

# **‘WALTER BLOUNT WAS GONE TO SERVE TRAYTOURS’: THE SACK OF ELVASTON AND THE POLITICS OF THE NORTH MIDLANDS IN 1454**

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In May 1454, a dispute between the Derbyshire gentry families of Blount and Longford, which had been gathering momentum since the summer of the previous year, exploded into violence in dramatic fashion.<sup>1</sup> Sir Nicholas Longford mustered a party of supporters — which was later alleged to have numbered a thousand men, and included members of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire families of Vernon, Cokayn, Montgomery, Fitzherbert and Egerton — and raided the Blounts’ manor of Elvaston, near Derby. Extensive damage was inflicted on the house and its contents: doors, windows, tables, bedhangings and household utensils were broken or cut into pieces; accounts, deeds and court-rolls were destroyed.<sup>2</sup> This conflict has attracted the attention of several historians of the period, but there has been little consensus about its nature and significance. Griffiths concluded that ‘it is difficult to view these disturbances as anything but the product of local enmities’,<sup>3</sup> while others have argued that the violence was a regional manifestation of the national division between York and Lancaster.<sup>4</sup> Storey, who devoted a whole chapter of *The End of the House of Lancaster* to the affair, suggested both possibilities, though he inclined towards the former as the more probable.<sup>5</sup> This divergence of opinion reflects the complex nature of the dispute, and the fact that many of its causes and implications remain obscure. A re-examination of the events of May 1454 and the circumstances surrounding them may help to shed further light on the dispute itself and on its troubled political context at both a local and a national level.

Recent analyses have proposed a version of events lying somewhere between explanations based on national ‘party’ politics and those which look solely to personal feuds. It has been suggested that the establishment of York’s first protectorate was a decisive moment in Derbyshire politics because Walter Blount had by 1454 attached himself unequivocally to the duke’s cause through the service of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick.<sup>6</sup> Many of the families ranged against Blount in that year, on the other hand, were associated with Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham, who, though included in the broadly

based protectorate administration, had originally been among the nobles who opposed York's manoeuvres.<sup>7</sup> It has been argued, therefore, that the Blount-Longford conflict formed part of a wider rivalry for the rule of the midlands between Buckingham and Neville.<sup>8</sup> Susan Wright, for example, suggests that during 1453 'the frontier between the respective spheres of influence of Warwick and Buckingham shifted northwards and Derbyshire became part of the broad arena of "national" or "court" conflict identifiable in the 1450s'; she argues that their antagonism 'found a focal point in south Derbyshire in Blount'. Although in the course of a detailed and nuanced account she warns that 'this was no simple case ... of one group of retainers versus another', she concludes that 'with Buckingham's approval and probable encouragement, current divisions in gentry society were exploited for wider political ends'.<sup>9</sup>

There are, however, significant problems with this analysis. First, there is no evidence to link Blount with Warwick before the attack on Elvaston took place. Storey argues that Blount 'apparently became a member of [York's] household no later than 1454'; he cites in support of this assertion a letter written to Warwick by York, in which the duke noted that 'for the good lordship ... that for my sake ye owe and bere unto my servaunt Walter Blount squier, ye desire me to geve him leve to be witholden with you as your Marchall' at Calais.<sup>10</sup> Warwick was appointed captain of Calais in the summer of 1455, so that York's letter, which is dated 15 October, cannot have been written before October 1455, and probably dates from later still, since Warwick was unable to take possession of Calais until July 1456.<sup>11</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to accept this as proof of Blount's affiliations more than a year before the letter can at the earliest have been written. Wright suggests that Blount 'entered Warwick's retinue', adding that the earl 'finally joined York at the end of 1453, and Blount subsequently followed Warwick into York's service'. She too makes reference to York's letter, despite both the discrepancy in the dates, and the fact that the duke's comments are if anything more suggestive of Blount moving from York's service to Warwick's than vice versa. She also cites Wedgwood's description of Blount as a member of Warwick's council, but this clearly refers to the period at the end of the decade when Blount's connection with the earl was close and unequivocal.<sup>12</sup> Though it is by no means impossible that this connection did exist as early as 1453-4, such a conclusion can be no more than speculative in the absence of any evidence. As such, it cannot be an *a priori* assumption in analysis of the conflict at Elvaston.

Moreover, even if an association between Blount and Warwick by 1454 could be proved, there would be little reason to interpret this as evidence that the latter was challenging Buckingham's authority in Derbyshire. Neville's attempts to rebuild the sphere of influence of his predecessors, the Beauchamp earls of Warwick, in Warwickshire since 1450 had certainly brought him into conflict with Buckingham in the north of that county.<sup>13</sup> However, Neville held no lands in Derbyshire, an area where the Beauchamps had never wielded any authority.<sup>14</sup> The earl's 'bastard feudal network in Derbyshire' was not only 'weak';<sup>15</sup> apart from the questionable case of Walter Blount, it seems to have been non-existent.<sup>16</sup> Nor, indeed, was conflict between Warwick and Buck-

ingham evident in the neighbouring county of Staffordshire, where the earldom of Warwick had territorial interests in the south of the shire, but where Beauchamp influence in the 1420s and 1430s had only been established through a noble coalition which included Buckingham himself.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the midland 'frontier between the respective spheres of influence of Warwick and Buckingham' seems to have remained firmly located in northern Warwickshire.<sup>18</sup>

It seems, therefore, that the quarrel between the Blounts and the Longfords cannot adequately be depicted as a clash either between adherents of York and Lancaster, or, in a regionally specific context, between retainers of Warwick and Buckingham. Nevertheless, it is also apparent — not least from the timing of the assault on Elvaston, which took place little more than a month after the establishment of York's regime — that the dramatic developments within national government in 1453-4 cannot easily be dismissed as a potential influence on the course of the dispute. This article seeks to offer a fresh perspective on the complex relationship between the dispute and its broader political context, by examining the regional circumstances which gave rise to the conflict of 1454.

A marked feature of north midland politics in the few years since 1450 had been the increasing authority of Walter Blount, eldest son of the eminent local knight Thomas Blount. The latter had been one of the most influential gentry figures in the region throughout the 1440s, holding office as sheriff in both Staffordshire and Derbyshire and as a regular member of the peace commission in the latter shire,<sup>19</sup> but during the early 1450s Walter became a significant local presence in his own right. He joined his father on the bench in 1449, and represented Derbyshire in four out of the five parliaments between 1447 and 1453; in 1449 he was also appointed bailiff of two Derbyshire wapentakes.<sup>20</sup> In a society where land conferred power, such independent authority was rarely achieved by a gentry heir who had not yet come into his inheritance.

It is clear that Walter Blount's remarkable success was the result not only of his family's traditional regional influence but also of his own connections with the court, where he had been a household esquire since 1441.<sup>21</sup> In March 1453, for example, when the farm of a wardship was granted to John, Lord Dudley, a midland nobleman who had chosen to focus his political career at court rather than on regional affairs, Walter Blount was among his mainpennors.<sup>22</sup> More significantly, Queen Margaret appointed Blount to the stewardship of the High Peak, one of the Duchy of Lancaster lordships which had been assigned as part of her dower settlement, and which dominated northern Derbyshire.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that during this period Blount may also have come into contact with Richard Neville, who was until the middle of 1453 still closely associated with the court.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, in February 1451 Blount stood bail for Robert Harecourt, who was at this point supported by Warwick as well as by other members of the court, when he appeared to face charges relating to the murder of Richard Stafford in Coventry in 1448.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, as has already been suggested, there is no evidence that any connection between Warwick and Blount at this point was close, substantial, or indicative

that the earl harboured regional ambitions in relation to Derbyshire.

