



Edward IV and his family. From the left: Richard of York, Edward Prince of Wales, the King, Elizabeth Woodville and their four daughters. Window in Canterbury Cathedral.

THE RIDDLE OF RICHARD III

'Every tale condemns me for a villain', *Richard III*, (Act I, Scene i). Five hundred years after Richard came to the throne of England, Jeffrey Richards seeks to evaluate those 'tales' and explain the continuing fascination of the short reign of the last Plantagenet king of England.

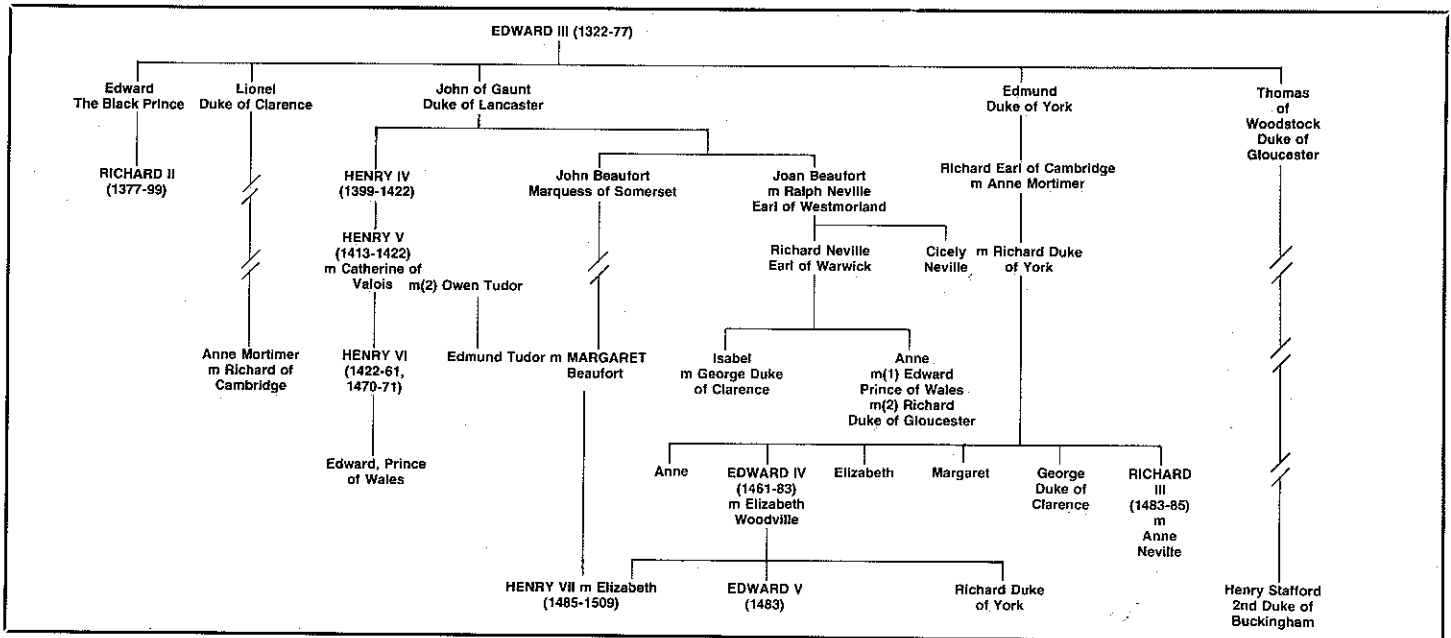
FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER HIS accession to the English throne Richard III continues to exercise more fascination, to provoke more argument and to stimulate more words in print than any other medieval English monarch – all despite the fact that he enjoyed the shortest reign, indeed the shortest life, of any sovereign since the Conquest with the single exception of his nephew, Edward V.

The two most recent publications on him neatly encapsulate the twin traditions, whose centuries-long war has kept his memory so much alive. Desmond

Seward's *Richard III: England's Black Legend* (Constable, 1983) leaves no fact untwisted and no slur uncast to restore the full-blown Shakespearian picture of Richard as a murderous hunchbacked Machiavel, a sort of English Cesare Borgia, gleefully slaughtering his way to the throne. Seward thus places himself firmly in the camp of the Tudor chroniclers and historians, notably Sir Thomas More, whose portrayal of Richard and his reign was so unforgettably dramatised by our greatest playwright. For them, Richard contrived the deaths of – among others – his own wife Anne

Neville and his brother George, Duke of Clarence; the saintly King Henry VI and Henry's gallant son Edward, Prince of Wales; and most heinously, his nephews King Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, the 'Princes in the Tower'.

