



*Richard II and the Rebel Earl,*  
A. K. Grundy  
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Press, 2013).

Review by: Gordon McKelvie

*Richard II and the Rebel Earl*. By A. K. Gundy. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-5218-3754-5. xv + 293 pp. £65.

**R**ichard II's deposition and the events leading up to it have been the subject of much debate by historians of late medieval England, producing many valuable monographs and articles that have cast a flood of light upon late medieval English politics and kingship. It therefore may be reasonably assumed that there is little left to be said about Richard II's reign. Dr Alison Gundy has proven any such assumption to be misguided in her study, which examines the personal relations between Richard II and one of his opponents, Thomas Beauchamp, eleventh earl of Warwick. The book can be regarded as a hybrid of royal and aristocratic biography on one hand and the type of detailed local/county study that proved to both popular with, and fruitful for, late medieval English historians during the 1980s and early 1990s, on the other. Dr Gundy's objectives are bold indeed: 'to present a picture of Richard's rule, drawn from a local perspective, but which take cognisance of the entire structure of the late fourteenth-century body-politic' (p. 31). The introduction surveys the historiography of Richard II's reign, particularly the diverse interpretations of his reign and his deposition, and is of particular value to anyone requiring a neat summary of the vast historiography of the reign. The proceeding chapters attempt to illuminate Richard's reign from the perspective of the earl of Warwick and his heartlands.

Chapter 1, titled 'The Geo-Political Framework', is essentially about the pattern of landholding in the West Midlands, defined here as Warwickshire and Worcestershire. It should be noted that, unlike many other local studies, Dr Gundy does take account of land held by ecclesiastical as well as secular lords. There are then four chronological chapters that examine the relationship between Richard and Warwick from the perspective of political society and government in the West Midlands in four different phrases: 1369-1382, 1383-1389, 1389-1397, and 1397-1401. The level of detail is impressive and the book contains a significant amount of archival work with a wide array of documents from seven different repositories, which has helped Dr Gundy flesh out the detail of many of the events of political importance discussed. There are three appendices that run to twenty-four pages detailing the Beauchamp affinity, as well as two further appendices showing the Justices of the Peace in Warwickshire and Worcestershire who are known to have been active. Readers of this journal will find of particular interest the way in which Gundy is able to demonstrate how events in the West Midlands relate to broader debates about the nature of Richard II's kingship.

In places the detailed reconstruction of certain legal disputes makes it

difficult to see the woods for the trees, as it were, although this may simply be an unavoidable drawback of the author's novel, and welcome, approach. Dr Gundy does, however, bring out the broader points of these detailed case studies at the end of each chapter. This reviewer is unsure about the underlying assumption that an active adult king, with all of the relevant duties that came with the office, could ever be overly concerned with individual legal disputes, even those involving his richest subject or their retainers. There would be too many other items in need of his attention. Similarly, it is uncertain how much of an earl's time would be taken up dealing with one particular legal dispute, although undoubtedly the issue would have been of greater concern to him than the king. In other places, it is difficult to see where individuals fit into the bigger picture. In this regard, a chapter on the earl's affinity would have been useful, particularly since significant detail is given to Richard retaining former members of the Warwick affinity. Indeed, for a book that is strongly focused on patronage networks and affinities, it is noticeable that the phrase 'bastard feudalism' is used once by Gundy (p. 14) and in quotation marks. Given the recent work of Dr Andrew Spencer which has, rightly, begun to reintegrate the phrase back into the vocabulary of the late medieval historian, it would have been interesting to read Dr Gundy's discussion of this topic in greater depth. A further complaint would be the number of cross-references, particularly in the first two chapters. These, however, are minor irritants that probably only reflect this reviewer's personal preferences and interests.

Overall, this book is a welcome and thought-provoking study of both the reign of Richard II and the West Midlands in the late fourteenth century. Although there are some minor drawbacks, the author's novel approach of effectively combining a local study with a study of central politics throws fresh light on older topics. A similar approach for other relations between kings and members of the nobility would be very much welcome.

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