York and Scrope's Rebellion of 1405', p. 69.

crown, and when heavily defeated, the city moved back to support the Lancastrian dynasty.⁴⁴ By the time the Lancastrians were politically exiled in 1461, the politicians of York were known as strong supporters of Henry VI. Therefore, their support of the Yorkist dynasty by 1485 meant a further change in dynamic between the élite of the city and the bureaucracy of the crown.

The civic élite of York, regardless of personal preferences for particular dynasties, needed to placate the interests of the crown in order to maintain their status as both a trading hub and a locus of regional importance. These merchants' businesses were inextricably linked to the town, and therefore the civic élite would have had a keen interest in maintaining civil relations with the reigning monarch, no matter the cost. The problem lay, therefore, not in the general oligarchy recognizing where their interests truly lay in relation to supporting a dynasty and contributing to the wealth and prestige of the city, but in maintaining peace among a populace that was growing evermore difficult to control.⁴⁵

The *York House Books*, as a civic record that encompasses widely varied types of entries relating to the town, are an excellent source to demonstrate the delicate situation of the politicians of the city of York. They relate the manner in which they attempted to negotiate these complex relationships, represent the aims and objectives of the city government, and provide a window into the lives of those subject to that government.

⁴⁴ Liddy, 'William Frost, the City of York and Scrope's Rebellion of 1405', p. 69.

⁴⁵ C. D. Ross, 'The Reign of Edward IV', in S. B. Chrimes, C. D. Ross and R. A. Griffiths (eds.) *Fifteenth Century England 1399-1509: Studies in Politics and Society*, (Stroud, 1995), p. 61.

Issues such as civic appointments, military activities and trade come together in the record. Furthermore a concern with money, of utmost importance to a city in decline, runs throughout the *Books*, including payments for services and collection of revenue.⁴⁶ These issues illustrate the difficult and wide-ranging demands placed on York's civic officials.

It is important to recognise that the *York House Books* were compiled during a time of national political upheaval in England, 1461-90, and those events in many ways shape the contents of these unusual records and may even explain their creation. In this space of 29 years, four kings reigned, two were killed and one took the throne by conquest. It was a situation that not only impacted nationally, but engendered uncertainty in every city in England, especially a regional capital and northern power base such as York. The city needed to tread carefully in order to remain in each dynasty's good graces. As each new monarch came to the throne, the city had to renegotiate their rights and privileges, and these records might have aided York's officials to that end. This study aims to view the importance of the *House Books* to the late medieval city of York. First, it exposes the breadth of correspondence the city shared with the government, and the city's search for a benefactor and royal representative. Next, it demonstrates the way in which the city attempted to maintain its importance as a strategic regional capital for the country's defence, through the recurrent wars and skirmishes with England's northern enemy, Scotland. Finally, it delves into problems the city had when social unrest threatened the agenda of the mercantile oligarchy, when the group of élite started to become unhinged

⁴⁶ L. C. Attreed, 'The king's interest: York's fee farm and the central government, 1482-92', *Northern History*, 17 (1981), p. 25.

from the inside, and the leadership was no longer able to control its populace. This aspect centres on the assassination of Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland and the subsequent Northern Rebellion of 1489. Each section of this dissertation will first interpret the record from the perspective of the civic corporation and then consider the wider implications of the city's decisions, providing a meeting point for the study of the social, political, local and regional relationship between York, the national government and crown.

1

CORRESPONDENCE AND THE SEARCH FOR GOOD LORDSHIP

*The cause I writt to you now is for somooch as I veraly knawe the kinges mynde and entire affeccion that hys grace bereth towards you and your worshipfull cite, for manyfold your kynde and loving deservyngnes to hys grace shewed heretofore, wich is grace will never forgete, and entendeth therefore so to do un to you that all the kynges that ever reigned upon you did never so moche, doubte not herof, ne make no maner peticion of desire of ony thing by hys hinges to you to be graunted...*⁴⁷

The above excerpt from the *York House Books* has been taken from a letter written to the council of York by John Kendale, Richard III's secretary, advising them that the newly crowned king was planning a visit to the city. This small portion demonstrates the depth of the relationship between the king and York: the 'affeccion' he felt for them and the reciprocal 'manyfold kynde and loving deservyngnes' the city had shown him. The secretary prepares the council for the king's intentions 'to do un to you that all the kynges that ever reigned upon you did never so moche,' a statement that the city could assume its proper place of importance as a base of support for the usurper-king. This appears to be a special relationship, but throughout the *York House Books* the collection of correspondence is indicative of the relationship the city had with each monarch during the period 1476-1489.

⁴⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 713. All excerpts of material from the *York House Books* have been transcribed from Attreed's edition. Ellipses in the *Books*' excerpts indicate portions of entries that have been omitted.

The correspondence provides a foundation for understanding national politics as they were reflected at the local level. Quantitative analysis reveals there are no fewer than 165 letters copied into the *House Books* dealing with crown issues spanning the period 1476-1489, indicative of the heightened concern of both royal government and the civic élite to establish good relations with each other. Proportionally, the number of entries made within each reign is illuminating. The first section of years, 1476-1483, encompassing the final seven years of the reign of Edward IV, contain 53 per cent of this correspondence. The relatively short two-year reign of his brother, Richard III (1483-85), contains 20 per cent of relevant royal entries, and the four years reflected of Henry VII's reign make up the final 27 per cent. Thus, it gives an impression of anxiety regarding relations between monarch and city, particularly following the accession of Henry VII. However, a true picture of what this means can only be understood through an analysis of the nature of these entries. This chapter, therefore, will attempt to elucidate the ways in which local and royal government negotiated relations in the latter half of the fifteenth century through examination of the correspondence in the *York House Books*. In particular it will focus on the middle period, when the city enjoyed a close relationship with Richard, first as duke of Gloucester and later as king, as it was through his position as constable and admiral that York potentially had its strongest representative close to the crown.⁴⁸ The chronological tracing of correspondence between town and crown in the *Books* will highlight the links that were developed, maintained, lost, and then rebuilt in the face of political turmoil and changing loyalties.

⁴⁸ R. Horrox, 'Richard III (1452–1485)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23500>> (15 November 2008).

As an example of the complexity of this picture, the entries and correspondence between York and the crown during Edward IV's reign were typically made through the intermediary of his brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester. Thus it can be taken both as evidence of York's relationship with Gloucester over a long period, and as illuminating Edward's approach to government in the north. After the earl of Warwick's defeat during the Readeption of 1470-71, a vacuum existed in the government and defence of the north. This was filled by Edward IV's younger brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester.⁴⁹ The majority of the correspondence reflective of the middle period, during the northern hegemony of the duke, shows that the relationship between specific nobles and civic élites was clearly open to co-dependency: the city's on the duke for intercession with his brother the king, and the duke's on the city as a firm base of support. This would prove invaluable to Richard when he later came to power following his brother's death in 1483.⁵⁰

Richard III's ardent interest in the town as evidenced in the correspondence copied into the *House Books* is likely to have stemmed from the manner of his accession.⁵¹ They illustrate the wide support Richard had in York at the beginning of his reign, indeed as Hicks suggests, it was probably Richard's retainers from the north who travelled south

⁴⁹ M. A. Hicks, 'Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the North', in R. Horrox (ed.) *Richard III and the North* (Hull, 1986), p. 13.

⁵⁰ Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, pp. 318-19.

⁵¹ Hicks, 'Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the North', p. 11.

with him at the time of his peaceful usurpation.⁵² For example, a contingent of men was supplied to the duke on 15 June 1483 for:

...my lord of Gloucestre gude grace <hath> (was) writtyn to the cite whow that the qwhen and hyr adherauntes intendyth to <distrew> hys gude grace and odir of the blod riall, it [is] agreid that that [sic] ... with CC horsmen defensably arayd shall ryd upp to London to asyst (upon) my said lord gude grace and to be at Pomfret at Wedynsday at nyght next cumyng thar to atend apon my lord of Northumberland to go to my said lord of Gloucestre gude grace.⁵³

The city's political wariness revealed in the *York House Books* can only be fully understood within the context of the Wars of the Roses. This series of conflicts between the greater nobles and royals of England erupted in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁵⁴ The two main camps consisted of the Lancastrians under the banner of the reigning Henry VI and his chief noble the duke of Somerset, and the Yorkists under the duke of York.⁵⁵ Following the first battle of St Albans in 1455 violent conflict ensued intermittently, with dynastic change occurring when the forces of Henry VI were defeated at the battle of Towton. This bloodiest of English civil war battles took place on Palm Sunday, 29 March 1461, near a village named Towton in the vicinity of York.⁵⁶

⁵² Hicks, 'Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the North', p. 11.

⁵³ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 284.

⁵⁴ Michael K. Jones, 'Somerset, York and the Wars of the Roses', *The English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), p. 285.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁵⁶ Boardman, *The Battle of Towton*, p. 2.

The battle was a definitive victory for the Yorkist side. Most of those killed were Lancastrians, and their remaining supporters and ranks fled to their power base in the city of York.⁵⁷ Anticipating their objective to regroup, the earl of March, soon to become Edward IV, followed the hobbled Lancastrians there and ensured a swift victory. The city of York, thus became the stage for the new king's triumph and faced its first challenge in negotiating relations with the crown under a new ruler. The correspondence in *House Books* does not provide evidence of how this was achieved in 1461, but by 13 March 1476 at least, relations between the crown and York seem to have reached a fragile status quo. They show that Richard, duke of Gloucester, and Henry, earl of Northumberland, among other barons, knights, squires, yeomen and approximately 5,000 men addressed civic officials on 13 March 1476 at Bootham Bar on the king's behalf, in order to support and reinforce the rule of law and peace.⁵⁸ This blatant show of crown strength may have been a matter of Edward IV reinforcing the legitimacy of his rule and widespread support to the city; certainly it was an event particular to York, read to the citizens in several places throughout the city.⁵⁹ This strong contingent of men of importance in a spectacular show of crown strength seems to indicate the king's need to reinforce his power in York, which had evidently remained loyal to the Lancastrian cause even after the failure of Henry VI's Radeption.

⁵⁷ Boardman, *The Battle of Towton*, p. 146.

⁵⁸ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁹ C. E. McGee, 'Politics and platitudes: sources of civic pageantry, 1486', *Renaissance Studies* 3, (1989), p. 29.

In 1470, nine years after the Yorkist dynasty came to power, the Lancastrians realigned their party and set about ousting Edward IV from his throne. Henry VI's Readeption was short-lived, however, lasting from October 1470 to May 1471. At the Battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471 the Lancastrian cause was killed along with their heir, Henry's son Edward of Lancaster.⁶⁰ Henry himself was quietly murdered in the Tower of London soon after.⁶¹ Given the Lancastrians' renaissance of power, however brittle and brief, perhaps the attitude amongst their once-powerful base in York was to remain loyal to that side either through self-interest, or perhaps their belief in the legitimacy of Lancastrian rule. With this assumption, the reasons behind the address of two powerful northern magnates, Richard, duke of Gloucester and the earl of Northumberland, together with their large show of men, seems to become clearer:

proclamacio The king our sovereigne lorde straitely chargith and commaundith that nomanere man of what so evere condicion or degree he be of, make ne cause to be made any affray or any other thing attempt or doo, wherthrough the pease of the king our saide sovereigne lorde shulde be broken; nor that no man make nor pike any quarrel for any olde rancour, malice, matier or cause hertofore donne;⁶²

In particular, the striking reference to 'olde rancour' indicates that these lords wanted the city to put the factions of the past to rest and that they should not be an excuse for current turmoil. As stated above, York was unique in receiving this proclamation, and it was read in several places throughout the city in order to ensure its wide dissemination

⁶⁰ P. M. Kendall, *The Yorkist Age*, (London, 1962), p. 487.