On the other hand Sharon K. Penman's thousand-page novel *The Sunne in Splendour* (Macmillan, 1983) shows Richard as a loyal, moral, idealistic and tragically misunderstood hero, guilty of no murders and seeking only to rule England with wisdom and justice; in her version, it is the Duke of Buckingham who kills the princes. This depiction



derives from a romantic tradition as old as the seventeenth century and developed notably by Horace Walpole in the eighteenth century and Sir Clements Markham in the nineteenth century. It rejects the Tudor version of Richard the monster and substitutes that of Richard the wronged hero. It is a tradition that has appealed particularly to lady novelists, most notably Josephine Tey, whose engaging book *The Daughter of Time* (Paul Davies, 1951) acquitted Richard of the murder of the princes and transferred the guilt to Henry VII.

Between these two extremes, but unable to escape their shadows, present-day historians have laboured, sifting every available shred of surviving evidence to try to establish the truth about Richard. In this anniversary year of his accession, it is appropriate to survey their findings. We must begin by clearing out of the way most of the legends attaching to Richard, which serious historians reject either because there is no evidence for them or because they are plainly contradicted by contemporary sources. Richard was not a limping hunchback with a withered arm. Contemporary accounts depict and his two surviving portraits show us a slight, dark, rather frail figure, with a stern, wary, thin-lipped visage, who may perhaps have had one shoulder slightly higher than the other. He did not murder the Lancastrian Prince Edward, who all the contemporary sources agree was killed in 1471 at Tewkesbury in the battle which decisively established the Yorkist Edward IV as king. He did not murder the captive Lancastrian King Henry VI who was liquidated in the Tower on Edward IV's instructions immediately after Edward's return to London from Tewkesbury. He did not murder his wife

Anne Neville, who died in 1485 from what appears to have been consumption. He did not contrive the elimination of his brother George of Clarence, put to death in the Tower, in 1478 on the direct authority of Edward IV; indeed Richard seems to have opposed it. So why is it that it is Richard rather than Edward who is remembered as a murdering monster? The answer is of course 'the Princes in the Tower'. Like the wicked uncle of the fairy stories, Richard is seen as disposing of the innocent 'babes' because they stood between him and the throne he coveted.

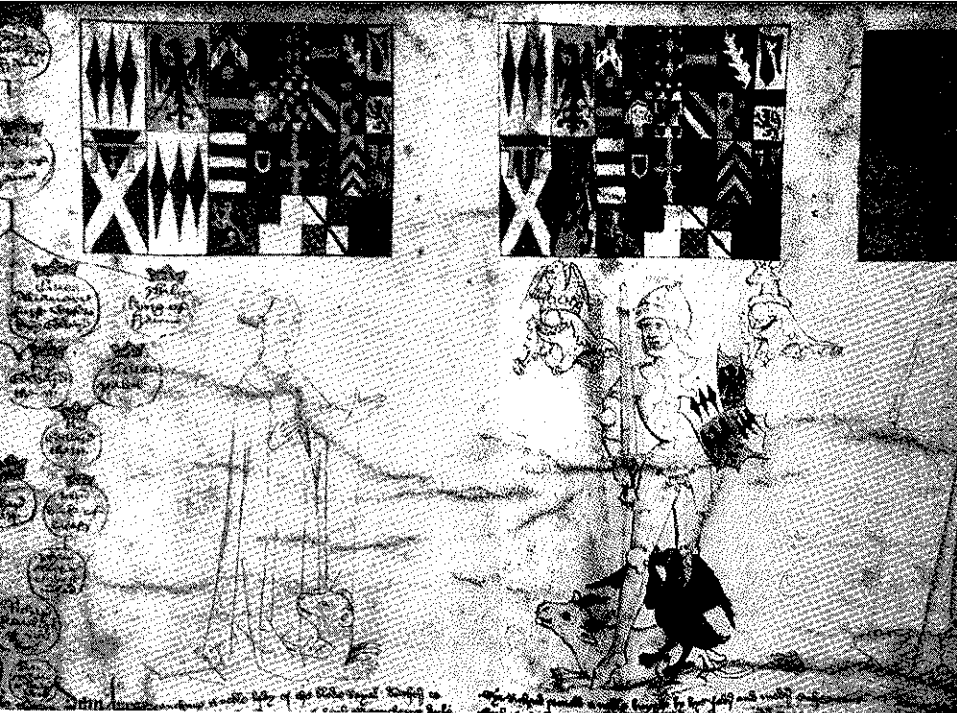
But if for a moment we ignore the murder, what else do we know about Richard? His record prior to 1483 is one of conspicuous loyalty to Edward IV, fully justifying his motto 'Loyalty Binds me'. He was only eight when his nineteen-year-old brother Edward, the Yorkist claimant to the throne, became King in 1461. Edward made his brothers George and Richard Dukes of Clarence and Gloucester respectively. But where Clarence was to prove scheming, ambitious and disloyal, Gloucester apparently never wavered. When Edward quarrelled with his principal supporter, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the powerful and proud 'Kingmaker', and was forced in 1470 to flee to the Continent, only a handful of faithful supporters went with him. One of them was Richard of Gloucester; Clarence, no doubt hoping to replace Edward as king, supported Warwick. In 1471 Edward returned with a small force, rallied support and launched a swift and successful campaign to eliminate his enemies. Warwick had chosen to make common cause with his old enemies, the Lancastrians, and had restored Henry VI to the throne; Clarence therefore rejoined his brothers. At

