

The Earl of Warwick's Domination of the Channel and the Naval Dimension to the Wars of the Roses, 1456–1460

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I

I am no apologist for naval history. Nevertheless, over the last few years I have become increasingly uneasy about its neglect by those writing on the Hundred Years War. It is as if James Sherborne had never lived: what is the purpose of historical scholarship if it is to be ignored? More recently I have been thinking again about the 1450s. Like every other historian of fifteenth-century England the origins of the Wars of the Roses fairly continuously exercise my mind. In a deservedly influential article Michael K. Jones re-concentrated our attention on the connection between the end of the Hundred Years War and the beginning of the Wars of the Roses.¹ The loss of Normandy led to recrimination in high places, which in its turn led to the first battle of St Albans if it did not lead any further.² The loss of Normandy also led to a loss of self-belief and self-respect, and not only in high places. English chauvinism took what might be called a body-blow. The dream world of English ambition, that disastrous product of the astonishing victory at Agincourt which in its mercantile form is so risibly evident in *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*,³ with the ignominious loss of Normandy could not be sustained, at any rate not in its more fantastic shapes. In that respect, the case for Agincourt being the (long-term? real?) cause of the Wars of the Roses is an easy one to argue. That, however, is not the argument here. Yet, if the loss of Normandy was critical, what of the loss of the English Channel? There was no clearer demonstration that the Channel was no longer English than the French raid on Sandwich in 1457. To English merchants it had been clear for many years, but to Englishmen at large the audacity of the French raid on a major English port revealed just how bad English

government had become. The fall of Rouen may have severely dented English arrogance; the sack of Sandwich seriously undermined English confidence. Or, so I want to suggest, because while there is not much of what historians call evidence that it did so, unless the complete absence of any reference by the Sandwich authorities to their embarrassment is an indication of trauma,⁴ there is in the popular enthusiasm for the Earl of Warwick's 'inspiring defence of the sea',⁵ one man's xenophobic response to what had been an humiliation for the nation as well as for the government.

The most articulate expression of the significance of Warwick's achievement at Calais is by John Bale, merchant, ship-owner, and chronicler of London:⁶

At that tyme [1458–9] the Erle of Warrewyk ... hadde gadered a greet felauship and a navy of shippes entending to kepe the see and to ... doo som enterprise upon the see in resisting the power and malice of the king[s] and the londes adversaries wheryn that noo lorde of the lond toke the jeopardde nor laboured for the honour and profite of the king and the londe but only he for the which manhoode and his greet pollecy and dedes doying of worship in fortefieng of Cales and other feates of armes [that] all the cominalte of this lond hadde him in greet laude and chierte ... and soo repute and take for as famous a knight as was lving.

It was Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick at Calais and on the Narrow Seas who made the Yorkists into an opposition worth supporting: New Model Yorkism we might want to call it, as after 1456 there was little life left in the Old Yorkist Cause. Moreover, because Michael K. Jones has taught us to put chivalry back into any discussion on the origins of the Wars of the Roses, it should be noted that John Bale's praise of the Earl of Warwick is in chivalric terms. It is as if Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick has been restored to life. In my thesis of thirty-five years ago chapter four, 'The Earl of Warwick, 1456–60', was what I called the fulcrum of my argument regarding sea power, official understanding of its nature, and the deployment by government of that power. As this aspect of the Wars of the Roses continues to be either entirely ignored or patronizingly side-lined, and as the chapter seemed to me on a re-reading to say what has to be said clearly and simply, I shall give it here, despite its archaisms and youthful excess, with only minor amendments to the style and with modernized annotation.

II

The events of the years 1455–60, and the story of Warwick at Calais, have been described many times, most recently by Jacob, most romantically by Kendall, but still most fully by Oman.⁷ The task here is not to repeat such well-known history in detail, but to illumine the maritime aspects of the civil war, and to analyse their significance in the struggle for power. There is virtually no new evidence for this, and most is printed, yet perhaps a new understanding of the period 1422–1485 as a whole can be achieved from a brief survey of these half dozen years.

When Warwick entered Calais as Captain sometime after July 1456, the real civil war had begun. For, as he continued to hold the town and garrison to himself with the financial backing of the Staplers, and with the proceeds of plunder on sea and land, he ruled (as it were) his own territory; he governed a Yorkist province, like Ireland after 1459, and had established 'in effect the seat of an alternative government'.⁸ This was made more obvious to contemporaries by the English government's removal from London: 'roughly from 1456 the government of England was conducted not from London but from the provinces'.⁹ The government which went to Coventry was more a court intent on saving itself, than a central administration trying to preserve the peace; as the crown withdrew from governing the country, and 'devoted the political and administrative resources at its command to the task of strengthening its material power and the protection of the dynasty',¹⁰ so Warwick and the English at Calais seemed less like a group of desperate opportunists and more like a party with a good claim (through its actions) to govern. Rebels in 1459 they might be called, but in fact, as the Lancastrians had abdicated all but formal responsibility, they were equal contenders for the powers of government. The keeping of the sea was a part of this, a most significant part; the Lancastrians made no attempt, while Warwick, it seemed, offered an active alternative.