Blount's career at court had therefore enabled him to interpolate himself into local structures of power; his rise was all the more significant because of the nature of those structures. The politics of the north midlands were profoundly influenced by the fact that the shire boundaries did not delineate discrete geo-political units, but were merely one element in broader territorial and political patterns across the region. Local power structures, therefore, were given shape by the interaction of the various territorial interests in the region, expressed through the formation of private networks and hierarchies, within the public framework of local government. This meant that changing political circumstances could affect not only the make-up of local power structures, but the structures themselves across the entire region.<sup>26</sup> In administrative terms, for example, Derbyshire and the neighbouring county of Staffordshire were two completely independent entities — indeed, their official structures of power faced in opposite directions, since Derbyshire's shrievalty was shared with its eastern neighbour Nottinghamshire, and Staffordshire's was periodically combined with Shropshire to the west.<sup>27</sup> In tenurial terms, however, this situation was almost exactly reversed. The extensive and valuable Duchy of Lancaster honours of Tutbury and the High Peak, the pre-eminent territorial interest in the region, straddled the Derbyshire-Staffordshire border,<sup>28</sup> so that eastern Staffordshire and western Derbyshire together naturally tended to form a political unit. This lack of correspondence between the administrative and tenurial structures of the region meant that the local balance of power would depend on the relationship of political interests and networks in the Tutbury region with those of western Staffordshire and eastern Derbyshire.

During the first decades of the century, the territorial dominance of the Duchy of Lancaster, which, after the accession of Henry IV in 1399, meant the king in his capacity as a private regional landowner, was matched by its political pre-eminence.<sup>29</sup> The honours of Tutbury and the High Peak supported an affinity which was already influential under John of Gaunt in the 1380s and 1390s,<sup>30</sup> and which developed under the Lancastrian monarchy into a broad, cohesive and extremely powerful gentry network. Under Henry IV and Henry V, Derbyshire and Staffordshire were incorporated into a broad sphere of influence stretching across the north midlands under royal direction. In Derbyshire, the Duchy's territorial power was unchallengeable in the west of the shire, but the east would always be susceptible to influence from Nottinghamshire. Nevertheless, the Duchy was also the dominant political interest in Nottinghamshire during these years, and there were few other sources of local lordship in Derbyshire, so that Lancastrian influence extended throughout the shire.<sup>31</sup> In Staffordshire, the Tutbury lands in the east of the shire were rivalled by the extensive estates of the earldom of Stafford in the west, but the protracted minority of Humphrey, earl of Stafford, from 1403 created a political vacuum in the latter area which allowed the Duchy to become the leading interest in the county.<sup>32</sup> Under the direction of the first two Lancastrians, therefore, the Duchy network — which included virtually all the leading gentry families from the Tutbury region, including the Blounts and the

Longfords, as well as others such as the Montgomeries, Cokayns, Gresleys, Shirleys, Cursons, Okeovers and Foljambes — played a crucial role in regional rule.

In 1422, however, royal direction was lost on the death of Henry V. Though the Tutbury connection managed to retain its coherence during the minority, it was becoming clear by the later 1430s that Henry VI's rule was unlikely to emulate the success of his illustrious father, and that the remains of the Duchy affinity would receive little more active leadership from the king as an adult than it had during his minority. In 1437, therefore, control of the major Duchy estates was delegated to leading members of the nobility.<sup>33</sup> In the north midlands, that meant Humphrey, earl of Stafford, later duke of Buckingham, who was appointed steward of the honour of Tutbury for life.<sup>34</sup> This grant effectively reversed the political circumstances of the first decades of the century. The Duchy connection around Tutbury, under royal leadership, had previously played a significant role in filling the vacuum left by the Stafford minority in western Staffordshire. Now, Buckingham had been given the means to extend his authority from his own estates in western Staffordshire eastwards across the county and into Derbyshire to fill the political gap left in the region's power structures by the king's failure to make active use of the local resources of the Duchy.

The combination of his Stafford lands and the Tutbury stewardship made Buckingham unquestionably the principal source of authority available to the gentry of the region, and it has been assumed that the duke was therefore able to dominate local society during the 1440s and 1450s. Ian Rowney suggests that during these years 'Staffordshire really was Stafford's shire', while Susan Wright argues that Buckingham 'steadily moved into a pre-eminent position in the midlands'.<sup>35</sup> Both they and Carole Rawcliffe discuss the duke's affinity in terms which implicitly assume that it functioned as a coherent and powerful force in the region.<sup>36</sup> When examining the details of Buckingham's rule, however, it has proved difficult either to adduce examples of the duke's lordship successfully influencing local affairs, or to explain the increasing confusion apparent in regional politics during the later 1440s.<sup>37</sup> Active use of his Duchy stewardship to reconstitute the gentry networks that had been formed around the Duchy interest in the Tutbury region earlier in the century was vital to any chance Buckingham might have of securing the rule of eastern Staffordshire and western Derbyshire, since his own landed stake in these areas was negligible.<sup>38</sup> However, when conflict within the formerly cohesive Tutbury connection erupted in the early 1440s on the Staffordshire-Derbyshire border, at the heart of Buckingham's newly formed power bloc, it was allowed to fester throughout the decade.

From 1442 the related families of Basset and Okeover became embroiled in two separate disputes with their neighbours, and erstwhile associates, the Meverells of Throwley and the Fitzherberts of Norbury.<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that significant disruption was being caused in Buckingham's recently enlarged 'country', where he now represented not only his own private lordship but also the king in the guise of the Duchy, the duke made no attempt to restore peace. Indeed, he did not intervene at all until June 1445, when he granted

an annuity to Ralph Basset.<sup>40</sup> Having with this single action taken sides in both disputes, the duke then failed to exercise his lordship in relation to the conflict; his gesture of support seems to have afforded Basset no practical help at all.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, by the late 1440s members of Buckingham's retinue, including his most eminent local retainer Richard Vernon, as well as other families traditionally associated with the Duchy, were offering substantial support not to the duke's new recruit Basset, but to his opponents the Meverells.<sup>42</sup> Nor does this seem to indicate that Buckingham had abandoned Basset and thrown the weight of his affinity behind Meverell, especially in the absence of any readily understandable motive for such a policy. It is far from clear that Buckingham had the degree of influence over men such as Vernon necessary to direct events in the region. In 1447, for example, when arbitration was sought in a dispute between the Vernons and the Gresleys, the matter was 'sette in peese' not by Buckingham but by William, Lord Ferrers of Chartley, who was at odds with the duke in both Staffordshire and Warwickshire during these years.<sup>43</sup> The fact that Vernon, the steward of the Peak, should turn for judgement not to Buckingham, who as steward of Tutbury was Vernon's immediate superior in the Duchy hierarchy, but to the duke's Staffordshire rival, is ample testimony to Buckingham's failure to exploit his Duchy office in support of his authority in eastern Staffordshire and western Derbyshire.