⁶¹ C. Ross, *Edward IV* (London, 1997), p. 175.

⁶² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

amongst a difficult population.⁶³ Clearly then, there must have been serious instability in York to warrant the appearance of members of the higher nobility in the city demanding peace. Evidently, this conflict was either felt by these particular lords, the crown, or expressed by the citizens as relating to the cause. Although there is a chance the reference to ‘olde rancour’ refers to another reason for strife, the implication through the appearance of crown strength and royal representatives is that it was a matter of high importance to the crown, and either way demonstrates the king’s power in imposing his will in what had formerly been his enemies’ stronghold.

Despite this reassertion of the king’s implacable will, as Edward IV’s reign continued the reins of power in the north were quickly passed on to his brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester, to the improvement of the relationship between town and crown. During Edward’s second reign, 1471-1483, Richard’s influence and power over the north grew almost exponentially, perhaps due to his large retinue or the military authority he commanded as crown representative in the region.⁶⁴ The power he held along with the popularity he enjoyed in York contributed to his influence among the corporation.⁶⁵ On 4 July 1476 a letter was sent to the king concerning a Thomas Yotten, with the reply being received from the duke of Gloucester just four days later.⁶⁶ Ensuring the Gloucester received correspondence at an equal level to the king may indicate his growing

⁶³ McGee, ‘Politics and platitudes’, p. 29.

⁶⁴ M. A. Hicks, ‘Richard III and the North’, p. 16.

⁶⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 46-48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 46-48.

importance to the city by July 1476. At least by 31 December 1476, he had done enough to establish his role as a patron of the city and was rewarded upon a visit as follows:⁶⁷

The saide day and tyme by the forsaide maire and counsaile it was holie agreed and assented the duk of Gloucestre shall for his grete labours of now late made unto the kinges goode grace for the conservacion of the liberties of this cite, that he shalbe presented at his commyng to the cite with vj swannes and vj pikes.⁶⁸

The trend of Gloucester being written to and addressed on the same level as, or before the king, continues throughout the *Books*, and it appears that he had enveloped himself into the trust of the city by ‘his grete labours...for the conservacion of the liberties of this cite.’⁶⁹ By the time of Edward IV’s death in April 1483, Gloucester had become highly important to the city of York. The latter half of June 1483 saw military support provided for him by the city, and by the first half of July presents were being sent to his son ‘the Prince’ at Middleham, Richard’s name being formally entered as ‘Ricardi tercii.’⁷⁰

Richard III’s first visit to the city as a king was received with much pomp and splendour. The *Books* reveal the large amount of planning and deliberation as to the best way to greet the king who might, in the eyes of the civic élite of York, raise the city back up in national status.⁷¹ To that end, Richard was greeted with a large monetary gift from the

⁶⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 78.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 286.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 287-93.

city upon his arrival, and the *Books* in keeping the record of those who contributed shed light on Richard's greatest supporters within the city.⁷² Alas, any special relationship York might have cultivated with the reigning monarch was not to last. Two years after coming to the throne, Richard's reign grew tenuous. The *Books* show that a letter was sent out against sedition, in the hopes that those who might be rising against him would be culled through his loyal subjects.

...And where it is soo that diverse sedicious and evil disposed personnes both in our cite of London and elleswher within this our realme, enforce themselves daily to sowe sede of noise and disclaundre agaynest our persone and ayenst many of the lordes and astates of our land to abuse the multitude of our subgiettes and averte ther myndes from us...⁷³

By 8 July 1485, the city was preparing for the worst. Entries show measures beginning to be taken in defence of the city, and the preparation, should it be necessary, to go to war on his behalf.⁷⁴ On the 19th of August, soldiers were sent to the king, but three days later the record reveals the city's reaction to news of his death in battle against Henry Tudor:

...the King Richard late mercifully reigning upon us was through grete treason of the duc of Northfold and many other that turned ayenst hyme, with many other lordes and nobiles of this north parties, was piteously slane and murdred to the grete hevynesse of this cite...⁷⁵

⁷² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 291-92.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 359-60.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 366-67.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 368-69.

The implications for the city were serious. The military support they had provided to the late king along with the general tenor of lamentation in the passage above conveys a sense that the corporation was at a loss as to how they should proceed faced with yet another change of dynasty. Finding the next possible benefactor was obviously at the forefront, and to that end they sent a letter to the person whom they believed may aid in their survival during the latest regime change: the earl of Northumberland.

...loving almightie God of your home cummyng at this woofull season, beseeching your good lordship to be towards us and this citie as ye have be heretofore right good and tender lord and soo to advertise us at this tyme as may be to the honour of your lordship, the well and prouffit of us and sauffegard of this said citie, whereunto we shall applie us both with bodie and goodes and ever to owe unto your lordship our faithfull hertes and true service.⁷⁶

Appealing to the next greatest northern magnate may not initially be particularly surprising, but given that he had travelled south with the late king this would make it a questionable move towards enveloping themselves in the new king's good graces. However, not addressed in the *Books*, and particularly illuminating as to the reasons behind the city's speedy letter to the earl, was the defection by dereliction of the earl and his forces at Bosworth. Although the earl had travelled south in support of the king, he did not enter into battle against Henry Tudor, the motivation of which is discussed in a later chapter. If the city was aware of his defection to the winning side, their pleas to aid them in the 'sauffegard of this said citie' make much more sense.

⁷⁶ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 369.

Nevertheless, the accession of Henry VII must have left the city concerned with how to renegotiate their position in the face of their obvious support of his opponent, despite any succour they may receive at the hands of the earl of Northumberland. The *Books* show Henry's first act with the city was to publish the proclamation of his reign and the general pardon of those who had been against him:

For asmoche as many and diverse persones of the north parties of this our land, knyghtes, esquires, gentilmen and other have done us now of late grete displeaser being ayenst us in the feld with the adversarye of us, enemy of nature and of all puplique wele, which as we be enfourmed repenting ther defaultes desiring to doo us suche pleasir and service and might reduce them unto our grace and favour...and also for that that they of thoo parties be necessarye and according to ther dutie most defend this land ayenst the Scottes of our especiall grace pardon to all and everiche persone or persones of thestate and degree abovenamed...⁷⁷

Although this gesture of magnanimity demonstrates Henry's interest in bringing together the country as a whole, it is marred by the caveat that those pardoned were required to continue their defence of England against the Scots. York having been the staging ground for so many Scottish campaigns, as is illuminated through the *Books* and discussed later, it implies a heavy condition on their pardon for having supported the then-reigning king.

The onus of defence thus firmly placed on York's shoulders by the new monarch, the *Books* demonstrate the city's attempts to insinuate itself as loyal to the emergent Tudor dynasty. Firstly, the royal nomination for recorder was accepted on 17 October 1485;⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 372.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 370-71, 383-84.

secondly, an Oath of Allegiance was demanded from the king on 25 October and was recorded and taken by 26 October;⁷⁹ thirdly, the city's acceptance of the king's recommendation for common clerk happened by 30 November.⁸⁰ Finally, when all these measures did not establish sufficient proof of loyalty to the new regime, the council officially informed Henry VII of their long-standing allegiance to the Lancastrian cause.⁸¹

...and then after at the commyng of King Edward in to your said cite, thenhabitautes of the said cite for ther trouth unto ther said souverain lord suche as a bode was robbid, spolid and rawnsomied, and the other soo extremely empoverishived that fue of them was ever after of power to diffend themeself leving in the said cite, but utterly constreigned to depart out of the same, by reason wherof the two parties of the said cite was within fewe yeres after the said batell utterly prostrated, decaied and waisted; and then after in the first yere of the readempcion of ther said souverain lord King Herry, when the said inhabitance joyng the commyng of hyme there old naturall souverain lord...⁸²

Despite the city's various attempts at re-establishing itself within the new dynasty, its actions appear to be at cross-purposes with its intended ends. Even though the city claimed to have ever been in support of the Lancastrians, they denied entry to the king's first emissary and continually refused to accept his nomination for recorder.⁸³ By these actions, the council appears to be at odds with what might be best for the city in terms of relations with the government. Eventually bolder attempts were made to re-assert

⁷⁹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 382.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 389.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 390-91; McGee, 'Politics and platitudes', p. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 390-91.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 370-71; McGee, 'Politics and platitudes', p. 30; Although in Attreed's introduction to her edition, she states, '...Henry VII, whose messenger refused to enter York for fear of his life.' *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xxiii.

themselves within the Lancastrian side, and explain through pageantry and correspondence their reasons for compliance with the House of York during the latter years of Yorkist rule. In fact, the bill delivered to the king states over and over again how their continued mistrust by Edward IV had ensured they were:

...in such disfavour that by his days they could never be relieved of their said povertie but from day to day so decayed that in the end of his reign they were and yet be greatly indebted and utterly impoverished and in such a point of extreme misery that without your grace be shewed unto them it is not likely that within few years they shall find any man that may take on him to bear the charge of the city as mayor, sheriff of chamberlain of the same...⁸⁴

Evidence from the *Books* supports this assertion – there are several entries that deal with the refusal of public office due to the candidate's inability to afford its financial responsibilities.⁸⁵ However, as suggested above, the civic elite that would have been promoted to positions of local authority would generally have been members of the merchant group; a group that in York during this period were already dealing with the burden of attempting to maintain their status, lifestyle and commerce through the system of credit.⁸⁶ This system did nothing for their cause, only furthering their debt and ensuring their and York's continual movement to the periphery of national importance in favour of London. Therefore although it may have been true that the city was subjected

⁸⁴ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 391.

⁸⁵ See for example *Ibid.*, vols. 1 and 2, pp. 137, 227, 230, 252, 302, 635. In the entries noted here, only the first explicitly states that the subject 'Brian Conyers shall not be called to the office of shirefyk within this city of Yorke within the space of viij yeres, unless he be the grace of God with<in> the said viij yeres may growe in gudes and ryches to have the said office...' However, the argument for flight from office due to not having the money to support the demands has been previously noted and studied. See for example R. B. Dobson, 'Urban Decline in Late Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 27 (1977), pp. 13-17; and Kermodé, 'Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York', pp. 179-98.

⁸⁶ Postan, 'Credit in Medieval Trade', p. 242.

to 'extreme miserie' and financial ruin under Yorkist rule, it is equally probable that a fiscal crisis would have occurred anyway, and the entry only reflects an easy excuse for city officials to renegotiate their position under the budding Tudor dynasty.

The records in the *York House Books* provide an insight into the aims, objectives and agenda of local and national government. As York was losing status by this period, it meant their combined objective to ensure their relevance at the national level required constant negotiation with the crown. The evidence shows it to have been no easy task for those to whom the responsibility fell; with the high turnover of kings and political strife of the final part of the Wars of the Roses York's leaders would have needed to step carefully and continually gratify national leaders to maintain their position of importance.

These records show how they best managed this task. Finding intermediaries for intercession such as Richard, duke of Gloucester, ensuring the support of whichever dynasty was currently ruling, and stressing their military and strategic importance against the Scots are some examples of how they attempted to achieve their ends. The ideal York was attempting to emulate remained distant, London's model of civic greatness enjoyed much easier access to royal government. York was raised to the level of national governance nearly a century beforehand in 1392, but this move was short-lived and the frailty of Richard III's regime reinforced its relative isolation from royal affairs.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Liddy, 'The rhetoric of the royal chamber', p. 323.