In summer 1457 Pierre de Brézé with a strong French fleet sailed the Channel unmolested, and finally on 28 August sacked Sandwich; this was more than a casual raid, like those on the ports of the South coast, or most recently on Harwich,¹¹ for it was by a powerful force, well led and organized, on an official expedition, and it was directed against a major port, and a rich one at that, already perhaps sympathetic to the Earl of Warwick. The French spent a day in the town and were not chased out until the evening by Sir Thomas Kyriell with some hastily raised men; they had done considerable damage, taking three ships of war and thirty merchantmen, prisoners to ransom and much plunder.¹² Whether Queen Margaret had first suggested this sort of pillage to the

French or not,¹³ the act itself was a sufficient condemnation of the English government. France had been lost, now the English coast was not secure, not even a port as important as Sandwich; English pride had been worn down since 1435, but the process had been gentle; here, however, was an outrage hardly to be tolerated, yet the government did little about it. Apart from panicky measures of coastal defence, revealing in themselves,¹⁴ ships were arrested in October for Sir Gervaise Clifton and his company going to sea to resist the king's enemies,¹⁵ and in October and November various vessels, including the *Grace Dieu*, were taken for an armed force;¹⁶ the latter were likely to have been for the Admiral, the Duke of Exeter, who had been ordered to victual ships to the sum of 400 marks and to set to sea, which by the end of December he had certainly done, as the 400 marks was to be repaid to him by the Exchequer.¹⁷ But 400 marks could only have got a few ships to sea for a short time, and if Exeter did get to La Rochelle, as Ramsay says he did, he did not achieve anything, while an English attack on Harfleur, perhaps by Clifton, also failed.¹⁸ After so dismal record of a decidedly limp administration, it was almost inevitable that one of the few successful men of action should come forward, or be recommended, and be accepted by an indifferent but desperate government.

On 26 November 1457 Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, indented with the king; the indenture was long and had been carefully considered: it followed the format of the indenture with the Sea-Keepers of 1454, who had included Warwick's father.¹⁹ Warwick undertook to keep the sea for a term of three years, as from the previous 29 September, with 3500, 4000, or 5000 fighting men, to be at sea from 1 February to 31 October in each of the three years. For the payment of the men and the ships to carry them he was to receive tonnage and poundage for three years from 29 September, except from Southampton and Sandwich, in place of which he was to have £1000 a year out of the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster. He was to have the right to nominate one collector of the subsidy in each port; the collectors were to hand over the money according to indentures to be made between them, an arrangement similar to that of 1454. The other clauses are also similar: all enemy ships and merchandize taken by Warwick were to be his, to divide among his retinue as he thought fit, as were the goods of subjects or friends found in enemy ships without safeconduct. He was to have full power against the king's enemies on land and sea, and authority to grant safeconducts for six months to any prisoners taken. His service was to cease if the grant of tonnage and poundage was discontinued, and he was enjoined not to molest friends and subjects at sea, but to harm all who did so and to do all the hurt he could to the king's enemies.²⁰ On

27 December the customers were ordered to hand over the specified subsidy to Warwick during the three-year period.²¹

By December 1457 Warwick must have realized that the income to pay the garrison at Calais from the customs set aside for the purpose was inadequate, the government using it for other purposes;²² he must also have known that the chances of receiving anything from tonnage and poundage, even for a year, were thin; in addition, money from the Exchequer for him as Captain of Calais or as a Keeper of the Sea was not likely to be forthcoming for long, if it was at all. It seems improbable that he could have kept his nominees at the ports, even if he got them appointed, and there is no record of him receiving any money from that source, although the collection of the money was his own affair, it was no longer, at any rate theoretically, the government's. On 4 March 1458, however, because the £1000 from the Duchy of Lancaster was not available in ready money, Warwick was to have £500 out of the Hanaper, obtained from the general pardon lately granted: 'thus it was ordeyned and graunted considering the navye of Fraunce is northward that it might be mette with and for the gode direction of the Englyssh navye'.²³ On 15 March John Bocking wrote from London to Sir John Fastolf: 'Other tidings here are none, sauf my Lord of Excestre is displesid that the Erle of Warwyk shall kepe the see, and hath therfore received this weke m li. of the Hanupere'.²⁴ That is all there is: Warwick was to have £500 (or £1000) and the Admiral of England was angry. It was extremely likely that Exeter was angry, seeing that he had received less money the previous autumn and the disaffected Warwick had been given a wider commission, one which amounted to complete freedom on the high seas. The government was apparently making a genuine effort, yet Exeter need not have worried; formal and even significant as the indenture with Warwick seemed, despite its 'openness' (the termination of a development from that made with Sir John Speke in 1440 to that entered into with Thomas, lord Roos in 1453²⁵), there was little of the ordinary, no formality, but plenty of significance in the activity which ensued. Even in April 1458 when the *Grace Dieu* was to be repaired and armed, it was to be done at the Earl's expense,²⁶ and the sea battles of summer 1458 were Warwick's battles not the government's. Exeter had not been superseded, he was being opposed; he did not have a rival, he had an opponent. In 1458 Warwick was not working for the government, but for himself, for the Yorkists perhaps, but chiefly for himself. Whatever he did at sea was as unofficial as any act of piracy committed by a licensed ship of the 1430s.²⁷ The whole system of seakeeping had collapsed. Not only had the government insufficient funds for effective seakeeping, even and especially in 1460 when it was directly threatened, also the last serious attempt at

naval defence of the reign, sponsored by government rather than by a party, had no chance of success where the interests of government were concerned. Those two interests of the nation were another matter. Those interests were no longer synonymous. That was a result of a breakdown of the administration, just as another consequence was keeping of the sea which benefited *only* the one who did the keeping (and his cause, whatever it was in 1458). Irresponsibility had turned into defiance, was shortly to become outright rebellion. Government command of its officers had reached a nadir: the Earl of Warwick at Calais and on the high seas was a free agent.