In other words, it is not necessary to explain 'what appear at first sight to be contradictions' within political networks during these years only in terms of 'the rather obvious point that the gentry were individuals'.<sup>44</sup> While this is undoubtedly true, it is also clear that even gentry as individually resourceful and independent-minded as those of Norfolk, for example, were eager to take advantage of the benefits of effective lordship where and when it was available to them.<sup>45</sup> The confused evidence of local associations in the north midlands during the late 1440s does not merely reflect the gentry's general unwillingness to commit themselves too firmly to any one network; it also indicates that reliable lordship was not available in the region. Such apparent political 'contradictions' need to be taken for what they were: evidence of increasing incoherence within local power structures. By the later 1440s, the political confusion evident within formerly close-knit gentry networks and within the duke's retinue itself, exacerbated by Buckingham's failure to act in response to the increasing conflict within his 'country', means that his authority cannot be assumed to have been the dominant factor governing regional affairs, nor can men such as Vernon be taken to have acted within the context of a functioning 'Stafford affinity'. While the developing 'horizontal' affiliations of Vernon, Basset and others can be traced throughout the period, it is far from clear where Buckingham stood in relation to any of them. It appears that Buckingham's authority was not an effective force in the region, while at the same time he dominated its political resources to such an extent that no one else was able to offer effective leadership in his stead. The delegation of Duchy authority to the duke seems, because of the deficiencies of his lordship, to have created a power vacuum in eastern Staffordshire and western Derbyshire.<sup>46</sup>

In these circumstances, the meteoric rise of Walter Blount proved particularly destabilising. A prime example of Buckingham's failure to reassemble the Tutbury connection under his own leadership was the fact that he had developed no personal association with the Blounts, who had been key members of the Duchy affinity in Derbyshire since the beginning of the century, despite the fact that Thomas Blount was the duke's deputy as steward of Tutbury.<sup>47</sup> Walter Blount had no greater personal links with the duke than his father; he had therefore succeeded in acquiring substantial authority in the region not only independently of his family's territorial interests, which he had not yet inherited, but also independently of Buckingham, who — nominally at least — dominated local society. The fact that a significant element in Blount's regional influence was provided by his acquisition of Duchy office at the High Peak demonstrates the extent of the duke's failure to exploit his own Tutbury stewardship as the focal point for a coherent affinity in the area. Nor, as the king's representative in the region, was he ensuring that local society was adequately represented in the distribution of office. Blount, who did not even yet control his own patrimony,<sup>48</sup> was hardly a sufficient substitute as steward of the Peak for the territorial eminence and political experience of his predecessor, Richard Vernon. The Peak stewardship conferred enormous influence in northern Derbyshire, an area where there were very few magnate interests, and it had allowed Vernon to develop his own independent regional lordship, to become the single most powerful member of the gentry in the shire for much of the three decades before his death in 1451.<sup>49</sup> Blount's appointment represented an extraordinarily rapid promotion, and dealt a severe blow to the regional aspirations of Vernon's heir William. It is in this context that Blount's success, and the peculiarly tense circumstances of the establishment of the protectorate in 1454, seem to have proved an explosive combination.

The origins of the conflict are obscure, but the earliest indications of trouble in fact suggest that it originally focused not on Blount and his family but on their relatives the Shirleys.<sup>50</sup> Ralph Shirley's grandfather, Sir Hugh, had been among the leading Duchy retainers in Derbyshire at the beginning of the century, but Ralph's father had spent most of his time in Nottinghamshire, and Ralph himself established the family seat at his wife's Leicestershire estate of Staunton Harold.<sup>51</sup> From the early 1450s Shirley properties in Derbyshire came under attack from a group of local gentry led by Sir Nicholas Longford. No evidence survives of the origin of the dispute, but in August 1450 the Shirley manor of Brailsford was raided by a group of yeomen from Longford.<sup>52</sup> There is no extant record of any further trouble until December 1452, when Nicholas Longford himself broke into the park at Shirley in the company of John Cokayn and Nicholas Montgomery.<sup>53</sup> The Shirleys had earlier in the century been engaged in a protracted dispute with Buckingham over the Basset of Drayton inheritance,<sup>54</sup> but it seems unlikely that the attacks by Longford were prompted by the duke. As has already been suggested, it is far from clear that Buckingham had the degree of control over his retainers required to initiate such a campaign. Even if he did have such influence, it is hard to see why he would choose to reopen hostilities years after the matter seems to have been settled substantially in his own favour. The fact that both of the Shirley

properties attacked, Brailsford and Shirley, lay only a few miles from the manor of Longford in south-west Derbyshire suggests that Nicholas Longford's actions were principally designed to further his own local interests.

Certainly, the context of the Shirley-Buckingham dispute offers no clue as to why hostilities subsequently focused on the Blounts, and specifically on the person of Walter Blount. In July 1453, seven months after the attack on the park at Shirley, Ralph Twyford, a local gentleman closely associated with Longford, assaulted Walter Blount's brother Thomas at Derby.<sup>55</sup> Though there is no indication of the cause of the incident, it may be significant that Walter Blount's prestigious and enormously influential Duchy office at the Peak, for which he may have been felt to be insufficiently qualified, had been confirmed less than a month earlier.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, these incidents provide unequivocal evidence of the dislocation that had occurred within the former Duchy network during Buckingham's tenure of the Tutbury stewardship, since the Shirleys and the Blounts, leading members of the Lancastrian affinity in the first decades of the century, were now being attacked by their erstwhile associates in Duchy service, the Longfords, Cokayns and Montgomeries.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, Blount does not seem to have become noticeably estranged from the bulk of his family's local gentry associates before the end of 1453.<sup>58</sup> It appears that, until this point, the sporadic demonstrations of hostility between Nicholas Longford and the families of Blount and Shirley caused relatively little regional disruption. That was to change in the spring of 1454, when the temper of the feud was decisively exacerbated — a development which seems to have been closely related to the dramatic course of events in national politics. At the end of 1453, a year in which the government had come under increasing pressure, not least because of the king's mental collapse, the duke of York challenged Somerset's authority, and by April 1454 had secured the removal of his rival and his own appointment as protector.<sup>59</sup> In the north midlands, as elsewhere in the country, the 'Yorkist' regime immediately sought to restore the credibility and efficacy of the crown's authority. The first step was the reinforcement of the peace commission, with the appointment of Warwick to the bench in Staffordshire in April 1454 and of Warwick, York and the earl of Shrewsbury to the Derbyshire commission in May.<sup>60</sup> These appointments constituted a significant change in regional power structures. The sources of authority previously available, in theory at least, to the gentry of the area — effectively Buckingham (whatever the deficiencies of his lordship) through his territorial power in Staffordshire and his stewardship of Tutbury, and indeed the crown itself in the guise of the Duchy — were inseparable from the authority of the court and the person of the king. Blount's court career had given him independent access to royal authority, which allowed him to carve out a substantial niche for himself in Buckingham's 'country', despite his lack of any close association with the duke. Nicholas Longford had been retained by Buckingham for the past decade,<sup>61</sup> and before 1454 Blount had shown little appetite for risking the possibility of a trial of strength with the duke — however remote, given Buckingham's erratic and often ineffectual role in local affairs — by responding to Longford's challenges. However, though Buckingham was not excluded



from the Yorkist regime,<sup>62</sup> he was far from being in the ascendant, and the appointment of Warwick and York to the peace commissions signalled their determination to make royal authority, newly reconstituted independently of the person of the now totally incapable king, directly effective in the localities.

