

IV.—NORTHUMBERLAND IN THE EARLY YEARS OF EDWARD IV

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The incidents of the Wars of the Roses in the early years of Henry VI's struggle with Edward IV are of the greatest interest to Northumbrian historians. For four years after the defeat of the Lancastrians at Towton in March 1461, until the summer of 1464 when Henry VI was captured and all the Lancastrian party scattered after the battle of Hexham, Northumberland is the centre of the conflict. From the outbreak of the quarrel between the Houses of York and Lancaster the Percy family had been among the leaders of the Lancastrian party and many of the northern gentry had taken the field with them, but the scene of war had always been farther south, and in the county itself few people must have realized the bitterness of the long drawn-out struggle in which some families, like the Nevilles of Durham, were divided against themselves,¹ until Edward, Earl of March, was proclaimed Edward IV on March 1, 1461.² It was largely through the influence of the Earl of Warwick and with the support of the Londoners that he was proclaimed, and immediately he set about establishing his position in the country. Without delay he advanced on the Lancastrian forces, driving Henry VI and Queen Margaret back from London and skirmishing all the way north until the Lancastrians turned to meet him on Palm Sunday, 1461, at Towton. There the Lancastrian party was severely defeated. Henry VI

¹ The Earl of Warwick and Lord Montague supported Edward IV, while Sir Humphrey Neville supported Henry VI.

² For Edward's title to the throne, see the pedigrees of the Houses of York and Lancaster in J. H. Ramsey, *Lancaster and York* (1892).

and his queen were forced to flee, many of their chief supporters, including Henry Percy, third Earl of Northumberland, and Lord Dacre of Gilsland, were killed on the field and their forces completely routed. They were forced back on to the north of England, for only the north continued to acknowledge Henry VI as king and regard Edward IV as the usurper. Not that the rights of either party probably bothered them very much, but from Henry VI most could gain something, while from Edward IV they could expect nothing, and family rivalries played their part. While nearly the whole family of Neville supported the Yorkist party, their age-old rivals, the Percies, would remain staunch Lancastrians, and in the main the Northumbrian gentry followed the Percies' lead, although we may note Sir Ralph Grey as an exception, for he played an important part in these years.

So the Wars of the Roses dragged on, rather as a war between north and south. Henry VI and Queen Margaret tried from Scotland to retrieve their fortunes. But the battle of Towton had lost them the south of England beyond hope of recovery. It was not only because their army had been defeated with such heavy losses as to make any further large-scale advance on London impossible, but also because of the behaviour of Queen Margaret's army some months previously when they had marched as far south as St. Alban's. Once the Lancastrian army had crossed Trent they were allowed to burn and pillage as much as they liked. There was no attempt to keep discipline. Royston, Grantham and Stamford had been sacked and Margaret's army was hated and feared. Certainly this did much to enhance the popularity of Edward in the south of England, and they regarded him as a deliverer from the dreaded northerners. Consequently he received far more enthusiastic support than he might have done.

After his victory at Towton on Palm Sunday, 1461, he advanced quickly north to York, where his first act was to remove the head of his father, the Duke of York,³ from the

³ Richard, Duke of York, was killed at the Battle of Wakefield on December 30, 1460, and his corpse beheaded.

walls and to enquire after those who had taken the field against him. This delayed his advance north, for he stayed in York from March 30 until April 16, when he moved to Durham,⁴ and from there paid a visit to Newcastle upon Tyne on May 1⁵ to witness the execution of the Earl of Wiltshire, who had been captured at Cockermouth.⁶ But he does not seem to have stayed in Newcastle. So far north must still have been dangerous ground for Edward IV. Carlisle was a Yorkist outpost in predominantly Lancastrian country, and Montague, brother of the Earl of Warwick, was able to prevent Queen Margaret's attempt to take the town late in May 1461.⁷ Naworth castle was in Lancastrian hands until July 1462 and the castles of Langley and Bywell apparently remained Lancastrian until after the battle of Hexham in May 1464. Farther north the castles of Alnwick, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh, round which the fighting was to centre for the next two years, were garrisoned by Lancastrian troops. About Warkworth we are nowhere told, until later, in December 1462, when the Yorkists held it and the Earl of Warwick made it his headquarters, but we don't hear when or how it was taken. It is unlikely that Hotspur's castle was all the time in Yorkist hands. Edward IV did not attempt to press his victories in the summer of 1461, in spite of the Lancastrian collapse, and their castles were left unmolested, while he returned south to prepare for his coronation.