He was what no other captain had quite been before him: entirely independent. Any money he had from the Exchequer or from tonnage and poundage was probably negligible and no doubt soon discontinued. The ships and men he disposed of were not raised by the government, but by him, and the loyalty of merchants, shipowners, soldiers and sailors was, and was increasingly as the months went by, to him and not to the crown. Even if the loyalty of the Calais garrison might not be depended on, unless he paid its wages, something Warwick was not always able to do, the masters and owners of most, perhaps all, of the ships he used, and the seamen in them, looked to him and not to the crown for monetary reward (and gain), and for an opportunity to perform feats of arms. In April 1457, while at Canterbury, Warwick had publicly thanked the people of Sandwich and Canterbury for their 'gode herts and vytaillyng of Calix',²⁸ and thereafter those who lived on and near the coasts of Kent and Sussex had more goodwill towards the Earl than to the king, many going over to join him and man his ships, for instance from Lydd.²⁹ Sandwich was to remain for many years distinctively a port of the Earl of Warwick and of the party and house of York. Dependent only on the co-operation of his supporters in the South East, for supplies, men, and above all for information, he (and they) were free of the government in outlook and attitude. By 1458 they had joined together in active opposition.³⁰

Warwick's two sea battles of 1458 demonstrate this clearly. Both of necessity and of choice he saw that he could do much for himself, and the Cause, in the Channel. From his base at Calais he could strike not only at England (that lay in the future), but also at the foreigner, and in so doing keep his following loyal and increase his own power. To remain inactive was useless. His alternative regime at Calais in order to exist had to be vigorous, had to offer more than the other regime at Coventry, had to prove itself. On 28 May 1458, informed of a Spanish fleet in the Channel consisting of 28 ships, 'wherof there was xvj grete schippis of forecastell', Warwick sent out 'fyve schippis of forecastell and

iiij carvellis and iiij spynnes'. Early next morning the two fleets engaged off Calais. The engagement lasted all day. John Jernynge described it in a letter to Margaret Paston of 1 June 1458: 'and there we took vj of her schippis ... And as men sayne there was not so gret a batayle upon the se this xl wyntyre; and for sothe we were wele and trewly bette. And my lord hath sent for more schippis'.³¹ Soon afterwards Warwick intercepted the Hanse salt fleet returning from the Bay of Biscay, and on the old (and lame) excuse of its refusal to strike in the name of the King of England, he took a number of ships as prizes, as many as 17 according to one chronicler.³² The Spaniards were enemies; the Hansards were not, and a commission of enquiry into what amounted to piracy was ordered.³³ It was probably to defend himself against the commission's charges that Warwick went to Westminster in October 1458, but the brawl there, in which Warwick nearly lost his life, interrupted any proceedings, and he returned to Calais unrebuked and unpunished for his high-handed action.

During the summer of 1459 Warwick fought another sea battle. In March 1459 commissioners had been appointed to arrest men, victuals, and munitions for vessels going to sea under the Earl of Warwick and at his wages.³⁴ There was still, it seems, cooperation of a kind between government and opposition, at any rate where seakeeping was concerned and despite the fact that such seakeeping could only be to Warwick's benefit. It seems also that he was in receipt of some revenue from tonnage and poundage and that, therefore, the arrangement of 1457 for sea-keeping over three years was still in force. Either with these ships, or with those he already had at Calais, Warwick encountered, probably on 22 June 1459, a small merchant fleet of two Genoese carracks and three or four Spanish ships, 'and took theyre grete vesselles and a carake of Jene, and gate in theym grete rychesse'.³⁵ On 9 July Edward Grey wrote from Calais to his 'full trusty Cousyn' Sir Thomas Findern;³⁶

And as for tydynges my lord hath tak iiij ... pryse that is to say a Carrak and ij Spaynardes how beit ther was sex or sevyne janntlemen of my lordes houshold slayn with dyvers other yomen. And the men that we have taken seyth that ther is l [fifty] saille of Spaynardes with ij Carrakes redy to come unto Flaunders in right strong manner and morover ther schop [escaped] fro my lord j Carrak and ij Spaynardes in flaunders. And other tydynges have we noon save that my lord hath bought all the gudes in the shippes and the patron of the Carrak.

It was, as Gerald Harriss says, 'flagrant piracy', and this instance was probably only the most notable among others in 1459; but it was, nonetheless, expedient piracy, just as Warwick's raids into French and Burgundian territory were expedient. Plunder was needed to pay the

garrison and reward the seamen, and as Whethamstede indicates, to satisfy those loyal to him in London and South Eastern England. Warwick's ceaseless activity also 'embarrassed the court and rallied his own supporters',³⁷ and was of itself sufficient justification, demonstrating to all Englishmen that the 'erle of Warrewyk, having a strong and a myghte naveye kepte the straye see'³⁸ as no English government had for a long time, and that 'Calais was a beachhead of power not a beleagured town'.³⁹ It is no wonder that Warwick was eulogized and that 'all the cominalte of this lond hadde him in greet laude and chierte',⁴⁰ for he was giving back to his countrymen some of the self-esteem lost in the depressing (and depressed) years since Joan of Arc had put an end to the highest of English hopes. Warwick was the greatest privateer of his age, yet he escaped censure because his piracy was on a grand scale and carried out in the grand manner, and it was all at the expense of foreigners; his chauvinistic exploits appealed to those who had witnessed the loss of an overseas empire, negligible and ineffective English aggression over three decades, and the disintegration of England's prestige. Where the people applauded the government trembled, for Calais was also a beachhead into England and after summer 1459 Warwick was no longer to deploy his power only against foreigners.

