

What if.....

The Princes in the Tower did not die there

The Early Stages:

Richard III was not a happy man in the Summer of 1483. He had been unhappy when his brother, Edward IV, married the Woodville woman, widow of Sir John Grey, who had fought for Lancaster. That marriage had produced two sons, both of whom with claims to succeed their father ahead of Richard. An earlier threat to Richard's ambitions had come from his older brother, George, Duke of Clarence, but he had changed his allegiances more often than most men changed their hose, so it was not difficult to persuade the King to incarcerate their brother in the Tower. It was even easier to find two willing and able men to send Clarence on his final journey where he would be re-united with their father. Clarence died fully realising, from a practical demonstration, just how harmful to health was an over indulgence in wine.

When Edward IV died Richard saw his chance. He lost no time in countering any threat from the Woodville clan – the Prince's grandfather and an uncle were summarily executed on 25 June 1483. Richard also disposed of another perceived threat – Lord William Hastings who was the most powerful and wealthiest of Edward IV's courtiers and who shared many confidences with the King. He also shared his mistress, Jane Shore.

Most of Richard's plots were executed, and the word has particular relevance here, by his bestest buddy, Henry Stafford, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, who now entered the room.

"You have done me good service but there is still a threat to my reign."

"Really? With the death of the traitor Hastings all of Your Majesty's enemies are now in the halls of their ancestors."

"But a threat remains! I mean the bastards in the Tower. My late brother's offspring, ill-conceived out of holy wedlock. I wish them dead, Buckingham!"

The Duke clearly showed his astonishment.

"You disagree, my Lord Duke?"

"Well, they are but children. To kill them in cold blood would be to copy the terrible deeds of Herod."

"You compare me to Herod?"

There was a menace in the King's tone that Buckingham had heard many times before but always directed towards others, never to him. Suddenly he felt worried.

"Not at all, my dread Sovereign," and the word dread had a more than usual significance this time.

"I wish them dead, and that's an end of the matter. If you are incapable of doing the deed, I shall find someone who can. I suggest, my lord, that you take some time to reconsider your answer."

The audience was clearly terminated and, giving a low bow, Buckingham left the room.

"You heard all of that, Catesby?"

A figure stepped out from beyond the shadows. His apparel was as dark as the shadows from whence he had emerged.

"I did indeed, my Liege."

"Then we must consider our options. Fetch Brackenbury to me!"

Sir Robert Brackenbury was Constable of the Tower of London and so was the man tasked with keeping the Princes secure.

"I will be blunt Sir Robert. I wish the bastards in your care to be no more!"

"But they are mere children, Sire, and they have been declared illegitimate and so have no claim on the throne!"

"Nevertheless, I wish them dead!"

There was silence for several minutes before the King spoke again.

"I respect your reluctance, Sir Robert. You and I have shared much over the years. Out of the love that I bear you I suggest that you take a few days to consider how best you can achieve my desires. If you are still of the same mind, why not go north to tend to your estates?"

"But what of my duties in the Tower, Sire?"

"Catesby here can look after things in your brief absence."

Once again the dark figure stepped from the gloom. Brackenbury realised that he was being handed a life-line, and knowing Richard as he did, he knew that this was a very rare gesture.

"I shall examine my conscience, Sire," and with a low bow he left the King and Catesby alone.

Sir Robert did not return immediately to the Tower, but sought out the Duke of Buckingham. The two men exchanged their respective accounts of what had happened that day and they both agreed that they were reluctant to do something which was certain to send them both to Purgatory come the day that they were called to account for their deeds on Earth.

"I have a plan which will allow us to see our Sovereign's wish fulfilled whilst at the same time saving our souls from eternal damnation," said the Duke. "Give me access to the Princes tomorrow evening."

The cell door opened to reveal two heavily cloaked men each of whom was carrying a bundle. One of the men gestured to the boys to be silent. The bundles were laid

onto the straw which served as bedding and the two men indicated for them to follow them out of the cell. They rode far into the night stopping only once they were clear of London.

“I have considered your generous offer, Your Majesty, and I feel that my spirit and soul would be renewed by a short visit to my estates in Durham. Here are my keys.” Brackenbury handed them towards Richard but was intercepted by Catesby who placed them into the purse hanging from his belt.

“A wise decision, Sir Robert. May you soon return to us with all of the vigour of your former years. You know what to do now, Catesby?” Richard asked once Brackenbury had left the room.

