

Whodunit: The Suspects in the Case

By Helen Maurer

Preface to the Re-publication of "Whodunit"

The following article is an artifact. It was originally published in the *Ricardian Register* 18.3 (summer 1983), with errata and notes on two additional sources appearing in the next published issue in fall 1984. Over the last several years, and particularly since the advent of the Richard III Society web site, I have been asked at various times for permission to republish the article online. I have always refused or otherwise dragged my feet.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to return to one's intellectual past. Because of the errors in the original and the subsequently added notes, it was clear that I would have to revisit "Whodunit" if it was ever to be republished, and I was not particularly keen to do it. For one thing, more has been published and some primary sources have become more accessible in the intervening years: the Jones/Underwood biography of Margaret Beaufort,ⁱ the Horrox/Hammond edition of BL, Harleian MS 433,ⁱⁱ and Radzikowski's edition of Niclas von Popplau's account,ⁱⁱⁱ to give but three examples. Women's history—and the history of individual women—has moreover become commonplace, and far fewer historians nowadays would so ignore "the working of a woman's wit" as the gentlemen I took to task, whether they agreed with any of my argument or not. Finally, my own concerns and interests have shifted. Though I remember quite clearly what the person I was then thought she was up to in writing "Whodunit," and though within that context the result still seems satisfactory, I have since moved on. If I were to write the article today, starting from scratch, it would be a very different piece from what she wrote, in ways that I can somewhat imagine but have no wish to conjure.

Thus, after some thought, it seemed best to leave "Whodunit" as it was. I have corrected the errors that appeared in the published version, inserted the two additional sources where they seemed best to fit, and made a few minor stylistic changes in the notes. Otherwise, it remains as it was originally conceived, with its intentions and enthusiasm—likewise its warts—intact.

With this in mind, one might fairly ask what its intentions were and whether I really agreed (and still agree) with its conclusions. Both questions have always had two answers. When I first thought of doing "Whodunit," the general plan was to collect as much evidence and as many arguments for and against all possible suspects as were then available and lay them out together in a single place. On this point, some things quite obviously fell through the cracks. The second motive, common to everyone who has ever discussed what may have happened to the Princes, was to "solve" the riddle to my own satisfaction and thereby have some fun. The importance of fun to the equation should not be underestimated. It soon became obvious to me—as it should to my readers—that not all of the suspects had been accused with a perfectly straight face. That was fine; serious or silly, all should be included. My own notion of fun revolved around constructing a story consistent with the arguments laid out, which could also compete on the level of "story" with

ⁱ M.K. Jones and M.G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (1992).

ⁱⁱ R. Horrox and P.W. Hammond, *British Library Harleian Manuscript 433*, 4 vols. (1979-83). The index volume was published last.

ⁱⁱⁱ P. Radzikowski, *Reisebeschreibung Niclas von Popplau, Ritter, Burtig von Breslau* (1998), reviewed by L. Visser-Fuchs in *The Ricardian* 11.145 (June 1999), pp. 525-530, with a translation of von Popplau's account of the contradictory rumors he heard during his visit to England.

Shakespeare's marvelous concoction. In terms of its plot elements, psychological compulsion, and dreadful retribution, it was to be the outline of the story that he should have written.

That brings us to the second question. It has always had two answers: yes and no. The "no" is easier to settle. I do not know what happened to the Princes. Nor does anyone else alive in the 20th century. To claim such knowledge is to be either a liar or seriously deluded. The subject is very much open to debate, and within the parameters of debate all sorts of positions are possible. That being said, I still think my reconstruction makes a fine story. The one point I would stand up for as a historian (rather than as a storyteller) is that the atmosphere of uncertainty brought about by the escalating events of spring 1483 lies at the crux of the matter. Its implications for Richard have long been clear, though its concomitant effects upon the other participants in the drama, including the general public, have never been fully explored. The rest of my story may be true or not. Whether it is credible or not is for the careful reader to decide.

—Helen Maurer May 2000

The late British historian Helen Maud Cam once said, "I just do not understand how people can become so upset over the fate of a couple of sniveling brats. After all, what impact did they have on the constitution?"¹ In a sense, Cam is right, of course. During their short lives the Princes in the Tower had no effect upon the course of British constitutional history. Only their disappearance gave them significance, and only their absence permitted certain events to happen, which otherwise might not have been. Like the Thane of Cawdor in *Macbeth*, nothing in their lives became them like the leaving of it: a cruel epitaph for children, but one in this case apt.

Despite Cam's evaluation, the Princes' fate has remained a matter of perennial interest. And no wonder. The unflagging fascination for mysterious murder and mayhem that lurks in the breasts of many Britons and their colonial descendants is by now well known. English is the detective story's mother tongue. A subgenre of crime fiction even exists called the "classic British mystery." Its ingredients are simple: first, a victim, a dead body; next, a list of suspects, each armed with sufficient opportunity and motive to have done the deed; and finally, a detective, possibly an intrepid amateur, to sift the clues and solve the mystery. Thus, the mystery of the Princes may be viewed as a classic, in the classic tradition. Even acknowledging serious remaining difficulties in the identification of the bodies—the bones in the Abbey—we have a documented disappearance that is most easily explained by murder. (Not everyone will agree. Various persons have argued that no murder took place and that at least one of the Princes survived.²) We have a number of worthy suspects, and we have already seen the valiant efforts of a great many "detectives"—professional historians, amateur enthusiasts, and at least one fictional investigator—to unravel the case. In the course of this article I will survey the possible suspects and the points for and against each one. I will then offer my own reconstruction of what I believe to be the crucial circumstances surrounding Richard's assumption of the throne, which led someone to murder.

¹ Quoted by Charles T. Wood, "The Deposition of Edward V," *Traditio* 31 (1975), p. 286. For an account of the origin of Cam's remark, see Charles T. Wood, "In Medieval Studies, is 'To Teach' a Transitive Verb?" *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching*, 3.2, fall 1992.

² See, for instance, Audrey Williamson, *The Mystery of the Princes*, 1978; Jack Leslau, "Did the Sons of Edward IV Outlive Henry VII?" *The Ricardian* 4.62 (Sept. 1978), pp. 2-14; and subsequent articles in 5.64 (March 1979), pp. 24-26 and 5.65 (June 1979), pp. 55-60. I believe it is accurate to say that what we each choose to believe depends in large part on our personal predilections. In this respect, I personally find the "survivalists'" arguments to be frequently ingenious, but ultimately unconvincing.

Before proceeding to the suspects, it will be appropriate to set forth the parameters of my investigation, to understand its aims and its built-in limitations. First, we must distinguish between the actual murderer and the instigator of murder. It is most unlikely that we will ever discover the identity of the real, physical murderer; and it is improbable that any of the suspects on our list ever soiled his hands in a literal sense. Thus, we will be looking at the possible instigators of murder.

Second, motive and opportunity are two very different things. It is relatively easy to build a hypothetical case based on motive, to be argued on the merits of logic alone. Partly for this reason and partly because motive offers the investigator a wider scope of operation, it has provided most would-be sleuths with their approach to the mystery of the Princes. But motive is notoriously unreliable. People do things every day—including commit murder—for the silliest of reasons or for no reason at all. To say that someone has, or might have, a very good reason to do something (or not to do it) is not to say that he will follow reason's orders. On the other hand, opportunity, while more reliable as an indicator of who *could* have committed a particular crime, is much trickier to pin down. Who was in the right place at the right time? Unfortunately, we don't know exactly when the right time was. Further, in our case opportunity must also be understood to mean the power to gain access or to give orders or, what is even more difficult to determine, the ability to plant the notion of murder in someone else's mind.

Finally, and most important: every investigator in this controversial case has had his bias. I have mine. It is important to distinguish between what one may believe privately, in his heart of hearts, and what can be set down as unquestioned fact. To constantly point out where facts give way to my own extrapolations or opinions would be too cumbersome; nevertheless, I hope it will be clear which is which. In any case, the reader should bear in mind that the arguments presented here are all subject to discussion, challenge, and reinterpretation.

MAJOR SUSPECTS

"This much can be advanced as a working hypothesis: the Princes were murdered at the instigation of one of three men. It is very possible that King Richard is guilty of the crime. If he is innocent, then it is well-nigh inevitable that either King Henry VII or Henry Stafford, second Duke of Buckingham, is guilty."³ Paul Murray Kendall's initial premise is wrong. There are four major suspects, the fourth being Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII's mother, and it behooves us to give them all their due if we hope to reach any understanding of what happened. We shall, however, begin by discussing them in the order that Kendall suggested.