Henry VI and Queen Margaret took full advantage of the respite. They badly needed troops, money and supplies to renew the campaign and from their base in Scotland started to regather their strength. Help was needed from the Scots if England were to be regained and they had one great asset with which to barter. Both the English and the Scots greatly prized the town of Berwick, with its castle and its

⁴ Ramsey, ii, p. 274.

⁵ *Gregory's Chronicle* (Camden Society, 1876), p. 217; *Paston Letters*, no. 386.

⁶ *Paston Letters*, no. 386.

⁷ Ramsey, ii, p. 275.

sheltered harbour. The Scots had reluctantly renounced their claim to it in the reign of Henry IV and now Henry VI's difficulties were a heaven-sent opportunity for them to regain the town. The details of the bargain are obscure, but soon after the battle of Towton, Berwick⁸ admitted a Scottish garrison, and we are told of Scots among the garrisons of the other northern castles and the *Scottish Exchequer Rolls* record sums of money paid out to Henry VI and Queen Margaret. So Berwick was evidently sold successfully. But, like the sale of Calais the following year, it damaged the Lancastrian cause as much as helped it, and greatly increased Queen Margaret's unpopularity. But it gave the Lancastrians immediate relief. Queen Margaret's attack on Carlisle in May and Henry VI's advance south from Scotland as far as Brancepeth, in Durham, in June 1461, must be the first fruits of the treaty. The object of his raid is obscure. Apparently he merely advanced and retreated again without opposition. Probably he was in no position to take the offensive. No doubt the Scots, once they had occupied Berwick and supplied some men to help garrison the Northumbrian castles, were unwilling to advance the Lancastrian cause further. And we know that Edward IV had received the exiled Earl of Douglas and was trying to stir up trouble in the Highlands to occupy the Scots at home.⁹

Queen Margaret was evidently not satisfied with the help afforded by the Scots and, in October 1461, sent the Duke of Somerset to France to negotiate with Louis XI. Meanwhile Edward IV was strengthening his position in the country. He had been crowned in June and later in the summer went a progress through the south and west of England where, so Warkworth's¹⁰ chronicle tells us, he

⁸ In the *Scottish Exchequer Rolls* Robert Lauder of Edrington's salary as Keeper of Berwick appears in an account of expenses dating from 20 March, 1460, to 27 July, 1462. There is also an account of expenses from 18 March, 1460, to 30 July, 1462, which includes the cost of supplies to Berwick during that period. Mention of the Scots in Berwick is also made in the *Paston Letters*.

⁹ Ramsey, ii, p. 287.

¹⁰ Camden Society Publications (1839), p. 2.

