In 1995, Steven Ellis complained that the ‘traditional historiographical response’ of Tudor historians to the border counties was to ignore them; that, in fact, Geoffrey Elton’s assertion that the ‘normal setting of government action’ lay south of the Trent still held sway. It may be due to the pervasiveness of this view that such modern studies as there are of the border region in this period tend to focus on the noble players in the drama. But the reign of Henry VII, following the lead of his predecessor, Richard III, saw the end of the century-old form of government of the Marches which had relied so heavily upon the resources and local influence of great magnates. This study focuses on the new administrative structures created and adapted by Richard III and Henry VII to take its place.

During the turbulent fifteenth century, wardens of the Marches played leading roles in four out of six coups d’état; three of which were successful (in 1461, 1470 and 1483). The safe-keeping of the Anglo-Scottish border required the delegation of considerable powers, and one of the principal goals of post-Wars of the Roses policy would be to exert a tighter control over the office of warden. Richard III, the first – and only – warden to play kingmaker on his own account, duly introduced an innovation; no new warden was appointed on the West March. Instead it would be administered, as it had been for the past ten years, through Richard’s own household in Carlisle, where Humphrey, Lord Dacre continued to act as Richard’s...
lieutenant.4 His master’s accession to the throne does not appear to have increased Dacre’s authority; as king, Richard continued to control the offices traditionally in the warden’s gift – the stewardship of Penrith, for example, was immediately granted as a separate office to the incumbent Sir Christopher Moresby.5 Dacre’s promotion to lieutenant-general of the West March in September 1484 made little difference in this respect, for shortly afterwards, Richard appointed Nicholas Ridley of Willimoteswick commander of Bewcastle.6

Perhaps more crucially, the king also continued to control the purse-strings on the West March. The traditional means of providing for the day-to-day costs of border defence and cross-border relations was to entrust annual lump-sum payments to the warden, to expend at his own discretion, and without account.7 In 1482, Edward IV had made an alternative arrangement: Richard had been granted the wardenship of the West March in tail male, on the understanding that he would meet the regular costs of its defence out of his own pocket. In lieu of future funding from the exchequer, the warden was granted all the royal lands and revenues in the West March in tail male.8 As lieutenant of Carlisle, Dacre simply received a salary (£200 per annum);9 Richard apparently intended that the household should continue to be maintained as it had been in his latter days as warden, with the issues of Cumberland initially being devoted to this purpose. On 10 October 1483, John Crackenthorpe, receiver of the revenues of the royal lands in that county, was ordered to pay 500 marks to Humphrey Metcalfe ‘for the expenses of our household at our castle of Carlisle’.10 However, perhaps due to the steadily accumulating number of fees and annuities granted from these lands, the following year witnessed some difficulties in providing for Carlisle. By 24 September 1484, the Crown owed William Musgrave six months’ wages for ten soldiers of the Carlisle garrison, £40 for other expenses incurred there, and 20 marks for Nicholas

4 Harleian MS 433, ii, 136.
6 CPR 1476–1485, pp. 485–486; SP 1/141, ff. 248–251 (all manuscript references are to TNA unless otherwise stated).
7 For example, as warden of the West March, Richard himself had received comparatively modest annual payments of between £800 and £1000; R.L. Storey, ‘The Wardens of the Marches of England towards Scotland, 1377–1489’, EHR lxxii (1957), p. 608. See also David Grummitt’s paper, p. 285, above.
9 Harleian MS 433, ii, 136.
10 Ibid, ii, 28.