Richard III

Like it or not, Richard III has always been the prime suspect in the murder of the Princes. He is the choice of the traditionalist Gairdner/Rowse historians. The case against him is a strong one, containing as it does the massive evidence of opportunity. The points against him and their existing counterarguments are:

1. The disappearance of the boys in the summer/fall of 1483, after which no solid evidence exists that they were ever seen again, by anyone.⁴ Single references to "the children" in the king's household in the North or to "the Lord Bastard," from July 1484 and March 1485 respectively,

³ P.M. Kendall, *Richard III*, Anchor Books ed., 1965, p. 439.

⁴ Reported by Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III*, ed. C.A.J. Armstrong, 1969, p. 93; while *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, 1938, p. 234, states that the Princes were seen playing in the Tower garden during the mayor's term that ended on 28 October 1483.

are subject to various interpretations.⁵ Nor does it seem likely that the Princes could have remained alive but so well hidden that no one would have known of their continued existence.

2. Richard's failure to show the Princes alive when the early movement to free them gave its support instead to Henry Tudor upon rumor of their deaths. One may argue, however, that Richard considered the threat posed by Henry, Buckingham, and all their rumors less dangerous to him than the initial movement to reinstate the Princes, which struck right at the heart of his own claim to legitimacy.
3. Past history and the king's authority. In the cases of Edward II, Richard II, and Henry VI, death followed deposition. Henry VI's death was delayed only while his son and heir remained alive. Similarly, one may argue that only the highest authority—the ruling king himself—could order such judicial murders. If the Princes were dead before August 1485, this argument makes it difficult to shift the blame to other shoulders and is the strongest point against Richard.
4. Contemporary testimony:
 - a) Dominic Mancini's account of the removal of Prince Edward's attendants⁶ and his withdrawal into the Tower until his disappearance, the physician Argentine's remarks about his frame of mind, the description of public sentiment in London. "I have seen many men burst forth into tears and lamentation...and already there was a suspicion that he (Prince Edward) 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."⁷ Mancini, who left England shortly after Richard's coronation, was writing before December 1483. It should be noted that his remarks refer to only one of the Princes; concern for the other may be implied. Prince Edward's reported anxiety may have been caused by fear of his uncle or by ill health; either view would seem to contradict the happier picture of archery and play described by the Great Chronicle. Finally, it must be emphasized that Mancini was reporting fearful rumor. He does not indicate how widespread it was, and he is at pains to point out his own inability to ascertain its truth.
 - (b) Statement by Guillaume de Rochefort, Chancellor of France, to the États Général in January 1484, directly accusing Richard of the crime. Rochefort may have got his information from Mancini's reported rumors; England was "the enemy," and France was then faced with the potential insecurities of its own minority reign.⁸
 - (c) The *Croyland Chronicle's* account of the movement to free the Princes and of how, upon the Duke of Buckingham's decision to lead it, a rumor was spread "that the sons of King Edward had died a violent death, but it was uncertain how."⁹ his rumor seems to have been part of a deliberate attempt to divert existing plans for an uprising to the purposes of Buckingham and Henry Tudor. Furthermore, the chronicler—who is unfavorably disposed towards Richard—does not accuse him by name, although he was writing after Richard's death when he could have safely done so.

⁵ Both entries are noted by Kendall, p. 455. The reference to the "Lord Bastard" is from British Library, Harleian MS 433, f. 211. See also the note by P.W. Hammond in *Ricardian* 5.72 (March 1981), p. 319, citing an instance when the term "Lord Bastard" almost certainly refers to John of Gloucester.

⁶ Substantiated by a royal warrant of 18 July 1483, authorizing final payment of wages to thirteen men for services to Edward IV and "Edward, bastard, late called King Edward I," cited by C.T. Wood, "Who Killed the Little Princes in the Tower?" *Harvard Magazine* 80.30 (Jan.-Feb. 1978), p. 40.

⁷ Mancini, p. 93.

⁸ Mancini, pp. 22-24.

⁹ *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, ed. Henry T. Riley, 1854, p. 491.

- (d) A Latin poem written by Petro Carmeliano to celebrate Prince Arthur's birth in 1486, charging that Richard "destroyed both his nephews." Carmeliano was, apparently, a social climber whose previous efforts under Edward IV and Richard III met with little success. He did better under Henry VII, who made him his chaplain and Latin secretary. The fact that the poem was circulated would seem to indicate, at most, its plausibility; at least, its acceptability.¹⁰
- (e) John Rous's statement in his *Historia Regum Angliae*, dedicated to Henry VII, that Richard killed the Princes, means unknown.¹¹ Rous's wild statements regarding Richard's person and his built-in bias greatly lessen his credibility.
- (f) The *Great Chronicle* says that after Easter 1484 there was "much whispering...among the people that the King had put the children...to death."¹² If the timing of the rumors, as reported, is correct, there may be a connection between the renewed rumors and the death of Richard's only legitimate son.
- (g) Robert Fabyan's *New Chronicles* reports "the common fame (that) King Richard had, within the Tower, put unto secret death the two sons of his brother Edward IV."¹³ Again, this is the report of a rumor only, and, as Kendall points out, if the deed was so secret, how could Fabyan—or anyone else—know about it?¹⁴
- (h) An entry in MS Ashmole 1448, charging that Richard, "being afraid that his nephews might prevent him from reigning with the approbation of the kingdom... (first taking counsel with the Duke of Buckingham...) removed them from the light of this world by some means or other, vilely and murderously."¹⁵
- (i) The *Memoires* of Philippe de Commynes, who states in one instance that Richard was guilty, in another that it was Buckingham.¹⁶
- (j) The Dutch *Divisie Chronicle* also retells conflicting rumors that Richard or Buckingham murdered the Princes.¹⁷ These last three sources are of particular interest because they show the existence of contradictory rumors within about thirty years of Richard's death.
- (k) Polydor Vergil, Sir Thomas More, and the later Tudor writers represent the officially sanctioned view that Richard was guilty. As such, their assertions of his guilt are less interesting than are the varying details with which they dress out their accounts.
5. The identification and dating of the bones in the Abbey.¹⁸ It appears possible/probable that the identification of the bones as those of the Princes is correct. Although the sex of prepubertal

¹⁰ P.W. Hammond, notes in *Ricardian* 4.57 (June 1977), pp. 23-24, citing BL, Additional MS 33736, quoted by James Gairdner, *Memorials of King Henry VII*, 1858, pp. lvi-lvii. I might add that the word "destroyed" is more subject to equivocal interpretation than either "killed" or "murdered."

¹¹ John Rous, *Historia Regum Angliae*, ed. T. Hearne, 1745, p. 213; printed in modernized English in Alison Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians 1483-1535*, 1975, p. 120.

¹² *Great Chronicle*, p. 234.

¹³ Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. Henry Ellis, 1811, p. 516.

¹⁴ Kendall, p. 444.

¹⁵ Hanham, p. 108. Hammond, *Ricardian* 3.44 (March 1974), p. 17, gives a slightly different translation that boils down to the same information.

¹⁶ Kendall, p. 460.

¹⁷ Received information from Maaïke Lulofs, printed in *Ricardian* 3.46 (Sept. 1974), pp. 12-13, citing the *Divisie Chronicle*.

¹⁸ For the original examination of the bones, see L.E. Tanner and W. Wright, "Recent Investigations regarding the Fate of the Princes in the Tower," *Archaeologia* 84 (1935), pp. 1-26. For later, sometimes conflicting views, see Kendall, pp. 454-455, 557-558; *The Complete Peerage* 12.2, Appendix J, pp. 32-39; William H. Snyder, *The Crown*

skeletons cannot at present be determined, they do appear to be about the right ages *relative to each other*. Missing teeth in the jaws of both individuals may argue consanguinity. The dating of the bones remains more problematic. At present, no way exists to accurately determine the exact year in which they died. Nor can their chronological ages be precisely established, due to normal variations in the rate of tooth and bone development. Considering the brevity of Richard's reign, the dating of the bones by any means cannot be said to prove his guilt; nor does it prove anyone else's.

6. Motive: that Richard considered the Princes to be a continuing threat to his safety despite the bastardy charge and especially in view of the movement to free them. If he did not, why hide and confine them? But if he did kill them for this reason, he could not benefit unless their bodies were displayed. This was not done.

Several points can be made in favor of Richard's innocence, apart from those relating to the specific charges mentioned above.