In September 1459 Warwick with some of the Calais garrison led by Andrew Trollope and John Blount came across to England to join the Yorkists, who were arming to confront the king. Warwick met his father, Richard, Earl of Salisbury, and the Duke of York at Ludlow and together they prepared a defensive position against the advancing Royalists at Ludford. The Yorkist army, however, was small: apart from the Nevilles, John, lord Clinton and Richard, lord Grey of Powis were the only noblemen with York and his two sons. The attempt to coerce the king was premature. When the Royalists came up on 12 October the king's offer of pardon was enough to detach Trollope, Blount, and their experienced garrison troops, and with their defection the Yorkists broke up their camp and got away as best they could. Warwick escaped with the Earl of Salisbury, the Earl of March, and Sir John Dinham to Devon; there they bought a ship and sailed first to Guernsey and afterwards to Calais, where on 2 November Warwick re-entered the base which, under William Neville, lord Fauconberg, his uncle, had remained loyal.⁴¹ Already, on 30 October, Richard Woodville, lord Rivers, and the sheriff of Kent had been ordered to arrest Warwick's ships and to keep them for the king's use, and on 6 December Rivers, Sir Gervaise Clifton, and the Duke of Buckingham, Warden of the Cinque Ports, were required to see that Warwick's ships were repaired and kept securely at Sandwich.⁴² Warwick's command of the sea was evidently at an end, his

ships appropriated at Sandwich, while he and his few friends had become rebels on the run. The government now made its last efforts to regain that command and to defeat the rebels. With the Duke of Somerset at Guines and with loyal fleets at sea, Warwick was to be contained within Calais, which was to become once again a beleaguered town.

Throughout the final months of 1459 the government prepared naval forces in the South East, the seizure of Warwick's ships having been the first step; finally, on 10 December the muster of an expedition under Lord Rivers and Sir Gervaise Clifton was ordered, and on the following day William Scot esquire was commissioned to arrest the ships required for 200 men-at-arms to go with him to sea against the king's enemies and for the safeguard of Winchelsea.⁴³ William Scot's small force was defensively intended, to patrol the South coast against an attempt at attack or invasion. Warwick had considerable influence on the English side of the Channel and in Kent and Sussex a contest between his power and the authority of the government took place until in June 1460 it was resolved in favour of the Earl. At Lydd early in 1460, for instance, men were dispatched to Lord Rivers 'to know how we should speed to be guided' if Warwick's men were to land and another man was sent to the Lieutenant of Dover for 'counsel of the Lord of Warwick', while at Rye followers of the Earl entered the town and took down the quarter of a man and buried it in the churchyard and John Pampleton was paid for sailing to the Camber to communicate with mariners from the West Country for news of Warwick.⁴⁴ From his friends Warwick was well-informed of the government's activity at Sandwich. To stop the mustered forces from sailing, to prevent Rivers crossing with reinforcements for Somerset, and to recover his ships John Dinham with an armed force sailed across to Sandwich on 15 January 1460. Boldness was rewarded: the assault was completely successful. Because it was early in the morning (how early?) Rivers and his son Sir Anthony Woodville were carried off from their beds and all the ships in the harbour, with the consent of their mariners, were sailed back to Calais, save for the damaged *Grace Dieu*. Warwick captured the royal fleet before it had the opportunity to proceed against him.⁴⁵

The following month the government began again to fit out expeditions to root out the rebels from their base. On 3 February 1460 Sir Baldwin Fulford indented with the crown to serve at sea with 1000 men for three months. He was to have 2s. a day for himself and 6d. a day for his shipmasters, while every soldier was to have 2s. 3d. a week; he was to have £1000 immediately and the remainder of the money after serving for six weeks: if it was not then forthcoming his service was to cease. The equipping of his ships was to be undertaken by the government and

a quarter of any prize was reserved to the king. All rebels and traitors taken were to be at the king's disposal, although Fulford was to get £1000 for every lord captured and 500 marks each for Sir John Wenlock, Sir James Pickering, and Thomas Cole. Government agents were to accompany the fleet to have charge of the king's share of prizes, and Fulford was enjoined not to molest any of the king's subjects or friends, not to break any safeconduct, and not to take the goods of subjects or friends found in enemy vessels without a safeconduct: the clause allowing him to do so was crossed through.⁴⁶ The indenture, which itself has not survived, is unusual at this time for its strictly formal nature; it is a return to the indentures of 1440 and 1442, except in one telling respect, namely that the soldiers' wages were 9d. a week more than they had been in the early 1440s.⁴⁷ The king also once more claimed his share of prizes, to which he was entitled, seeing that the government was again paying (or offering) wages and not simply 1s. a week for victualling, as it had been doing in recent years. Probably the chief reason for a revival of what must be called official service during such a time of strain was that Fulford's service was so specific: he was engaged to hunt down and destroy the Earl of Warwick. He was unlike the seakeepers of 1442, 1449, or the early 1450s, whose service was less readily definable.⁴⁸ Now that the danger, the danger of invasion, was immediate, and the need to respond urgent, the government returned to the traditional and well-tried arrangements for sea-keeping, which it had abandoned over the previous twenty years when the issue of naval defence had been of a far more general insecurity at sea. Fulford had no doubt insisted on such an indenture: he was not interested in going to sea for what he might get out of it, only in eliminating the Earl of Warwick.

During February a variety of shipping was arrested for service, and on 4 March the muster of Fulford's force at Dartmouth was ordered.⁴⁹ On 31 March he was to have 2000 marks out of a loan of 4500 marks from the king's faithful subjects, other money being unavailable for the setting forth of the expedition: the loan was to be repaid out of tonnage and poundage. The Duke of Exeter was to have the other 2500 marks of the loan, as he also had been engaged to serve at sea.⁵⁰ Exeter had been retained on 19 March, three days after Warwick, who had sailed unmolested to Ireland to meet the Duke of York, had landed at Waterford. Exeter, with a company of 3500 men, was to resist the king's enemies and rebels and to punish pirates for a period of three years. Apart from the 2500 marks, he was to have, once the loan had been repaid, the revenues from tonnage and poundage for three years from 1 January 1460; the arrangement was virtually the same as that of 1457 with Warwick.⁵¹ Meanwhile, in March vessels were arrested and victualled for