gathered much money for the coming campaign. But the autumn of 1461 passed without any attack on the Lancastrian castles in the north. The country was alarmed in the following February by rumours of a three-fold Lancastrian invasion—from Wales, from the north and from Jersey and Guernsey. But it was only a rumour. Still Edward must have felt that it was unwise to commit the main part of his forces in Northumberland while there was any risk of invasion, particularly from France. He could not know that the Lancastrian envoys, the Duke of Somerset and Lord Hungerford, were making no progress in their negotiations with Louis XI. In March 1462¹¹ they returned to Scotland without anything accomplished, and Margaret herself, rather than give up all hope of help from France, borrowed £290¹² from the Regent of Scotland, Mary of Guelders, and sailed from Kirkcudbright in April¹³ to interview her cousin, Louis XI, and to offer Calais, as she had offered Berwick, in exchange for French help. Almost as soon as she had left, Edward IV sent Warwick and other ambassadors to Dumfries¹⁴ to try to detach Scotland from the Lancastrian cause. William Worcester says they were to negotiate a marriage between Edward IV and Mary of Guelders. Whatever the negotiations, they came to no conclusion, and the later meeting at Carlisle in July 1462 was no more successful. The war seems to have halted completely while all these negotiations were in progress. The Paston Letters¹⁵ mention a siege of Carlisle in this summer, but rather as a rumour than as a known fact and it seems unlikely. There was, however, some fighting in the district.

In July 1462 the stalemate in the north was coming to an end. Once the Scottish negotiations were ended, Edward started to move against the Lancastrian castles. Worcester¹⁶ records the surrender of Naworth and of Lord Dacre to

¹¹ *Paston Letters*, no. 14.

¹² *Scottish Exchequer Rolls*, vii; Ramsey, ii, p. 290.

¹³ Worcester, *Annales*, p. 779, printed in *Wars of the English in France*, ii, part 2 (Rolls Series).

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ no. 459.

¹⁶ p. 779.

Montague in that month, and it is confirmed by one of John Paston's¹⁷ correspondents who sent him the news of Lord Dacre's capture and also mentioned that Sir Richard Tunstall¹⁸ had been taken. If that is true, then Sir Richard must have escaped again, for we hear of him with the Lancastrians later. The letter does not mention another important piece of news, which Worcester gives; that is the surrender of Alnwick castle to the Yorkists. He is the only writer who mentions this incident, but that is no reason to doubt the accuracy of his information. We know that Alnwick castle changed hands some time between the battle of Towton, when we are told the Lancastrians held it, and October 1462 when Queen Margaret was besieging it. Moreover Worcester substantiates his story with some detail. He tells us that Lord Hastings and Sir Ralph Grey received the castle from William Tailbois. From the *Paston Letters* we know that Lord Hastings was in Carlisle with the Earl of Warwick in July and he could easily have come over to Alnwick to receive the surrender. The castle was handed over, not captured. Sir Ralph Grey may have been at Carlisle also or he may have been nearer at hand. We do not know. But at this time he was with the Yorkist party, although later he broke his allegiance to Edward IV. William Tailbois is a likely Lancastrian captain of the castle, as he was one of the prominent members of the party and entrusted with important duties, although he also broke faith with his party two years later and embezzled some money which should have gone to pay the troops. Alnwick, then, was surrendered in July 1462 and Bamburgh also must have fallen to the Yorkists at about this time. No source mentions its capture, but we learn from the *Paston Letters*¹⁹ that Sir William Tunstall was captain of the castle in the autumn

¹⁷ *Paston Letters*, no. 459.

¹⁸ If the Yorkists really captured Sir Richard Tunstall at this time, he must have escaped again, for we hear of him at Bamburgh in the summer of 1462 and as one of those who marched out of Alnwick to join the relieving force in January 1463 (Worcester, p. 780).

¹⁹ no. 463.

of this year. Here is a case of two brothers taking opposite sides in the civil war, Sir William Tunstall the Yorkist and Sir Richard the Lancastrian, and even fighting against each other.