1. The report of a common belief that Sir Richard Ratcliffe and William Catesby opposed Richard's alleged interest in his niece for fear that if she "should attain the rank of queen, it might...be in her power to avenge upon them the death of her uncle, earl Anthony, and her (half) brother Richard, they having been the king's especial advisers in these matters."¹⁹ That no one feared that she might avenge herself for the deaths of her brothers, the Princes, seems, at the least, a little odd.
2. The peculiar behavior of Elizabeth Woodville, who became reconciled with Richard in 1484, accepted Henry after Bosworth, but became involved in a conspiracy against him in 1487.²⁰ Ross argues that her "reconciliation" reflects a practical acceptance of her own situation and the (then apparent) likelihood that Richard would not be deposed.²¹ Although this seems reasonable, Ross's insistence that Richard's public promise not to harm her daughters derives from her knowledge of the Princes' death at his hands is unnecessary. The executions of her brother, Earl Rivers, and her son from her first marriage, Richard Grey, on Richard III's orders, are sufficient in themselves to account for her suspicions.
3. Henry VII's failure to clearly and immediately demonstrate that the boys were dead and that Richard was guilty, when it was plainly in his interest to do so. At the most, this indicates that Henry knew that Richard was innocent; at the least, that Henry did not know exactly what had happened to the Princes.
4. Sir William Stanley's alleged statement that if Perkin Warbeck was really the son of Edward IV, he would never fight against him.²² If Stanley did say such a thing, it indicates his own

and the Tower, 1981, pp. 249-254 (which includes a summary of the talk given by Dr. R.H.G. Lyne-Pirkis to the Society in 1963); P.W. Hammond, "The Bones of the 'Princes' in Westminster Abbey," *Ricardian* 4.52 (March 1976), pp. 22-25; Charles Ross, *Richard III*, 1981, pp. 233-234; Julie Vognar, "Whose Jaws?" *Loyaulte me Lie* 1.2 (March 1979), pp. 7-9.

¹⁹ *Croyland Chronicle*, pp. 499-500.

²⁰ For an alternate view of Elizabeth Woodville's behavior, see H. Maurer, "The Amazing Elizabeth: A Possible Reconstruction of her Actions 1483-1487," *Loyaulte me Lie/Ricardian Register* 16.2 (summer 1982), pp. 10-15.

²¹ Ross, pp. 100-101.

²² Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, ed. Denys Hay, Royal Historical Society, Camden 3rd series 74, 1950, p. 75. Hereafter referred to as Vergil II.

uncertainty regarding the Princes' fate. And he was charged with having communicated with Warbeck—a treasonous act—and duly executed.²³

5. A curious passage in *Hall's Chronicle*, in which Buckingham tells John Morton, Bishop of Ely that Richard had informed his lords of his intent to be king until Edward IV's son is twenty-four and can rule for himself. Hall is much too late to be considered a genuine source, but one wonders, since he is plainly anti-Richard, why he would choose to manufacture this particular tale. It appears to have no antecedent.²⁴
6. Negative motive: to kill the Princes immediately, on top of the bastardy charge, would merely demonstrate to an already uncertain public that Richard's legal claim was hogwash.
7. Throughout his career, up until his assumption of the throne, Richard had served his brother Edward with demonstrably unswerving loyalty. There is every reason to believe that he had Edward's complete trust. While he was a man of his time, capable of violent action to achieve his ends, the killing of his brother's sons is arguably the one act of violence he could not have committed without, at least, serious misgivings

Henry VII

Our second suspect, Henry VII, is the choice of the Markham/Tey revisionists. The case against him is primarily one of motive. Regarding opportunity, we may say that if the Princes survived Richard's reign, Henry's opportunity would have been absolute, as Richard's was before. But there is no concrete evidence that either of the boys lived past 1483. The points against Henry are:

1. Motive: Henry's Act of Parliament that repealed the *Titulus Regius* (and, therefore, the bastardy charges) made the boys' deaths necessary; otherwise Prince Edward was the lawful king of England. However, this same act states in closing: "...be it ordained and enacted...that this Act, nor anything contained in the same, be any way hurtful or prejudicial to the Act of establishment of the Crown of England to the King (Henry) and to the Heirs of his body begotten."²⁵ This could be interpreted as a means of covering all contingencies, in the event that Henry knew the boys were still alive or did not know what had happened to them. Or it may simply be insurance, in legal language, that repealing *Titulus Regius* would not affect Henry's claim.
2. The failure to specify Richard's alleged crime in his attainder, beyond the cryptic reference to the "shedding of infants' blood."²⁶ This is, in a sense, negative evidence. Although it may be used to argue Richard's innocence, it does not necessarily point to Henry's guilt. If Henry were guilty, but had no watertight story to foist the blame on Richard, why bring up the matter at all? This would only arouse fresh curiosity about the Princes' fate. A possible explanation suggests itself: Henry, if he was not personally guilty, may still have known more about the Princes than he cared to admit. Or he simply may have hoped, without knowing, that the insinuation was true.
3. When Edward IV's daughters left sanctuary, Richard does not seem to have restricted their freedom. The eldest, Elizabeth, apparently enjoyed the 1484 Christmas festivities at court. One

²³ W.A.J. Archbold, "Sir William Stanley and Perkin Warbeck," *English Historical Review* 14 (1899), pp. 529-534. On 14 March 1493 Stanley made an arrangement with Robert Clifford to contact Warbeck. Gairdner suggests in a note to Archbold that Stanley may simply have wanted to secure his position with both sides in case of an invasion.

²⁴ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 1809, p. 387. Hanham, p. 203, seems to dismiss this as original embroidery attempting to imitate More.

²⁵ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, vol. 6, p. 289; also printed in Snyder, pp. 278-279.

²⁶ *Rot. Par.*, vol, 6, p. 276.

might contend that the girls were no danger to Richard while the Princes were alive; if they were dead, their claim to the throne would devolve upon their sisters (who, of course, would still be legally illegitimate, regardless). This highly circumstantial argument is used to show that the Princes lived through Richard's reign. Although this may have been the case, the situation also admits of other explanations. While the Yorkist claim to the throne allowed—in fact, depended upon—inheritance *through* a female, there was no immediate tradition of inheritance *to* a female.²⁷ Although England had no Salic law, this simply was not done. So long as the daughters of Edward IV remained unmarried and childless, they posed no threat to Richard. Upon Henry's accession it was necessary for him to marry Elizabeth, not so much to consolidate his claim, but to ensure that her children would also be his children.

4. The belief that Elizabeth Woodville and her son, the Marquess of Dorset, joined the Lambert Simnel conspiracy of 1487 because they had discovered Henry's guilt. While this is possible, the same argument can be used to indict both Buckingham and Margaret Beaufort with equal or greater credibility.
5. The assumption that the Tyrell story is essentially correct, except in its assertion of Richard's guilt. Two pardons granted to Sir James Tyrell in the summer of 1486²⁸ are cited as evidence of the interval during which the deed was done, and it is further assumed that after Tyrell's execution in 1502, Henry let out a true account of the murder, except to lay the blame on Richard. The pardons happen to be "general pardons," with nothing to distinguish them from the many other general pardons given to a large number of other persons at these times. The second part of the argument appears to rest upon the (too?) fortuitous discovery of the bones in pretty much the exact spot specified by More, with the inconvenient exception that More had them dug up and reinterred, site undisclosed, by an unnamed priest. Several observations may be made. First, that if More did somehow know where the Bones were buried, he could not have been the only one to know. In fact, knowledge of the site would have had to be fairly widespread for him to know of it. Second, if a body of common belief concerning the site did exist, the story of the unnamed priest would not have been sufficient to deflect interest and accompanying speculation from those stairways in the Tower precincts that could have been dug under. Third, if Henry—and others—did know or suspect where the bodies were hidden, regardless of how they got there or on whose orders, it was in Henry's immediate interest in 1502 to demonstrate that the boys were dead. After that many years, no one could have told from the condition of the bodies exactly when they had been killed. Alison Hanham takes an appropriately jaundiced view of this portion of More's story.²⁹ It simply has too many holes in it to be taken seriously. More, who probably had not the faintest idea what had actually been done with the Princes, was pulling our legs.³⁰
6. The observation, made by Henry's confessor and others, that Henry suffered extreme guilt feelings towards the end of his life. It has been argued at length that Henry's remorse was occasioned by his practice of extortion.³¹ If one is inclined to venture out upon a very fragile

²⁷ Matilda or Maud, daughter of Henry I, had briefly reigned in the 12th century.

²⁸ *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, ed. Rev. William Campbell, vol. 1, 1873, pp. 460 and 503.

²⁹ Hanham, pp. 186-187.

³⁰ As for why the bones should have been discovered more or less where More said they would be, it might be profitable, if only in the interest of leaving no stone unturned, to forget about Richard, Henry, and the late 15th century for the moment and concentrate upon Charles II and the political pressures and perceived necessities of the 1670s. Any takers? [I did this in Part 2 of "Bones in the Tower," *Ricardian* 9.112 (March 1991), pp. 2-22.]