Blount, perhaps encouraged by contact with Warwick at court during the early 1450s,<sup>63</sup> seems to have decided that the new regime offered him a favourable political climate in which to pursue his local grievances. On 30 April 1454 he led a raid on the manor of Longford.<sup>64</sup> If he had hoped to secure the protector's backing for his efforts, he was to be disappointed. On 10 May, royal letters were issued summoning both Blount and Longford to appear before the council 'in all hast'.<sup>65</sup> Despite this even-handed response, Blount's decision to seize the initiative against his local rival under the auspices of the new regime seems to have been immensely provocative, inspiring Longford to a dramatic assault both on Blount himself and on the legitimacy of York's government. Longford's response to the summons clearly demonstrated that, at least in Derbyshire, the protectorate was neither immediately nor universally accepted as a legitimate and non-partisan delegation of royal authority. Nor should the significance of this demonstration be underestimated. Susan Wright's account of the conflict, for example, is in part based on the assumption that York's intervention was a manifestation of the 'intrusive and partial authority' of a 'powerful *but partisan* figure'.<sup>66</sup> However, not only is it far from clear that York did in fact have any partisan connection with Blount before the assault on Elvaston took place, but the duke had been able to establish himself at the head of a viable government only by winning a broad basis of noble support.<sup>67</sup> In order to demonstrate the legitimacy of the royal authority he wielded as protector in place of the now totally incapable king, and thus to reinforce the fragile consensus among the lords on which his power rested, the duke's primary concern in the localities was not to support partisan interests, but to display the impartiality of royal justice,<sup>68</sup> a concern reflected in his actions throughout the Blount-Longford dispute. York therefore seems to have had grounds for hope that his authority would be seen not as 'intrusive and partial', but as legitimate and universal. Its immediate rejection by a substantial proportion of Derbyshire landed society is telling evidence of the division and dislocation that Henry VI's ineptitude had already created within the polity at a local as well as a national level.

In the particular context of Derbyshire politics, York's attempt to present his government as an impartial and representative regime was somewhat compromised from the outset by the fact that the sheriff charged with delivering the royal summonses was John Gresley.<sup>69</sup> Gresley was the first Derbyshire gentleman to hold the joint shrievalty of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire since 1447-8, and had recently joined Longford as a member of Buckingham's retinue,<sup>70</sup> both of which circumstances might in theory have reinforced the credibility of his authority in Longford's eyes. Nevertheless, he was Walter Blount's cousin, and his brother Nicholas had participated in Blount's recent attack on Longford's estates.<sup>71</sup> If the latter had any doubts about the justice he could expect from York's government, they would therefore have been compounded by the identity of the government's principal officer in the

region.<sup>72</sup> Gresley despatched his servant Christopher Langton to deliver the royal letter to Longford at his manor of Hough in Lancashire.<sup>73</sup> Longford refused to receive the summons, and Langton left after being threatened by servants. The next day, however, he returned. Determined to deliver the letter, even if Longford refused to accept it, Langton placed it on a bench by the door, instructing the servants to tell their master what he had done, and rode away. This time, the Longfords' refusal to accept the authority of the sheriff and the government he represented was demonstrated more dramatically. Before Langton had reached the park gate, John Langford and a group of men overtook him. They had brought the royal letter, and tried to force the unfortunate Langton to eat it. When he said he would rather die, his attackers spat on the letter and made him tear it up — an explicit rejection of royal authority as represented by York's regime. Langton was put in the stocks at Hough, and then taken as a prisoner to Poynton in Cheshire, before eventually being moved to Longford in south-west Derbyshire on 27 May.

Derbyshire had by this point already experienced some reaction to the arrival of the summons; on 17 May the Blounts' tenants at Sutton had been assaulted by Richard and Edward Longford.<sup>74</sup> This raid offers an early indication of the breadth of regional support the Longfords could muster in their rejection of the government's intervention, since they were said to have been aided by William Vernon and John Cokayn.<sup>75</sup> The latter were both at Longford on 27 May when Langton arrived as a prisoner, as were Edmund and Roger Vernon, Edward Cokayn and Ralph Fitzherbert.<sup>76</sup> Also among Longford's supporters assembling there were several knights and esquires from Cheshire and Lancashire, some of whom — such as Sir John Mainwaring and John Davenport, both of Cheshire — were also retained by Buckingham. As Wright implies, however, it is difficult to regard this as substantive evidence that the duke instigated the attack, especially in the light of the conclusions reached above about the nature of Buckingham's relations with his retainers even in Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Longford himself, after all, owned estates in Cheshire and Lancashire, and it was at his manors in these counties that his supporters originally gathered.<sup>77</sup>

On 28 May, it became clear why Longford had assembled such a substantial show of support. He led his force, which was estimated by the Blounts to have numbered about a thousand, and included the Vernons and the Cokayns as well as Hugh Egerton and the younger Nicholas Montgomery, to Derby. There, they attacked Walter Blount's lodgings and the home of one of his servants.<sup>78</sup> The sheriff John Gresley met them in the market-place and sought to restrain them by reading the commission of the peace and a letter from York ordering that the peace should be kept. Longford and his associates treated Gresley's instructions with contempt, telling him that they would be restrained by no lord, sheriff or royal minister; significantly, the indictment detailing their actions originally alleged that they added '*persone regie excepta*', although the phrase was later crossed out.<sup>79</sup> Even if the emphasis on this distinction between the authority of the king himself and of York's officials acting in the king's name was a ruse on Blount's part to secure the duke's support, the willingness of Longford and his allies to challenge the authority

of York's regime seems clear from their treatment of the sheriff, his servant, and the royal letters.<sup>80</sup>

That Longford's hostility was directed primarily at Walter Blount rather than at his family as a whole was already evident from the attack on his lodgings at Derby. Ample confirmation of Blount's personal unpopularity was provided by the next target of Longford and his supporters. They left Derby and rode to the nearby manor of Elvaston.<sup>81</sup> The Blounts' family seat lay at Barton Blount,<sup>82</sup> whereas Elvaston had been acquired relatively recently by the family and, significantly, had been settled on Walter by his father by 1447.<sup>83</sup> Blount himself was away, but the raiding party ransacked the house. Most importantly, care was taken to emphasise that this violence was far from random or mindless: tapestries decorated with Blount's arms were cut into four, the attackers declaring that 'that seyde Walter Blount was gone to serve Traytours therefore his armus shall thus be quartered'.<sup>84</sup> The identification of the protector and his government as 'Traytours' was a dramatic demonstration that, in some minds at least, York had not succeeded in establishing that his regime was a legitimate attempt to take on the public responsibilities of an incapable king, rather than the illegitimate accroachment of royal power by a partisan faction. Whether Blount had indeed 'gone to serve Traytours', or whether his final decision to commit himself to York had not yet been made when the raid on his home took place, his position by the time indictments relating to the attack were presented in July was unequivocal. His rapid rise to personal power in the region, and the perception among his peers that he had associated himself with York by May 1454 (whether or not that was true), had left him virtually isolated in Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Members of the Longford, Vernon, Cokayn, Montgomery, Egerton and Fitzherbert families had taken part in the attacks on his property; John Curson was accused of aiding and abetting the raid on Elvaston, as was Longford's son-in-law Thomas Foljambe (although his name was later deleted from the indictment).<sup>85</sup> In such circumstances, when a significant proportion of the society in which Blount operated had perceived a connection between him and York, and rejected both, Blount was left with no option but to throw in his lot with the protector. It is no coincidence that he was the only local gentleman to commit himself so early and so completely to York's cause.<sup>86</sup>