the battle of Barnet, Edward defeated the army of Warwick, who was killed; at Tewkesbury, he smashed the Lancastrian army under Prince Edward, who was also killed. In both battles the teenage Richard of Gloucester commanded the vanguard and fought bravely. Edward rewarded Richard's loyalty by making him effectively viceroy of the north.

In 1472, he married Anne Neville, the younger daughter of the Earl of Warwick, and acquired all Warwick's vast estates north of the Trent. In 1483 Edward created for him a border palatinate, consisting of Cumberland and Westmorland, which he was encouraged to extend at the expense of the old enemy, Scotland. From his castle at Middleham near Richmond, Richard ran the north of England from 1471 to 1483, busying himself with administration, prosecuting the 1481-83 war against Scotland and creating around him a closely knit and devoted circle of northern knights and gentlemen, his 'Northern affinity'. There is nothing here to suggest that he was other than a popular, generous and efficient ruler, and this is attested by the well-informed contemporary commentator, Dominic Mancini, writing in 1483:

He kept himself within his own lands and set out to acquire the loyalty of his people through favours and justice. The good reputation of his private life and public activities powerfully attracted the esteem of strangers. Such was his renown in warfare that whenever a difficult and dangerous policy had to be undertaken, it would be entrusted to his discretion and his generalship.

Similarly, after he had become king, Richard showed himself to be devout, cultivated, generous, loyal, courageous and conscientious. He was a patron of



Richard Neville (Kingmaker) with his wife, Anne Beauchamp, who brought him wealth and the Warwick title with its power and influence in central England. The Rous Roll, 1483-5.

learning and the church. His only parliament passed some sensible and beneficial legislation. He took firm action to suppress piracy in the Channel. He provided for the government of the north by setting up the Council of the North, which continued in the form he devised until 1641. He ruled the kingdom from his administrative base in the royal household with detailed concern and efficiency.

The question of motivation, however, remains, and estimates of Richard's motives, resting as they do on deduction, surmise and supposition, tend to tell us more about the commentators than they do about the king. Cynics believe that his actions were calculated to win popularity. Romantics tell us that they were selflessly inspired by the desire to be a good king. The truth, as so often in history, may well be a mixture of both.

But all interpretations hinge ultimately on the usurpation, which casts the long shadow of hindsight across the known facts. An understanding of how and why Richard became king is central to all estimates of his reign and character. We are fortunate in possessing an exactly contemporary account of the course of events, written by an Italian visitor to England, Dominic Mancini, who completed his account on December 1st, 1483. This is a particularly valuable source because Mancini was a detached and apparently disinterested foreign observer who was able to report what he saw and heard with no axe to grind. His narrative, amplified and endorsed by later sources, enables us to determine the course of events reasonably clearly.

Edward IV died in London on April 9, 1483. His will stated that his brother Richard should be protector of the realm

during the minority of his son and successor Edward V. Richard was in Yorkshire; Edward V was in Shropshire at Ludlow, his administrative headquarters as Prince of Wales. The royal council therefore met in the absence of both. Dominated by the Woodvilles, the family and faction of Edward IV's Queen Elizabeth, it rejected Richard's protectorship and voted to vest the regency government in the council itself. Edward V was urged to proceed at once to London for coronation.

Richard was informed of all this in a letter from William, Lord Hastings, who had been Edward IV's Chamberlain and was the leader of the minority party on the council and of the anti-Woodville faction at court. Hastings urged Richard to proceed south at once, to seize the person of the king and to impose his protectorship. Richard duly hurried south with five hundred retainers, was joined at Northampton by Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, and took control of the king at Stony Stratford. Edward V's advisers, notably his Woodville uncle and half-brother, Anthony, Earl Rivers, and Sir Richard Grey, were despatched under guard to the north. In London, the Woodvilles tried and failed to raise an armed force to resist Richard. Instead they fled into sanctuary at Westminster Abbey, taking with them Richard, Duke of York, and his sisters. When Richard of Gloucester arrived in London, he had himself proclaimed protector by the council and the date of June 24th was fixed for Edward V's coronation.