³¹ See the series of articles in the *Historical Journal*: G.R. Elton, "Henry VII: Rapacity and Remorse," *HJ* 1 (1958), pp. 21-39; J.P. Cooper, "Henry VII's Last Years Reconsidered," *HJ* 2 (1959), pp. 103-129; Elton, "Henry VII: A

limb, one might wonder whether Henry's guilt had anything to do with the Princes, but there seems to be no evidence whatsoever that this was the case. It seems most likely that Henry's remorse, whatever its original cause, was much exacerbated by a lengthy period of failing health, accompanied by deteriorating mental condition—i.e., senility.³²

In addition to the total lack of substantive evidence against Henry, there are two reasons for supposing him innocent.

1. His behavior, particularly during the Perkin Warbeck affair, would seem to indicate that Henry himself did not know just what the truth was. His failure *throughout his reign* to produce any bodies, when it was clearly in the interest of his own security to do so, argues strongly that he simply did not know where the bodies were.
2. No contemporary charges were made against Henry, either at home or abroad. As A.R. Myers pointed out, if Henry's government was so efficient that it could suppress every report of the Princes being alive in 1485 and of their subsequent murder, it ought to have been able to produce a clearer and firmer story of their murder by Richard.³³ The parade of imposters and continuing rumors that one of the boys, at least, was still alive should nevertheless be viewed with caution. Apart from reflecting a lack of public knowledge of the Princes' fate and its corollary of public uncertainty, the rumors that were directed against both Richard and Henry (quite opposite, as they were) were exactly those that could damage them most, a fact not lost upon those persons who opposed one or the other, for whatever reason.

Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham

The third in the trio of usual suspects tends to be the choice of moderate Ricardians who for reasons both of sentiment and logic have rejected (or can't quite swallow) the case against Richard, but who, in the face of the available evidence, cannot bring themselves to believe that the Princes survived Richard's reign. Kendall has provided an elaborate, though convoluted, argument for Buckingham's guilt.³⁴ The case against him, like the one against Richard, rests on both opportunity and motive. Opportunity, however, is assumed, rather than clearly indicated.

1. Buckingham, as Constable of England, would have had access anywhere and the authority to order murder. This is refuted by the parallel case of Henry VI. Most historians nowadays, including those who do not care for Richard, agree that Richard as Constable would not have had the authority on his own to order the murder of Henry VI. We cannot have it both ways. On balance, it seems unlikely that any Constable would have had the power, without the king's consent, to order political murders of this magnitude.
2. The several days Buckingham remained in London after Richard set out on his progress are cited as opportunity. This is really a variation on the first point because it assumes that Buckingham would have had the *authority* to order the deed in the king's absence and without his consent.

Restatement," *HJ* 4 (1961), pp. 1-29. For a slightly different view, that Henry's remorse may have been caused by his specific practice of exacting bonds and recognizances from persons he mistrusted, see. S.B. Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 1972, pp. 309-313.

³² Chrimes, pp. 313-314, for Henry's failing physical and mental health.

³³ A.R. Myers, "The Character of Richard III," *History Today*, Aug. 1954, p. 517.

³⁴ Kendall, pp. 460-467. The following arguments are largely based on his work.

3. Contemporary testimony:

- (a) MS Ashmole 1448, which says that Richard killed the Princes, having taken "counsel with the Duke of Buckingham."³⁵
- (b) The chronicler Jean Molinet, who says that "on the day that Edward's sons were assassinated, there came to the Tower of London the Duke of Buckingham, who was believed, mistakenly, to have murdered the children in order to forward his pretensions to the crown."³⁶
- (c) Commynes, who can't make up his mind whether it was Richard or Buckingham.³⁷
- (d) The *Divisie Chronicle*, which likewise mentions both Richard and Buckingham.³⁸
- (e) Vergil, depending on how one reads between the lines. "...the multitude said that the duke did the less dissuade King Richard from usurping the kingdom, by means of so many mischievous deeds, upon that intent that he afterward, being hated both of God and man, might be expelled from the same, and so himself be called by the commons to that dignity, whereunto he aspired by all means possible..."³⁹
- (f) An entry for 1482-83 (the mayoral year ending 28 October) in a London commonplace book: "this yer King Edward the vth...and Richard duke of Yourke hys brother...wer put to deyth in the Towur of London be the vise of the duke of Buckingham."⁴⁰ Although the present document is a copy, there is some evidence to suggest that the original annals were written contemporaneously, or nearly so. R.F. Green points out that the word "vise" could mean "advice" in our sense of the word, but could also mean, in the phrase "bi his avis," either "in compliance with his orders" or "under his direction."⁴¹ Thus the exact nature of Buckingham's alleged role remains elusive.

The question that these sources raise is whether we might be dealing with two instigators rather than one: the one who actually ordered the murders to be done (Richard), and the one who talked him into taking this action (Buckingham). I shall return to this possibility.

- 4. The motive of ambition, mentioned in some of the above testimonies. If Buckingham wanted to play at being kingmaker, or even become the king himself, the murder of the Princes, *if it could be blamed on Richard*, would strengthen his cause and win over the existing Woodville conspiracy to free the Princes to his own ends.
 - (a) The original legitimation of Henry Tudor's Beaufort ancestors did not have the "except the crown" clause, which was added at some time after 1397, probably in the reign of Henry IV. This addition had no legal force. By 1485, however, it seems to have been the version that was generally known.⁴² It is argued that Buckingham, who was also descended from

³⁵ Hanham, p. 108. Hammond, *Ricardian* 3.44 (March 1974), p. 17.

³⁶ J. Molinet, *Chroniques*, found in *Collection des Chroniques nationales francaises*, ed. J.A. Buchon, vol. 44, 1828, p. 402; mentioned by Kendall, p. 460.

³⁷ Kendall, p. 460.

³⁸ Maaik Lulofs, in *Ricardian* 3.46 (Sept. 1974), pp. 12-13,

³⁹ P. Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, Camden Society, o.s. 29, 1844, p. 195. Hereafter referred to as Vergil I.

⁴⁰ Richard F. Green, "Historical notes of a London citizen, 1483-1488," *English Historical Review* 96 (1981), pp. 585-590, for a discussion and transcript of the document, College of Arms, MS 2M6. The entry regarding the Princes appears on p. 588. I am grateful to Professor H.A. Kelly for bringing this article to my attention.

⁴¹ Green, pp. 585-586, and 587, n. 3, discusses these matters.

⁴² James Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of Richard III*, 1898, p. 107; *Letters and Papers illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, ed. J. Gairdner, vol. 2, Rolls Series, 1861, p. xxx.

the Beauforts, knew that the original patent conferred *unqualified* legitimacy and that the later addition was legally invalid. Buckingham's son, executed in 1521 by Henry VIII, claimed during his trial to have possessed a copy of the original. This would have given Buckingham a double claim to the throne: through the Beauforts and—with no question about legitimacy—from Thomas of Woodstock. Unfortunately, Henry's Beaufort claim preceded Buckingham's.

It appears that Buckingham did not share his inside knowledge with Henry. Can it be that he intended to use the generally known, restrictive version of the patent to later bring down Henry and make way for himself? While Vergil indicates that Buckingham at least toyed with the idea of replacing Richard with himself, the risk of setting up two kings in quick succession, with no foreknowledge of the outcome, would have been tremendous. If Buckingham intended to use the exclusionary clause to his own advantage, he could have done so right from the start to direct attention to himself instead of Henry. Since by revolting he ran the risk of being executed for treason anyway, he might as well have run the risk in his own behalf.

- (b) The second part of the argument assumes that Buckingham had the right character for the job. He may have been vain and shallow, and he probably was ambitious—as were most people of his time—but this hardly makes him a likelier candidate for murderer, given the right circumstances, than any of the other suspects. This line of reasoning, whether it focuses on Buckingham or someone else, depends too much on the eye of the beholder.
 - (c) Discontent over his failure to obtain the Hereford inheritance. Buckingham did, in fact, get a signet bill from Richard promising to give him these lands.⁴³ His revolt and execution intervened, and the actual letters patent were never issued.
5. Buckingham's frantic efforts to speak to Richard before his execution.⁴⁴ Faced with death, he may have been looking for a way to wriggle out. Whether the desired interview would have included words concerning the fate of the Princes or whether Buckingham had something else entirely on his mind, is a matter of conjecture.
 6. The argument, produced by Kendall, that Buckingham's guilt explains Elizabeth Woodville's behavior.⁴⁵ Although it may explain her reconciliation with Richard in 1484, it does not explain her apparently happy acceptance of Henry's marriage to her daughter in 1486 and her about-face involvement in the plot of 1487. If Elizabeth was convinced by Richard or his go-betweens that Buckingham was guilty, on his own, of the murders (this is Kendall's hypothesis), it would not have taken her until 1487 to figure out the connection between Buckingham's guilt and Henry Tudor's benefit. That Buckingham was revolting in support of Henry was public knowledge in 1483.
 7. Kendall's further argument that Buckingham's guilt explains Henry's later behavior: his failure to openly proclaim Richard's guilt or the simple fact of the Princes' deaths. It may, but it is not the only explanation that will serve.