This analysis of the events of May 1454 has suggested that attempts to explain the conflict simply by identifying the disputants as partisans of York and Lancaster, or of Warwick and Buckingham, may need to be modified. Indeed, far from Derbyshire being the scene of rivalry between Warwick and Buckingham, Warwick seems to have had virtually no interest in the county, and there must also be some hesitation over Buckingham's local role. While the region was undoubtedly in many senses within the duke's sphere of influence, it has already been argued that his control over his retainers and over local affairs in general was limited. It is difficult to accord Buckingham's lordship even a tacit role in orchestrating the conflict, when, for example, John Gresley — the sheriff whose authority was so forcefully challenged — was one of the duke's most recent retainers.<sup>87</sup> Rather, the violence reflected the fact that there was a political vacuum in the Tutbury region of eastern Staf-

fordshire and western Derbyshire, which had been created initially by the minority and subsequent incapacity of Henry VI, the natural ruler of this Duchy area, and then compounded by Buckingham's deficient management when the region was given into his charge. The impression created by these attacks on Blount, the steward of the Peak, by men associated with Buckingham, the steward of Tutbury — attacks in which virtually all of those involved on both sides had at one time been associated with the Duchy — is one of extreme confusion.

Yet even if Buckingham's involvement before the event in the attack on Blount was limited, it does seem that the duke actively *responded* to the conflict, and that this response may have owed something to his wider political concerns. In the months after the assault on Elvaston, Buckingham chose overtly to demonstrate his support for those responsible. Longford and Curson had already received annuities from the duke for more than a decade.<sup>88</sup> As has already been suggested, the actual significance of these formal links in shaping the events of May 1454 is called into question by the fact that Buckingham had failed during that decade to establish his lordship as a controlling force in the region. However, in August 1454 the duke granted John Cokayn an annuity of 10 marks and, in the same month, awarded William Vernon a fee of £10.<sup>89</sup> The decision to retain two of the leading figures responsible for the attack on Blount's property only three months after it took place cannot have been coincidental, particularly since the grants made no political sense within the context of Buckingham's existing retinue. Vernon was at loggerheads with the duke's recent recruit John Gresley, while Cokayn was being kept out of his inheritance by his mother's remarriage to Thomas Bate, another of Buckingham's retainers.<sup>90</sup> It is possible that the duke's decision to offer such overt backing to Blount's opponents was prompted by his rivalry elsewhere in the midlands with the earl of Warwick. However, given the fact that Warwick had no political stake in Derbyshire, and that it is unclear whether Blount was now developing links specifically with Warwick or with York himself, an equally important role in shaping Buckingham's actions may well have been played by his opposition to the Yorkist regime as a whole.<sup>91</sup>

Buckingham's willingness to offer partisan support in the aftermath of the violence is perhaps reflected by the fact that he was not among the justices who heard the indictments when a commission of *oyer* and *terminer* sat at Derby in July 1454.<sup>92</sup> The events of May, and especially Longford's explicit challenge to the legitimacy of York's authority as protector, had made it even more essential for the duke to demonstrate rapidly that his regime could offer credible, impartial justice, which, if Buckingham were to some degree implicated in the dispute after the Elvaston raid, would have provided a compelling reason for excluding him from a judicial role at the sessions. The fact that Warwick too was absent from the commission may lend support to the suggestion that the tensions between the earl and Buckingham in Warwickshire had influenced the repercussions of the dispute. Alternatively, his absence may reflect the fact that Warwick — unlike the earl of Shrewsbury who did appear on the commission, and unlike Buckingham — had neither estates

nor significant political interests in Derbyshire.<sup>93</sup> In fact, since there is no evidence that Warwick, unlike Buckingham, made a show of partisan commitment even after the raid,<sup>94</sup> the earl cannot be demonstrated to have taken any action at all in relation to the dispute; he had no lands in the area in which it occurred, and no demonstrable connections with any of the protagonists at the time of the conflict. It seems that the events of 1454 may best be understood in terms both of the power structures of a region that was nominally under Buckingham's authority, and of the relationship between the latter and the dominant interests in national government, rather than as a manifestation of regional rivalry between Buckingham and Warwick.

Both Longford and Blount were on 3 June again ordered to appear before the council and charged on pain of £1,000 to 'attempte noo thing ayens oure pees in the meane tyme', and on 1 July York himself arrived at Derby with Shrewsbury to hear the indictments.<sup>95</sup> The government's concern to manifest its impartiality is evident in the fact that efforts seem to have been made to select juries unconnected with either side.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the commission failed to compel the attendance of Longford, Cokayn or Vernon, and York could not stay long in Derby, so that many of the accused were bailed until September.<sup>97</sup> Despite York's presence, the government's intervention had failed to secure the co-operation of the bulk of local society with the judicial proceedings of July 1454. Blount and Shirley were virtually the only gentlemen to present complaints, and their opponents stayed away from the hearings.<sup>98</sup>

The limited success of York's intervention in a dispute during which the legitimacy of his regime had been challenged reflects the fundamental weakness of his position. The duke might claim to govern on behalf of the hapless king, but at a local level some landowners at least were drawing a clear distinction between the administration of the protector and the supreme authority of the crown. It was that supreme authority which alone could compel the obedience of the king's greater subjects, and, without it, York was unable to enforce a resolution of their private feuds. Indeed, the events of the spring and summer of 1454 in Derbyshire form a telling example of the complex nature of divisions within regional society in this period, and demonstrate the impossibility of investigating that complexity through analyses which seek to classify conflict as either local or national in origin. The course of the Blount-Longford dispute reflects the constant interaction of local concerns and tensions with broader developments in national politics.

In this context, the role played by the Duchy of Lancaster, and by the private, regional authority it bestowed on the Lancastrian kings, has not always been taken sufficiently into account in discussions of local political society. Possession of the Duchy estates meant that the Lancastrian crown had an important part to play in regional rule, but Henry VI proved incapable of shouldering such responsibilities. In the north midlands, an attempt was made to contain the devastating effects of the king's incapacity by delegating control of the Duchy's local resources to Buckingham. His failure to use those resources to establish effective control of the region was the underlying cause of much of the disorder that developed in the area during the 1440s and 1450s.