By the autumn of 1462 it must have seemed as though Henry VI's cause had failed and that only time was needed for Edward IV to reduce the remaining Lancastrian garrisons in the north. But within a few months the situation in Northumberland was reversed. Queen Margaret successfully concluded her negotiations with Louis XI and set sail for the north of England with de Brézé in command of some French troops variously estimated as 2,000²⁰ and 6,000 in number. More than one source gives the story of her return. Gregory's²¹ chronicle says that she landed in Northumberland on October 25 and Worcester gives the place of her landing more precisely as near Bamburgh, where she expected that the country would rise on her behalf. But when the Northumbrians saw the strength of her forces they did not join her. However, she advanced on Alnwick and since the castle was short of victuals, it was handed over to her without a long siege²² and she left a French garrison to hold it under the command of Lord Hungerford and de Brézé's son. Bamburgh was also taken without a long siege and given into the Duke of Somerset's keeping.²³ A letter from John Paston, junior, to his father²⁴ tells us that Sir William Tunstall and the garrison were captured by Sir Richard Tunstall's men. Dunstanburgh also received a Lancastrian garrison. But in spite of her success, Queen Margaret did not stay in England. She may have regarded the capture of the castles merely as a preliminary to an invasion in force from Scotland. Whatever the reason, as soon as she could she took ship for

²⁰ Worcester, p. 780.

²¹ Gregory, p. 218.

²² Worcester, p. 780.

²³ *ibid.* Also Gregory, p. 219.

²⁴ *Paston Letters*, no. 463. The *Northumberland County History*, i, gives an account of the events of these years in as far as they affect the history of Bamburgh.

Scotland,²⁵ most unfortunately as it turned out, for a sudden storm sprang up and wrecked her fleet. She and de Brézé reached Scotland safely, but the money and valuables she had brought back from France and many of her troops were lost. Some of the French troops reached Holy Island, but a party of Yorkists crossed to the Island and took them prisoner.²⁶ Meanwhile the news of her return had travelled and Edward IV prepared to meet the new danger. The Earl of Warwick with an army started north on October 30²⁷ and Edward himself left London on November 3.²⁸ He travelled as far north as Durham, which he reached on November 16. Then an attack of measles kept him there,²⁹ but even after his recovery he does not seem to have moved nearer the scene of action, for we are told that he spent Christmas at Durham.

The Earl of Warwick advanced as far as Warkworth and from there conducted the sieges of the three castles—Alnwick, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh. The Yorkist forces were assembled in strength and fortunately we have more details of the organization of this campaign than usual, for John Paston, the youngest, was at Newcastle with the Duke of Norfolk and a letter he wrote from Newcastle on December 11³⁰ is preserved among the Paston correspondence. So we know that Alnwick was besieged by the Earl of Kent and Lord Scalys, Dunstanburgh by Sir Ralph Grey and the Earl of Worcester, and Bamburgh by Lord Montague and Lord Ogyll. From another source we learn the names of the defenders. The writer did not know who was in Alnwick castle, but says that Sir Richard Tunstall and Thomas Fyndern were in Dunstanburgh and the Duke of Somerset with Sir Ralph Percy in Bamburgh. John Paston goes on to

²⁵ Worcester, p. 780. *N.C.H.*, i, p. 44, says that she reached Berwick on November 3. I have been unable to find any grounds for this statement.

²⁶ Gregory, pp. 218-219.

²⁷ *Paston Letters*, no. 463. This letter, written from Holt Castle, states that he 'yed forward into Scotland', but in fact he went no farther north than Warkworth.

²⁸ Worcester, p. 780.

²⁹ Ramsey, p. 293.

³⁰ *Paston Letters*, no. 464.