Several points may argue Buckingham's innocence:

1. If Buckingham was guilty, why didn't Richard say so and provide evidence to quash the rumors that were circulating about himself? Would anyone have believed him if he had?

⁴³ Ross, p. 114, citing BL, Harleian MS 433, f. 107v.

⁴⁴ Vergil I, p. 201.

⁴⁵ Kendall, pp. 462-465.

- (a) If Richard only learned of the deed from Buckingham at Gloucester, or even later, he didn't have much time to think about it before the rebellion broke out. At that point, and certainly at any time after Buckingham's execution, such charges would inevitably have sounded false. Nevertheless, we do have previous indications (the coup at Stony Stratford and Hastings' execution) that Richard could be swift in dealing with a situation.
- (b) If Kendall's argument can be believed, Richard showed no reticence in explaining things this way to Elizabeth Woodville, if this is what got her out of sanctuary.
- (c) Again, we have the suggestion of double guilt. If Buckingham talked Richard into ordering the deed, Richard could hardly proclaim Buckingham's guilt without damning himself as well. It should be noted also that Richard's standing *in loco parentis* made him morally responsible for the boys' welfare in any event.

Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond

The possibility of multiple instigators and the question it raises of who was leading whom brings us to the fourth major suspect, Margaret Beaufort. She is my choice. Margaret's motive is uniquely provocative; her opportunity, though less certain, is by no means impossible.

1. Motive: a mother's fear for her son's life. The argument rests on two points: a perception of Margaret's feelings towards her son, and the existence of a situation that warranted such fear.
 - (a) Margaret's devotion to Henry is evidenced by her surviving letters to him. Phrases like "my own sweet and most dear king and all my worldly joy," "my dear heart," and "my good and gracious, prince, king, and only beloved son" show an affection going well beyond the requirements of polite familial correspondence.⁴⁶ It might be argued that these letters come from later years, after mother and son were reunited and had the opportunity to become reacquainted with each other. In 1483 they had not seen each other for more than ten years, and before that had probably only had infrequent contact since Henry's early childhood.⁴⁷ It should be remembered, however, that Henry was an only child, in an age when inheritance and the bonds it forged between the generations were of paramount importance. As the years passed and it became increasingly apparent that there were to be no other children, Margaret's thoughts would have turned more and more to Henry. He was her link to the future, whose existence gave her own life meaning. It seems incredible that she never would have written to him in all the years of his exile; though no letters from this time seem to have survived, I suspect they once existed, written out of motherly affection and concern.
 - (b) The circumstances of Richard's accession created an unstable situation that continued well beyond his coronation. Besides offering a potential opportunity to any would-be rival claimant, the situation also automatically threatened him with death.⁴⁸
 - (c) Within this context, Margaret's probable perception that the only sure—though risky—way to safety lay in bold action to take advantage of the situation and turn it to Henry's benefit. Once this decision was made, its implications for the Princes would be obvious.

⁴⁶ *Original Letters*, ed. Henry Ellis, vol. 1, 1825, pp. 46 and 218. See also Chrimes, pp. 301-302, for evidence of strong mutual affection.

⁴⁷ Chrimes, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁸ Because a discussion of the perceived situation in 1483 forms the central piece in a larger picture of what was happening and why, I must ask the reader's indulgence in deferring it to the end of the article.

2. Margaret's connections and her preeminence in the conspiracy surrounding Buckingham's Rebellion. Since these two points are closely interwoven, I will deal with them together, although some of the supporting arguments pertain more to one than to the other.
 - (a) From a variety of sources it is known that Margaret was in contact, either directly or through intermediaries, with all of the major persons who had an interest in the rebellion—e.g., Elizabeth Woodville, Morton, Buckingham, Henry, Sir Giles Daubeney, Sir Richard Guildford, Thomas Ramney, John Cheney, etc.⁴⁹
 - (b) She was Buckingham's aunt by her second marriage (to Sir Henry Stafford) and his mother's first cousin. These relationships may have given her some reason to know him better than the mere fact that they both moved within a given circle of society. If so, she would have had the opportunity to form some judgment of his character—its strengths, weaknesses, and malleability—long before 1483.
 - (c) Vergil's contention that Margaret was "commonly called the head of that conspiracy."⁵⁰ The *Croyland Chronicle* reports only that Buckingham had agreed to lead the rebellion, but does not say who was responsible for the necessary preparatory plotting; the inference is that Buckingham was not. More, writing after Vergil, makes an elaborate story of Morton's seduction of the Duke by flattery, but makes short shrift of his role in the general plot.⁵¹ A careful reading of Vergil's account of the entire course of the conspiracy shows Margaret taking the lead at almost every turn.⁵² Interestingly, in his version of events it is Buckingham who "unfolded all things to the Bishop of Ely," including his intention to set Henry on the throne (although in the very next paragraph Vergil notes Buckingham's ambitions for himself). Morton gets Reginald Bray, who was already Margaret's servant, to carry word to her of their conversation.⁵³ We then learn that Margaret was already embroiled in a plot of her own, involving the Dowager Queen, Elizabeth Woodville. As a result of the excellent progress she was making, she had appointed Bray to be her chief go-between to draw men into her party, "as secretly as might be," which he was already busily doing. If we put these events in their logical order, it seems at least possible that Bray's role in the conversion of Buckingham was something more than that of messenger boy. And in this context, it makes sense that Buckingham would get the word before his guest, Morton.
 - (d) A slightly different account of who was seducing whom is found in Grafton's continuation of *Hardyng's Chronicle*. This version follows Vergil right up to the point where Bray is hurrying to Margaret with his news. When, lo and behold, "it came to pass that...Buckingham and the lady Margaret...had been in communication of the same matter before, and that the said lady Margaret had devised the same means and ways for the deposition of King Richard and bringing in of Henry her son, the which the duke now brake unto the bishop of Ely, whereupon there rested no more, forasmuch as she perceived the duke now willing to prosecute and further the said device, but that she should find the

⁴⁹ See, for example, Vergil I, p. 196.

⁵⁰ Vergil I, p. 204.

⁵¹ Morton will be discussed further on.

⁵² Vergil I, pp. 194-198, takes the story up to the outbreak of violence.

⁵³ One wonders why they *sent for* Bray—his trotting back and forth a time-consuming process—when it would have been much simpler and speedier to send a trusted man of Buckingham's to Margaret. For the probable reason for this contact, read on.

means that this matter might be broken unto Queen Elizabeth..."⁵⁴ In the still later version of Hall the chronology becomes more muddled. His version of the meeting between Margaret and Buckingham places it on the road between Worcester and Bridgnorth as Buckingham is riding home to Brecon. When he meets Margaret it occurs to him—out of the blue—that she and her son have a better claim to the throne than he does.⁵⁵ These stories appear rather late to be considered reliable—and Hall's account is untenable as it stands—but a slight possibility remains that they represent a genuine tradition that an "early" meeting between Buckingham and Margaret was believed to have occurred.

- (e) A variant—and even later—version of Margaret's conspiratorial role may be found in Sir George Buck's contention that he "(had) read in an old manuscript book...that Dr. Morton and a certain countess, [conspirin]g the deaths of the sons of King Edward and some other, resolved that these treacheries should be executed by poison and sorcery."⁵⁶ Whether Buck can be considered a credible witness or not has been much debated, and we may dismiss his credulity regarding means. Nevertheless, Kincaid has argued that Buck was generally careful in his documentation. Although he was unable to locate Buck's source for this passage, he is unwilling to say that it never existed.⁵⁷ The countess, of course, would have been Margaret Beaufort.
- (f) Modern estimates of Margaret's activities and importance tend to be ambivalent. Kendall, criticizing Vergil's version of the conspiracy, disapproves of the prominence given to the Countess of Richmond at the expense of the existing Woodville-generated plot to free the Princes. What he fails to recognize is that until the two movements become one, he is really comparing apples and oranges. Vergil simply chose to ignore the apples. A page later Kendall gives his view: that Buckingham and Morton, "with the *aid* of the Countess of Richmond (my emphasis)," took over and diverted the existing Woodville conspiracy. A little further on he says that Buckingham and Morton, upon making contact with Bray, learned that rebellion was already brewing and that the "Countess had been in touch with a number of Lancastrian friends." And "the Countess...could command a large Lancastrian following and had connections with some of the leaders of the plot which was already hatching." But it is Morton and Buckingham, off in Brecon, who are able to devise the rumors (either true or false) of the Princes' deaths which enable Margaret to obtain Elizabeth Woodville's consent to Henry's proposed marriage to her daughter. Still further on, Kendall acknowledges the "major role (Margaret was playing) in preparing the invasion of her son." In summarizing the fate of the various rebels and the extraordinary clemency shown to Margaret, Kendall finally calls her "the Athena of the rebellion."⁵⁸

A few years later, S. B. Chrimes offers a telling observation: "...what exactly it was that moved...Buckingham to rebel (against Richard) is likely to remain conjectural." He briefly wonders about Morton and cites the divergent accounts of his role provided by Vergil and More. But then, apparently without much regard for what he is actually saying, he goes on: "Whatever Buckingham's precise process of mind may have been, there can be little doubt

⁵⁴ *The Chronicle of John Hardyng...together with the Continuation by Richard Grafton*, ed. Henry Ellis, 1812, p. 526. But see also Richard Grafton, *Grafton's Chronicle*, vol. 2, 1809, pp. 128-130, which relegates Margaret to the role of follower, with Buckingham doing all the devising of means and ways.