Exeter's force, and the *Grace Dieu*, being forfeit to the crown, was granted to him and re-equipped, all her tackle having been carried off by John Dinham in the January raid.⁵²

These were not the only naval preparations taken by the government in the first quarter of 1460. On 12 March Thomas Osbern, sergeant at arms, was required to take mariners called 'galeymen' for galleys of the Earl of Wiltshire at Southampton.⁵³ This, it seems, was the prelude to the earl's withdrawal from English politics, described by an unsympathetic chronicler: the Earl of Wiltshire, under the pretence of going after the Earl of Warwick but in reality in order 'to stele privyly owte of the reame', went to Southampton where there were five Genoese carracks; these he armed and victualled at government expense, and 'stuffed theym with sowdyers of Englysshemen', putting on board his own treasure; he then embarked, and 'sayled aboute in the see, dredying alwey the comynge of the forseyde Erles of Warrewyk and Salesbury, and atte laste arryved in Ducheland, and sent his sowdyers in to Englonde ayene'.⁵⁴ What better illustration of the breakdown of English government can there be than the flight of its Treasurer? The administration's handling of Venetian and Genoese shipmasters also shows how close it was to panic. Once Warwick had retrieved his ships in the raid on Sandwich of 15 January 1460, the government had no warships to hand; nor, if Warwick was to be intercepted, was there time to undertake the lengthy procedure of the arrest and concentration of merchantmen: Warwick, in other words, had collared what used to be called 'the fleet in being'. In the Thames and at Sandwich, however, were Venetian and Genoese carracks, ideal for carrying large bodies of troops. On 26 March it was proclaimed that all captains of galleys and carracks serving against Warwick might have pardons for any offences regarding the shipment of goods in their vessels.⁵⁵ On 5 April Julian Cope, captain of a Venetian carrack, was ordered to have £100 a month for 50 men, and Julian Flew, captain of a Genoese carrack, £105 a month for 80 men; if they agreed to serve for longer than a month, they were to receive 2s. 3d. a week for each of their men; the money was to be had out of the loan for the keeping of the sea.⁵⁶ On 7 April another warrant to the (absent?) Treasurer required him to pay the Duke of Exeter from that source £200 for two other Genoese carrack captains who had been asked to serve the king.⁵⁷ The rates of pay which the crown was offering were absurdly high: about 8s. a week for each of the crew of the Venetian carrack, 5s. 3d. for those of the Genoese carrack, compared to the already generous 2s. 3d. a week for the soldiers of Sir Baldwin Fulford's force. Evidently, it was thought a month's service would be time enough to deal with Warwick. The government did not get even that. Entreaties

and temptations were of no avail. The Italian shipmasters sailed for home rather than become embroiled in an English civil war, being in that regard more circumspect than their fellow countryman the papal legate, Francesco Coppini. In a show of pique which demonstrated the extent to which the government was flailing about, it arrested Venetian merchants and demanded a ransom of 30,000 ducats.⁵⁸

Warwick set out from Ireland at the beginning of May. Sir Baldwin Fulford's force had only recently put to sea, for although its muster had been ordered early in March he was not granted authority over his retinue and the power of punishment of rebels until 24 April.⁵⁹ Once at sea, Fulford, who had boasted that he would destroy the Earl of Warwick and his navy on pain of losing his head, achieved nothing, and 'whenne he had consumed and wasted alle that money, his vyage was done and [he] wente home ayenne'.⁶⁰ Initially, the Duke of Exeter was more successful. He had been given power to receive the submission of rebels and to grant safeconducts to any prisoners he might take on 22 and 26 April, and his force must have got underway shortly after 8 May, when the order for its muster at Sandwich was issued.⁶¹ Apparently, he sailed along the Channel and put into Dartmouth where, for lack of supplies and money 'his soudyers were dysparbeled and wente away fro hym'.⁶² Before he did so, however, he had done what he had set out to do: encounter the Earl of Warwick. Yet, he had not engaged. Why not? The simple answer would be that Warwick had the stronger fleet: he had his own ships, some, like the *Julian* of Fowey and the *Mary* of Bristol, which he had pressed into his service *en route* to Ireland,⁶³ and probably others which he had commandeered in Ireland.⁶⁴ There is agreement among chroniclers that Exeter came up with Warwick but did not give battle; for example, *The Great Chronicle of London* says, 'And [Warwick] comyng in the west Cuntre upon the See met wyth hym the duke of Excetir Admyrall of Engelond in the Grace of dieu accompanied with many shypis of warre, but they fowghth not for for the people beyng wyth the duke of Excetir owgth more favour to the erle then to hym'.⁶⁵ Disaffected seamen and soldiers could have been the reason that, as *An English Chronicle* has it, Exeter 'durst nat sette opponne the Erle'.⁶⁶ While we have seen that where the seamen are concerned loyalty to Warwick is more than likely, there is more to this epic non-engagement than pro-Warwick, anti-government sailors.

If Exeter, the Admiral of England, in the best ship to be had in England, the *Grace Dieu*, failed to attack a rebel fleet when offered the opportunity -and it was rare in the later Middle Ages for opposing naval forces to meet on the high seas- then something was badly amiss. Here was one of those critical moments when action was essential but was not forthcoming.

If Warwick had been killed or captured Yorkism would have suffered an irrecoverable reverse. For whatever reason the Lancastrian government had failed, and blatantly failed, to keep the sea. Its hand-to-mouth measures had proved inadequate when up against a 'personal fleet', or at any rate a naval force of which Warwick's 'personal fleet' was the nucleus.⁶⁷ The contest, or what amounted to a no-contest, was between two forms: a homogeneous 'personal fleet', not royal in this case but in every other way like a royal fleet, that, for example, of Henry V or Richard III, and an impressed heterogeneous naval force. The former clearly demonstrated its superiority. It was the Earl of Warwick who was refounding an English navy.