Through the frequent correspondence with Richard, duke of Gloucester and the special relationship the city had with him during his tenure as admiral and later as king, the correspondence in the *House Books* suggests that the city felt it had some chance to secure its place in the national political sphere between 1483 and 1485. Perhaps the corporation sensed that under Richard, its high political status and proximity to national government would return, raising the city's chances for economic survival in the face of challenging financial times.⁸⁸ Certainly, this is what seemed to be Richard III's agenda upon his lavish coronation celebration in York in 1483.⁸⁹ Not only did he relieve the city of portions of its tolls, he also set forward plans for a new castle to defend the city.⁹⁰ Sadly for York, Richard's untimely death two years later meant his plans were never carried out and worse still, that which he attempted to grant to the city was left in judicial limbo with neither the corporation nor the crown fully understanding what his intentions for the financial and strategic succour of the city were.⁹¹

As has been shown in this brief survey of correspondence between York and the crown, the records in the *House Books* give a clear picture of national government striving to control the city and the city attempting to assert its own concerns and aspirations.

Maintenance or escalation to national importance was of utmost concern to the economically failing city, and to that end the search for good lordship, patronage and intermediary measures between the king and the city were consistently at the forefront.

⁸⁸ Kermode, 'Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century', pp. 475-501.

⁸⁹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. xxi; Attreed, 'The king's interest', p. 24;

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. xxi-xxii.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. xxi-xxii.

Following the death of Richard III in 1485, the city was adrift without their royal benefactor, and despite the earl of Northumberland's envelopment into the good graces of Henry VII, the city was unable to attain the status they had reached under his predecessor. Left without a firm supporter close to the crown, the city had few other means through which they could assume regional importance and national prestige. The next best means for the city to appeal to the crown was by their strategic location and mustering point for wars with the northern enemy: Scotland. The record of York's involvement with wars against Scotland in the *House Books* is the subject of the next chapter.

2

YORK'S STRATEGIC ROLE IN THE SCOTTISH BORDER WARS

*We have understande to our ful good pleasur your redy disposicion to serve
un in hys company ayenst oure ennemys and rebells the Scottes...*⁹²

York's relationship with the crown was defined above all by its strategic position as a major northern city, a buffer to and manpower provider for war with Scotland. York's *House Books* are replete with communication between the city and central government on the mustering of troops, detailing both the system through which men were enlisted and civic concerns about funding. The city, although exceedingly burdened by the responsibility of providing both troops and financial support to these campaigns, carried on giving what they could as often as commanded. The evidence from the *Books* suggests a city uneasily embracing a double-edged role: one that gave York prominence at the same time as burdening it with financial and security concerns. As opposed to looking at entries from the *Books* piecemeal, the approach here is to take every entry regarding conflict with Scotland and attempt to piece together a picture of a late medieval city striving to provide logistically for costly campaigns, through which service it hoped to raise its status with the crown. This chapter will first focus on the context of English-Scottish relations in the later fifteenth century, then look at how contention between the two countries influenced the mentalities of the urban population. It will look beyond the

⁹² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 700.

bald entries and assess the beginnings of intolerant behaviour to foreigners at a time when national identity was becoming increasingly important.⁹³

Although in the later medieval period York was in fiscal decline, civic officials were desperate that it should remain an essential and strategic entity to the crown. One of the most powerful ways York attempted to achieve this during the politically tumultuous later fifteenth century was as the city from which Scottish campaigns were strategically supported. Its situation in the north, along with being a regional capital and hub for overseas trade, meant York was well-placed for the responsibility of national security along the border. However, declining prosperity meant that meeting the obligation of providing troops for the frequent campaigns became evermore difficult.⁹⁴

Even though other cities occasionally took on the burden of providing for Scottish campaigns, York carried the greatest responsibility as the closest regional capital to the northern Marches which was also accessible to the political leaders in the south.⁹⁵

Hostility between England and Scotland had a long history by the later fifteenth century, and affected regional, social and economic relations with Scotland.⁹⁶ Evidence of statutes attesting to this include Edward III's Second Statute of the Staple, cap. 12, which

⁹³ C. J. Neville, 'Local Sentiment and the "National" Enemy in Northern England in the Later Middle Ages', *The Journal of British Studies*, 35 (1996), p. 421; R. Bean, 'War and the Birth of the Nation State', *The Journal of Economic History*, 33 (1973), p. 203.

⁹⁴ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p, 703.

⁹⁵ Attreed, *The King's Towns*, p. 193.

⁹⁶ Neville, 'Local Sentiment and the "National" Enemy', p. 421.

forbade the carrying of wool to Berwick-on-Tweed or any other part of Scotland.⁹⁷ Similar statutes were adopted in 1383 by Richard II to keep armour or food out of the north and ultimately, during Henry VIII's reign, even the trading of horses north of the Marches was forbidden.⁹⁸ Hostilities between the two countries can in part be traced to the consistent raiding of livestock over the borders, a practice known as reiving.⁹⁹ The catalogue of statues relating to hostilities between the nations is ample enough, but the *York House Books* add a further dimension to the study of cross-border animosities in providing a local dimension to this continuing tension. They also fully demonstrate the difficulties of shouldering the burden of defence in the face of economic ruin and social upheaval.

By the time of Edward IV's accession in 1461, Scotland and England had enjoyed four years of relative peace, the truce established in 1457 having remained in effect for almost half a decade, but Edward's approach to Scotland had been different from that of his predecessor. By 1481 his public assertions that Scotland was a possession of the English crown, as well as the marked hostilities following a failed marriage contract with the Scottish princess, meant he earned the appellation 'Revare Eduarde' or Reiver Edward.¹⁰⁰ The rift ran much deeper than Edward IV and King James III of Scotland could mend,

⁹⁷ W. R. Riddell, 'The Unspeakable Scot', *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 18 (1928), p. 533.

⁹⁸ Riddell, 'The Unspeakable Scot', pp. 534-35.

⁹⁹ S. Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (London, 2000), p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ W. R. Riddell, 'The Unspeakable Scot, Again!', *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 21 (1930), p. 264.

despite the period of truce existing between the two countries during the 1470s.¹⁰¹ In August 1479, the collapse of marriage arrangements with the Scottish princess meant a renewal of hostilities between the nations. York had been warned by the crown on 21 August 1479 to expect the Scottish princess:

...it is agreed betwix us and our derrest cousin and brother the king of Scottes that our right dere cousine his suster shall is alle goodly hast arrive in this our royaume for to come towards our town of Notyngnam for hir marriage, so that with Goddes mercy she shalbe at our cite of Yorke...¹⁰²

Both the breakdown of the truce of 1457 and the collapse of the peace of the 1470s were seemingly due to the termination of this proposed marriage, compounded by the continued skirmishes along the border without reparations being made to England. The renewal of hostilities is documented in the *Books*, showing that York was making preparations for war with Scotland by 1480.¹⁰³ Conflict was renewed in February 1481, when Edward sent out a long list of preparations for war with Scotland.¹⁰⁴ These preparations are well-documented in the *Books*, the king calling for a quick response to his letters, the victualling of his army, and the proper uniformed dress of those men accompanying him on his campaign. An excerpt from a lengthy call from the king is as follows:

Item, that every mane that shall go with the kyng in his seid viage to have upon him a white jaket with a crosse of Seynt Georgie sweed theruppon, and if ony

¹⁰¹ Attreed, *The King's Towns*, p. 193.

¹⁰² *The York House Books*, vol. 1, p. 196.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 220-21.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 694-95.

mane woll have beside that his particurer bagge of him list he may have it so that it be upon a jaket of armes of Seint Georgie withoute change of coloure.¹⁰⁵

This particular example is important as it highlights a sense of national identity being engendered in the quest to subdue the Scots. This sense of identity, or at least the mentality that those who lived north of the border were wholly different than themselves had existed since at least the fourteenth century, and would only deepen as campaigns progressed.¹⁰⁶

Fortunately, these detailed preparations and the city's responsibility was slightly lessened as the wapentake of Ainsty to the west of York was also expected to provide troops, money and support. The wapentake, an area of York's hinterland, had been formally annexed in 1449, which brought in added revenue, increased the pool from which soldiers could be called, and extended York's jurisdiction further into the countryside.¹⁰⁷

Between February and September 1481 there are eleven entries in the *House Books* that illustrate not only the great pains the city took in preparing for the campaign but also the importance the city felt in ensuring that an accurate record of the proceedings existed.

Keenly important to city officials was the appearance on 25 July 1481 of two of the king's men who had come to the council chamber cap-in-hand to request money in order to pay the destitute soldiers who were lingering in the city.

¹⁰⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2. p. 695.

¹⁰⁶ A. King, 'Best of Enemies: Were the Fourteenth-Century Anglo-Scottish Marches a "Frontier Society"?' in A. King and M. A. Penman (eds.) *England and Scotland in the Fourteenth Century: New Perspectives* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 117.

¹⁰⁷ Attreed, *The King's Towns*, p. 37.

At the which cam into the counsell chaimbre tofore all abovenamyd the right wirshupful sirs Henry Walker yoman of the crown, and William Kyghley (yo) yoman of the chaimbre to the kynges highnesse, and ther and then shewid howe at they by the kynges high comaundment war commyn with the sowgers now beyng within this cite, the which sowgers wer destitute of money and noight to content the people for the stuffe takyn uppon thame ne forto convey thame furth to the Newcastle, for the which cause and for the kynges plesour they desired a prest of money aswele for the contentacion for the stuffe as for the conveying furth of the said sougeours.¹⁰⁸

York's constancy, however detrimental to the city itself, was eventually recognized. By

18 October 1481 Edward expressed his gratitude explicitly:

...and by the reaporte of our derest brodir the duc of Gloucestre we have understande to our ful good pleasur your redy disposicion to serve us in hys company ayenst oure enemys and rebells the Scottes, for the whyche we tenderly thanke you and pray you of you continuance in the same, lattyng yow wytt that in suche reasonabyll thynges as ye shall have to doo with us hereafter we shal therfor so remembre youre saide disposicon as shalbe to your wele and honnour in tymes to come.¹⁰⁹

This passage not only illuminates the king's good will towards York for assistance in this matter, but also shows how the special relationship between the city and the king's brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester was developing. In his position in the north, Richard was quickly becoming the country's most powerful magnate. This may also have enhanced his good reputation in the city through gaining recognition from the crown, which would stand him in good stead four years later at his contested accession as Richard III in July 1483.

¹⁰⁸ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 242.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 700.

Perhaps sensing the egregious burdens that had been placed on the city, on 12 April 1482 Edward attempted, at least superficially, to ease the city's military responsibility.