It seems to have been at this stage that Richard's objective changed and he set his sights on the crown. Through the Duke of Buckingham he apparently sounded out various leading figures on their attitude to a usurpation. One small

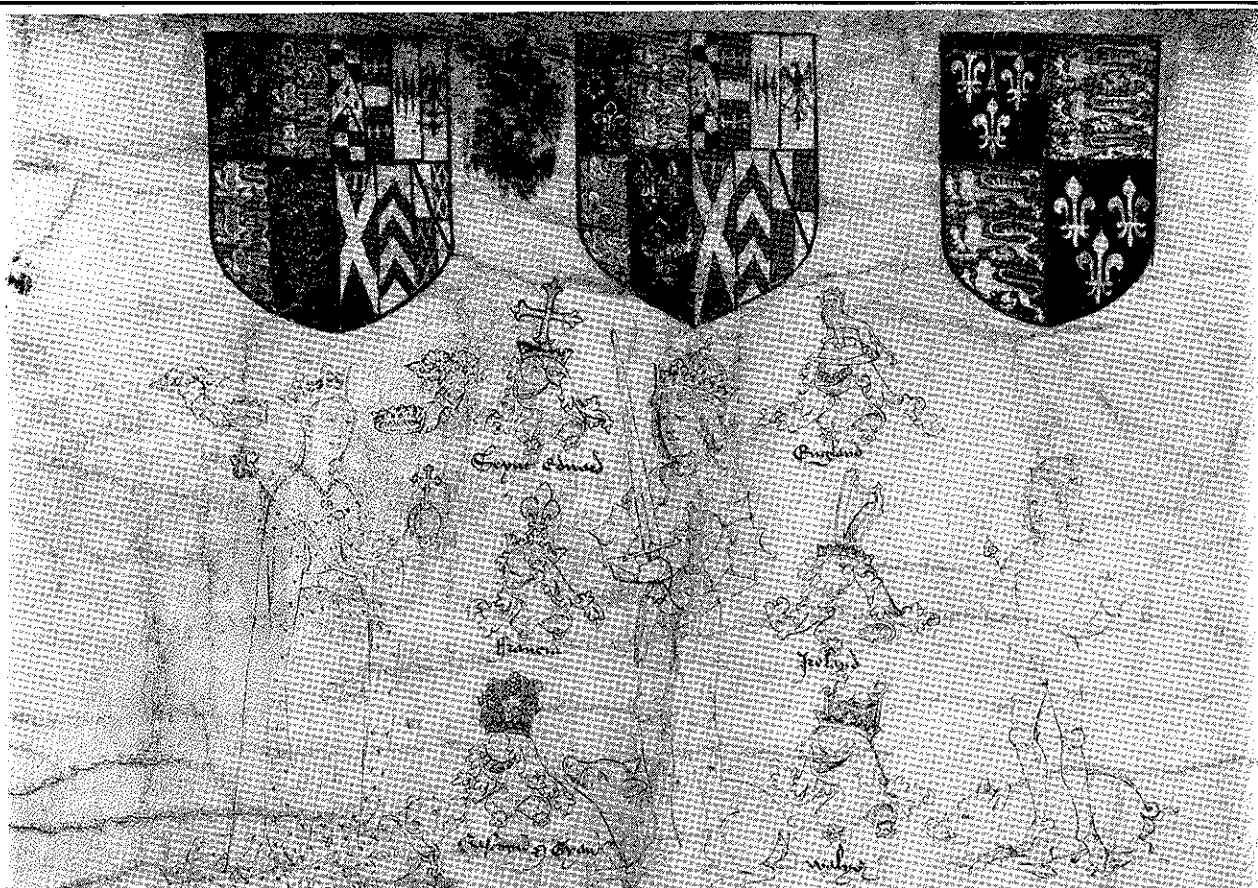
group evidently raised objections. For on June 13th as they unsuspectingly attended a meeting of the council, Richard arrested Lord Hastings, Archbishop Thomas Rotterham of York and Bishop John Morton of Ely, alleging a plot against him. Hastings was immediately executed and the other two imprisoned. Then on June 16th Richard ringed Westminster Abbey with troops and sent Archbishop Thomas Bouchier of Canterbury to persuade Queen Elizabeth Woodville to release the Duke of York for his brother's coronation. She agreed on the promise that he would be returned immediately thereafter. Edward V and York were lodged in the Tower. On June 25th Rivers, Grey and the others were executed at Pontefract on the protector's orders. Then Mancini ominously reports:

After Hastings was removed, all the attendants who had waited upon the king were debarred access to him. He and his brother were withdrawn into the inner apartments of the Tower proper, and day by day began to be seen more rarely behind the bars and windows, till at length they ceased to appear altogether... I have seen many men burst forth into tears and lamentations when mention was made of (Edward V) after his removal from men's sight and already there was a suspicion that he had been done away with. Whether, however, he has been done away with, and by what manner of death, so far I have not at all discovered.