It had been easy finding two boys of about the right ages from amongst those recently deceased from within the peasant class of London. Suitable sums of money assuaged the parent’s guilt at parting with their dead children, especially as Buckingham promised that they would get a burial fit for a king. Dressing the corpses in the quality velvet robes of the nobility was no problem to the Duke, and only he knew where the real Princes were located.

“So it is done, Catesby?” asked Richard.

“It is, my Liege. A gentleman who had been a soldier but who had gambled away all of his money was only too keen to do the task.”

“And he had no knowledge of the identities of the boys?”

“None at all, and even if he did, he is unable to tell of it.”

“How so?”

“At this moment, Sire, his body should just be floating on the tide past Greenwich. His head lies some distance deep within a dung heap at Southwark.”

“Then a good night’s work in every way. And what of the bastards – where do they now repose?”

They have been entombed under the steps in the Tower which lead to their last residence. They will never be discovered!”

“But what of Buckingham? Where is he?”

“Gone, Majesty!”

“Gone!”

“Disappeared – as if he had never been¹.”

Less than 2 years later Bosworth Field lay covered in the bodies of those killed in Richard’s last battle. Amongst those who died alongside Richard were Catesby and Brackenbury. Meanwhile, in Scotland, two young boys were becoming accustomed to a new life as part of the Scottish royal household.

1 He was soon to be executed for his part in attempting to gain the throne for Henry Tudor.

The Later Stages:

War broke out between England and France (now there's a surprise), which put James IV in an awkward position. He was allied to both by treaty, but when Henry VIII invaded France, James declared war on England. This culminated in the Battle of Flodden in 1513 where the Scots were soundly beaten by an English army under the command of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and later, 2nd Duke of Norfolk.² James was killed.

One of the noblemen who survived the battle and who was taken captive stood in front of Surrey. He was tall, with a long, bushy ginger beard (not to be confused with a modern soft drink called ginger beer).

"I am Alexander McDougall of McDougall, and I am the Duke of Avvalaugh."

"So what happened to your King's body? We found only his blood-stained surcoat."

"His mortal remains were buried in Holyrood Priory as is usual for Scottish monarchs."

"And according to some reports there were two English noblemen fighting with you?"

Surrey was keen to find out who amongst his fellow peers had committed such heinous treason.

"Aye. Brothers of some 40 summers in age."

"Are you able to name them, my lord Duke?"

"It was said that they fled to Scotland to escape the wrath of your Richard of Gloucester. They said that their names were Edward and Richard Grey, but we knew them by their titles bestowed by our King – Lords Inverapenny and Inverapound.

"What happened to them?" asked Surrey.

"They perished alongside my King.

"And their bodies...?"

"Buried beneath the stone steps in Holyrood Priory, near to the King."

Meanwhile, to paraphrase Rupert Brooke, "*there is some corner of Scotland that is forever England*".

² He has the fairly rare distinction of being a Duke of Norfolk of the period to die in his bed (at the ripe old age of 81) – it was more common for the Dukes to lose their heads for treason.

What if.....

King Richard III won the Battle of Bosworth Field

"A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse", cried out a beleaguered Richard III as he stood surrounded by Henry Tudor's men, each one wanting a piece of the action – or more accurately, a piece of the king! At least, that is the story we were all told at school. It was the version according to Shakespeare who was writing at the peak of the Tudor rule and it is a well-known fact that in history it's the victor who gets to write the accounts. The Bard used as his source the work of Sir Thomas More who was Henry VIII's BFF until Henry performed a Donald Trump-like fit of pique and had his best buddy beheaded for daring to disagree with him.

Probably the most significant reason for Richard's defeat was down to Lord Stanley who held his force in reserve supposedly to be deployed at an opportune moment on the side of Richard. However, Stanley soon realised that things were not going the Yorkist way so instead of riding his troops to Richard's defence he launched a full-on attack on Richard. His decision was probably helped by the fact that he was Henry's step-father and so may have had at least one thought towards the removal of his conjugal rights if he caused the defeat of his wife's son. But what if Stanley thought "to Hell with these Tudors, I'll support my King even if means incurring the wrath of the missus"? His troops ride to Richard's aid and Henry Tudor is beaten.

So a triumphant Richard leaves the killing field and returns to London to continue his reign. His son, Edward, by his wife Anne Neville, had died the year before Bosworth and Anne herself died shortly before the decisive battle, so Richard's first task was to secure the dynasty by marrying a suitable candidate. His brother, Edward IV, had generated bad feeling by marrying a commoner but his children were, by default, of the blood royal. An ideal candidate therefore was Elizabeth of York (she who married Henry Tudor in the alternative scenario).