...ye be not of such riches as ye have been in tyme past, we wold be content to have a capitan and six score archers at your costes and charges tattend uppon us in this our voyage, that with Goddes grace we think to make against (or) our enymies and rebelles the Scottes; we lat you wite that for the prayer and at instance of our said brother we be pleasid with the said capitan and vj^{xx} archers, willyng you in every wise to se that the said costes and charges be not laid uppon eny pour (cocitesyn) comoner bot uppon such citezins within our said citie as may easelie bere the same...¹¹⁰

This entry not only highlights the king's growing magnanimity toward the city for their support, but also his awareness of their growing poverty. However, notwithstanding this modicum of good will on the part of the king toward the previously Lancastrian city, just one month later York was expected to provide men for the duke of Gloucester's invasion of Scotland.¹¹¹ Although this particular foray into enemy territory was to occur 'uppon Wedhenisday next commyng after this present date in subduyng the kynges greit enemye the kyng of Scottes and his adherentes,' references in the *Books* to this set of invasions run consistently through to July 1482.¹¹² From the entries it is difficult to discern whether the city was expected by Richard himself to provision and supplement his army; the rhetoric used in the first passages regarding this bout of war aims to couch it in terms of a voluntary service on the city's part, and perhaps it was so, bearing in mind the king's attempt to alleviate the city's military burden only one month earlier.

¹¹⁰ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 696.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 255.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 260.

...and for somuch as the said duc at all tymes have ben benevolent gude and gracios lorde to this cite (<at all tyme>), it was thocht by the said lieutenaunte that the nobles and men of (hanour and) hanour of this cite that it war spedeful and also thankful to his said grace to send unto (his grace) <hym> a certeyn people wele and defensable arraid in assisting of his said grace in <this> his said purpose.¹¹³

Certainly the city officials, whether they felt they were expected to or not, complied in assisting Gloucester in subduing the king's 'auncient enemyes.'¹¹⁴ However, logistically, this last foray was where the city felt the greatest pinch. The following entry, dated 29 June 1482, is highly detailed about the wages to be paid to the soldiers and in appointing the captains, and the following passage regarding the campaign of 13 July 1482 follows the same general format.¹¹⁵ As highlighted above, the city was in a difficult position in attempting to meet the logistical requirements of their calling. As Attreed argues on York's financial problems, 'the city of York found itself in a particularly difficult position, as its officers were reluctant to oppose a favourite project of the good lord Gloucester, but suffered too many economic problems to be open-handed in their support.'¹¹⁶ Luckily, the following day York received a reprieve and they recorded their great joy at being relieved of meeting the demands for so many soldiers by the duke of Gloucester in the *House Books*:

...and in especiall of that at wher we here afore promittid to our most drad suffreyn legh lord the kyng the nombyr of vj^{xx} archers to this viage now to be had in to Skotland, that it lyst your gude grace of your benevolens to cencedyr the

¹¹³ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 255.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 260.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 260-61.

¹¹⁶ Attreed, *The King's Towns*, p. 193.

povert of thys pure cite to pardon us to the nombyr of v skor archers and a capiten...¹¹⁷

The rhetoric of this passage reasserts the poverty of the city, which is a reoccurring theme throughout the *Books*. Crucially, it also exposes the city's position as a town that was still attempting to breach the gap between their support of the house of Lancaster in the past and their current support of the Yorkists through the description of themselves as 'pure.'¹¹⁸

The city's financial problems, however, were not resolved by the duke's intercession requesting fewer soldiers. Just a few weeks later, the *Books* record that 'a tax shall be rasid of the parishons of thys cite for vij days wages' in order to pay the soldiers in Scotland.¹¹⁹ A short time after that, a complaint was recorded that the troops were not receiving their due.¹²⁰ Disputes over money raised for this campaign and its allocation continued well into the autumn of that year, ending only with the agreement that the captains should retain the remainder of the money.¹²¹

At the wich day it was agreid by all above writtyn that all soch money as is in the handes of John Brakynbery and Thomas Davyson that remaynys unspent of soch money as was deliwyrd to tham for thar expensis in the viage now late made in to Skotland, shalbe gevyn to tham in reward for thar deligent service in the said

¹¹⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 703.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 703.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 262.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 263.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 267-69.

viage at the instaunce of the ryght nobill prince my lord of Gloucestir, so that it be takyn for no precedent.¹²²

Thus, perhaps rightly, the city provided for their troops and accounted for the compensation of the captains. The language of this passage duly praises the captains for their diligent service, an important detail, as they might have been needed to campaign or to help muster soldiers again.

The evidence from the *Books*, however, shows that this service would be decreasingly in demand. Following the contentious years of Edward IV's reign, when relations between the two countries proved fractious, the few years of Richard III's are seemingly quiet. In fact, there are no entries regarding mobilization of troops or support for northern campaigns during Richard's tenure on the throne, possibly due to the more pressing domestic concerns that harrowed his reign.¹²³

Richard's successor Henry VII found that relations with Scotland would be contentious from the very beginning.¹²⁴ The *House Books* show that as early as 15 October 1485 battles were occurring with rebels associated with the Scottish enemy. As such, the citizens of York were again called upon to mobilize themselves in their own defence.

Thus Henry's approach to warfare with the Scots was wholly different to that of his predecessors: not only did the king provide no troops or support from the crown for the

¹²² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 272.

¹²³ R. Horrox, 'Richard III (1452–1485)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 2004, '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23500>' (15 November 2008).

¹²⁴ Riddell, 'The Unspeakable Scot, Again!', p. 264; and J. Sadler, *Border Fury*, (Harlow, 2005), pp. 402–403.

city, he also did not tax the already poor city in order to launch the campaign. The entry reads:

...Sciatis ut nuper intelligimus certos rebelles nostros associates cum antiquis inimicis nostris Scocie personam nostram pacem et tranquillitatem...nos malicie eorundem rebellum et inimicorum nostrorum obviare et resistere volentes ut tenemur; assignavimus vos coniunctim et divisim ad omnes homines ad arma ac omnes alios homines defensabiles in civitate predicta et suburbiis commorantes coram vobis venire et eos et eorum quemlibet iuxta gradus et facultates suos armari et arraivare faciendum; et eos in armaturam et arraicionem huiusmodi continue ad rebellos et inimicos predictos si civitatem predictam ingredi sive invadere presumant debellandum et expellendum et ad eandem civitatem ad opus nostrum iuxta fidelitatem et ligeanciam quibus vobis tenendum custodiendum et custodiri faciendum.¹²⁵

The burden of defence, therefore, was placed wholly upon the population of York, but in an entirely different manner than under previous reigns. The reception of this shift in royal expectation cannot be discerned solely from the *Books* themselves. It is likely that the considerable loss of national importance and regional prestige associated with being the city from which campaigns were launched was felt keenly by city leaders, but it is equally possible that it was met with relief. After so many years of supporting the crown in their northern endeavours, coupled with the acute economic decline, even the very fabric of the city was falling apart. This is noted in the *Books* when the city asked the king for aid in restoring their defences:

...Pleasit the same to be acertayned we er and evermore shalbe your true and feithfull subgiettes redye tobbe with our bodis and godes any your high

¹²⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 380. '...Know that whereas we recently learned that certain of our rebels associated with out old enemies in Scotland are violently disturbing of our person, peace and tranquillity... we shall meet this rebellion and strongly resist our enemies. We have appointed you jointly and severally to call all armed men to come to us and all other men remaining in the aforesaid city and suburbs capable of defence, and to cause them and each of them to be armed and equipped according to their degree and ability; and those who are armed and equipped are to make war on and drive out the rebels and the aforesaid enemies if they presume to attack and invade the said city, for our service and according to the loyalty and allegiance which you hold and guard.'

commaundementes aswell for the safeguard of youre moost royall persone as this youre realme, and in especiall in sure preserving of this youre citie unto youre grace singularly ayenst all other entending the contrary. Albeit, souverain lord, youre said citie is soo gretely decayed aswell by falling downe of the walles of the same and by taking downe of youre castell ther by King Richard and as yit not reedified as othre in diverse wise that without the same bee more largely manned may ne cannot wel be kept ayenst youre ennymes and rebelles, if they shuld as God defend approche and move werre ayenst the same...¹²⁶

This passage is particularly illuminating as it is the first instance where the *Books* show the city laid the blame for their poor defences upon Richard III's shoulders. In doing so, the corporation communicated that the decay of their city was not due to any malfeasance of their own, rather it was the fault of the regime that Henry VII was in opposition to. On the other hand, in naming Richard III as culpable for the city's poor defences the *Books* also highlights that on the part of the civic government at least, the memory of Richard III as York's great benefactor was beginning to sour. This would become important at a later date, when the true political leanings of the corporation were tested by the Tudor dynasty. Therefore, the *House Books* illustrate both the city at it highest point in their role of national security and at their lowest.

The consequence of years of arduous campaigning and ill-feeling towards their counterparts from the other side of the border was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a deep resentment towards the Scots. The *House Books* reveal the negativity attached to being Scottish in myriad entries. Despite his not being Scottish, the *Books* even show resentment to Richard, duke of Gloucester on at least one occasion, a dislike that may have stemmed from his direct involvement in calling upon the city to provide for the Scottish wars and for destroying the city's defences without amply providing for their

¹²⁶ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 549.

rebuilding. It is interesting to note that this enmity must have been rampant enough throughout the city in order to have been made an example in the *Books*. Earlier, during Edward IV's preparations in the summer of 1482, two artisans had appeared before the mayor to report Master Roger Brere for saying about the duke of Gloucester, 'What might he do for the cite? Nothing bot gryn of us.'¹²⁷ This questioning of the duke's motives would have been highly detrimental to the city's priority of remaining in his good graces as a way to maintain its status with the crown, so it is significant that an undercurrent of negative opinion towards the war and its associated taxes existed and was voiced in the *Books*. It ran parallel to the attitude that to be Scottish was to be inferior, such that implying someone had Scottish origins was a means of defaming one another.

In the *House Books*, there are six instances of people either peremptorily coming forward to stifle any accusation of being Scottish or else appearing in the council chamber to refute having been called a Scot by other members of society. The language of these entries is particularly striking. On 17 March 1477 one John Colyn was 'notyd and diffamyd of the chylder of iniquite be veray malesse that he shud be a Scotte and no Ynglyzman;¹²⁸ and then in November of the same year, 'John Saunderson, ffisher, ... was wrongfully noysed, slaundered and defamed that he should be a Scotissheman...'¹²⁹ Just as the *Books* affirm that to be associated with Scots was derogatory, so they also show that even being considered foreign was enough to merit rough treatment on the part

¹²⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 696.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 109.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 131.

of the civic establishment. This was perhaps due to the community of aliens who resided in the city, and the attitudes that often coincided with relationships between ‘locals’ and ‘foreigners’.¹³⁰ England, after all, was a country that had imposed a separate tax on aliens from 1440.¹³¹ On 17 November 1480, simply being considered an alien required a person to go to particular trouble to appear before the mayor, pay a fine or else be relieved of their ‘ffraunches.’

It is agred that the alienyenes inhabiet within the citee shalbe called tofore the mair and examynd apou the ordinaunce apou theym, and that he or thei shall make ffyne such as shall be [*illegible*] by the maire and his counsell etc. And if that or any of tham refuse so to do than to discharge him or theym of his ffraunches.¹³²

Further evidence of this animosity is shown in a lengthy list of city regulations written into the *Books* less than a year later:

...videlicet quod nullus alieni forensicus admittatur [ad] libertatem civitatis ab hac die in antea nisi se inhabitat infra istam vicinitatem concenserunt esse bonum etc. Et ad secundum articulum omnes prescripti concenserunt quod omnes illi <(forensicos) forensici> qui preantea recepti sunt ad libertatem inhabitant seipsos infra istam civitatem citra festum Advincula Petra proximum sub pena amissionis libertatis sue. Et eciam quod nulli alienigeni admittantur ad libertatem ab hac die in antea nisi quilibet eorum solvit xl solidos...Et eciam quod nullus officialis non vendit nec alienat officium suum alicui sub pena exoneracionis officii sui. Et eciam quod omnes officials camere et alienigeni inhabitant infra tenuram communitatis et in nullo alio loco etc. Et eciam quod omnes qui utlagi sunt infra civitatem portent onera escaete eiusdem etc. Et eciam quod omnes illi qui vendunt allices et alios in articulos specificatos vendunt in foro Jovis et non alibi.

