RICHARD III, THE CITY OF LONDON
AND SOUTHWARK

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On the Feast of Epiphany, January 6th 1484 Richard III sitting crowned in 'le Whitehawe' of the Palace of Westminster at dinner presented Robert Billesdon the Mayor of London and the aldermen there present with a gold cup garnished with pearls and other precious stones which he desired the commonalty of the City to use in their Guildhall. On Tuesday, January 13th at a meeting of the Common Council of the City after the election of the City's four representatives to the Parliament due to be opened ten days later, the cup was displayed to the citizens and the King's wishes for its use made known. The Great Chronicle of London describes the cup more fully, 'a flat Cup wyth a covyr of Goold garnysshid with certayn Baleysis diamantys & perlys. The which was valowid at an hundred mark.' The only other reference to this cup in the City's Journals occurs under the date 13th July 1486 when it is recorded as being in the custody of Hugh Brice, the then mayor, and he is duly indemnified from hurt or impeachment should the cup be stolen, destroyed by fire or lost while it is in his keeping.

The magnificence of this gift and its confusion with the earlier customary personal perquisite of the then mayor of London of a cup and ewer 'at the coronation of the King' has inadvertently led to the ignoring of the following entry in the Journal for January 13 1484 by the compilers of its subject index in the nineteenth century and consequently by those interested in the history of the relationship of the City with Southwark. The following entry says that at the same Common Council it was declared how the King at the same Feast of Epiphany had said he intended to bestow and make the borough of Southwark part of the liberty of the City and further to give £10,000 towards the building of walls and ditches around the borough. The relationship of Southwark with the City has recently been exhaustively examined by David J. Johnson and this small piece of information adds one more detail to an already highly complex story. This gift and intention of Richard III never materialized and it is not easy to assess why he ever voiced the intention or how serious he was, for Southwark was an area which posed many problems at this date. I shall attempt to explain briefly what these problems were and to use the attendant gift of the gold cup to illustrate what may have been the circumstances which prompted this princely offer to the City of London.

The area of Southwark in the middle ages was a mass of conflicting local jurisdictions which included the Guildable manor, the Great Liberty manor of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Paris Garden, and the various ecclesiastical liberties of the Clink (the bordello area) belonging to the Bishop of Winchester, of the Prior of St. Mary Overys, of the Hospital of St. Thomas and of Bermondsey Priory which held the King's manor. The power of the Sheriff of Surrey and the Surrey Justices of the Peace as well as that of the King's Court of the Marshalsea also ran in the area. The 'borough' of Southwark, mentioned by Richard III, is generally taken to have meant the built-up area comprising
in particular the Guildable manor at the south end of London Bridge and part of the Great Liberty manor to its east. Paris Garden and the Clink Liberty were not considered part of the borough, and the King's manor only when it was built over. Southwark was never incorporated as a borough in the middle ages partly because of the number of authorities existing in the area which discouraged a development of municipal feeling and partly because of the rival municipal authority of the City. The locals turned rather to an identity by parish and by the end of the 15th century had developed some sort of effective local government within a parish framework in opposition to the stagnating manor courts. These manorial authorities were largely ineffective against local disorder but they remained eager to maintain their useless powers against their neighbours and so hampered the development of any one authority.

