

Allegation:

It is alleged that Richard III was an unpopular king, his unpopularity arising thanks to the evil character he revealed in his usurpation of the throne of England. And further, that this unpopularity led to the occurrence of rebellions during his reign, the earliest only 3 months after his coronation. It was also the cause of his failure to control the south of England, and of his ultimate failure at Bosworth when his subjects refused to fight for him.

Rebuttal Synopsis:

- In his lifetime Richard was seen by many as having exactly the qualities desired in a medieval monarch.
- Richard's assumption of the throne was approved by parliament; Mancini's report to Angelo Cato in December 1483, was written in Latin and used the word "occupation" which has been inaccurately translated as "usurpation."
- Richard's reign was not unique in the occurrence of rebellions and plots against his authority; other medieval monarchs required much longer than 26 months to stabilize their reigns.
- There was only one rebellion (in October 1483, easily quashed). It represented a coalescence of several interest groups, each with its own agenda, but sharing a common need to remove Richard before their own interests could advance.
- Richard's actions in creating "plantations" of his northern followers in southern counties were a necessary reaction to fill the voids created in the fabric of local government after the removal and/or flight of numbers of southerners who had been involved in the October rebellion..
- The outcome of Bosworth was decided by the betrayal of two or three men with sizeable armies at their command who came to the field ostensibly to fight for their king, Richard. This provided a lesson that Henry Tudor was to take to heart. In the words of Charles Ross, "Never again were the attitudes of just three or four over-mighty subjects able to exercise so decisive an influence on the survival or death of an English monarch."
- It is inconceivable that any ruler should achieve universal popularity; however, there are indications in

contemporary records that Richard inspired loyalty and even affection.

- It can, in fact, be argued, if measuring popularity by public interest, that Richard III has never been unpopular - as A R Myers wrote "...there has never been a generation between his day and ours when more than one historian has not written about him."

Richard's Character

Lord Chief Justice Sir John Fortescue, taking his reference from scripture, wrote in his advice to Edward, Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI, that "*the office [duty] of a king is to fight the battles of his people and to judge them rightfully*, as you may very clearly learn in 1 Kings, chapter viii." ¹ From this, it seems fair to conclude that the late medieval ideal was that a king should be a successful warrior, should apply the law equitably, and should be a dutiful son of the church.

Richard was recognized by his contemporaries for exactly these qualities -- as military commander, for his insistence on justice especially for the poor, and as a supporter of the church:

"...trusting with full powers our illustrious brother, Richard Duke of Gloucester, in whom not only for his nearness and fidelity of relationship, but for his proved skill in military matters and his other virtues, we name, depute and ordain him our Lieutenant General in our absence, to fight, overcome and expel the said King of Scotland our chief enemy and his subjects, adherents and allies, however great the fight may be, giving and allowing to our same Brother, our Lieutenant, our power and full authority..." - Edward IV., letters patent, 12 Jun [1482], translated from Latin ²

"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." - Dominic Mancini, December 1483 ³

"his lords and judges in every place sitting, determining the complaints of poor folk with due punishment of offenders against his laws" - John Kendall, the King's secretary writing from Nottingham to the City of York 23 August 1483 4

"[King Richard] contents the people where he goes best that ever did prince, for many a poor man hath suffered wrong many days, hath been relieved and helped by him, and his commands on his progress. And in many great cities and towns were great sums of money given to him, which he hath refused." - Thomas Langston, Bishop of St. David's in a private letter to the Prior of Christ Church - September 1483 5

"The most mighty prince Richard... all avarice set aside Ruled his subjects In his Realm full commendably punishing offenders of his laws especially Extortioners and oppressors of his commons and cherishing those that were virtuous by the which discreet guiding he got great thanks of god and love of all his subjects rich and poor and great laud of the people of all other lands about him." - John Rous, Rous roll (English version, ca 1484) spelling modernized 6

"This King Richard was praiseworthy for his building, as at Westminster, Nottingham, Warwick, York, and Middleham, and many other places, which can be viewed. He founded a noble chantry for a hundred priests in the Cathedral of York, and another at Middleham. He founded another in the church of St. Mary of Barking, by the Tower of London, and endowed the Queen's College at Cambridge with 500 marks annual rent. The money which was offered him by the peoples of London, Gloucester, and Worcester he declined with thanks, affirming that he would rather have their love than their treasure". - John Rous, circa 1490 7