Buckingham meanwhile took charge of matters, holding meetings with the peers, knights and gentlemen who were in London for the coronation and the parliament. He also inaugurated a propaganda campaign, which claimed that Edward IV's children were illegitimate because their father had been contracted to marry Lady Eleanor Butler at the time of his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. With Edward, Earl of Warwick, Clarence's son, debarred from the throne by his father's attainder, the throne therefore passed to Richard. Richard was duly petitioned to accept the crown, agreed to do so and was crowned King Richard III on July 6th. Shortly afterwards Mancini left for France.

The questions of when and why Richard decided to take the throne remain. The smoothness and efficiency with which this *coup* was brought about has inevitably prompted the idea that it had been long-planned. But there is no evidence for this and it is inherently unlikely. Richard's loyalty to his brother is well-attested and he had no reason to expect that Edward would die at the early age of forty. The course of events implies that his decision was taken after he had successfully established his protectorship. Equally inevitable is the

Richard III and his Queen, Anne Neville (the daughter of the Earl of Warwick), with their son, Edward. From the Rous Roll, a history of the Earls of Warwick, 1483-5.



explanation in terms of personal ambition. Again there is no clear evidence of that, apart from the obvious fact that Richard did take the throne. But there is considerable evidence to suggest that the root cause lay in factional rivalry.

The seeds of the tragedy were in fact sown by Edward IV. Although he bought stability, peace and sound government to England, in retrospect he made a great mistake by secretly marrying the beautiful Elizabeth Woodville, widow of the Lancastrian Sir John Grey, in 1464. This love (or rather lust) match had far-reaching consequences for the balance of power. For the Queen brought with her to court a large, ambitious and acquisitive family, which Edward – perhaps deliberately seeking to use his newly acquired in-laws to create a counterweight to the overpowerful Nevilles – turned into a wealthy and powerful faction.

The Woodvilles were a Northamptonshire gentry family, which had achieved a certain eminence when Elizabeth's father, Richard Woodville, had married Jacquetta of Luxembourg, widow of Duke John of Bedford, brother of Henry V. This marriage had brought Woodville a title (Lord Rivers), the Garter and membership of the royal council. But it also produced thirteen children who had to be provided for. Following the marriage of Elizabeth to Edward IV, her father became Earl Rivers, Constable and Treasurer of England. Her eldest brother Anthony, Lord Scales, became Governor of the Isle of Wight. Five of her sisters were married prestigiously, to the Duke of Buckingham and to the heirs of the Earls of Kent, Arundel and

Essex and Lord Herbert, thus scooping up almost the entire lucrative marriage market. Elizabeth's eldest son by her first husband, Thomas Grey, became Marquis of Dorset and was married to the heiress of the Duke of Exeter. Her brother Lionel became Dean of Exeter and later Bishop of Salisbury. Another brother, twenty-year-old John, was married to the sixty-five-year-old Dowager Duchess Katherine of Norfolk, a move which caused a great scandal not only on account of the disparity in their ages but because of the wealth and land that John thereby gained.

The pre-eminence at court of the Woodville clan was one of the proclaimed causes of Warwick the Kingmaker's split with Edward. During the strife which followed it, Earl Rivers and John Woodville were captured and executed. But Edward's restoration saw the family restored to power. They were soon at odds with George, Duke of Clarence, and were instrumental in persuading Edward to dispose of him. Their power was considerably enhanced by the provision that Edward made for his two sons. When in 1471 Edward made his eldest son Prince of Wales, he set up a Council to administer Wales, which was dominated by the Prince's governor, Anthony, 2nd Earl Rivers. In 1478 the Duke of York gained the vast inheritance of the Mowbray dukedom of Norfolk and the council set up to administer that was dominated by his mother and uncle. Furthermore, Dorset, became Edward's viceroy in the south-west. In addition to this huge reservoir of patronage and power, Mancini records that Dorset, his brother Richard Grey and

their uncle Edward Woodville were Edward IV's boon companions in his debaucheries.

By the time Edward IV died, the court was completely polarised. It is no coincidence that three of Richard's earliest supporters were men who saw themselves as victims of the Woodville nexus. Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who allegedly deeply resented his enforced marriage to Catherine Woodville, resented even more the fact that he had been given no preferment at Edward's court and had been kept out of the circle of power. John, Lord Howard, heir to the Mowbray dukedom of Norfolk, had lost that inheritance when it was vested in Richard of York. He became one of Richard III's staunchest supporters, duly rewarded for his loyalty with the Norfolk dukedom, and died with his king at Bosworth. William, Lord Hastings, a life-long supporter of Edward IV and head of that king's household, had quarrelled so bitterly with the Marquis of Dorset that Edward had been forced to effect a public reconciliation. He was anxious that Richard should become protector but his ultimate loyalty was to Edward V; this cost him his life.