¹³⁰ R. B. Dobson, ‘Aliens in the City of York During the Fifteenth Century’, in J. Mitchell (ed.) *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: Studies in Memory of Andrew Martindale*, (Stamford, 2000), pp. 249-50.

¹³¹ S. L. Thrupp, ‘A Survey of the Alien Population of England in 1440’, *Speculum*, 32 (1957), p. 262.

¹³² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 224.

Et eiam <respectuatur> quod mercatores London' non vendunt mercandizas suas nisi mercatoribus civitatis...¹³³

This list of regulations demonstrates both the growing tensions between citizens of York and their foreign neighbours, and also those between the citizens of York and their neighbours from London. This may be evidence of the growing concern of employment and opportunity being handed to those not native to the region, an attitude which went beyond the 'alienyenes' in York.¹³⁴ The period during which the previous two excerpts were written, the beginning of the 1480s, saw an increase in the movement to decrease liberties and privileges granted to foreigners in England. This is best exemplified in the anti-alien legislation and parliament of 1484 when the citizens of London were successful in petitioning the government for official sanctions against aliens.¹³⁵ In York, the movement to curb liberties extended not only to foreigners but also to those who hailed from other parts of the country, and predated the official parliamentary legislation of 1484.

¹³³ *The York House Books*, ed. L. C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 229-31. Translated, '...namely that no alien be admitted to the liberty of the city from this day forward unless he dwelt within the city. They all agreed to the second article that all those foreigners who were already admitted to the liberty should live within the city by the next feast of Saint Peter's Chains, under penalty of dismissal from the freedom of the city. Also, that no alien be admitted to the freedom from this day unless he paid 40 s....And also that no official sell or alienate his office under penalty of being discharged from his office. Also, that all officials of the chamber and all aliens should live within the tenure of the commonalty and in no other place. And also that all who are outlawed within the city should bring their charges to the escheator. And also that all those who sell herrings and other things specified in the articles should sell them in Thursday Market and not elsewhere. And respectively, London merchants should not sell their merchandise except to merchants of the city...'

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 224.

¹³⁵ A. F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs, *Richard III's Books: Ideals and Reality in the Life and Library of a Medieval Prince*, (Stroud, 1997), pp. 244-50.

However, should the question of nationality arise for an ordinary individual, it must have been significantly defamatory for that person to go to great expense and pains to ensure their Englishness could be officially asserted.¹³⁶ The *Books* illustrate examples of when this occurred, as in the case of William Brown, lister:

...tofore all abovesaid cam personalie (tofor) Thomas Arole dwellyng in (Newarte) <Elborth' in the parich of Dodyngton> in the countie of Northumbreland yoman <and James Tailfere servaunt to Sir Henry Percy knyght>, and thare shewid and said that one William Broun of Yorke litster was a trewe Inglissheman born in the town of Nesbet in the parissh of Dodyngton ande son to William ;Broun of the same Nesbet, and (hag) had to his godfaders Robert Colstone of Dodyngton and William Gudeneighbour of the same and Isabol Clerke the wiffe of John Clerke of Nesbet his godmoder, and at the said William Broun was nather of aliene of blode to eny Scottishman and that he with mony other if nede require is and wolbe redy at all tyme to testefie the same and more.¹³⁷

The entry affirms that even an accusation of being Scottish was enough to seek help from social superiors to ensure that the claim was refuted, as Thomas Arole is identified as a yeoman and James Tailfere a servant to Sir Henry Percy. This form is further exemplified in the case of John Meldrom in 1482, who bore a letter from Sir Henry Percy himself when appearing before the mayor.¹³⁸ One of the most striking incidences is the case of John Harrington, a council clerk who found himself accused of being Scottish by Thomas Wharf in the autumn of 1486.¹³⁹ Interestingly, John Harrington's nomination to

¹³⁶ R. H. Helmholz, 'Canonical Defamation in Medieval England', *The American Journal of Legal History* 15, (1971), pp. 262-65.

¹³⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 237.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 728.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 510.

position of recorder by Henry VII was a matter of dispute,¹⁴⁰ and he had previously worked closely with Richard III as both common clerk and in the interest of favouring petitions of the poor.¹⁴¹ Perhaps Harrington's past as a Yorkist adherent and nominee of the Tudor king led to an accumulation of animosity from others, resentful of his ability to negotiate positions of power within both reigns. Furthermore, his position as common clerk may have identified him to the commons as a person of no significant social status who was rising in the ranks of the gentry aspirant.¹⁴² The accusation of being Scottish made against him was immediately refuted with a letter from a kinsman who also happened to be a knight, bolstered by sought further assistance from Lady Fitzhugh.¹⁴³ If these testimonies had not been enough to show that he was no Scot, Master Harrington also secured correspondence to the council chamber from no fewer than two more knights, Sir John Conyers as well as Sir Robert Harrington, and Thomas Stoil the vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge.¹⁴⁴ Evidently this affirmation of identity from multiple trusted sources was enough to disprove the charge: by 10 December 1486, the *Books* show that a conclusion was reached in his favour:

...that the saide Thomas Wharff name and noesed Master John Harington to be a fals Scot, the saide Master John wolling to have amendes and recompence for his damagies and costes maid in that partie after the discrecion and pleasour... in an hundreth pounedes unto my saide lord...¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 389-90.

¹⁴¹ Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, p. 341; *The York House Books*, ed. L. C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 349-50.

¹⁴² Dobson, 'John Shirwood of York: a Common Clerk's will of 1473', p. 117.

¹⁴³ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 510.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 519-20.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 523.

It is interesting to note, however, that those individuals explicitly named in the *Books* as having been defamed as Scots originally hailed from areas near the border. William Brown was from Nesbit near Doddington in Northumberland,¹⁴⁶ John Meldrom from ‘Northame,’ probably Norham-upon-Tweed,¹⁴⁷ and John Harrington, though originally from Eastington-beside-Howden near present day Goole, spent some time in Richmondshire¹⁴⁸ in the service of the Sir John Conyers.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps these people were singled out because of their northern origins and connections, but it is equally possible that their northern origins were reason enough to make them suspicious personages. Indeed, those who hailed from the northern marches often had more in common with their counterparts on the other side of the border than with Englishmen.¹⁵⁰

There is an assumption that the distinctive difference existing between the people of the northern marches and those of the rest of the kingdom stemmed from the belligerent environment in which they lived.¹⁵¹ It must also be remembered that more often than not, the enemies of the English crown residing in the border lands were members of extended English families. The people of the marches lived in an area where borders were often

¹⁴⁶ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 237.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 728.

¹⁴⁸ R. Horrox, ‘Conyers family (*per. c.*1375–*c.*1525)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 2004; online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, 2008, ‘<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52783>’ (15 November 2008).

¹⁴⁹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, pp. 510, 514, 519-20.

¹⁵⁰ A. Goodman and A. Tuck (eds.), *War and Border Societies in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1992), pp. 2-3.

¹⁵¹ Neville, ‘Local Sentiment and the “National” Enemy’, p. 420.

fluid, at one point belonging to Scotland and at another to England. With families and kin groups living at times on the ‘wrong’ side of the border, it may have been difficult to identify with the rest of the nation who considered them the avowed enemy of the English crown and government. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that some of those whose nationalities were questioned hailed from the northern parts of the country that were perpetually embroiled in war and reiving with the Scots.

In the later fifteenth century, society along the border between England and Scotland was in disarray.¹⁵² The people of the marches had little in common with Englishmen who lived outside of it, creating difficulties when they moved away from their natal homes to the cities to assimilate themselves into the intended society. Due to this, northerners and those with northern connections were persecuted and accused. This occurred to such an extent that the only recourse, should one be defamed as a Scot, was refutation, a process that meant going through considerable trouble and expense. This phenomenon is illustrated in the *House Books*, as well as one possible root of this dissension, namely, the Scottish border wars that drained the urban society of York – the very society in which the outsiders were attempting to integrate themselves.

The Scottish border wars were hardly new occurrences in the later fifteenth century.¹⁵³ Centuries of reiving, raiding and dissent between the two nations meant that from 1296 open war with Scotland was generally a fact of life for northern Englishmen. This

¹⁵² Neville, ‘Local Sentiment and the “National” Enemy’, pp. 419-20.

¹⁵³ For a more in-depth study of the Border Wars and relations along the marches in the fourteenth century see for example C. J. Neville, ‘Keeping the Peace on the Northern Marches in the Later Middle Ages’, *The English Historical Review*, 109 (1994), pp. 1-25, especially pp. 1-22.

drained York, a city that maintained for much of this time the responsibility of supporting northern campaigns logistically and financially. The *York House Books* illuminate this, displaying through their entries a portion of the tremendous toll that the wars had on the city, as well as on the urban society that was tasked with maintaining it. The financial and social tolls that these wars had on the people of York were just one reason for the social unrest that was increasingly the norm in the city. This social unrest, between the city's officers, government and populous, would eventually lead to open rebellion against the crown and its representative in the north: Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland.

3

SOCIAL UNREST AND THE MURDER OF A PEER OF THE REALM: THE NORTHERN REBELLION OF 1489

*...in a place beside Thriske (b), and ther and then as he said my lord of Northumberland takyn and hurt by certan commons of the cuntrie ther aboutes. For the suretie of this cite, it is determynd that proclamacions shalbe maid for the king in diverse parties within the same.*¹⁵⁴

In the above passage the council of York recorded the murder of Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland on 28 April, 1489. This incident not only marked the death of a peer of the realm and the most powerful man in northern England, but also the beginning of the northern rebellion of 1489. The relatively small rebellion and death of Henry Percy have elicited a large amount of scholarship, most recently centring on the work of M. J. Bennett and M. A. Hicks.¹⁵⁵ The *House Books* chronicle some of the major incidents of the rebellion, and also illuminate the manner in which York's corporation attempted to negotiate relations between the increasingly over mighty crown and a rebellion that was popular with the people they governed. The rebellion of 1489 demonstrates the tenuous relationship that York held between the people, their civic needs, and duty to Henry VII. Study of the impact of the rebellion as it is recorded in the *House Books* sheds light on the way in which York navigated itself through a politically tumultuous period and the

¹⁵⁴ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 646.

¹⁵⁵ M. J. Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', *The English Historical Review*, 105 (1990), pp. 34-59; M. A. Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered', *Northern History*, 22 (1986), pp. 39-62; and M. A. Hicks, 'Dynastic Change and Northern Society: the career of the fourth earl of Northumberland', *Northern History*, 14 (1978), pp. 78-107.

ramifications open rebellion had for those in power who chose to support the opposition to the crown.

