

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.