"Usurpation"

Most of the documentation that is thought to have once existed is now missing, leading to recurring debate about the circumstances under which Richard came to the throne. What is certain is that Richard's single parliament of January 1484, passed an Act of Succession known as *Titulus Regius*. This laid out and proclaimed Richard's right to the throne. It is only by chance that a single copy survived Henry VII's orders to destroy it unread. This Act recapitulated the terms of

the petition presented to Richard the preceding summer by the representatives of parliament gathered in informal assembly, who had reviewed the evidence for the removal of Edward IV's offspring from the succession and concluded that Richard must be offered the crown. After a lengthy analysis of the implications of parliament's role in the selection of a monarch, C T Wood wrote "ironic though it may be, Richard III, legendary usurper and tyrant, has some claim to having been the one possessor of a genuinely parliamentary title during the entire middle ages."⁸

Rebellions

It is only necessary to look at the long list of challenges to the authority of practically every monarch of the period to recognize that rebellion in England was frequent and recurrent. In most cases, it took other monarchs considerably longer than 2 years to stabilize their thrones, and some, it may be said, were never fully successful:

Richard II (1377-1399) - deposed in 1399, after 22 years on the throne

Henry IV (1399-1413) - first 5 years virtually one long rebellion; last battle, Bramham Moor in 1408 after 9 years as king

Henry V (1413-1422) - Southampton Plot in 1415 after 2 years

Henry VI (1422-1461) - deposed in 1461 after 40 years as king, the last 5 years characterized by civil wars; restored to the throne in 1470, before being deposed again

Edward IV (1461-1483) - briefly replaced by Henry VI in 1470 during rebellion 1469-71, no further serious threats after 1471

Henry VII (1485-1509) - probably achieved stability only after the Cornish Rebellion in 1497, 12 years after taking throne

Henry VIII (1509-1547) - rebellions in 1536, after 27 years on throne

Edward VI (1547-1553) - 2 rebellions in 1549, 2 years after being crowned

Mary I (1553-1558) - questionable whether her reign was ever completely stabilized, since armed conflict occurred as late as 1557 (Thomas Stafford invasion) 4 years into her reign of 5 years

Elizabeth I (1558-1603) - various plots, rebellions and attempted invasions continued as late as 1601 (Essex Rebellion),

43 years after beginning her reign

The rebellion that occurred in the first year of King Richard's reign (culminating in the arrest and execution of Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham 2 November 1483) was created by the coalescence of a number of factions each with its own vested interest, sharing only the common goal of removing Richard. One group consisted of the Woodville family and their adherents, who had lost their influence with the deposition of Edward V. Their goal was the restoration to power of Edward V. They had begun by attempting to seize the interim government, gaining control of the Tower, of Edward IV's treasure and of the navy.⁹ Although most of the navy was reclaimed by early actions taken by Richard's agents, Sir Edward Woodville eluded capture and arrived in Brittany with 2 ships and an estimated £10,250 in gold coin.¹⁰ During the course of the summer Elizabeth Woodville negotiated with Henry Tudor's mother, Margaret Beaufort, for the marriage of their children, each party in this negotiation probably expecting to achieve her own end once Richard was eliminated; one mother must have been plotting for the restitution of her son Edward to the throne, while the other may have been, even at this early stage, plotting for her son Henry to become king. Margaret Beaufort's chief ally, John Morton bishop of Ely, had been arrested and entrusted for safe-keeping to the Duke of Buckingham. The Duke's motives remain unclear, but it appears that he too had his own cause to advance, and was, by Morton's own account, easily manipulated into heading the rebellion, even as Morton was manoeuvring on behalf of Margaret Beaufort's son, Henry Tudor. Bishop Morton is said to have "set out the entire entrapment of Buckingham in an anti-Richard tract which survived for at least a century, although it has since disappeared... The consensus among those who saw the tract seems to be that the duke was persuaded that he, rather than Richard, was more fit to wear the crown."¹⁰ Henry Tudor's interest initially may have been simply the restoration of his earldom of Richmond, and it is uncertain when he began to plot for his own advancement to the throne of England; in any case, he became a useful tool first of Duke Francis of Brittany, and then, of the French monarch, who was aiming to prevent an anticipated invasion by Richard III. While rumours were reportedly in circulation during the course of this rebellion that Edward IV's sons had been killed, it is also clear that these rumors were to the advantage of both Buckingham and Tudor as they attempted to draw support from the Woodville faction to their own causes. The evidence of the Crowland chronicle and of Polydore Vergil, indicates that the sons of Edward IV were still alive at the time of the investiture of Richard's son Edward as Prince of Wales, 8 September 1483.¹¹