give some interesting details. The ordnance was gathered at Newcastle ready to be brought up if it were needed. Both siege pieces and field pieces were in readiness in case a Scottish invasion should force them to a pitched battle. The Duke of Norfolk was in charge of the guns and of victualling the besieging forces. John Paston himself had left Newcastle on the day before he wrote, with ordnance and supplies for the Earl of Warwick at Warkworth and had heard that the earl rode round daily to the siege camps to oversee the operations. The sieges started early in December and Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh held out until December 24. Then, for no clear reason, the Duke of Somerset and Sir Ralph Percy surrendered the two castles and took an oath of allegiance to Edward IV.³¹ No hint is given why they broke faith with Henry VI. It may have been jealousy of the favour with which de Brézé and the French contingent were received, or from disgust at Queen Margaret and the French failing to advance from Scotland to relieve them. One does not get the impression that they had any real need to surrender. The siege was too short for them to have run out of supplies in that time,³² and in any case both castles could have been replenished from the sea, for there was no naval blockade. Certainly the walls had not been breached, for both parties were extremely reluctant to use their siege guns against any castle, since once the defences were reduced the castle would be valueless to the victors. In the case of these three Northumbrian castles there was even stronger reason, for they were an important part of the Border defences. However, on Christmas Eve Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh were handed over to the Earl of Warwick, and Sir Ralph Percy received them back to hold for Edward IV. It is surprising the way Edward was ready to entrust two important places to someone who had just betrayed them. That was Sir Ralph's reward for his part in the surrender. The Duke of Somerset

³¹ Worcester, p. 780; Gregory, p. 219.

³² Stow, *Annales*, quoted in *N.C.H.*, i, p. 45, says that the garrison were reduced to eating their horses, but Stow is not a contemporary writer and is quite possibly merely adorning his tale.

was promised to be reinstated in all his lands and dignities. Alnwick continued to hold out and in January a relieving force, commanded by de Brézé, was sent down from Scotland. When the Lancastrian force approached the castle, the Earl of Warwick withdrew in fear of their strength and the attacking force were likewise nervous, thinking that this was a feint on Warwick's part. Then, while the two parties outside were hesitating, the defenders came out of the castle, leaving behind only a skeleton force to man it. No blow was struck on either side. The defenders joined de Brézé and the whole force marched back to Scotland,³³ leaving the castle practically open to Warwick, for the men inside could not hope to keep it in the face of any attack. Not unnaturally, they came quickly to terms with Warwick and admitted a Yorkist garrison, with Sir John Ashley, to the great annoyance of Sir Ralph Grey,³⁴ in command. So Queen Margaret's campaign which had started so hopefully petered out. The Lancastrians were driven back into Scotland and the only active resistance to Edward IV was from Harlech castle in Wales, which surrendered later.

The winter campaign of 1462-3 gives the impression that the Lancastrians considered their cause lost and were giving up all hope of restoring Henry VI. But such was not the case. Queen Margaret, at least, had no intention of admitting defeat, although there was little she could do with her depleted forces. Fortunately for her cause both Sir Ralph Percy, who held Bamburgh, and Sir Ralph Grey, who considered that he should hold Alnwick, were thoroughly discontented with the Yorkist party. Sir Ralph Percy evidently regretted his change of allegiance in December, and in April 1463 allowed the Lancastrians to reoccupy Bamburgh.³⁵ The following month, Sir Ralph Grey, a Yorkist of far longer standing than Sir Ralph Percy, took Sir John Ashley, under whom he was serving, prisoner and handed over both Sir

³³ Worcester, p. 780.

³⁴ Worcester, p. 781.

³⁵ Gregory, p. 220; *N.C.H.*, i, p. 45.

John and Alnwick castle to Queen Margaret. So in the spring of 1463 the three northern castles, Alnwick, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh, were in Lancastrian hands, and no immediate attempt was made to regain them. The Yorkist forces had withdrawn farther south, but in the summer both the Earl of Warwick and Montague were back in Northumberland with their army. Apparently they had nothing to fear from the garrisons, for we hear of no attacks on any of the castles. All the Yorkist troops were concentrated on breaking up the Lancastrian siege of Norham. One would expect the Lancastrians from Alnwick and the other castles to try to cut their supply lines. But they do not appear to have made any move in support of the besieging force and within eighteen days the Lancastrian forces before Norham were routed and both Henry VI and Margaret nearly captured.³⁶ Edward does not seem to have been concerned to retake Alnwick and the other two castles, but to have concentrated on bringing pressure to bear on the Scots to break off their alliance with the Lancastrians. He was in some measure successful, for Henry VI seems to have left Scotland about this time and moved either to Alnwick³⁷ or Bamburgh, his exact residences are always hard to trace, and to have remained in Northumberland until a short time before the final defeat of his forces at Hexham in May 1464. I have previously attempted to deal with the events of that period which led up to the battle of Hexham,³⁸ with the Duke of Somerset's return to the Lancastrian party and his attempts to force a pitched battle with the Yorkists and defeat them in the field at Hedgeley Moor and Hexham. But here we may pass over these events and move on beyond the battle of Hexham to round off the story of the three castles which were the centre of these campaigns.