Although the *York House Books* clearly demonstrate York's strategic position as a northern city and its importance as a hub of overseas trade, they also demonstrate the fragile relationship that existed between the common people, the city governance, and the royal government. This is perhaps best illustrated during the reign of King Henry VII – a time when the city's former patron Richard III was dead and the city needed to renegotiate relations with both a new king and a new dynasty. Evidence from the *Books* suggests that the role of civic government during this time was uneasy, at once trying to look out for their best interests, whilst also understanding the need to remain loyal to the crown and attempting to placate the populace. These three objectives clashed in 1489 when the commons finally rose up in rebellion and killed Henry Percy, fourth earl of Northumberland. In his role as a great northern lord and representative of royal government he proved unable to walk the line between the crown and the people, and as a result paid the ultimate price. This chapter will look at why the people killed a noble who was potentially one of their greatest benefactors after Richard III, and the impact his death and the rebellion had on the city's relationship with the crown as highlighted in the *House Books*.

The earl of Northumberland came to power in the north in 1485, just after the battle of Bosworth.¹⁵⁶ Although he had been a supporter of Richard III, he had not openly entered into battle with him, tarrying on his way to the battle and preventing his retainers from joining the fray, action which perhaps contributed to the Yorkist loss on that fateful day.¹⁵⁷ The analyses of reasons for Henry Percy's withdrawal of support from Richard III at the last minute are complex. First, it has been suggested that the earl became discontented with the Yorkist dynasty because of the strong reins Richard III kept in the north.¹⁵⁸ Despite the Readeption of Henry VI in 1470-71, when his family's previously strong Lancastrian sympathies would have been tested, Percy carefully worked his way to increasing his northern power through support for the House of York. The *House Books* shed little light on the relationship between the city and the earl, the extant entries between the two parties being few and far between until the accession of Richard III in 1483. From 13 March 1476 until 15 June 1483 there are only ten entries pertaining to the earl. As a peer who was aiming to assert his hereditary regional importance, this is proportionately askew, with over four times as many entries pertaining to Richard, duke of Gloucester. Unfortunately the *House Books* did not exist before 1461, so a comparison of the earl's pertinent entries with those of his father is impossible from this record. However, the evidence points to the duke of Gloucester having usurped the earl's hereditary position of influence within York, and it does not seem to improve from the records in the *House Books* until after the accession of Henry VII. Between 23 August

¹⁵⁶ S. G. Ellis, 'Percy, Henry, fourth earl of Northumberland (c.1449–1489)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, (2006), '<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21935>' (15 December 2008).

¹⁵⁷ A. Goodman and A. MacKay, 'A Castilian Report on English Affairs, 1486', *The English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), pp. 96-97.

¹⁵⁸ Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, p. 347.

1485 and the earl's death in 1489, there are 33 entries that chronicle either correspondences and interactions between the earl and the city or matters that pertained to the earl in which the counsel felt obliged to mention him by name. The 1470s saw a steady rise in Percy's political career and his popularity among the commons of his domains, the culmination being his commanding a force of 6,000 men for Richard, duke of Gloucester's invasion of Scotland in 1482. Northumberland was, however, consistently overshadowed in the north by Edward IV's brother, Gloucester, both during the latter's tenure as lieutenant in the north and as king of England. This is another possible reason for his disaffection from the Yorkist cause at Bosworth. Yet finally, and perhaps most compellingly, it has been suggested that Henry Percy enjoyed a previous amicable relationship with Henry Tudor dating from the late 1460s.¹⁵⁹ Whatever his reasons for delay or withdrawal at Bosworth in 1485, it was a great departure from his strong support of Richard III from the beginning of his reign two years earlier. The *House Books* show the city sending him two hundred horsemen in order to assist Gloucester in his bid for the throne:

At the which day for as moch as my lord of Gloucestre gude grace <hath> (was) writtyn to the cite whow that the qwhen and hyr adherauntes intendyth to <distrew> hys gude grace and odir of the blod riall, it [is] agreid that that [sic] ... with CC horsmen defensably arayd shall ryd upp to London to asyst (upon) my said lord gude grace and to be at Pomfret at Wedynsday at nyght next cumyng thar to atend apon my lord of Northumberland to go to my said lord of Gloucestre gude grace.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Goodman and MacKay, 'A Castilian Report on English Affairs', p. 96.

¹⁶⁰ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 284.

A further reason for the earl of Northumberland's withdrawal could perhaps be explained by the history attached to the Percy name. Traditionally the Percy family had been strong supporters of the Lancastrian cause, a trend that had changed with the death of the third earl at Towton in 1461.¹⁶¹ Following the resounding Yorkist victory there, the Percy estates were given to the Neville family, Yorkist supporters.¹⁶² The Percys had always been a powerful force in the North, and the attempt to govern that part of the country without Percy support proved to be too difficult for the Yorkist dynasty.¹⁶³ By 1469 the fourth earl was released from the Tower and March 1470 saw the return of the Percy estates to their ancestral lands.¹⁶⁴ Although these facts were not recorded directly in the *House Books*, they do show that by March 1476 the crown felt the earl was representative of royal government enough to join in a demonstration of royal power at the city's Bootham Bar with the duke of Gloucester:

Richard duke of Gloucester, Great Constable and Admiral of England, and Henry earl of Northumberland, visited York 13 March 1476 with other barons, knights, squires, yeomen and others numbering 5000 men ... And overe this the right high and mighti Prince Richard duc of Gloucestre, grete constable and admirall of England, and the right noble Lorde Herry erle of Northumberland on the kinges behaulf straitely chargeith and commaundith that every man observe, kepe and obeye all the premises upon the peyne abovesaide.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Ellis, 'Percy, Henry, fourth earl of Northumberland', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 8.

Significantly, this passage in its entirety demonstrates the crown's frustration with the commons of the north, as it focuses on the charge that 'the pease of the king our saide sovereigne lorde shulde (ne cause) be broken; nor that no man make nor pike any quarell for any olde rancour, malice, matier or cause hertofore donne'.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, it addresses both that the peace of the city should be not be broken for any reason and also that old animosities, neither directly nor wholly identified, were disruptive to the peace of the city and thus also to the crown.

As has been previously stated, the social order within York consisted of a mercantile élite governing the entirety of the populace. This phenomenon had long been established within the city walls and existed throughout much of medieval Europe.¹⁶⁷ Despite the rule of civic elites over the populace, they were not always a coherent group, with rivalries and factionalism at times creating division.¹⁶⁸ It was perhaps this style of governance that alienated some of the commonalty of York. Economic problems facing the city, and the political uncertainties of the civil wars, increased the potential for unrest in the later fifteenth century. Indeed, the *House Books* record a growing number of civil disturbances. Interspersed between passages denoting bonds to keep the peace and arrests, there are specific instances where the city addressed citizens who questioned the civic leaders and the crown. On 19 January 1480, the *House Books* show that:

¹⁶⁶ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed., vol. 1, p. 8.

¹⁶⁷ See for example B. Hanawalt, 'Peasant Resistance to Royal and Seigniorial Impositions', in Francis X. Newman (ed.), *Social Unrest in the Late Middle Ages* (Binghamton, 1986), p. 23.

¹⁶⁸ See for example Liddy, 'William Frost, the City of York and Scrope's Rebellion of 1405'.

Willelmus Lewty taillour venit personaliter coram Willelmo Wellis adtunc maiore civitatis Ebor' et toto consilio eiusdem civitatis xvj^o die Januarii anno xix^o regni Regis Edwardi iiiij^{ti} et recognovit se debere (prefato Willelmo Wellis et s) domino regi xx^{ti} libras legalis monete Anglie solvendas ad festum Purificationis Beate Marie Virginis proximum futurum sub hac condicione quod dictus Willelmus Lewty de cetero erit de bona gubernacione et gestura erga dictum maiorem et successors suos maiores civitatis predicte et omnes alios de consilio tam in verbis quam operibus quod legitime probari patiet etc.¹⁶⁹

This is the first of several chronological passages that demonstrate a growing sense of unrest within the city. A further instance shows that the keeping of weapons within the city walls was becoming worrisome to the council. On 4 March 1485 the *Books* record:

Wer assembled in the counsaill chambre upon the water of Ouse where it was deternynged and ordand that fromhensforth ther shall no maner of man, except he be a knight or a squire of honour, shall were nor bere noo swerd within this citie upon payne of forfaitting of the same and his bodie at the maires pleaser.¹⁷⁰

The above passage in its entirety also addresses the slander of the mayor, yet another means of public insubordination towards their civic officials. Furthermore, the *House Books* provide evidence that rioting was not only taking place, but was becoming a more regular burden to civic leaders. They show that on 3 July of 1480:

Primo consideratum est ad inquirendum de riotis, conventiculis et aliis transgressionibus contra formam statute etc. Et eciam fiat aliam inquisitionem de purpresturis, incrochiametis et aliis nocumentis ac proprietatibus ad nocumentum etc...Et ulterius consideratum est quod maior omittat pro (ab quam) riotis etc.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 191. 'Tailor William Lewty came before the mayor and council on 16 January 1480 and bound himself for £20 to be of good behaviour in both words and deeds towards the mayor and his successors in office and all others of the council.'

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 354.

¹⁷¹ *The York House Books*, ed. L. C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 218. 'First, it was decided that an inquiry should be made into the riots, conventicles, and other crimes against the statutes, and also an inquisition into

Above and beyond the bonds to keep the peace, where one citizen needed to contend with another for his or her transgression, the increasing number of passages in the *Books* demonstrating dissatisfaction with the local or national government suggests that people were questioning the legitimacy of their ruling élite, and perhaps even the crown. This is supported by the reaction to the northern rebellion of 1489, which although rising more from an economic fracture with the government than a political one, was quashed in the manner of an attempted coup.

However, far from being endemic to any particular reign, the evidence from the *Books* suggests this trend of civil disobedience was rampant throughout the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII, raising the possibility that civil unrest was not new to York, but better recorded because of the creation and survival of the *House Books*.¹⁷² The frequency with which bonds to keep the peace appear in the later period, however, are suggestive of a public increasingly ill at ease with Tudor sovereignty. Specifically, entries dealing with utterances of seditious language against both the king and the civic governance begin to emerge, to the point that on 31 May 1488 the crown felt it necessary to make an example of particular instigators and prescribe due punishment:

...forsomuch as we be credible enfourmend that Thomas Sturgeon and William Willemot of that our cite of Yorke have uttred of thair great untrouth and contrarie

purprestures, encroachments, and other appropriations that are nuisances...And finally it was decided that the mayor will disregard the riots etc.'

¹⁷² For an examination of earlier instances of unrest and disorder within the city, see Liddy, 'Urban Conflict in Late Fourteenth-Century England', pp. 2-5.

to thare naturall dueties of ligeance certain sedicious and obprobrius language ayanest our magestie roiall, ffor the which we ne may suffre thaym to passe unpunysshed; ...that upon the next market day after the receipt of these our lettres ye doo oon of thayme to be sette upon the pilorie for a certan season, and both his eers to be cut off, and efterward to be committed to prison thare to remaign withoute baille or maunprise till ye undrestand our forther pleaser in that behalve; and that on the secund market day ye doo like execucion to the othre his felawe, in evident knowlidge of thar grevouse offenses and to the ferefull example of othre that wold enforce thayme semblably to (have) behave theym hereafter...¹⁷³

Furthermore, the passage also states that should the council fail to carry out this direction, they will incur the king's 'high displeaser and answer therfore unto us at your uttermost perell'.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps this is evidence that the crown was not only worried about the seditious language of specific citizens within the city, but also the civic governance's hostility towards the crown, a point which leads back to the rebellion of 1489.