The South of England

The failed October rebellion was mainly the creation of Woodville adherents in some of the southern and south-western counties who feared for their future careers. After its suppression there were numbers of local office-holders who forfeited their places and/or fled the realm. Richard, faced with the necessity of rebuilding local government infrastructure, replaced the rebels with locals when possible, but found it necessary in certain places to insert reliable followers, generally from the north, by appointing them to local positions and giving them forfeited properties. Afterwards, although there may well have been lingering resentment, there was no renewed rebellion. It is Rosemary Horrox's considered opinion that "it was only when royal influence was used in an arbitrary manner for the gratification of personal whims that it was likely to become contentious. Richard had already demonstrated that he could run a region justly and effectively, and there was no real reason why he could not have repeated his success on a national scale." 12

Bosworth

When Henry Tudor landed in Wales, his army consisted principally of French mercenaries. He was supported by a number of dissident English gentry who had joined him after the 1483 rebellion (22 of 81 known supporters of Henry Tudor believed present at Bosworth 13 had been named previously in the bill of attainder following the failed rebellion). In some cases, like the former Earl of Oxford, or Henry Tudor himself, they were diehard Lancastrians who had been absent from England for much longer. There were also Scots mercenaries who had been redeployed from service in France; their commander was Alexander Bruce of Earlshall, who was later rewarded by James III of Scotland and by Henry VII, the latter giving him an annuity of £20. 14 Most importantly, the French government had provided several thousand mercenaries complete with ships, arms and equipment. After the battle, Mosén Diego de Valera wrote to the catholic kings Ferdinand and Isabella, 1 March 1486, relating an account of the demise of Richard III and establishment of Henry VII as king in England. He reported that Henry had received from the French Crown 2,000 soldiers paid up for four months a loan of 50,000 crowns and a fleet for transport. 15 (Another source mentions 60,000 francs, and 1800 "compagnons de guerre" and a third, 3000 men from Normandy). 16 The French contingent has also been described as "veteran soldiers from the military base at Pont l'Arche, on the payroll of the King of France, and despatched to Henry's aid by the order of

Philippe de Crèvecoeur, the Marshal of France." 17 The importance of the French commander, Philibert de Chandée , to the outcome of the battle of Bosworth may be indicated by the fact that Henry VII rewarded him with the title Earl of Bath. 18 In short, there is compelling evidence that this was a politically motivated invasion financed by France to destabilize the English realm.

As Henry crossed Wales, he attracted Welshmen, apparently drawn to his claim of Welsh descent and his raising of the Welsh standard. In the end, however, the outcome of the battle was decided by the self-interested actions of two lords whose large armies came to the battlefield ostensibly in support of King Richard. Thomas, Baron Stanley, current husband of Henry Tudor's mother (created Earl of Derby in 1485 by Henry VII), sent forces under the command of his brother, Sir William Stanley. The family's long-established policy was to avoid committing themselves until they saw which was the winning side. Thus the Stanley forces held back until they saw that Richard's charge with his household cavalry separated him from the rest of his army and brought him close enough to Henry Tudor to kill his standard-bearer; at that point, according to the account of Henry's historian Polydore Vergil, "William Stanley with three thousand men came to [Henry's] rescue. and King Richard was killed fighting manfully in the thickest press of his enemies." 19 Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland never brought his men into the combat for reasons which are still debated; he has been identified by some as the Lord "Tamorlant", mentioned by de Valera, who conspired with Henry Tudor before the latter's invasion; he had delayed executing commissions of array in York 20 ; after the battle he seems to have been regarded by some in the north of England as a traitor to Richard, and was murdered 28 April 1489 during the Yorkshire Rebellion against taxes imposed by Henry VII.