⁵⁵ Hall, pp. 388-389.

⁵⁶ Sir George Buck, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. A.N. Kincaid, 1979, p. 163.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. cxiv, and pp. cxii-cxv, for his defense of Buck's documentation more generally.

⁵⁸ Kendall, pp. 292, 293, 296, 297, 300, 308.

that the chief spinner of plots so far as Henry's future was concerned, was his own mother, Margaret Beaufort." That the two matters could be closely linked seems to have escaped him. Chrimes describes Margaret elsewhere as the "chief schemer on behalf of Henry" and, along with Morton, as a prime mover in the original plot.⁵⁹

Most recently, Charles Ross seems disinclined to think about her very much. In a footnote he allows that she was sending messages to her son, but says that Reginald Bray (her man) was recruiting rebels "to accept Buckingham's scheme." On the next page he apparently has second thoughts about whose schemes Bray was peddling; now Buckingham, Elizabeth Woodville, Henry and Margaret are intriguing together, while "the master-mind behind the entire plan may well have been the wily John Morton, bishop of Ely." Ross has the grace to admit that the evidence on this point is contradictory. Further on, he provides evidence that Margaret was probably the one to warn Morton—and, through him, Henry—of the attempt to lay hands on him in Brittany in 1484. And, finally, Ross also bestows on her the important-sounding, but ultimately empty accolade of "prime mover."⁶⁰

Gentlemen: this is absurd! Can it be that we still hold such a constrained view of the working of a woman's wit that we refuse to wonder just what this same wit might contrive? No such hesitancy is apparent when we built our paper cases against Richard, Henry, Buckingham, or even Morton, for that matter; does it occur to no one that it might also be worthwhile to take the lady seriously? While it may be easier to admire than to analyze her countless virtues, the analysis is long overdue.⁶¹

- (g) So far as we know, Margaret was in London—certainly at the time of Richard's coronation—and probably for some time before and after. This put her in exactly the right place at the right time to be...a prime mover, if you please!
3. Margaret's guilt may provide a better explanation for Elizabeth Woodville's later behavior than does Buckingham's. I suggest that Elizabeth could have accepted the notion of Buckingham's guilt, even benefiting Henry as it obviously did, so long as she believed that Buckingham was acting in his own interests and for his own self-aggrandizement (either as kingmaker or king). Henry, an exile on the Continent, would be held blameless. There is no reason to believe that he had any contact with Buckingham before the latter left London, and no way, in any case, for Henry to go about the dangerous business of persuading Buckingham, from such a distance, to join his cause or do away with the Princes, with any assurance of success. What Elizabeth could not accept, however, would be the knowledge that someone else, acting in Henry's behalf, had planted the idea of getting rid of the Princes in Buckingham's head. The most likely person to have undertaken such a project is Margaret.
 4. Similarly, Margaret's guilt via her influence on Buckingham can also explain Henry's later behavior, including any uncertainties he may have had as to whether the deed had actually been carried out.
 5. If one insists upon finding particular significance in Buckingham's efforts to speak to Richard in person prior to his execution, Margaret's involvement would provide the perfect reason.

⁵⁹ Chrimes, pp. 20-21, 28, 57.

⁶⁰ Ross, pp. 112, n. 22; 113; 119-120, incl. n. 19; 210.

⁶¹ Vergil II, p. 151. I suggest that someone undertake a serious investigation of Margaret's activities from 1483-1485, not for the purpose of proving or disproving anything, but simply to acquire a clearer understanding of her position in the scheme of things. Existing biographies of her by E.M.G. Routh (1924), C.H. Cooper (1874), and Caroline Halsted (1839) badly need to be updated.

What better excuse to make—for whatever—than to be able to say that "someone else made me do it."

6. Finally, Margaret's later fits of weeping, noted by her confessor, Bishop Fisher, occurring at times—like Henry's coronation—when she might have been expected to show joy. These, of course, might also be attributed to a lessening of psychological tension after years of strain.⁶² And some people just choke up and cry when they are very happy. But, if we can raise the issue of remorse for Henry, we can raise it too for Margaret. Was there a price for her son's elevation? This point, however, is a weak one.

The major argument against Margaret's guilt is that she is not named by any contemporary source in connection with the deaths of the Princes. The terms of her attainder are both particular and vague: she is charged with having "conspired, considered and committed high treason...in especial in sending messages, writings and tokens to...Henry, desiring, procuring and stirring him...to come into this realm, and make war...(and having) made *chevisancez* of great sums of money...in the city of London as in other places to be employed to the execution of...treason; (and having) conspired, considered and imagined the destruction of our said Sovereign Lord, and was assenting, knowing and assisting Henry, late duke of Buckingham and his adherents...in treason."⁶³

The case against Margaret rests on the assumption of multiple instigators, of which her role would of necessity be more of influence than of action. It is possible, under these circumstances, that she could have escaped detection. Whether or not it is likely, I leave to the reader's judgment.

MINOR SUSPECTS

Now we have finished with the major suspects, but we haven't solved our mystery. If we cannot lay the Princes' ghosts, we can, however, dispose of the shades of the minor suspects.

Chief among them is **John Howard, Duke of Norfolk**.⁶⁴ Howard was first accused by J. Payne Collier, who edited his household books.⁶⁵ Collier makes an argument of opportunity, based on the now-famous entry of 21 May 1483, detailing payment to six men for a day's labor at the Tower, to a carpenter for making three beds; for wood, nails and two sacks of lime. With "the Tower" looming ominously in the back of his mind, Collier's thoughts took a suspicious leap from lumber to coffins and from lime to "quicklime," commonly used in his day for disposing of the bodies of executed felons.

More than a hundred years later, Melvin J. Tucker suggested a motive: Howard's desire for his rightful half-share of the Mowbray inheritance, perhaps including the dukedom of Norfolk which was then held by Edward IV's younger son, who had married the by-then-deceased Mowbray heiress. To the original argument of opportunity, Tucker added Howard's position as Constable of the Tower and his friendship with Richard.⁶⁶

⁶² Elizabeth Jenkins, *The Princes in the Tower*, 1978, p. 216.

⁶³ *Rot. Par.*, vol. 6, pp. 250-251.

⁶⁴ The best discussion of his case is presented by Anne Crawford, "John Howard, Duke of Norfolk: a possible murderer of the Princes?" *Ricardian* 4.70 (Sept. 1980), pp. 230-234. See also her further article, "The Mowbray Inheritance," *Ricardian* 5.73 (June 1981), pp. 334-340. My summary is based on these two articles.

⁶⁵ *Household Books of John, Duke of Norfolk, and Thomas, Earl of Surrey, 1481-1490*, ed. J. Payne Collier, 1844, pp. xiii and 394.

⁶⁶ Melvin J. Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard, 1443-1524*, 1964, pp. 38-45.