When Henry VII heard the news that his lieutenant in the north had been murdered and a rebellion was being raised, he would have been unsure of the true extent of the rising. The north did not have a history of easily acquiescing to his rule, with Ricardian retainers holding out against him in 1485, and the earl of Lincoln and Lord Lovell's rebellion in the wake of Lambert Simnel's pretence to the throne in 1487.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, it has even been suggested that he may not have entirely believed early reports of Northumberland's death, perhaps thinking the earl was abetting the rising and was its de facto leader.¹⁷⁶

Enough intelligence arrived soon thereafter to convince the king that nothing could have

¹⁷³ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, p. 402.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 402.

¹⁷⁵ Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 34.

¹⁷⁶ Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 38.

been further from the truth. Not only had the commons killed the earl, the rebellion was a much smaller affray than previous reports had indicated. In hindsight, the rioters must have seen the earl's murder as an error, for once the mob had killed him, they removed the only person with whom they could relay complaints to the crown and who could bargain with them in the name of the king.¹⁷⁷

The roots of the rebellion were not anti-dynastic in nature, but sprung from protest against taxes. Having long been granted exemptions from taxes due to their poverty, the people of the north had grown unaccustomed to the burden, and balked when the second instalment was due in 1489. The *House Books* record that the city of York was in the process of collecting the tax and that the crown was willing to dole out rewards in exchange for timely delivery:

This day assembled in the counsaill chaumbre it was shewid by the mouth <of> the recorder that he had comoned with Thomas Wandesford gent[leman], oon of the collectours of the kinges tax, and the same Thomas shewed unto hym so that he myght have a reward etc., and also that he may have sufficiant suretie for his discharge he wolbe of goode will to (al) delyver all such money as he hath in his hondes of the second half tax.¹⁷⁸

The earl's role had been to confront those who were unwilling to pay and ensure the tax was levied and paid. When he realized the enormity of the opposition to the tax in the north, the earl wrote to the king to explain the gravity of the situation.¹⁷⁹ However, the

¹⁷⁷ Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered', p. 44.

¹⁷⁸ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 643.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, ed. H. Ellis, pp. 442-43; and Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 38.

king was unmoved, telling the earl that he needed to exact every penny of the tax and to be especially firm with those who opposed it the most.¹⁸⁰ This unwillingness on the part of the crown to negotiate with the malcontents is what placed the earl's life directly in peril. Given the general tenor of unruliness in the north, the readiness to oppose the ruling party in either word or deed had burst into disturbances during the election in York on 19 March 1489:

...it was shewid by the right wirshupful Sir Richerd York knyght <and Sir William Todd knyght> the credence the which was comaunded (hym) <thayme> to shewe by the kinges grace unto the maiour and (commalit) the communalitie of this <cite> as toching the unkyndlie deling of the cocitesyns at ther eleccion apou Saynt Blaise day last, as in the kynges gracious lettres missives more planelie doeth appere, which (he) <they> shewid in nowise the kinges grace woldnot bot that tobe ponysshed, and apou that for the correccion of <the same> the kinges grace shewid forther unto (hym) <theym> he wold have a commission tobe direct unto the moost reverend ffadder in God tharchiebisshop of York, therl of Northumberland and othre to inquir etc., to thentent his highnes may be acertanyd apou the said dealing...¹⁸¹

Perhaps the king might have seen the error in his obstinacy regarding the tax as well as the precarious position in which he had placed the earl. Despite the earl's position as arbiter in the north, popular among the ruling civic élite, he was identified as an agent of an overbearing crown and this classification resulted in his death. When news of his death reached the king, and intelligence as to the nature of his murder became known, both the crown and the commons knew the time for negotiation had passed. The shocking murder of a peer of the realm was a treasonous offence, and killing the earl left the commons without noble representation. Sir John Egremont, a cousin of the earl's

¹⁸⁰ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, ed. H. Ellis, pp. 442-43; and Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 38.

¹⁸¹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 642.

who had been a staunch Yorkist supporter, rose to the challenge of leading the rebellion, providing military leadership and lending a noble name to their cause.¹⁸² Other than this minor noble, however, the rebels had no other supporters among the ruling status group, and worse still the murder of the earl caused the nobles of the realm to band together in a show of aristocratic solidarity.¹⁸³ Never before had such a small rebellion elicited such a major response among the peers of the realm.

The *House Books* provide evidence of the distress the rebellion caused within the city. They record the earl's murder on 28 April 1489, and the next day an entry shows the city's intention of remaining loyal to the crown:

ther and then for suretie, tuicion and keping of the kinges cite the maiour commaundet every alderman and othre of the xxiiij^{ti} in the kinges name our sovereign lige lorde that noon of thame depart oute of this cite unto the tyme the kinges mynde be forthre understand, and that as they woll answer to the king at thare perell and the imprisonment of ther bodys.¹⁸⁴

This passage not only illuminates the city's disposition regarding the rebellion, but also perhaps their fear of opinions amongst the ruling body. Another example of the city's inability to discern the full threat of the rebellion in its early days is demonstrated in an entry dated 4 May. The passage includes a letter from the king directing the council to 'savegard and keping of this his cite', as well as one from Lord Clifford announcing to the council that he intended:

¹⁸² Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 45.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁸⁴ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 647.

...to resorte to this cite with such othre lordes, knyghtes and esquirez of the cuntrie the iij^{ti} day of this same moneth, and here by the advise of the said maiour and the counsail and thame such a <sad> direccion may be takyn as may stand to the pleasour of God, the kingand the suretie of this <cite and the> cuntrie.¹⁸⁵

Uncertain as to whether or not to allow Lord Clifford's entry, the council read the missives aloud in the Common Hall.¹⁸⁶ When the lord arrived with 'a hundreth personez' and awaited entry, the council decided to deny his passing into the city, perhaps afraid that he was siding with the rebels and erring on the side of caution.

Despite the care with which entry into the city was granted or denied, the defection of alderman and former mayor Thomas Wrangwish to the rebel cause rendered this care moot. A strong Yorkist supporter, it was perhaps his second tenure as mayor (1484-85) which firmly secured his lot for the Yorkist cause.¹⁸⁷ As mayor during the reign of Richard III, who had been so steadfastly supportive of York and the north, Wrangwish would have reason to believe that the house of York and their adherents had the best interests of the city at heart.¹⁸⁸ Although he was not re-elected to the mayoralty during the Tudor reign between 1485 and the rebellion of 1489, Wrangwish did remain in civic power through his position of alderman which he held consecutively after his first mayoralty from 1477 to 1490, excepting his second term (1484-85) as mayor. Moreover,

¹⁸⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 649.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 649.

¹⁸⁷ Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered', p. 57.

¹⁸⁸ D. Palliser, 'Richard III and York,' in R. Horrox (ed.) *Richard III and the North*, (Hull, 1986), pp. 51-73. This chapter illuminates the close relationship Alderman Wrangwish had with Richard III and reasons for his strong support of the Yorkist sympathisers even after his death.

he held the post of warden of Walmgate Bar in 1486-87, which meant he held yet another powerful post in the city.¹⁸⁹ On 5 May, the day after the council denied Lord Clifford's entry, Wrangwish aided a group of rebels headed by Egremont and allowed them to break in at Walmgate and Fishergate, and with that handed over control of the city to the rebellion.¹⁹⁰ Negotiating this situation must have been difficult for the council; they were stuck between maintaining crown interests in order to remain a viable regional power during the Tudor dynasty and the rebellious desires of the populace. Almost as interesting is the *Books*' omission of Wrangwish's treasonous act at Walmgate and Fishergate Bars, perhaps the result of the council's desire to elude culpability, considering the position of power and status Wrangwish had held among them. This demonstrates the precarious position in which the civic leaders found themselves once the city of York had fallen to the rebel cause.

The on 8 May, a time when the city lay firmly in the rebels' hands, the council denied the Sheriff of Yorkshire entry. The passage states that:

... forsomuch as the kynges grace hath sent is (l) gracious lettres missives to the maiour, shewing and comaunding in the same that this his chaumbre surelie to be kept to the behufe of his <most> roiall person, and forsomuch as they had denyed the entre of the Lord Clifford and othre, that in nowise noon othre gentilman of what (decr) degre or condicion he be of be suffred to enter this the kynges chaumbre, and so all to be excludet etc., and noon to have reule bot the maiour, aldermen and the shireffes.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, pp. 446, 466.

¹⁹⁰ Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 45.

¹⁹¹ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 650.

Interestingly, while denying entry of the king's agent into the city, the council also continues to identify itself as the 'kynges chaumbre'.¹⁹² This rhetorical device may have been a way for the council to lessen the betrayal engendered through their placation of the rebel leaders who held the city, indicating to the king that they were still firmly on his side in this matter.

By 17 May, the city, fully in the rebels' grasp, were forced to provide soldiers to Sir John Egremont. The entry shows that this was done:

...the said Sir John willed and comaundet hym and his brethern that ther myght be prepared shortlie xx^{ti} pratie men well horsed to attend and go with certain fellship of his into Richemond shire, and that not tobe failed as thai wold answer to hym at ther iuperdie...¹⁹³

Furthermore, the council recorded that:

...forsomuch as he had reule and his people here (for), that to denye hym (that) they thocht he and his people wold rob the cite, and if he wold pay ther costes in avoding such iuperdies unto the tyme thai myght be better providet that to graunt hym.¹⁹⁴

In order to save the city from utter ruin, the council provided the men Egremont demanded and recorded in the *House Books* that this was only done under duress.

¹⁹² *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 650; and Liddy, 'The rhetoric of the royal chamber', p. 323.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 651.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 651.

Once the city was safe from Egremont's control, the council attempted to reopen dialogue with the king to avoid further persecution when he would undoubtedly arrive with his army. Firstly, on 17 May they ensured the king's tax was kept safe, and secondly they decreed that the commons should not 'in eny wise of ther malice do hurt bodily' the Archbishop of York.¹⁹⁵ Next, 21 May saw a deputation to the Archbishop 'desiring his lordship to be goode lord and mean for this city unto the kynges g[race].'¹⁹⁶ Finally, the same day saw knights from the city ride directly to the king:

...shewing to the same the (humb) humblynes of the maiour, his brethern and the hole body of this cite with othre thinges consernyng the publique wele of the same; and also it is determyned that the said (knights) shalhave two jakkettes of the kynges lyvera of sattan, white and grene, contenyng both in the hole (v) <iiij> yerdes <and dimidium>, and ethre havyng vj servauntes attending apon hym and every man havyng a jaket of white and grene cloth which shalbe boght by the chaumbreleyns of the common cost.¹⁹⁷

The council, therefore, was willing to forego their poverty in the space of a few days to demonstrate their loyalty to the Tudor dynasty.

By the time the king entered Yorkshire, the rebels had all but dispersed. Triumphantly the king entered York on 23 May with perhaps as many as 10,000 troops at his command as well as nearly every available member of the aristocracy.¹⁹⁸ The rebellion had been well and truly quelled, the committers of treason indicted, and Sir John Egremont fled to

¹⁹⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 651.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 652.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 652.

¹⁹⁸ Bennett, 'Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489', p. 52.

the Duchess of Burgundy.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps for his intercession with the king on behalf of the city, the *Books* show that the Archbishop of Canterbury was sent a gift of ‘hogges of clarret wyne and other of white.’²⁰⁰ The council also made a show of progress as a consequence of the rebellion, recording that changes were suggested to the mayoral elections – the riots that followed the previous elections having been a cause of regional unrest.