Moreover, the culmination of Walter Blount's spectacular rise through the confusion of local power structures — which seems to have been over-rapid, given that he had not yet inherited his family's estates, and to have alienated a significant proportion of regional society — was his acquisition of Duchy office. It was the vacuum of power caused by the long-term failure of Duchy authority in the region, as wielded either by the king or by Buckingham, which made the immediate circumstances of York's protectorate so explosive in Derbyshire in 1454. The significance of the Duchy in the north midlands in the 1450s suggests that the affairs of other regions where it was a substantial territorial presence may also need to be reconsidered.<sup>99</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Dr Christine Carpenter for her comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office (hereafter P.R.O.), KB9/12/1 m. 13.

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (London, 1981), 765.

<sup>4</sup> A. Carrington and W.J. Andrew, 'A Lancastrian Raid in the Wars of the Roses', *Jnl. of the Derbys. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, XXXIV (1912), 33, 35; D.A.L. Morgan, 'The house of policy: the political role of the late Plantagenet household, 1422-1485', in D. Starkey (ed.), *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London, 1987), 50.

<sup>5</sup> R.L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster* (London, 1966), 150.

<sup>6</sup> Storey, *End of the House of Lancaster*, 152; S.M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Chesterfield, 1983), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Griffiths, *Henry VI*, 721-3, 726-8; J. Gairdner (ed.), *The Paston Letters*, 6 vols. (London, 1904), II, 295-8. Nicholas Longford and Hugh Egerton were among Buckingham's retainers, for example, while the Vernons and the Cokayns had been associated with the duke for many years: Staffordshire Record Office (hereafter S.R.O.), D641/1/2/15, 56, 59, 272.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 73-4, 136-7; I.D. Rowney, 'The Staffordshire Political Community, 1440-1500' (University of Keele Ph.D. thesis, 1981), 22-3, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 136-7, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Storey, *End of the House of Lancaster*, 152, 254; British Library (hereafter B.L.), Cotton MS Vespasian F XIII, no. 89 (printed in H. Ellis (ed.), *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, second series, i (reprint, London, 1969), 124-6).

<sup>11</sup> G.L. Harriss, 'The Struggle for Calais: an aspect of the rivalry between Lancaster and York', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, LXXV (1960), 40-1, 46. Morgan points out that another of York's retainers, Sir Edmund Mulso, was also seconded from the duke's service to serve under Warwick at Calais. Mulso's will was made at Calais in May 1458, and he was dead by January 1459. Morgan suggests that it may have been to replace Mulso that Warwick requested Blount's presence, which would date the letter to October 1458: 'The house of policy', 53n.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 73, 100, 180; J.C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Biographies of the Members of the Commons House 1439-1509* (London, 1936), 86.

<sup>13</sup> C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992), 452-8. For the complex and protracted division of the Beauchamp estates between Neville, the earl of Shrewsbury, the duke of Somerset and George Neville, Lord Latimer, the husbands of Anne Beauchamp and her three half-sisters, see Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 439-46.

<sup>14</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 449; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 66, 169. For the role of the distribution of a magnate's estates in determining the areas in which he could establish his authority, see C. Carpenter, 'The Beauchamp Affinity: a study of bastard feudalism at work', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, XCV (1980), 517.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 137.

<sup>16</sup> Blount is the only Derbyshire gentleman that Dr Wright links firmly with Warwick during the 1450s: Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 72-5; cf. the analysis of the earl's midland interests during these years in Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, ch. 12. This point is also made in M. Hicks,

review of Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, *Midl. Hist.*, X (1985), 113.

<sup>17</sup> It seems difficult to accept Ian Rowney's argument that 'much of the political history of Staffordshire in the 1440s and 1450s was an extension of that of Warwickshire, where Humphrey, earl of Stafford ... contested supremacy with the Beauchamp and Neville earls of Warwick': 'Staffordshire Political Community', 40. Between 1439 and 1449, for example, there was no adult earl of Warwick, apart from Henry Beauchamp's brief career between 1444 and 1446, when he showed little active interest in Staffordshire. There is also little evidence that Richard Neville, who did not even hold the Beauchamp estate in its entirety, showed any significant interest in Staffordshire in the 1450s, preoccupied as he was with Warwickshire and, increasingly, with national politics: Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 372-8, 389-91, 449, and chs. 11-12, *passim*; H.R. Castor, 'The Duchy of Lancaster in the Lancastrian Polity, 1399-1461' (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1993), chs. 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 137. Far from this frontier moving northwards into Derbyshire during 1453, Carpenter suggests that for much of 1453 Warwick's fortunes in Warwickshire itself were at the lowest point they reached during the years 1450-6: *Locality and Polity*, 466-7.

<sup>19</sup> *List of Sheriffs for England and Wales*, P.R.O. Lists and Indexes, 72 (1971), 103, 127; *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (hereafter C.P.R.) 1436-41, 581; C.P.R. 1441-6 469; C.P.R. 1446-52, 588.

<sup>20</sup> C.P.R. 1446-52, 221, 588; *Return of the Name of Every Member of the Lower House of the Parliament of England, 1213-1874*, Parliamentary Papers, vol. LXII, pt. I (London, 1878), 335, 338, 344, 347.

<sup>21</sup> Morgan, 'The house of policy', 50n.

<sup>22</sup> *Calendar of Fine Rolls* (hereafter C.F.R.) 1452-61, 29. For Dudley's career, see *Complete Peerage* IV, 479; Griffiths, *Henry VI*, 281-2; Rowney, 'Staffordshire Political Community', 40.

<sup>23</sup> The date of the queen's grant is not known, but it was confirmed by the king on 4 July 1453. Blount was to be constable and master forester as well as steward: P.R.O., DL37/21 nos. 30-1.

<sup>24</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 459, 466.

<sup>25</sup> Blount's description in the record of the mainprise as 'of London' supports the suggestion that he was active at court at this point: G. Wrottesley (ed.), 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls in the reign of Henry VI', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, William Salt Archaeological Society, new series, III (1900), 198; for the Stafford-Harecourt feud, see Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 427-8, 454-6.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 25-6; C. Carpenter, 'The duke of Clarence and the midlands: a study in the interplay of local and national politics', *Midl. Hist.*, XI (1986), 25-6. Failure to take account of this point has hampered previous studies of the north midlands. For example, though Dr Wright's conclusions about the Derbyshire gentry are illuminating, her analysis of local politics is sometimes compromised by the fact that she does not look beyond the largely artificial boundaries of the shire. She argues that 'this study is concerned with Derbyshire rather than with any of the Derbyshire gentry's activities in, and links with, other counties', despite the fact that many events in Derbyshire can only be explained fully by such activities and links: *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Staffordshire was, however, a single shrievalty throughout the Lancastrian period: *List of Sheriffs*, 103, 127.

<sup>28</sup> R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, I (London, 1953), 7; P.R.O., DL29/728/11987; for map, see Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', 193a.

<sup>29</sup> For full discussion of this account of regional power structures, see Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', chs. 2 (iv), 6-8; see also comments in Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 83-4.

<sup>30</sup> S. Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361-99* (Oxford, 1990), ch. 6 (2).

<sup>31</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 62, 83; S.J. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991), 119-40; Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', chs. 6 (ii), 7 (i).