Anne Crawford has provided an elegant refutation of the case:

1. Motive:
 - (a) Upon the death of John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, in 1476, his titles went into abeyance, to be regranted by the crown as it saw fit. The dukedom was no longer inheritable, by anyone. Even *if* young Richard of York's bastardization disqualified him from the title—a doubtful *if*—it did not automatically confer it on anyone else. Nor did his death.
 - (b) Regarding the lands, two acts of Parliament, of January 1478 and January 1483, had set aside the customary rules of land transfer and essentially disinherited Howard. In theory, whether York were dead or alive, only another act of Parliament could restore Howard to his portion.
 - (c) Regardless of theory, Richard III did, in fact, grant the Mowbray inheritance to its traditional coheirs, Howard and Berkeley, and created them Duke of Norfolk and Earl of Nottingham respectively on 28 June 1483. There is no indication that the Princes had disappeared by this time or that anything had happened to them.
2. Opportunity:
 - (a) Howard was never, officially, Constable of the Tower. He was granted the second reversion to the office in 1479, after John, Lord Dudley, who died at great age in 1487, and Richard Fiennes, Lord Dacre, who died 25 November 1483. Dudley's deputy at the time of Edward IV's death was Anthony, Earl Rivers, who was then in the process of transferring the office to his nephew, Dorset.⁶⁷ Since Rivers was in custody and Dorset, in sanctuary, by the time Richard arrived in London, there was a time lapse between their incapacitation and the appointment of Sir Robert Brackenbury to the office on 17 July. There is no evidence as to who, if anybody, was clearly in charge of the Tower during this period.
 - (b) The "beds and lime" entry comes from Howard's private accounts, which do not include payments made in connection with the offices he held. Nor was it designated "by my Lord's commandment," as was always done with payments made specifically at Howard's request. In December 1483 Howard received grant of a house in London called "the Tower," which had formerly belonged to Henry, duke of Somerset (d. 1464).⁶⁸ It may have been a retrospective grant and this "the Tower" referred to in the household entry. In any case, the "beds" were probably just beds, for people to sleep in, and the lime was probably used for whitewash or sanitation.⁶⁹ Finally, the allegedly sinister payment took place on 21 May, 26 days before Richard of York left sanctuary and joined his brother.

The case is definitely disproven.

Insofar as **John Morton, Bishop of Ely** and later Cardinal, has enjoyed a reputation as a conniver, he ought to be considered a suspect. Though some historians may cringe, Morton's continuing reputation derives in large part from the insistence of Clement Markham and Josephine Tey that he provided More's version of events, if he did not write the first draft of it himself. If one rejects the source, it might perhaps be better not to swallow the argument whole. The fact is that Morton was arrested before Richard's assumption of the throne, when events were in flux, the Princes were still very much alive, and no one—probably including Richard himself—knew

⁶⁷ E.W. Ives, "Andrew Dymmock and the papers of Anthony, Earl Rivers, 1482-1483," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 41 (1969), p. 225.

⁶⁸ *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1476-1485*, p. 411.

⁶⁹ G. Brenan and E.P. Statham, *The House of Howard*, vol. 1, 1907, p. 46, appear to have been the first to come up with this ingenious but obvious explanation.

exactly what was going to happen next. Morton was soon removed to Brecon, to be held in custody in Buckingham's household. He did not return to London until after his own escape to France and Henry's accession. Whatever conversations he may have had with Buckingham at Brecon, they could not have decided the fate of the Princes, for Buckingham did not return to London either. Now it may be that Morton was instrumental in persuading Buckingham to abandon Richard and support Henry,⁷⁰ but to blindly assume that he masterminded the entire conspiracy from start to finish goes a bit too far. Brecon was not London, and Morton was not in a good position, even with his trusty, secret messengers, to do the job of organizing everything, however his sympathies lay.⁷¹ Certainly, in the matter of the Princes, we may consider him acquitted.

Well, then, what about **Sir Robert Brackenbury**? He was Constable of the Tower, at least as of 17 July 1483, and he did receive a number of grants and rewards in the spring of 1484, although they were said to be for his services against Buckingham's rebels.⁷² Contemporary or near-contemporary writers describe him without question as a man who would never stoop to such a thing. But, apparently, Hanham favors him: "More says he didn't do it—need I comment further?"⁷³ Do I detect a twinkle in her eye? I believe that we may safely allow our "gentle Brackenbury" to keep his reputation.

As we begin to scrape the bottom of the barrel, there is **William Catesby**.⁷⁴ Catesby was a climber, who first supported Henry VI, switched to York in 1461, and was by 1483 attached to William, Lord Hastings. This enabled him to get a position on the royal council during the Protectorate, where he soon found the opportunity to report to Richard about Hastings' plotting. The corollary is that he may have decided, on his own initiative, to kill the Princes, assuming that this deed would induce Richard to further his career. If we may wonder whether Buckingham or others could have wielded such authority, there can be no question about Catesby. He simply did not have it.

A suspect who may come as a complete surprise to many is **Elizabeth Woodville**, the Princes' mother.⁷⁵ Motherhood aside, she was notoriously ambitious in an age when ambition was pretty much taken for granted. The argument comes in two parts:

1. Her children were of interest to her only insofar as their rights could be used to ensure her own position.
2. Once her sons were in Richard's custody, the best way to reestablish her position was to have them killed, foist the blame on Richard, and negotiate her daughter's marriage with Henry Tudor.

The second part of the argument, which is the one that matters, is directly contradicted by all the evidence. With the Princes in Richard's custody, the best way for Elizabeth to get back her own was to have them freed and reinstated. This is exactly what a number of persons, among them members of the Woodville affinity, originally planned to do. As long as the Princes lived, she had no need to resort to Henry or to anyone else.

⁷⁰ Sir Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. R.S. Sylvester, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 2, Yale ed., 1963, pp. 90-93.

⁷¹ As claimed by Jenkins, p. 200.

⁷² *Dictionary of National Biography*, Supplement, p. 247; Ross, pp. 121-122.

⁷³ According to Wood, "Who Killed the Princes?" p. 40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39. I suspect that Wood may have suggested him more as an example of just how far the inquiry can go than as a serious contender.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

The first part, amounting to a subjective assessment of Elizabeth's character, is also contradicted if one accepts that she became a part of the Lambert Simnel conspiracy in 1487. At that time her position was secure through her daughter's marriage, and she stood to gain nothing by turning against her daughter's interests.

Finally, we have "**Jane**" Shore. Jane appears to be the choice of William Dunham, Professor Emeritus at Yale.⁷⁶ While jealousy might have given Jane a motive to hurt the Dowager Queen, and revenge a motive to strike at Richard, who had publicly humiliated her, it is very difficult to imagine how or when she could have engineered the deed. She was in custody by 21 June 1483,⁷⁷ released at an unknown date, and imprisoned a second time as a result of her involvement with the Marquess of Dorset, who was charged with treason on 23 October.⁷⁸ At a still later date, though probably during Richard's reign, she married Thomas Lynom, Richard's solicitor.⁷⁹ The letter Richard wrote to Chancellor Russell concerning Lynom's wish to marry her is well known. It is difficult to see how he could have taken such a lenient, though disapproving, view if he knew that she had instigated the murder of the Princes. Likewise, during her periods of freedom, it is unlikely that she would have been allowed access to them. Nor does it seem probable that she could have talked someone into murdering them for her, just because she had the notion. She comes down to us more as a medieval groupie than a plotter, and we may dismiss her.

WHODUNIT?

Now that we have met the characters in our classic British mystery, I would like to take a final moment to set the stage for them to act upon: the scene and circumstances of the crime.

When Edward IV died, the political situation in England destabilized. On the one hand lay the uncertain prospect of a minority reign, which may have been aggravated by the ill health of the heir.⁸⁰ On the other, the potential for factional rivalry existed, which, in the worst case, could have led to renewed civil war.

Richard's assumption of the throne, whether justified or not, did not provide a remedy. Although some people may have been glad to see power returned to the hands of a competent adult, the circumstances of his accession created more and greater uncertainties than they solved:

1. In this context, the execution of Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey could be seen as a warning: this was the justice that awaited anyone who might be seen to stand in Richard's way or threaten him.

BUT...

2. Richard's claim—the bastardy charge—was shaky. By this, I do not refer to its *actual* truth or falsehood, nor to whether it could legally invalidate Prince Edward's right to succeed his father. The important point for our consideration is how the allegation was *perceived at that time*. That a number of people either didn't believe it, didn't think it mattered, or didn't care is evidenced by the movement to free the Princes that immediately got underway.

The wording of the *Titulus Regius* also indicates that, up till that point, the validity of Richard's title had been questioned: "...the court of Parliament is of such authority...that declaration of any truth or right, made by the Three Estates of this Realm assembled in Parliament...maketh,

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷⁷ *Stonor Letters and Papers*, ed. C.L. Kingsford, Camden Society, third series, 30, 1919, p. 161.

⁷⁸ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1476-1485*, p. 371.

⁷⁹ For an account of her, see Nicholas Barker, "The Real Jane Shore," *Etoniana* 125 (June 1972), pp. 383-391.