Inevitably Southwark was a source of perpetual irritation and interest to the citizens and rulers of the City of London. The City needed to defend its own criminal jurisdiction for its felons could easily escape to this area of conflicting jurisdictions and weak officials where the City's own officials had no power to pursue them. Equally it wanted to have economic control over the suppliers of much of its food and goods who worked and lived in Southwark outside the City's surveillance and yet selling their goods to citizens. By the 14th century Southwark was notorious as a resort for felons and its brothel area attracted further disorderly persons. It was recognized by all as a place of riots and potential political disorder. It had, of course, its law-abiding and industrious population but this in turn included an alien population which provoked jealousy and hatred among the citizens of London in similar trades. The aliens were attracted to the area because it was near the great market of the City of London and yet outside its jurisdiction which discriminated against them. In particular there were the refugees from the Netherlands in the 1430s active in the goldsmith trade and the various aspects of the clothing and leather trades. A particularly unpleasant example of xenophobia, foiled at the last moment, occurred in 1468 when a group of London citizens in the crafts of goldsmiths, skinners, tailors and cordwainers plotted to cross to Southwark by night and cut off the thumbs or hands of the Flemings so that they might not again take away 'the living of English people.' Butchers and bakers were the other two major trades which flourished in Southwark with the City as their greatest customer and the City similarly responded by wishing to control them in order to maintain standards and prices in conformity with its own laws and practices. By the 15th century the City guilds had increased their power to such extent that many Southwark craftsmen found it profitable and necessary to be members and thereby freemen of the City and thus indirectly the City did in fact gain some control over its Southwark suppliers. The governors of these guilds were often the City fathers while the guilds themselves were under the surveillance of the Mayor and Aldermen of the City. However this was at best an indirect control.

The story of the City's gradual acquisition of some very limited but direct control over the area south of the bridge is told in its collection of Southwark charters. It is a complicated story and the City's jurisdiction was never easy to define adequately at any point in its development even by contemporaries.
In 1327 Edward III granted the City the Guildable manor, the small manor just south of the bridge, for the yearly farm of £10. Essentially all that this gave the City was the right to appoint the manor’s bailiff to collect tolls within the manor. The duties of the bailiff were never formally defined and he remained essentially a financial officer in constant dispute with the neighbouring local authorities all of which by the 15th century had clearly defined geographical boundaries which he might not overstep.8

In 1406 Henry IV granted to the City all his rights in the Guildable manor and defined the bailiff’s right to arrest criminals there, imprison them and take them to Newgate prison in the City if he chose.9 He might also return the King’s writ within the manor. This charter also gave the City the Assize of Bread and Ale within the manor so that the City acquired for the first time some direct and readily enforceable economic control over its suppliers south of the bridge.10

The charter of 1444 added the View of Frankpledge to the City’s powers in its manor which meant it operated a police court for minor offences.11

In 1462 Edward IV reiterated his predecessor’s charter and confirmed the mayor and aldermen as justices of the peace in the manor. However the definition of the City’s jurisdiction was still inadequate and the City had to defend its liberties in court as early as 1466.12

On the occasion of each of the 15th century charters the burgesses of Southwark had petitioned against them.13 It was into this quagmire of jurisdictions and antipathies that Richard III was venturing so boldly.

Southwark had a unique importance to the government of England as well as the City of London because of its position at the south end of the major crossing over the Thames on the main route to the continent. It was a convenient hiding place for potential traitors who might wish to fly the country. In the wrong hands the area was a danger to the City and to the King when he was threatened as the events of 1263, 1321, 140514 and in the Yorkist period the rising of Falconbridge had illustrated. The citizens were naturally jealously protective towards their bridge which could suffer severely at the hands of rebels and rioters as it did in 1471. The City itself in the event of attack had walls, ditches and a drawbridge to protect it but Southwark had nothing since 1267 when the King had ordered all fortifications there to be levelled,15 and thus Southwark was likely to suffer far more than the City. In January 1484 the memory of Buckingham’s rebellion, which had had much support in Kent, was fresh in the King’s mind and further attacks on the kingdom were expected shortly. Thus the defence of Southwark and the bridge approaches may well have seemed of prime importance at that time.