...for the publique wele of this cite, forsomuch as greit and unkyndlie dealing hath tofor this ben emonges the cocitesyns of this cite in the eleccion of ther maiour, for the pacifying of the same a humble supplicacion to be had unto the kynges grace, shewing unto the same by thassent of the commonaltie of this said cite that the chartour might be changed, and to thentent thre eslites of thame that ben aldermen and have not ben of thre yeres tofore maiour by the comunes might be put (in by) <in>, and one of thame by the (advise of the counsaill to be) <eleccion of the maiour, aldermen and the common counsaill might be> takyn as thame shall seme most best for the common wele of this cite.²⁰¹

With that and a few executions ended the rebellion of 1489. King Henry VII quelled a minor uprising that might have turned into a major obstacle for his emergent dynasty with an enormous show of crown strength. The city of York, desperate to remain in the king’s good graces but held hostage by the rebels, successfully navigated their way through to survive after the dust had cleared. The only member of the civic élite to fail was Thomas Wrangwish, the most blatant among the rebels. It is possible that Wrangwish’s obvious support of the rebels worked to the some of the citizens’ and the corporation’s advantage, yet this was not the first instance of division within the council. During Scrope’s

¹⁹⁹ Bennett, ‘Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489’, p. 45.

²⁰⁰ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 2, p. 653.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 653.

rebellion in 1405, the council was highly factionalised between those who supported the new Lancastrian dynasty and those who dissented.²⁰² Following this rebellion the city was humiliated, its liberties seized and those supportive of Henry IV put quickly back to their positions of power.²⁰³ Similarly, following the rebellion in 1489, alderman Wrangwish, the most ardent supporter of the rebels, took the greatest fall. Fortunately for him, he died of natural causes, and not an axe or noose, in 1490.²⁰⁴

The *House Books* reveal the numerous ways in which the civic élite attempted to harness an increasingly unruly public during both peaceful and tumultuous times. They also illuminate the difficulty the city had in remaining steadfast to the crown, no matter who the monarch was. The commons of the city were progressively more disorderly towards the governing civic élite and each other, and the *York House Books* demonstrate the manner in which the city managed to find its way through peaceably during one of its most trying times, the rebellion of 1489.

²⁰² Liddy, 'William Frost, the City of York and Scrope's Rebellion of 1405', pp. 79-81.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁰⁴ Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered', pp. 42-43.

CONCLUSION

The evidence from the *House Books* provides various impressions of York during a portion of the latter half of the fifteenth century. Although the evidence represents barely a third of that time frame, the record in its peculiarity of contents and richness of entries provides historians with a colourful picture of York during the period 1461-90. The loss of entries from the *Books* is a source of considerable lamentation for anyone who might utilize the record, but what is extant provides ample scope for detailed analysis of the corporation and city of York during that time.

This period saw many changes in the north of England and in York in particular. The effect of regime change upon the city was keenly felt in 1461 after the battle of Towton. The city had been diametrically opposed to the battle's victor, and his entrance through Micklegate Bar as a conquering ruler cowed the city into uneasy submission. Records in the *Books* of how the city coped with Edward IV's first reign, 1461-70, have been for the most part lost to time and decay. It must however have been a period of uncomfortable peace, considering the special attention the city merited in 1476.

...venerunt civitatem istam Ebor', Ricardus dux Gloucestr', magnus constabularies et admirallus Anglie, ac Henricus comes Northumbr' cum quampluribus baronibus, militibus, armigeris, valettis et aliis ad numerum v^{ml} hominum, quibus obvianerunt [sic] maior, aldermani et vicecomites ac xxiii^j or de dignioribus huius civitatis. Et post obviacionem ac debitam salutationem <eis> factam et habitam prefatus nobilis dux dictis maiori et aldermanis publica et apperta voce infra barram de Botham huius civitatis quampluribus ibidem circumstantibus et audientibus <dicebat>: Domine mairo sit vobis nobum quod causa mei adventus iam ad istam vicitatem est pre honore eiusdem et bono regimine populi domini <nostril> Regis habendo ac pace ipsius Regis <reformanda et> conservanda. Et super hoc missa fuit et directa quedame

proclamacio per ipsos ducem et comitem predicto maiori ad pronunciandum et proclamandum per totam civitatem, cuius tenor sequitur in his verbis...²⁰⁵

This attention paid to the city is yet another spectacular show of crown strength, perhaps representing the hopes of the Yorkist dynasty as finally quashing any pockets of Lancastrian sympathy in the second greatest city in the kingdom.

It was only after this event that the council's relationship with the king's brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester, really began to flower into co-dependency. York was dependent upon Richard to alleviate any burdens placed upon them by the crown, and the duke needed York as a base of support for his northern endeavours. The success of this symbiosis promoted northern hegemony for Richard and greater political leverage for the city, although financial concerns stemming from the nature of overseas trade in this period meant they could never fully attain a successful fiscal status.²⁰⁶ That the civic council was largely comprised of a mercantile oligarchy only highlighted the financial worry evident in the *Books*.²⁰⁷

Following Richard's usurpation in 1483, evidence of the city's excitement in the record is palpable. Preparations for the new king's visit were made with alacrity and it is obvious they did everything they could to show their support for the new monarch.

²⁰⁵ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 8-9. Translated: Richard duke of Gloucester, Great Constable and Admiral of England, and Henry earl of Northumberland, visited York 13 March 1476 with other barons, knights, squires, yeomen and others numbering 5000 men. After greetings were exchanged, the duke addressed the civic officials within Bootham Bar, saying that he was sent by the king to support the rule of law and peace. A proclamation was written reminding the citizens of their duties to the law...

²⁰⁶ Hicks, 'Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the North', pp. 16-19.

²⁰⁷ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. xxiv-xxv; and Attreed, 'The King's Interest', p. 25.

...my lord the mair and all my maisterz hys bredyr the (ar) aldermen in scarlet and all my maisterz of the xxiii^{ti} and the chamberlains and all tho that have beynd chamberlains and also all tho that (will) have boght owt thar charegez of all officez in thys cite, shall in reid gownys on horsbak meit our most dred lege lord the kyng at Brekles Mylnys, and over thys that the brygmastyrs and all odir that haith beynd brygmastyrs and all odir onest men of the cite shalbe in reid apone the pay[n] of xx s. to be forfaite and pay to the communalte of thys cite by every man doing the contrary; and my lord the mair shall rays the forfaitz in that behalf apone the payn of xl s. to be forfaite by hym to the communalte of thys cite (and thar and that ther servauntz shalbe in blew) and that all odir persons of every occupacion in blew, violet and musterdvyles shall on fote meit our said sufferan lord at Saint Jams (day) chyrch.²⁰⁸

These detailed preparations underscore the pomp with which the city planned on welcoming their new king; however, they were only the forerunner to the lavish gifts that were also presented to the visiting monarch. This further demonstrates the vulnerability the city authorities felt in the relationship between themselves and the crown, and their need to present their king with extravagant hospitality and splendour in order to maintain their relationship with him.

...our suffreynd lord the king shalbe presented at his cumyng with (C) D marcs in a pare of baysyns of sylwyr gylt or in a (pare) cop of gold or in a gylt pees, and that our suffreynd lady the queyn shalbe presented with C li. Of gold in a pees...²⁰⁹

Lists of those who contributed to the king's gift are extant in the *Books*, adding a more personal dimension to the record. Further investigation into these names would lend more insight into support for Ricardian rule at that time, as well as illuminate the pockets of Yorkist support that had grown during the preceding decade and the relations of those supporters to the ruling oligarchy. The nature of Richard's usurpation coupled with

²⁰⁸ *The York House Books*, ed. L.C. Attreed, vol. 1, pp. 287-88.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 290-91.

lingering Lancastrian resentment led to a challenger to his throne, Henry Tudor. York's support of Richard at the battle of Bosworth proved yet another poor choice, as Richard died in battle and Henry Tudor won the crown.

Attempting to establish a good relationship with the new monarch proved difficult for the city, which had been such a firm base of support for the late king. One means by which the city attempted to maintain its importance was through its strategic position as a launching base for northern campaigns against the Scots. Although this device pre-dated the Tudor reign, by the latter portion of the fifteenth century it was still a means whereby the city stressed its importance to the crown. Indeed, the long history of the Scottish border wars only added to the importance of maintaining the city's defences and retaining economic subsidies from the crown. Remission of their fee farm had taken place under Richard III's rule, but the brevity of his reign meant neither the city nor the government were fully clear as to the true nature of tax relief.²¹⁰ Henry VII, therefore, waived it for a period of years that allowed the city and region a chance to re-establish economic viability.

Despite Henry's magnanimous gesture, by 1489 the tax was due to be paid, leading to a social crisis that further threatened York's relationship with the crown. In April 1489 an unruly mob killed York's current benefactor Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, near Thirsk. This act naturally engendered uncertainty on the part of the king. Early reports did not give a clear indication of Northumberland's murder, instead suggested that he had been taken hostage or else was the instigator of the rebellion. However, it soon became

²¹⁰ Attreed, 'The King's Interest', pp. 24-26.

clear to the crown and court that one of their own had been brutally murdered by a mob. The mob reacted in the only way left open to them, rallying support where possible and convening in York. The crown, moving more methodically, gathered the support of the peers of the realm and made so great a show of royal strength that few could question Tudor support among the nobility of the country. Once again, the city of York found itself in the middle.

The city was taken quickly by the rebels due to the actions of city alderman, Thomas Wrangwish, a former mayor and member of the ruling oligarchy. He was also a known Yorkist supporter. Allowing the rebels in through Walmgate and Fishergate Bars, Wrangwish put the council in an impossible position, their only option being to yield to the rebels' demands. As soon as the city was safe from the mob, however, the council sent word to the king of their loyal support. This proved to be the best course of action, although the *Books* only record a portion of the occurrences, it is clear that had the city not acted hastily in support of the crown, more officials might have fallen to the executioner.

This episode proves how precarious York's position was during the first part of Henry VII's reign. Although the city was able to extract certain benevolences from the king, such as the deferment of taxes, any balking when they were due was not tolerated by the crown. Furthermore, an open challenge to the king's authority was met with crown force. Examples of this from the record include not only the northern rebellion of 1489 but also the pretender Lambert Simnel's rebellion in 1487.

The records of the *York House Books* demonstrate the tenuous political situation generated in the city during the final part of the Wars of the Roses. They are records that provide historians myriad aspects from which to study the city in that period, and offer insight into the impact on real people at different levels of society. Furthermore, they represent a new type of source: one that was compiled by the city for the city, encompassing the full spectrum of civic activity. The three examples used in this study have focused more on the political situation, but the scope for other studies of the city in that era through the *Books* is almost boundless. The *House Books* in and of themselves constituted a new kind of politics in the city and provide a new perspective on the city government. The selective focus here on the letters copied into the record, the entries relating to the city's benefactors both Richard, duke of Gloucester and Henry, earl of Northumberland, and records dealing with war against Scotland and instances of civil unrest during the period has been especially illuminating as to the relationship between the crown and the town. Ultimately, the records in the *York House Books* show that however they are approached, they provide evidence of the people in the city, from the perspective of the people in the city. This dissertation has offered a window into the civic governance of York, and the negotiation of crown relations against a backdrop of civil war, foreign wars and social unrest. It exposes York as a town that needed to constantly walk a political and social tightrope to maintain harmonious relations with the crown and with the governed, but above all it allows for study of the lives of individuals in the town. What ultimately emerges from the record is the story of these people, making them and the late medieval city more relatable through the fog of time.

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