⁸⁰ This depends, of course, upon the identification of the Bones. If the older set is Edward V's, the presence of osteomyelitis could have affected his general health.

before all other things, most faith and certainty; and, quieting men's minds, removeth the occasion of all doubts and seditious language...Therefore...be it pronounced, decreed and declared, that our said Sovereign Lord the King was and is, very and undoubted King of this Realm of England...."⁸¹ It is apparent that the "doubts and seditious language" can only refer to questions regarding Richard's right to rule.

3. Richard did not have a broad base of support across the country. He came to power as the head of a large and powerful northern affinity. Within a context of regional mistrust, this was viewed from the south with suspicion. Although Richard did attempt, at least initially, to retain the support of Edward IV's southern adherents (in some cases successfully—e.g., Norfolk), he tended from the outset to rely upon northerners for "politically delicate" tasks or offices involving close personal contact with himself.⁸² A circular situation developed: the visibility of Richard's northern support led to increased suspicion, which caused him to rely more and more on northerners.

It is no wonder, under these circumstances, that rumors concerning the fate of the Princes began to take shape, even before Richard's coronation. Drawing on known experiences of the past and the perceived instability of the present, men began to voice their concern for the Princes' safety; some went so far as to fearfully speculate that something dreadful had already happened. The existence of such rumors should surprise no one; it would have been more amazing had they not occurred. But it should be clearly understood that, at least initially, they are more indicative of the general situation of uncertainty and upheaval than of a particular antipathy towards Richard.⁸³

Aware that his position remained tenuous, Richard took steps to strengthen it. Most noticeably, he set out on a progress, to show himself as king to as many people as possible. This effort was generally successful; Richard gave the impression of fair-minded justice and benevolence. One would like to think that he wanted to be this sort of ruler, from within his own soul, but it would be naive to overlook the fact that, in his situation, this may have seemed good politics.

At about the same time, soon after Richard's coronation, the Princes began to be withdrawn from public view within the Tower precincts. Two desired effects may have been anticipated: the practical one, of making them inaccessible to those who still believed that Prince Edward should be king; and the psychological one, of getting them out of public sight and mind. If it succeeded on the one count, it failed miserably on the other. The Princes' disappearance only added to public concern for their safety, exacerbated the existing rumors, and added to the feeling of unrest.

The next thing Richard did concerned Henry Tudor. Up until the late spring of 1483, Henry had been a person of no great significance.⁸⁴ He had spent his childhood as a ward of the Herbert family, staunch Yorkists, who intended him to marry one of their daughters. But in 1471, when Henry was fourteen, his uncle Jasper took him away to the Continent, probably fearing for his life

⁸¹ Snyder, p. 274. I have modernized the spelling.

⁸² For example, John Nesfield to guard the sanctuary at Westminster; Sir Richard Ratcliffe to carry the orders for Earl Rivers' execution; Francis, Viscount Lovell (a northerner, like Richard, by osmosis)—Chamberlain of the Household; Sir Robert Percy—Controller of the Household; John Kendall—Secretary. See Ross, pp. 44-59, esp. 56 on. See also Michael Weiss, "*Loyaulte Me Lie*": *Richard III and Affinity Politics in Northern England*, PhD thesis, University of California, Irvine, 1977, for a discussion of the origins and operation of Richard's northern affinity; and A.J. Pollard, "North, South and Richard III," *Ricardian* 5.74 (Sept. 1981), pp. 384-389, for north-south antagonism.

⁸³ This point, regarding the politics of rumor, should not be underestimated. It is possible that rumors current during the reigns of both Richard III and Henry VII have as much to do with opposition efforts to use and turn existing perceptions of instability against the king as with actual public beliefs and sentiments.

⁸⁴ See Ross, p. 192; but cf. Kendall, pp. 167-169, and Chrimes, pp. 18-19.

in the wake of Tewksbury. There he remained, in the nominal custody of the Duke of Brittany. Edward IV made various attempts to have Henry repatriated, without success. The fact remains, however, that at the time of Edward's death, Henry had no cause, no following, and no reason to suspect that he might someday be a king. All of this changed with Richard's assumption of the throne and the sudden sense of instability it aggravated. From a homeless nobody, Henry overnight became a person of potentially enormous significance. The bastardization of the Princes and the doubts surrounding Richard's title automatically made Henry a possible rival claimant. This was not lost on the uneasy Richard. Within a few weeks of his coronation, before any noticeable partisan activity on Henry's part had gotten underway, Richard sent his agent, Dr. Thomas Hutton, to Brittany to discuss, among other things, Henry Tudor's future.⁸⁵

Much has been made of the opportunity which Richard's accession and England's political destabilization offered to Henry. That Henry and his initial partisans began acting in an appropriately ambitious fashion is something we have taken for granted, going back at least to Polydore Vergil, who coyly reported that Margaret "began to hope well of her son's fortunes."⁸⁶ But there is another side to it, which deserves our serious thought. If Henry had suddenly become a potential threat to whoever sat on England's throne, it was to be expected that he would be dealt with like one. Whatever he or his mother felt in terms of hope, it is even more likely that they feared for his very life.

It would not have taken Margaret long to apprehend the ramifications of the situation. Being in London, she would have had the opportunity to listen, observe, and begin to draw her own conclusions before her exiled son was even aware that the situation existed. Her husband, Lord Stanley, was a member of the council during Richard's brief Protectorate and may have remained Steward of the Household through the very early days of Richard's reign.⁸⁷

Buckingham, her nephew and cousin, had played an instrumental role in Richard's rise and, in the beginning, was as close to him as anyone. And Buckingham was himself a theoretical contender for the throne in an uncertain time when everyone's claim was tainted, suspect. Margaret may have wondered why the Duke, who had always stayed cautiously clear of politics, should take such a sudden, active role. We may say, in any case, that it was in her interest to ascertain his thoughts and aims, as it was even more necessary to discover Richard's. Of the two men, Buckingham would have been the more easily and uncompromisingly accessible to her.

It is my belief that the thought of Henry Tudor as a viable alternative to Richard was first planted in Buckingham's mind by Henry's mother, Margaret Beaufort. What his initial reaction to it was I do not know. It may have taken considerable thought and further persuasion by Margaret's man, Bray, or that old Lancastrian, Morton, to convince him. Or he may have decided from the outset to play both ends against the middle, to maintain himself in Richard's favor while establishing discreet contact with the intriguing—in both senses of the word—opposition. It is possible that his most secret plans were only for himself.

Once Richard's replacement had been contemplated, within the perceived instability of a situation where rivals to his throne (the Princes) already existed, it was but a short step to recognizing that the Princes would have to go. If they threatened Richard, they would be an even greater threat to anyone who supplanted him. I believe that Margaret understood this. She would have had more reason to think about this aspect of the situation than Buckingham. It was her son

⁸⁵ Ross, p. 195.

⁸⁶ Vergil I, p. 195.

⁸⁷ Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, held the office by 24 July; the date of his appointment is not known.

who, at this early point, toward the beginning of Richard's reign, was directly threatened by the sense of instability. Buckingham was not. But it may be that Buckingham had already, on his own, considered murdering the Princes, either to further secure Richard's title and his own ascendancy, or for other, more far-reaching reasons. Whether Buckingham had already thought about it or whether it was just now suggested to him by Margaret, I believe it most likely that their communication on the matter was circuitous and cautious, neither one willing to openly commit to such a course in the other's presence. One of them may have observed that if Richard were to order the Princes' deaths, the suspicions already being cast upon him might be expected to multiply and turn to active opposition. And there I believe they left it, without a definite conclusion.

Buckingham returned to Richard. Perhaps very shortly thereafter, they talked about the situation. I believe that Buckingham now urged upon Richard the action he had, perhaps, shrunk from, which he may have deluded himself into thinking he could avoid or, at the least, delay. I do not believe the choice could have come easily. Nevertheless, the choice was made and the order given, by the only man who had the power to give it.⁸⁸ Someone—it may have been Buckingham or it may have been another person—conveyed the order to the Tower. The Princes died.

I have now reached the end of my investigation. I set out looking for a villain, but, instead, have found three hopeful, frightened people, more deserving of pity and compassion than of condemnation. There is nothing more one can demand of any of them; each one has already paid a terrible penalty. Buckingham was executed ignominiously as a failed traitor; Richard fell in battle, the victim of treason; Margaret lived long enough to see her own son die.

*** I should like to specially thank Peter Hammond, whose constructive criticism has bailed me out of difficulties on various occasions, and Julie Vognar, whose support and encouragement have never let me down.**

⁸⁸ The only alternatives to this I can imagine would necessarily involve either a commando-type raid upon the Princes' quarters—a difficult proposition in their guarded situation—or the stealthy administration of slow-acting poison by someone suborned for the purpose. Although the latter scenario is delightfully wicked, it seems no more likely than the former.