Unpopularity

Popularity was not mentioned in Sir John Fortescue's discourse on the duties of a king, and it is likewise not a quality that is addressed in contemporary or near-contemporary writing about Richard III. It is therefore difficult to say with certainty, how he was regarded by the vast majority of his subjects, most of whom would have "known" him only through gossip, rumor and propaganda. There were, of course, no opinion polls, and the concept of market segmentation lay far in the future. Nevertheless Charles Ross analyzed the degree to which Richard appea

rs to have succeeded in finding support within various layers of English society. After looking at "The People" and "The Magnates, Knights and Gentry," his general conclusion was that although there was popular protest in the fifteenth century, it tended to be expressed locally, was frequently self-destructive, and generally did not seriously influence events unless supported by the upper ranks of society. Regarding those upper ranks of society, Ross wrote that "had it not been for the subsequent defection of one of the most powerful magnates, Richard's management of the nobility might have come to be regarded as a model exercise of patronage;" and "in his patronage of the lesser nobility, Richard seems to have been no less successful;" and finally "it must be regarded as something of a success for Richard that he induced so many noblemen to support his cause in 1485. No less impressive is the fact that, apart from those in exile, no English peer declared himself for Henry Tudor until the issue was fairly joined at Bosworth." 21

As difficult as it is to gauge the popularity of an individual at such a distance in time, there are indications that Richard inspired loyalty and even affection, which lingered after his death.

On 20 August 1485, Robert Morton of Bawtry, a man described as a Yorkshire squire, made his will, in which he stated that he was "going to maintain our most excellent king Richard III against the rebellion raised against him in this land." 22 As Annette Carson observed, Morton did not write his will expecting it to be read by posterity, and he was not trying to make a political point 23; it was a statement of his opinion of his king that could easily have been omitted.

In the municipal records of the City of York, an entry of 23 August 1483, says "that King Richard, late mercifully reigning upon us, ...was piteously slaine and murdered, to the great heaviness of this City;" the councillors called it "a woeful season," a phrase repeated in the letter they sent shortly after to the Earl of Northumberland. 24

In his "History of King Henry VII," Francis Bacon wrote regarding the rioting in 1489, "For when the commissioners entered into the taxation of the subsidy in Yorkshire, and the bishopric of Duresme; the people upon a sudden grew into great mutiny, and said openly, That they had endured of late years a thousand miseries, and neither could nor would pay the subsidy. This no doubt proceeded not simply of any present necessity, but much by reason of the old humour of those countries, where the memory of King Richard was so strong, that it lay like lees in the bottom of men's hearts; and if the

vessel was but stirred it would come up." 25

Lastly, it has been said, that as late as the 1940's and 50's, there was in use by some in Yorkshire the expression "as welcome as good King Dick." 26

Conclusion

Evidence from his contemporaries is lacking that Richard III was an unpopular king. It was only when his reputation was left to the mercy of his successor, and writers seeking to support that successor's weak claim to the throne that the portrait of Richard III, as an evil unpopular king, began to grow. As with the description of his physical flaws, the tale became more exaggerated with each successive chronicler, culminating in the vivid caricature found in More's *History*, and Shakespeare's play.

In fact, if one measures popularity by public interest, it may be said that Richard III has never been unpopular, with A R Myers writing "...there has never been a generation between his day and ours when more than one historian has not written about him." 27 His character and reign have been the subject of debate since the death of the last Tudor in 1603, with the earliest now-known rebuttal of the Tudor myth seeing publication in 1616. 28 Practically every succeeding generation has produced writings presenting evidence that the common allegations against Richard III are false.

1 S B Chrimes, Sir John Fortescue *De Laudibus Legum Anglie*. Edited and Translated with Introduction and Notes by S B Chrimes. (Cambridge Studies in English Legal History) [copyright 1942; paperback edition 2011]; p 3; also John Fortescue and Ralph de Hengham, *De laudibus legum Angliae* (1775); p 2.

2 P W Hammond & Anne E Sutton, *Richard III The Road to Bosworth Field* (1985); pp 83-85

3 C A J Armstrong, *The Usurpation of Richard the Third* (1936); p 77, 79. Armstrong also notes (fn 20, p 135) "The duke of Gloucester's efficient rule in the West Marches against Scotland was remembered long after the Tudors had come

to the throne (J S Brewer, *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII*, 1920, i, pt 2, nos. 283, 2913; iv, pt. 1, no. 133)."