If we look at the situation in 1483 from Richard's point of view, it is not hard to see how he perceived himself to be under threat. The Woodville-dominated council had rejected his protectorship, and Dorset was reported to be declaring: 'We are so important that even without the King's uncle we can make and enforce these decisions.' On the face of it, the Woodvilles were strongly entrenched. The Queen and Rivers con-



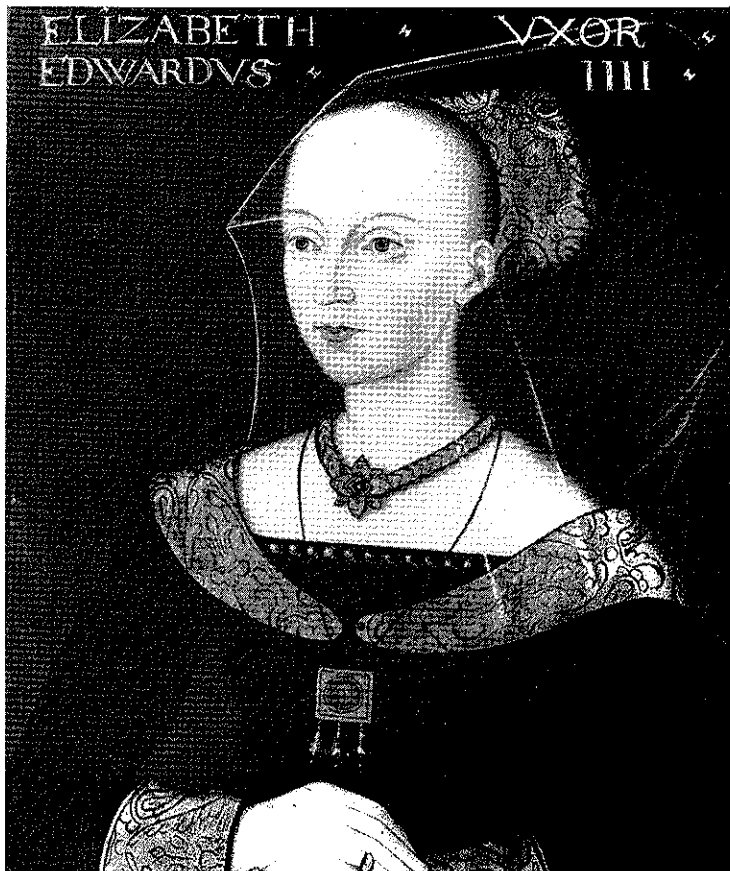
against Clarence, so too could they turn Edward V against Gloucester. Richard hardly knew his nephew, who had been raised by the Woodvilles during his absence in the north. Richard's fears can have been in no way allayed by Edward V's spirited defence of his arrested relatives. All the contemporary evidence confirms that it was fear of the Woodvilles that prompted Richard's actions. Mancini admits that:

it seems that in claiming the throne Richard was actuated not only by ambition and lust for power, for he also proclaimed that he was harassed by the ignoble family of the Queen and the affronts of Edward's relatives by marriage.

This was a constant theme in Richard's pronouncements, confirmed for instance in his summons of June 10, 1483, to the men of York to come under arms to assist him 'against the Queen, her blood adherents and affinity, which have intended and daily doth intend, to murder and utterly destroy us and our cousin the duke of Buckingham, and the old royal blood of this realm'.

What may well have clinched Richard's decision to go for the crown itself was the council's refusal to condemn Rivers and Grey for treason. If they were permitted to remain alive, with the Queen, Dorset and York still in sanctuary, and Edward V favourably disposed towards them, his position remained insecure. The efforts Richard made to capture Dorset, when he slipped out of sanctuary and escaped, testify to his continuing concern at the danger from the Woodvilles. What if Richard carried on as Protector and retired when Edward V came of age? There was no guarantee that he would have been safe. He cannot have been unaware of the fate of the two previous dukes of Gloucester, both of whom had exercised power during the youth of their nephews. Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, uncle of Richard II, had been arrested and murdered, most probably by his nephew's orders. Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, uncle of Henry VI, had also been arrested and was widely believed to have been murdered at the instructions of the ruling Suffolk faction. Richard was a realist. He also seems to have been rather highly strung. Both portraits of him show him twisting one of his rings, in what was obviously a familiar nervous mannerism. The historian Polydore Vergil, writing in 1510 but drawing on eyewitness reports from courtiers who remembered Richard, talks of him biting his lower lip when he was thinking and habitually toying with a dagger.

Once the course of action was decided upon, it was managed with characteristic efficiency. The group on the council



The Woodville faction: (Above) Earl Rivers presents Edward IV with his book, *The Dicte and Sayes of the Philosophers*. Beside him is the printer, Caxton. Rivers' sister, Queen Elizabeth, stands behind the King.