Even more important to Richard and his predecessors in prompting grants to the City was their growing reliance on the money market of London. Despite a disinclination of kings like Edward III to increase the City’s power at the expense of his own and a desire to maintain his own authority in Southwark via the Court of Marshalsea, his successors were less able to hold their own against their own financial needs.16 In particular Henry IV in 1406 when he gave his Southwark charter was £6000 in debt to Richard Whittington about to become Mayor of London for the third time a few months later and in
his precarious position Henry knew he was likely to need more money in the near future from London merchants. Similarly there were loans made by the City to the government of Henry VI in 1444 and in 1462 it made two large loans for the defence of Calais to Edward IV before he granted his Southwark charter.17

Richard III's financial relations with the City in January 1484 are less easily defined for there are no loans made to him by the Mayor and Commonalty recorded in the Journals at this date. He had received £1000 as a coronation gift from the City to himself and the Queen, two thirds to the King and one third to the Queen, but such a gift was not unusual and had been made to Elizabeth Woodville and Edward V, the last of which was naturally rescinded. Edward IV had had many loans from the citizens of London during the course of his reign and finally repaid all outstanding debts in the spring of 1478.18 He was a great buyer of their luxury goods19 and he practised an easy bonhomie with the merchant class,20 all of which combined to make him popular in the City. The shadow of this happy relationship was the benevolence, a method of taxing his people without Parliament's consent. By 1483 difficulty was experienced over raising the contributions. The citizens had agreed to lend King Edward £2000, each alderman putting up 50 marks and eighty commoners £15 each but the names of eleven men who refused to contribute were forwarded to the King on his demand.21 A king who could avoid making such demands would be welcomed, equally one who would take action in the City's favour. Richard III showed he was very willing to help and favour them in his first Parliament as well as on the Feast of Epiphany. J. R. Green supposed that it was the City who presented a petition which resulted in the act against benevolences in 1484; the petitioners were determined not 'to live in such thraldom and bondage as we have lived some time heretofore oppressed and injured by extortions and new impositions against the laws of God and man, and the liberty and laws of this realm wherein every Englishman is inherited.'22 The 1484 Parliament also passed various acts concerning trade including one which restricted the employment of foreign apprentices by aliens and restricted merchant strangers generally. In August 1484 the citizens of London were prepared to lend Richard III £2400, each alderman contributing £10023 and in June 1485 they lent a further £2000 to assist against the rebels.24

Richard III's financial dealings in the City after Buckingham's rebellion are shown in records other than the official City ones for he had recourse to loans from individuals rather than the City itself. The Great Chronicle25 has the fullest description of these borrowings necessitated by the rebellion. The King sent for certain aldermen and head commoners and asked them personally to lend him money on pledges and the sums given varied from £100 to £40. He then assigned a priest called Master Chatyrton to deliver the pledges which included a helmet of Edward IV decorated with gold, precious stones and pearls, a cup of gold similarly garnished and the twelve apostles in silver and gilt. 'But the money by hym thus borowid, was never Repaid by his dayes nor the pledys Redemyd.' It is possible to verify these statements and partially at least correct the last remark from contemporary documents. We know that on December 20th 1483 Richard III sold to Sir Edmund Shaa, ex lord mayor,
plate worth £550.13.4, the transaction being carried out by Edmund Chaderton, the treasurer of the King's chamber and that Sir Edmund also lent Richard 400 marks, quite possibly at this date, and order for his repayment was certainly made. Richard Gardyner, alderman, lent Richard £66.13.4 on "a salte of a morene garnysshed with perlés and precious stones," again probably at this date, but he had to wait for this pledge to be redeemed by Henry VII. At the same time it must be pointed out Richard was also spending heavily with the citizens of London. He bought mercery to the value of £1138.18.7. from John Pickering elected to be one of the City's representatives at the Parliament of 1484 at the Common Council of January 13th. Pickering was repaid on a warrant dated in March 1484.