4 Lorraine C Attreed, *The York House Books* (1991); p 713.

5 J B Sheppard, *Christ Church Letters. A volume of mediæval letters relating to the affairs of the Priory of Christ Church Canterbury*. Camden Society. M.DCCC.LXXVII.; p 45-6.

6 Charles Ross, *The Rous Roll John Rous*, 1980; p xvii.; p 63. 'The moost myghty prynce Rychard ...all avarice set a syde Rewled hys subiettys In his Realme ful commendablylly poneschyng offenders of hys lawes specyally Extorcioners and oppressors of hys comyns and chereschyng tho that were vertues by the whyche dyscrete gudyng he gat gret thank of god and love of all hys subiettys Ryche and pore and gret lavd of the people of all othyr landys a bowt hym.'

7 Alison Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians, 1483-1535* (1975), "John Rous's account of the reign of Richard III" [Translated from B M MS Cotton Vesp A XII ('Historia Johannis Rossi Warwicensis de Regibus Anglie'), ff. 131v-136r.]; p 121.

8 C T Wood, 'The Deposition of Edward V' *Traditio*, 31 (1975), 247-286; p 282.

9 Annette Carson, *Richard III, the Maligned King* (2013); pp 40-41, 44-45.

10 Annette Carson, "The Summer of 1483: Who Was Doing What, Where, With Whom, and Why; <http://www.richardiii-nsw.org.au/about/the-summer-of-1483-who-was-doing-what-where-with-whom-and-why/>.

11 Annette Carson, *Richard III, the Maligned King* (2013); p 171.

12 Rosemary Horrox, *Richard III A study in service* (1989); p 333.

13 Lists kindly supplied by Paul Trevor Bale and David Rayner.

14 Katie Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424-1513*. (2006); p 25.

15 A Goodman & A MacKay, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 346 (Jan 1973) pp 92-99. "A Castilian Report on English Affairs, 1486."

16 J Ramsay, *Lancaster and York*, ii (1892), 538, note 2: "Avec quelque peu d'argent du Roy et quelques trois mil hommes prins en la duché de Normandie et des plus meschans que l'on peut trouver"; Comines-Dupont, ii. 246. "Le roy Charles lui delivra soixante mille francs et dix-huit cents compagnons de guerre, non point de ses ordonnances, mais gens rassablés avec certains navires pour les mener"; J Molinet, ii, 406, ed Buchon.

17 Jeremy Potter, *Good King Richard?* (1983); p 65.

18 Sir Charles Whitworth, *A list of the English, Scots & Irish nobility* (1765) p 10.

19 *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, comprising the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III.* from an early translation, preserved among the mss. of the old Royal Library in the British Museum. ed. Sir Henry Ellis, K H, for the Camden Society, London: M.DCCCXLIV.; p 224. Spelling modernized.

20 Paul Murray Kendall, *Richard the Third* (1956); p 420.

21 Charles Ross, *Richard III* (1981); "The search for support" pp 147-169.

22 Michael K Jones, *Psychology of a Battle Bosworth 1485* (2010) p 156; the extract from Morton's will in J Hunter, *South Yorkshire: the History and Topography of the Deanery of Doncaster*, 2 vols (1818), I, p. 75; also A J Pollard, *North-eastern England during the Wars of the Roses: lay society, war and politics*; (1990); p 364.

23 Annette Carson, *Richard III, the Maligned King* (2013); p 327.

24 Robert Davies, *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York, during the reigns of Edward IV. Edward V. and Richard III.* (1843); p 218; spelling modernized.

25 *The works of Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England, A new edition: With a life of the author, by Basil Montagu, Esq.* in three volumes. Vol. 1. (1850, Philadelphia); "History of King Henry VII;" p 333.

26 Post to the Richard III Society forum on Yahoo, 2 May 2013.

27 A R Myers, "Richard III and Historical Tradition," *The Journal of the Historical Association*, Volume 53, Issue 178, pages 181-202, June 1968; p 181.

28 *The Encomium of Richard III by Sir William Cornwallis the Younger*, A N Kincaid, ed; introduction by J A Ramsden and A N Kincaid (1977); p ii.

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