While Warwick had been absent from Calais the Duke of Somerset had been contained at Guines, and then decisively checked at Newnham Bridge on 23 April. On his return defence was turned into aggression. On 6 June 'my lorde Vervyke sent into the see diverse Carvelles and balyngers of varr' and there was a battle at sea with French vessels, which began 'afor donkyrke' and ended 'afor Bolen'; the result was the re-capture of an English 'holke laden with mell and malte and Calfells and other merchandys'. The writer of this letter from Calais of 14 June commented: 'and thus daily as my lorde hafe any knowlage of an enemye, anone my lorde makes his schippes to the see'.⁶⁸ He added that 'my lorde Fauconberge commes over the see to London'. William Neville, lord Fauconberg did not cross to London, but to Sandwich, which on 21 June he, Sir John Wenlock, and John Dinham seized from government troops being gathered there under Sir Osbert Mountford to reinforce the Duke of Somerset.⁶⁹ It was not a raid, but the first stage of an invasion; the second stage was completed with the crossing of Warwick, Salisbury, and the Earl of March five days later on 26 June.⁷⁰ The clerk writing the chamberlains' accounts at Rye noted that the counties of Kent and Sussex were up with the Earls of March and Warwick.⁷¹ This time invasion and revolt were successful.

Warwick's claim to supremacy in the sphere of action which he had dominated for three years was recognized before Edward was crowned king. On 17 December 1460 he was appointed to go on the safekeeping of the sea, and to receive tonnage and poundage for that purpose, from the previous 29 September until Easter 1461 under the same conditions as in December 1457.⁷² Those three years are of great significance for our theme. The Yorkists came to power because, in the end, they were victorious on the battlefield. Nevertheless, Warwick's command of Calais and of the Straits, and the support he had in Kent and Sussex, had been crucial. Warwick had acted on the Emperor Sigismund's advice to Henry V on Dover and Calais:⁷³

Kepe these too townes sure to youre mageste
 As youre tweyne eyne to kepe the narowe see

Above all he had the means to that end: a fleet. Calais and a fleet, a 'personal fleet', the 'fleet in being', went hand in glove. Warwick's strategy, apart from the premature commitment which failed at Ludford, was sound; he kept Calais, he kept the sea, and by so doing he advertized his ability at the same time as he proved his power and financed his rebellion.

The fleet was a principal instrument of his success. With it he showed himself to be stronger at sea than the government, particularly in the stand-off with the Duke of Exeter in May 1460. Warwick had what the government ought to have had, a fleet, and did what the government ought to have done, kept the sea. Henry VI's failure in this aspect of good government was, therefore, a direct cause of his deposition. It might be thought extraordinary that a fleet of 10–20 ships was the instrument of the downfall of a dynasty, but that is what an examination of the Earl of Warwick at Calais in the later 1450s demonstrates. Edward IV took due notice, at any rate after 1471, and ten years later he had a royal fleet. That, however, is another story, as is the curious history of the king's ships in the reign of Richard III.⁷⁴

III

An account of the naval history of the years 1456–60 has, therefore, uncovered a political truth. It has also been important for a better understanding of the thirty-five years before 1456 and of the twenty-five years after 1460: the failure of Henry VI's government to keep the sea and its want of a fleet had the direst consequences in 1456–60; and Warwick's keeping of the sea with a fleet in those years had a pronounced impact on the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. The relevance of naval history to a history of domestic politics has been demonstrated: the historian who ignores what happened at sea does so at the expense of the truth.

Notes

1. Michael K. Jones, 'Somerset, York and the Wars of the Roses', *English Historical Review*, CIV (1989), pp. 285–307.
2. 'It was perhaps the fall of Somerset which finally laid to rest the issue of how France had been lost. The new reasoning that misgovernment would encourage foreign attacks was employed in the preamble to the 1455 act of resumption': John Watts, 'Polemics and Politics in the 1450s', in *The*

- Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale's Book*, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich and others (Stroud, 1995), p. 27, fn. 103.
3. Most recently and most ably discussed by Carol M. Meale, 'The *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* and Mercantile Literary Culture in Late-Medieval London', in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Boffey and Pamela King (Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies, London, 1995), pp. 181–227. Her suggestion (pp. 216–219) of John Carpenter as patron of the *Libelle* ought to set off hares in all directions.
 4. J. K. Wright, *The French Attack on Sandwich in 1457* (Tibor Gönye for the Sandwich Local History Society, 1997), p. 29. I am deeply grateful to Thérèse Wright, for sending me a copy of her late husband's lecture. By far the best evidence of the fright which the French descent on Sandwich gave the English is the exchange of letters between the City of London, the King, and the Chancellor a few days afterwards: R. R. Sharpe, *London and the Kingdom*, III (1895), pp. 380–384. The two letters enclosed in the London letter to Henry VI were no doubt from the Mayor and Jurats of Sandwich, or at any rate from the Jurats, as Mayor John Drury was either a casualty of the raid, a victim of plague, or he was not at Sandwich when the attack took place: for a discussion of Lambeth Palace Library MS 448 and this mystery, see John Wright's lecture cited above pp. 28–31.
 5. John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 356.
 6. *Six Town Chronicles of England*, ed. Ralph Flenley (Oxford, 1911), p. 147; for John Bale, p. 69, esp. fn. 2. For the importance of the sea-keeping scheme of 1436 in which John Bale played a part, see C. F. Richmond, 'Royal Administration and the Keeping of the Seas, 1422–1485', unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis 1963 (hereafter: Richmond, thesis), pp. 177–186.
 7. Now 'most recently' by Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI* (1981), index, *sub* Warwick, Richard Neville, at Calais. Not unexpectedly, the best discussion is by John Gillingham, *The Wars of the Roses* (1981), pp. 97–110, esp. pp. 101–102 and 109–110.
 8. G. L. Harriss, 'The Struggle for Calais: An Aspect of the Rivalry between Lancaster and York', *EHR*, LXXV (1960), p. 52.
 9. E. F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1961), p. 513.
 10. Jacob, *Fifteenth Cent.*, p. 513.
 11. *C(alendar of) P(atent) R(olls)*, 1446–52, p. 528.
 12. See now, Griffiths, *Henry VI*, p. 815 and fns. 260–263, to which should be added John Wright's lecture cited above and Charles de la Roncière, *Histoire de la Marine Française*, II (Paris, 1900), pp. 290–2.
 13. Griffiths, *Henry VI*, p. 815, believes not: 'Rumours that Queen Margaret and her advisors had actually encouraged the raid ... were largely malicious or ill-founded, though they came near to reflecting the political situation in England and the anxiety of the French to strike a blow against Warwick, the Staplers, and Calais, rather than against Henry VI and his queen'.
 14. Griffiths, *Henry VI*, pp. 815–6.
 15. CPR, 1452–61, p. 403.
 16. CPR, 1452–51, pp. 404, 405; R. C. Anderson, 'The Grace Dieu of 1446–1486', *EHR*, XXXIV (1919), pp. 584–6; C. F. Richmond, 'English Naval Power in the Fifteenth Century', *History*, LII (1967), p. 7; 'Gregory's

- Chronicle', *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London*, ed. J. Gairdner (Camden Society, New series, XVII, 1876), p. 185.
17. London, P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice) E404/71/2/41, 30 December 1457.
 18. J. H. Ramsay, *Lancaster and York* (Oxford, 1892), II, p. 202; Charles de la Roncière, *Hist. de la Marine Francaise*, II, p. 293.
 19. For which and for whom, see Richmond, thesis, pp. 241–2.
 20. PRO E101/71/4/938; there is an incomplete contemporary copy of the indenture in the British Library, Harleian Charter 54 C 17. See also CPR, 1452–61, p. 413. The indenture of 1454 is PRO, E101/71/4/935.
 21. *C(alendar of) C(lose) R(olls)*, 1454–61, p. 240.
 22. Harriss, *EHR.*, LXXV, p. 49.
 23. PRO E28/88, cf *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, ed. N. H. Nicolas (Record Commission, 1834–7), VI, p. 294.
 24. *The Paston Letters*, ed. James Gairdner (Library edition, 1904), III, p. 127.
 25. Richmond, thesis, pp. 206–240. For Speke, see C. F. Richmond, 'The Keeping of the Seas during the Hundred Years War: 1422–1440', *History*, XLIX (1964), pp. 296–8.
 26. CPR, 1452–61, p. 439.
 27. For licensing, see Richmond, *History*, XLIX, pp. 292–6.
 28. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis (Oxford, 1971–6), II, p. 172.
 29. Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. H. Ellis (1811), p. 635; *The Records of Lydd*, ed. Arthur Finn (Ashford, 1911), pp. 181, 188.
 30. See now, Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 355–6, esp. fn. 397.
 31. *The Paston Letters*, ed. Norman Davis, II, pp. 340–1. The forty winters takes us back to the English victories at the battle of Harfleur in 1416 and the battle of the Seine in 1417: a perfect example of the relevance of historical memory to any discussion of the origins of the Wars of the Roses. For another good description of the battle, see 'Gough London 10' in Flenley, *Six Town Chronicles*, p. 160.
 32. *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, ed. James Gairdner (Camden Society, New series, XXVIII, 1880), p. 71.
 33. CPR, 1452–61, p. 443.
 34. CPR, 1452–61, p. 494.
 35. *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI*, ed. J. S. Davies (Camden Society, Old series, LXIV, 1856), pp. 83–4; *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede*, ed. H. T. Riley, *Rolls Series* 1872, pp. 330–1; Flenley, *Six Town Chronicles*, p. 147. There are discrepancies as to how many and of what type the vessels were that were captured. It is Whethamstede who gives 22 June, and as that was the feast day of St Alban one might suppose that he got it right. He is quite biblical in his account of the booty taken and its impact on prices in England; he is equally extravagant in his praise of the victor.
 36. PRO, SC1/60/12. Edward Grey was the second son of Edward, lord Grey of Groby; he later married Elizabeth, sister and co-heir of Thomas Talbot, viscount Lisle, killed at Nibley Green in 1470; on the death of Elizabeth's only sister in 1475, Edward was created Lord Lisle, and on 28 June 1483

he was promoted to Viscount. Sir Thomas Findern was lieutenant of Guines from 1452 until sometime in 1459; a thorough-going Lancastrian, who went into exile with Margaret of Anjou, he was caught and executed after the battle of Hexham in 1464.