<sup>32</sup> Under Henry IV, this was a controversial process, since the king allowed his Duchy retainers virtually exclusive access to local office in Staffordshire, leaving the west of the shire largely unrepresented — a situation which provoked an outbreak of serious disorder in the region in the latter part of the reign. Henry V, however, succeeded in assimilating gentry interests from this 'Stafford' area into a more broadly representative local regime: E. Powell, *Kingship, Law, and Society: Criminal Justice in the Reign of Henry V* (Oxford, 1989), 208-16; Castor, 'Duchy of

Lancaster', chs. 6 (ii), 7 (i).

<sup>33</sup> Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', 53-5.

<sup>34</sup> P.R.O., DL42/18 pt. 1, fos. 59-59v; Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, 539, 556.

<sup>35</sup> I. Rowney, 'Government and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century: Staffordshire 1439-59', *Midl. Hist.*, VIII (1983), 66; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Dr Wright points out substantial limitations to Buckingham's affinity in Derbyshire during the 1440s, but she is prepared to accept that his authority was an effective force in some areas of the shire. Rowney, 'Staffordshire Political Community', 49-50, 58-71; C. Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 1394-1521* (Cambridge, 1978), 72-85; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 68-72.

<sup>37</sup> What follows is a necessarily truncated version of a more detailed argument; for full discussion, see Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', ch. 8.

<sup>38</sup> See Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, appendix A.

<sup>39</sup> For details of the conflict, see Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', ch. 8. The Meverells, Bassets, Okeovers and Fitzherberts had been associated with each other during the previous three decades in the context of a regional network which included the Longfords, the Cursons of Kedleston, the Cokayns, the Montgomeries, the Poles of Hartington and the Bradbournes: Derby Central Library (hereafter D.C.L.), Every 3242-3, 3307, 3519; Derbyshire Record Office (hereafter D.R.O.), D231M/E451, T22-3, T169, T308, T379; Leicestershire Record Office (hereafter L.R.O.), 26D53/190; B.L., Harl. MS 4028, fol. 93; B.L., Add. Ch. 53621; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 212 (deeds of 1420 and 1430), 242 (deed of 1429).

<sup>40</sup> S.R.O., D641/1/2/56. Carole Rawcliffe (*The Staffords*, 233) dates this grant to October 1444, quoting National Library of Wales (hereafter N.L.W.), Peniarth MS 280, p. 35. However, the Peniarth MS gives no specific date for the grant, unlike the S.R.O. MS. Some indication of the approximate timing is given in the Peniarth MS by the fact that the grants are listed in chronological order, but this too supports the S.R.O. MS, since Basset's annuity appears among others dated to 1445. By 1445 an arbitration between the Meverells and the Bassets had been attempted under the adjudication of Buckingham, but of John, Lord Dudley, whose interests and activities were concentrated at court rather than on his midland estates: H.S. Grazebrook, 'The Barons of Dudley', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, William Salt Archaeological Society, IX (1888), 70; see above, n. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Rowney follows Rawcliffe's dating of Buckingham's grant to Basset, and therefore attributes the lifting in October 1444 of the excommunication that had been imposed on the latter's ally John Southworth to Buckingham's intervention. This conclusion is difficult to support if the duke's grant is redated to the following year, since there is no other evidence that Buckingham became involved in the dispute in 1444. Basset does seem to have had some association with Buckingham and his inner circle during the late 1430s (see S.R.O., D1721/1/1 fos. 38, 269v), but this had apparently not been enough for him to be able to call upon the duke's intervention when the conflict began. The only possible benefit Buckingham's support may have provided to Basset's cause is facilitating a temporary lull in hostilities. Direct confrontation between the two sides seems to have stopped until January 1448, possibly because Basset may have spent a brief period at Calais in Buckingham's retinue. However, this might also represent a temporary success for the arbitration carried out by Dudley. Rowney, 'Staffordshire Political Community', 313; *Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, 48, 'Calendar of French Rolls, Henry VI' (London, 1887), 370; see above, n. 40.

<sup>42</sup> I.H. Jeayes (ed.), *Descriptive Catalogue of Derbyshire Charters* (London, 1906), 304 [2394], 337 [2678]; P.R.O., KB27/750 Coram Rege rot. 61v; CP40/751 rot. 61v; CP40/754 rot. 321; Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', 284-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission: Report on the Manuscripts of the Duke of Rutland*, IV (London, 1905), 29; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 391, 405-8, 410-14, 424-7; Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', 272-4.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 71.

<sup>45</sup> Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', Part II, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> This conclusion is supported by the evidence of local office-holding. The joint shrievalty of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire was held by Derbyshire men only three times during the 1440s; none were retainers of Buckingham. In Staffordshire, remarkably, not one of the sheriffs during



the decade was retained by the duke: *List of Sheriffs*, 103, 127; Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 232-40.

<sup>47</sup> For Blount holding office at Tutbury at least by 1439, see *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, V, 16; P.R.O., DL42/18 pt. 1, fos. 84v-85, 142-142v; DL37/10 no. 44. Wright states that Blount was retained by Buckingham during the 1440s, citing information from T.B. Pugh, but Rawcliffe makes no mention of Blount in any connection with the Stafford retinue. The only evidence I have been able to find of any possible associations between them during these years is a charter of 1443 involving Buckingham, to which Blount's brother-in-law Sir John Gresley was a witness. It is not clear whether Buckingham or the crown would have been responsible for Blount's appointment as deputy steward, but in the absence of any other traceable connection between Blount and the duke, the crown would perhaps seem more likely: Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 71, 100n; S.R.O., D1721/1/1, fos. 148v-149; Rowney, 'Staffordshire Political Community', 452.

<sup>48</sup> This had significant implications in local politics. Unlike his father, for example, and although he had held office as MP and JP, Walter had not yet been appointed to the shrievalty, the most prestigious and powerful of the shire offices: *List of Sheriffs*, 103; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 263-9.

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 66-70; Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', 246-8, 267-8; C.F.R. 1445-52, 231.

<sup>50</sup> Ralph Shirley's step-mother may have been a Blount; his second wife was Walter Blount's sister Elizabeth: L.R.O., 72'30 vol. I, unnumbered deed (December 36 Henry VI); E.P. Shirley, *Stemmata Shirleiana* (London, 1873), 1, 45, 397-8, 399-402.

<sup>51</sup> Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity*, 217, 222-3; Shirley, *Stemmata Shirleiana*, 44, 46-7.

<sup>52</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 12.

<sup>53</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 70-1; Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 12, 192.

<sup>55</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 15. The indictment describing the attack originally alleged that it had been carried out on the instructions of Nicholas Longford and John Curson, but the phrase was later crossed out.

<sup>56</sup> See above, at nn. 23, 48-9.

<sup>57</sup> For the earlier Lancastrian connections of these families, see Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity*, 264, 267, 273, 275, 281; Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', chs. 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> See Nottinghamshire Archives (hereafter N.A.), DDFJ 1/84/4 (printed in Jeayes (ed.), *Derbyshire Charters*, 200 [1616]) for Blount as a witness with William Vernon, John Cokayn and John de la Pole in June 1453; D.C.L., Every 3523 for Blount and co-foeffees including Ralph de la Pole and Nicholas Fitzherbert in September 1453.