(Left) Elizabeth Woodville, Queen of England. Edward's secret marriage to a commoner aroused much disapproval and the subsequent favouring of her numerous family created great resentment.

trolled the two princes and their estates, the royal council, the treasury and the Tower. Under their instigation, the council appointed Edward Woodville to command of the fleet. What had Richard to fear from the Woodvilles? There is evidence to suggest that he may have anticipated the same fate as his brother Clarence. Mancini reports that Elizabeth Woodville had pressed Edward IV to rid himself of Clarence and recent research has shown that the

Woodvilles and their faction played a prominent part in those proceedings. Mancini also records Richard's reaction to these events:

Richard Duke of Gloucester was so overcome with grief for his brother, that he could not dissimulate well, but that he was overheard to say that he would one day avenge his brother's death. Thenceforth he came very rarely to court.

Just as they had turned Edward IV

who could not stomach the removal of Edward V were disposed of by execution and imprisonment. Rivers, Grey and their companions were executed. There remained the embarrassment of the princes. Defenders of Richard have argued that the bastardisation of the princes rendered them harmless. But this is absurd. Just as parliament had decreed their illegitimacy, so it could revoke it, as indeed it did retrospectively under Henry VII. As long as they lived, they were a danger, providing a potential focus for discontent and rebellion. The likelihood is that they were murdered on Richard's orders in August 1483. The evidence for this, although circumstantial, is very strong.

Firstly, they were never seen alive again after that date by anyone. Secondly, rumours were circulating to this effect throughout Richard's reign, not only in England but on the Continent. He took such great pains to refute publicly other rumours, such as the one that he intended to marry his niece Elizabeth of York, that his silence on the princes is positively thunderous. He needed only to produce them in a public procession for their survival to be confirmed. Thirdly, Elizabeth Woodville in the autumn of 1483 gave her support to plans for her eldest daughter Elizabeth to marry the exiled Lancastrian pretender Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, to strengthen his claim to the throne. She would never have agreed to this if her sons were still alive. It is quite clear that those Yorkists who supported Henry Tudor did so in the clear belief that Edward V was dead. Lastly, there is the evidence of context. No other deposed monarch was left alive by his successor in the Middle Ages. Richard would have been unique, and uniquely foolhardy, in doing so. The deposed Edward II was murdered at the orders of his wife Isabella, who had taken power in the name of her son Edward III. Richard II was almost certainly starved to death by Henry IV. Henry VI was certainly murdered at the orders of Edward IV. Henry VII was to order the executions of Richard III's illegitimate son John of Pomfret and of Clarence's son, Edward, Earl of Warwick. Henry VIII executed Warwick's sister, Margaret, Countess of Salisbury. It was all part of the political process and of securing the régime. Richard no doubt hoped that once he was established, Edward V would be forgotten and indeed if he had won Bosworth, reigned for another thirty years and done great things, it might well have been so.

The most likely instrument of the murder was Sir James Tyrrell, who confessed to it before his execution by Henry VII in 1502. The details of the



Middleham Castle, Yorkshire, which had belonged to Warwick and was the home of Richard and Anne Neville after their marriage.

confession were nor made public and the version that Sir Thomas More gives of the murder is demonstrably inaccurate in parts and clearly fanciful in others. But one fact that he reports was to receive corroboration. Tyrrell said that the bodies were buried at the foot of a staircase in the Tower and in 1674 when repairs were being carried out at the Tower, a coffin containing the skeletons of two children was found at the foot of a staircase. They were assumed to be those of Edward V and his brother and a forensic examination in 1933 confirmed the skeletons to be those of two children aged about twelve and ten, which would have been the ages of the princes in 1483. It is not absolutely certain that these are the princes' remains and of course the remains do not tell us unequivocally who killed them. But the likelihood is that they are the princes and that their deaths were authorised by the king either explicitly or implicitly ('Will no one rid me of these troublesome princes?').

What effect did the rumours about the princes' death have on Richard III's popularity? There is clear evidence that he was unpopular in London and the

south of England. But this may not have been entirely due to his supposed murder of the princes. Part at least of his unpopularity may have stemmed from the fact that he was, uniquely among medieval English kings, a northerner. He had spent four formative years at Middleham in the household of the Earl of Warwick and after 1471 he ruled the north from the same base. 'The Northern affinity' he had created there, part of it inherited from his Neville father-in-law, came south when he became king and took over key positions in court. It has been estimated that half his council were northerners, as were half the known knights of the body and six out of his seven knights of the Garter. Most of his inner circle, Sir Robert Percy, Sir Richard Ratcliffe, John Kendal and Francis, Lord Lovell, were by birth or adoption northerners. He retained so much popularity in the north that the city of York invited the displeasure of his successor by recording of Bosworth that 'Richard late mercifully reigning over us... was piteously slain and murdered to the great heaviness of this city'.