37. Harriiss, *EHR*, LXXV, p. 48.
38. Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 83.
39. P. M. Kendall, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (1957), p. 42.
40. Flenley, *Six Town Chronicles*, p. 147.
41. Cora L. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward IV* (1923), I, pp. 41–2; Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (1974), p. 21. The ship which John Dinham bought in Devon was probably not the one in which they sailed from Guernsey to Calais: *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (1938), p. 191.
42. CPR, 1452–61, pp. 525, 526, 555, cf *Letters and Papers illustrative of the Wars of the English in France*, ed. J. Stevenson, Rolls Series, 1861–4, II, part ii, p. 512.
43. CPR, 1452–61, pp. 555, 556.
44. *The Records of Lydd*, p. 192; Hist. Mss. Comm., *Fifth Report*, p. 492. Some of the ships which had been conveying troops to Somerset at Guines were sailed into Calais, because the sailors 'ought more favour to therl of Warwik than to the Duke of Somerset ... And after this, dayly come men over the See to thise lordes to Caleys and began to wex strenger': *The Brut or The Chronicle of England*, ed. F. W. D. Brie (Early English Text Society, Original series, Vol. 136, 1908), p. 528.
45. Griffiths, *Henry VI*, p. 828, calls the raid 'spectacular' and rightly so. For the *Grace Dieu*, 'broke in the botome', see Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 85; for the consenting mariners, Brie, *The Brut*, p. 528.
46. PRO, E404/71/4/28, cf Stevenson, *Wars of the English in France*, II, part ii, pp. 512–5.
47. Richmond, thesis, pp. 208, 217.
48. Richmond, thesis, ch. 3.
49. CPR, 1452–61, pp. 563, 564.
50. PRO, E404/71/4/36, cf Stevenson, *Wars of the English in France*, II, part ii, p. 515.
51. PRO, C76/ 142, m. 5, 26 March, cf Scofield, *Edward IV*, p. 60. No indenture, if there ever was one, has survived. See also, CPR, 1452–61, p. 554; *C(alendar of) F(ine) R(olls)*, 1452–61, p. 258; CCR, 1454–61, p. 412.
52. CPR, 1452–61, pp. 554, 566, 567, 577, 602, 605, 606.
53. CPR, 1452–61, p. 564.
54. Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 90, cf *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts existing in the Archives and Collections of Milan*, I, ed. A. B. Hinds (1912), no. 38.
55. CPR, 1452–61, p. 591.
56. PRO, E404/71/4/37, cf Stevenson, *Wars of the English in France*, II, part ii, p. 516.
57. PRO, E404/71/4/38, cf Stevenson, *Wars of the English in France*, II, part ii, p. 517.
58. For this episode, see now Griffiths, *Henry VI*, p. 858, who says, nonetheless,

that two Genoese carracks did serve with Exeter; I have been unable to consult J. Heers, 'Les Genoës en Angleterre: la crise de 1458-1466' in *Studi in onore di Armando Saporiti* (two vols, Milan, 1957).

59. PRO, C76/142, m. 17.
60. Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 85. Fulford duly lost his head at Bristol in September 1461: Ross, *Edward IV*, p. 48.
61. *Foedera*, ed. Thomas Rymer (1704-1735), XI, p. 451; CPR, 1452-61, p. 607.
62. Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 85.
63. PRO, C1/27/383, 440, 471.
64. 'John Benet's Chronicle' says Exeter had 1500 men in 14 ships: 'John Benet's Chronicle for the years 1400 to 1462', ed. G. L. Harriss, *Camden Miscellany*, XIV (Camden Society, Fourth series, 9, 1972), p. 225. If this is correct, and it feels about right, Warwick either had more ships, or bigger and better ships, or more bigger and better ships.
65. Thomas and Thornley, *The Great Chronicle of London*, p. 192. Brie, *The Brut*, p. 529, is identical.
66. Davies, *An English Chronicle*, p. 85.
67. As his fleet of ten or so ships formed the nucleus of naval expeditions in the 1460s: Richmond, thesis, pp. 372-382, cf Richmond, *History*, LII, pp. 8-9.
68. C. L. Kingsford, 'The Earl of Warwick at Calais in 1460', *EHR*, XXXVII (1922), p. 545. The letter is PRO, SC1/60/43. The interest of Englishmen and women in Warwick's maritime exploits, as evidenced by the letters written about them, is to be noted.
69. Fauconberg was to play a leading part in naval and military affairs in the first years of Edward IV's reign before his early death in January 1463; he was, for example, the commander of the naval expedition of summer 1462, which was principally defensive in intent, although and characteristically, Fauconberg led it in a descent on the Ile de Ré, in what may have been seen as a riposte to the French descent on Sandwich five years earlier: Richmond, thesis, pp. 317-21. A royal letter dated by Curt F. Bühler to 31 May 1485 ('Some New Paston Documents', *The Review of English Studies*, xiv (1938), pp. 139-40) is of 31 May 1462 and relates to Fauconberg's expedition: 'We, therefore, overe the nombre of shippes and men that oure cousin, therl of Warrewyk is bounde by endentures to have upon the see to resiste the malice of oure said enemyes, have disposed and ordeigned certain other shippes to bee sette furth in all hast to the same entent with a notable nombre of men, and have deputed oure uncle, therl of Kent ... to have the guyding and rule of the said shippes and men'. Fauconberg had been created Earl of Kent on 1 November 1461.
70. I have lately been thinking that the murder of the captive Sir Osbert Mountford at Rysbank sometime between 21 and 26 June was the first gratuitous act of brutality of the Wars of the Roses, as Warwick here took the law into his own hands: *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's will* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 27. He had, however, done that already, according to Brie, *The Brut*, p. 528, when from the ships which deserted Somerset for Warwick in November or December 1459 'diverse men, as Jenyn Fynkhill, John Felaw, Kaylles and Parser ... wer beheaded sone after in Caley's'. See also Vitellius A XVI in *Chronicles of London*, ed.

C. L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1905), p. 170. Even if they were killed because they had gone over to the king at Ludford, as Scofield, *Edward IV.*, p. 44, suggests, Warwick had no warrant for acting as judge, jury, and executioner.

71. Hist. Mss. Comm., *Fifth Report*, p. 492.

72. CPR, 1452-61, p. 642.

73. *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, ed. Sir George Warner (Oxford, 1926), lines 20-1.

74. C. F. Richmond, *History*, LII, pp. 8-15.