Sir Edmund Shaa, Richard Gardyner and John Pickering were all present at the Common Council of January 13th and many of the others recorded as present were also widely experienced in royal business. Sir Edmund had played a conspicuous part as Mayor during the protectorship period when Richard assumed the crown and it had been his brother Friar Ralph who had preached the famous St. Paul's Cross sermon announcing the bastardy of Edward IV's children. He is mentioned both as Engraver of the Mint and Privy Counsellor of Richard III. Hugh Brice, also a goldsmith, was used to going on foreign embassies for Edward IV and dealing with his business as was Sir William Heryot who during his mayoralty had not only been knighted by Edward IV but with the aldermen had been entertained hunting in Waltham Forest by the King. Later Edward had made a gift of two harts, six bucks and a tun of wine to regale the Lady Mayoress, and aldermanic wives and the chief citizens at Drapers' Hall, Sir William being a draper, and all because the mayor had "by his trade with foreign countries increased the royal customs very largely." Sir William was also involved in the purveyance of goods for Richard III's coronation which service did not go unregarded by the King and secured a repayment of £97.3.1 which Sir William was owed by Edward IV. He too was elected to Richard III's Parliament with John Pickering and the Recorder of the City. The fourth representative elected was John Fenkyll also a draper and described by Sir William Heryot as his "brother" in his will. Thomas Hill, a temperate man, was to become mayor in October 1484 and be knighted by Richard III during his year of mayoralty. Thomas Northland, grocer, was alderman of Bishopsgate ward and one of the sheriffs for 1483-4 possibly as a compliment to Richard III's associations with that area as a tenant of Crosby Hall, and there were two Yorkshiremen among the aldermen, William White, draper, from Tickhill and Richard Rawson, mercer, from Fryston.

Of the twenty-six men recorded as present at this Common Council, Richard Chester and Sir William Heryot died early in 1485 and later in the same year the sweating sickness claimed Sir Thomas Hill, the then mayor, who made his will on August 22nd, Thomas Bretyn, Sir William Stokker, John Stokker, Thomas Northland and Richard Rawson in rapid succession. The others continued to occupy the same positions of wealth and influence in the reign of Henry VII, many receiving knighthoods.

The Great Chronicle says that Richard III presented the gold cup to the
citizens in acknowledgement of their services and co-operation over loans making no reference to the offer of Southwark but we may assume that like the cup it is to be set against a background of mutual advantage and appreciation. The City appears not to have pursued the matter possibly because it had such wide ramifications and would provoke serious hostilities south of the river. At best it was a gift that would have to be carefully thought out to make it effective and time was not in Richard III's gift. In fact it was not until 1550 that the City was sufficiently provoked and able in fortunate political circumstances to secure substantial control of the Southwark area.

NOTES

1. Journal of the Common Council of the City of London (Jor.) 9 f. 43.
3. Jor. 9 f. 114b.
5. D. J. Johnson: Southwark and the City, p. 25.
6. Ibid. p. 104-5.
7. Ibid. p. 78-92. Depositions on the 1468 plot Jor. 7 f. 178 and f. 178b.
8. Ibid. p. 43ff.
9. Ibid. p. 73.
10. Ibid. p. 81.
12. Ibid. p. 59, p. 68.
13. Ibid. p. 72.
15. Ibid. p. 10n.
17. Ibid. p. 76-7.
21. London and the Kingdom I p. 319, Jor. 9, f. 14 and 14b and Scofield II p. 363.
22. J. B. Green: A Short History of the English People II g. 585. He gives no source for his supposition but his words which I quote are similar to the Act's preamble.
23. Jor. 9 f. 56 and London and the Kingdom 1 p. 325-6.
24. Jor. 9 f. 78b, f. 81 and Ibid.
25. The Chronicaler has in error dated Buckingham's rebellion, the subsequent loans and the presentation of the cup 1484-5, p. 234-236. And see P. M. Kendall: Richard III p. 278 and p. 483 n.1.
27. Ibid. f.55b, n.d.
29. B. M. Harl. 433 f.165.
33. Exchequer of Receipt, Writs and Warrants of Issuance E40478/3 no. 39.
37. The names of the commoners present were not entered in the Journals.