Richard initially tried to reach an accommodation with the southern members of Edward IV's old household and there were some career civil servants who served blithely on from Edward

IV's reign through Richard III's to that of Henry VII. But there were bound to be challenges to his rule from those whom his rise to power had ousted. In the autumn of 1483 there was a massive rebellion, or rather series of rebellions, right across the south and west of England. It comprised a coalition of all the groups hostile to the regime: the Woodvilles and their faction, headed by Dorset and the Bishop of Salisbury; the unreconstructed Lancastrians who were particularly strong in the west; southern gentlemen and officeholders who feared displacement by the new men from the north and former members of Edward IV's household who, like its head, Lord Hastings, gave their first loyalty to Edward V. The Tudor-Woodville marriage alliance had clearly been devised as a means of uniting these groups. But most surprisingly the rebellion was joined by the Duke of Buckingham. Richard, who had rewarded him spectacularly by making him effective viceroy of Wales and the Marches, was horrified by his treachery. It seems likely, however, that emboldened by the comparative ease with which Richard had taken power, and encouraged by the removal of the alternative Yorkist heirs, Buckingham saw a chance to press his own claims to the throne, which were as good if not better than those of Henry Tudor. Both Buckingham and Tudor had Beaufort mothers, but by strict primogeniture, Buckingham's took precedence. On his father's side, Buckingham could claim descent from Thomas of Woodstock, the youngest son of Edward III, a descent not tainted as the Beaufort was by illegitimacy. He had given an indication of his ambitions in 1474 when he adopted the royal arms of Thomas of Woodstock, something which may well have accounted for Edward IV's coolness towards him. Buckingham was, however, an incompetent commander; the rebellion collapsed, and he was captured and executed. In the aftermath of the crisis, Richard systematically inserted his northern supporters into key positions in the southern counties, cutting across the complex and long established power structures of the local élites. The sense of alienation this produced is faithfully reported by the Croyland Chronicler:

Attainders were made of... many lords and men of high rank, besides peers and commoners, as well as three bishops... What immense estates and patrimonies were collected into this king's treasury in consequence of this measure all of which he distributed among his northern adherents, whom he planted in every spot throughout his dominions, to the disgrace and lasting and loudly expressed sorrow of all the people in the south, who daily

longed more and more for the hoped-for return of their ancient rulers, rather than the present tyranny of these people.

So when at last Henry Tudor made his bid for power, Richard was backed largely by his faithful northerners. At Bosworth, the bulk of the depleted English peerage stood with him, to face a numerically smaller force which essentially comprised a small Lancastrian family clique, backed by an army of Frenchmen and Bretons, Scots and Welsh, Lancastrian diehards and vengeful 'Edward V loyalists'. But in the end just as it was factional rivalry that had raised him, it was factional rivalry that destroyed Richard. In the territorial spheres of influence which had emerged under the Yorkists, Richard of Gloucester's principal rivals in the north were Lord Stanley, who controlled Lancashire and Cheshire, and happened to be married to Henry Tudor's mother, and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, whose power extended from that county into Yorkshire. These two magnates held their forces back until the outcome of the battle was clear, probably forcing Richard's decision to go for his rival directly and thus knock out the opposition with one blow, which chanced all and lost all. In a very real sense Bosworth concluded the Wars of the Roses and brought the wheel full circle. In 1483 Richard III, the heir of the Nevilles, ousted the Woodvilles whose rise had alienated and led to the destruction of Warwick the Kingmaker and his son-in-law, Clarence. In 1485 the Neville heir was betrayed by the Nevilles' principal northern rivals, the Percies, whose traditional eminence their rise had eclipsed. So when all the great families had consumed one another, the crown of England passed to an alliance of perhaps the two most improbable, upstart and

new-made families, the Tudors and the Woodvilles.

Richard III, the last Plantagenet king, was neither the sinister, sardonic hunchback monster of Shakespeare's play nor the doomed, romantic White Rose knight of the novelists' imagination. He was an efficient but unlucky and ultimately unhappy ruler, the right man in the right place at the wrong time. But his fascination will endure. The British have an affection for gallant losers, particularly those who are the last of their line, witness the romanticisation of King Arthur, Harold, the last of the Saxon kings, and Charles Edward Stewart, 'The Young Pretender'. When you add to that the apparently unsolved mystery of the murder of the princes in the Tower, the recipe is irresistible.

Author's note: I am indebted to my colleagues Dr K.J. Stringer and Dr A. Grant for reading and making a number of helpful comments on this article.

FOR FURTHER READING:

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Richard's boar badge. To be worn in the hat of a Yorkist supporter. Pewter, 1" in diameter.