³⁶ Gregory, p. 220, says that Queen Margaret and de Brézé sailed immediately for Sluys. *N.C.H.*, i, p. 45, says that Warwick chased her to the walls of Bamburgh, and that she embarked from there.

³⁷ *Year Book*, extract published in the Surtees Society volume, *The Priory of Hexham*, i (1864), p. cviii, says that he was at Alnwick. *N.C.H.*, i, p. 46, says Bamburgh, but I cannot trace the source of the information.

³⁸ *AA*⁴, xxx (1952).

Alnwick and Dunstanburgh yielded without any resistance on June 23, as well they might. No one knew where Henry VI was hiding.³⁹ Queen Margaret was in France, Somerset and many of the other Lancastrian leaders had been executed and there was no one to reorganize the party. Henry VI's cause was lost. Bamburgh, however, did not yield immediately. Sir Ralph Grey had fled there before the battle of Hexham, perhaps straight from the route at Hedgeley Moor on April 25, and he determined to resist. He must have realized its futility, but he knew well that he could hope for no mercy from Edward IV, to whom he had sworn allegiance and then betrayed. Until June 1464 he was left to occupy the castle in peace, but after the surrender of the other two castles, the Earl of Warwick and Montague, now created Earl of Northumberland, appeared outside the castle with their forces on June 25.⁴⁰ A herald was sent out to offer a free pardon to all within, with the exception of Sir Ralph Grey and Sir Humphrey Neville.⁴¹ But the defenders did not respond by handing over the castle and Sir Ralph Grey, so Warwick was forced to lay siege to it and even to fire his siege guns, 'Newcastle, the king's great gun, and London, the second gun of iron' into the walls so that the stones flew off into the sea. Breaches were made in the walls and the castle taken by assault. Sir Ralph Grey was taken alive and a long indictment drawn up against him, in which one of the major charges was that he had compelled the besieging forces to fire on the castle. Others concerned his betrayal of Alnwick castle and his treacherous behaviour.

³⁹ Henry VI was apparently in the west of England. It is unlikely that he fled from Bywell to Bamburgh; there is no contemporary authority for supposing that he did so, and we hear nothing of him when the last stand of Sir Ralph Grey is made in Bamburgh castle. *N.C.H.*, i, p. 47, says that he escaped there before the battle of Hexham and moved again on May 31, but this seems unlikely to be correct.

⁴⁰ MS. in the College of Arms, printed in the notes to Warkworth's Chronicle.

⁴¹ It is surprising to find Sir Humphrey Neville's name here. He was present at the battle of Hexham and is said to have fled eastwards and lived for a time on an island in Derwentwater (*Year Book*). Later he was captured in Holderness. He can hardly have been in Bamburgh, as in that case he would have been taken with Sir Ralph Grey.

to Sir John Ashley, under whose command he served. With his capture, all resistance to Edward IV came to an end and those who sympathized with Henry VI hid their disloyalty. Edward made a treaty with the Scots and the whole country was at peace again for several years. But local feeling was still strong and Edward's creation of Montague as Earl of Northumberland in place of a member of the Percy family was greatly resented and, in fact, Edward felt obliged to submit and to restore the title of Earl of Northumberland to the heir of Henry Percy, although Henry Percy had been killed at Towton on the Lancastrian side, and to reward Montague with other titles. But we hear of no more fighting in the north for several years.