<sup>59</sup> Griffiths, *Henry VI*, 715, 719-26.

<sup>60</sup> York and Shrewsbury were also added to the Staffordshire commission in July 1454: C.P.R. 1452-61, 663-4, 677.

<sup>61</sup> See above, n. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Griffiths, *Henry VI*, 726-8.

<sup>63</sup> See above, p.23.

<sup>64</sup> He was accompanied by his brother Thomas and his cousin Nicholas Gresley: P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 9. (The indictment is printed in A. Carrington and E.M. Poynton, 'A Lancastrian Raid in the Wars of the Roses', *Jnl. of the Derbys. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, XXXV (1913), 244.) Storey misdates this attack to 30 May: Storey, *End of the House of Lancaster*, 154.

<sup>65</sup> N.H. Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, 7 vols. (London, 1834-7), VI, 180.

<sup>66</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 136 (her italics).

<sup>67</sup> Griffiths, *Henry VI*, 726-8; J.L. Watts, 'Domestic Politics and the Constitution in the Reign of Henry VI, c.1435-61' (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1990), 322-3, 335-7.

<sup>68</sup> cf. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 467-75; Watts, 'Domestic politics and the constitution', 324-6.

<sup>69</sup> *List of Sheriffs*, 103.

<sup>70</sup> Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 239.

<sup>71</sup> The sheriffs between 1448 and 1453 were members of the Nottinghamshire gentry: *List of Sheriffs*, 103; Payling, *Political Society*, 244-5; see above, n. 64.

<sup>72</sup> Gresley had, however, been appointed to the shrievalty in November 1453, before the establishment of the protectorate, and at a time when Griffiths suggests that 'members of the court and the household ... still exercised significant influence': *List of Sheriffs*, 103; Griffiths, *Henry VI*, 720-1.

<sup>73</sup> All details, unless otherwise noted, are taken from P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 24 (printed in Carrington and Poynton, 'A Lancastrian Raid', 228-32). See also Storey's account of the episode, in *End of the House of Lancaster*, 152-5.

<sup>74</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 23 (printed in Carrington and Poynton, 'A Lancastrian Raid', 232-6). Servants of Longford also raided Ralph Shirley's park at Shirley on 26 May: KB9/12/1 m. 8.

<sup>75</sup> John Curson, Nicholas Montgomery jr and Nicholas Fitzherbert were also originally included in the indictment for the offence, but their names were later crossed out.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholas Montgomery jr and Nicholas Fitzherbert were also originally included in the charge against this group: P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 24.

<sup>77</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 13; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> All details of the events of 28 May, unless otherwise noted, are taken from P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 13. (The indictment is printed in Carrington and Andrew, 'A Lancastrian Raid in the Wars of the Roses', 39-49.) See also Storey, *End of the House of Lancaster*, 152-5.

<sup>79</sup> '... quod nullus dominus persone regie excepta nec aliquis vicecomes aut minister domini Regis esse eorum gubernator nec illos impediret': P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 13.

<sup>80</sup> cf. n. 84 below.

<sup>81</sup> All details of this attack are also taken from P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 13.

<sup>82</sup> It was Barton which was attacked when the Blounts became a focus of anti-Lancastrian feeling in the first decade of the century: Powell, *Kingship, Law, and Society*, 208-10.

<sup>83</sup> D.R.O., D518M/E8. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Elvaston formed part of the estates of the Willoughbys of Wollaton. Though the details are not clear, it seems to have come into the Blounts' possession in the second decade of the century via Sir John Dabridgecourt: for detailed discussion, see Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster', 308n.

<sup>84</sup> Dr Wright rightly points out that this supposedly verbatim quotation 'may simply be the Blounts ensuring York's protection' (*The Derbyshire Gentry*, 136), but, as suggested above, unless the entire account in all its detail is wildly exaggerated, this speech is not inconsistent with other actions of Longford and his supporters. Moreover, the account of the quartering of the tapestries is so detailed and non-formulaic, and the quoted phrase so startling in its attack on York, that it is hard to believe that the episode was wholly invented.

<sup>85</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 13. Nicholas Fitzherbert's name was also struck out from this part of the indictment. All those present during the attack were said to have pledged to stand together in all things against Blount, his kinsmen, friends, servants and tenants. For Foljambe's marriage to Margery Longford, see N.A., DDFJ 4/5/1-2.

<sup>86</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 101.

<sup>87</sup> See above, n. 70. Wright's evidence for 'Buckingham's approval and probable encouragement' of the attack on Blount essentially consists of the fact that he 'did nothing to stop the assaults on this retainer of Warwick' (*The Derbyshire Gentry*, 74, 136). While this is undoubtedly true (with the proviso that there is no evidence that Blount was a retainer of Warwick), Buckingham had also done nothing to stop repeated assaults on his own retainer Ralph Basset throughout the 1440s (in the course of his dispute with Sampson Meverell, for which see above, at nn. 39-42), which makes any attempt to draw conclusions from such inactivity extremely difficult. In this context it seems difficult to sustain Ian Rowney's argument that the attack on Elvaston represented 'ill-discipline within the Stafford affinity', in the sense that it is hard to discern a functioning 'Stafford affinity' of any sort (although there is no doubt force in his conclusion that Blount was 'almost driven into the arms of Warwick and York'): Rowney, 'Staffordshire Political Community', 73; cf. Rowney, 'Government and Patronage', 65.

<sup>88</sup> So had Hugh Egerton's father: see above, n. 7; S.R.O., D641/1/2/56; N.L.W., Peniarth MS 280, p. 11.

<sup>89</sup> S.R.O., D641/1/2/59 (grant to Cokayn on 1 August 1454, given in Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 239, as 1453); P.R.O., SC6/1040/15 (Vemon retained for life to serve both Buckingham and his heir Humphrey, Lord Stafford - Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 240, mentions only Stafford).

<sup>90</sup> Rowney, 'Staffordshire Political Community', 316-18; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 411, 431.

<sup>91</sup> cf. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 466-7.

<sup>92</sup> P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 24v.

<sup>93</sup> See reference in note above. Warwick had been appointed to the commission of the peace in Derbyshire in 1454, but then so had York, who had no claims to regional lordship in the north midlands: see above, at n. 60.

<sup>94</sup> Indeed, as a central figure in the Yorkist regime, Warwick too had every incentive to demonstrate his commitment to impartial justice. In Warwickshire, for example, his local ascendancy between 1453 and 1456 seems to have been characterised by conciliation and compromise: Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 467-75.

<sup>95</sup> *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council* VI, 192; P.R.O., KB9/12/1 m. 12v.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Blount, for example, was among the names empanelled but not selected for the jury of Appletree and Wirksworth: P.R.O., KB9/12/2 m. 5; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 135 n. 112.

<sup>97</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 136; Storey, *End of the House of Lancaster*, 155.

<sup>98</sup> The earl of Shrewsbury also presented charges against John Cokayn for incursions into property he owned at Ashbourne between January and March 1454: P.R.O., KB9/12/1 mm. 16, 20-1.

<sup>99</sup> For a reappraisal of the politics of East Anglia — one such 'Duchy' region — under the Lancastrians, see Castor, 'Duchy of Lancaster,' chs. 3-5.