There was one small problem with this idea – Elizabeth's brothers, including the rightful heir, had perished in the Tower. The modern take on this was that Richard had murdered them, or at least, sanctioned their murder, but there is a school of thought that they were actually done away with by, or at the behest of, Henry's mother in an attempt to clear the way for her son's accession. Clearly the Tudors were not going to own up to this after their victory – and remember, it is the victor who gets to write the history. Some sources have suggested that Richard had already started to make overtures to his niece before he dashed off to the Midlands in search of a horse.

So Richard and Elizabeth tie the knot and live happily ever after, blessed by the son of York who in due course arrives, but what to call him? Henry was the name of the last Lancastrian king as well as the name of the vanquished Tudor, so that would not have been a favourite name. They could name him Edward after Richard's brother, Edward IV, but that was also the name of the murdered "Prince in the Tower" who was Edward V. It was also the name of Richard's recently deceased son by his first wife. They choose the name of Richard, partly after the proud father but also after his grandfather who had been killed by the Lancastrians at the battle of Wakefield in 1460. Long live King Richard, the Fourth of that name!

Remembering that the victor gets to write the history, Richard III reveals the bodies of his slain nephews with "irrefutable proof" that it was the Tudors "wot dunnit". Neither Perkin Warbeck nor Lambert Simnel appear in the annals of English history. In a twist of irony King Richard IV marries Catherine of Aragon and they go on to have a daughter named Mary who becomes Queen in her own right and marries King Philip II of Spain. Ultimately, instead of a Union between the crowns of England and Scotland, it is one between England and Spain.

Under this scenario there would have been no Tudor regime, possibly no Reformation and a totally different course of English history. And not only English history. Henry VII's eldest daughter, Margaret, married King James IV of Scotland (she was born 4 years after Bosworth) and their son was James V. The marriage of James V to Mary of Guise produced Mary, Queen of Scots. So no Henry VII, then no MQOS and therefore no Scottish claim to the English crown. No Stuart dynasty, at least not south of the border down England way, and its name north of the border would continue to be Stewart.

What if
Mary I and Phillip of Spain had a Male Child

Friday, 26th February 1557. The day started crisp and frosty with bright sunshine. Elizabeth Tudor emerged from her rooms in the Tower of London escorted by her ladies in waiting to the tower green. Standing on a small dais were her welcoming party; the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Reginald Pole, and another man standing unobtrusively, for someone of his height, behind Pole. She knew that this was her executioner, a skilled swordsman from Calais. His sword some three feet long made of Toledo steel. The same man with the same sword who executed her mother 21 years ago, a final act of malice by her sister. Elizabeth removed the hood of her cloak to reveal the redness of her hair, accentuated by the morning sunshine, and prepared to meet her fate.

Mary, the first child of Henry VIII, and a fervent Catholic came to the throne of England after a turbulent struggle against the opportunistic champions of Jane Grey and other notable protestant leaders. The country she inherited was deeply protestant in name, but a significant number of the populace were still more comfortable with the more ritualistic observances of the Catholic Church. 20 years after the break from the Catholic church one could say that the “head” of England was protestant, but the “body” of England was not entirely in step.

Mary was crowned in 1553 and one of the first items on the political agenda was the succession. The Council and Parliament were keen that Mary should marry an Englishman as marrying a foreign prince could endanger the status of England as an independent nation. However, Mary was insistent that she would marry Phillip of Spain on the suggestion of his father Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who was a prominent Catholic. The marriage was allowed by parliament but only under the terms of “Queen Marys act” which gave Phillip the title of King with joint authority but only for Mary’s lifetime. Only his offspring could inherit the throne. The couple were duly married on 25 July 1554 at Winchester Cathedral.

Mary’s was always wary of her younger half-sister Elizabeth, a staunch Protestant. Until Mary produced an heir the succession would fall to Elizabeth on Mary’s death, something she feared as this would return the country back to the protestant path set out by her father and further enforced by her late brother Edward VI. On the announcement of Mary’s marriage to Phillip, insurrections broke out. Thomas Wyatt, a leading politician with a hatred of Spain, was executed as the leader of the rebellion. Elizabeth was implicated in the plot and imprisoned in the Tower of London for two months where she fervently protested her innocence. She was then put under house arrest at Woodstock Palace under the watchful eye of Mary.

Until Mary had a child Elizabeth was safe. If Elizabeth were executed, Mary Queen of Scots would be next in line to the English throne. Mary Queen of Scots was betrothed to the Dauphin of France and a French inspired coup to take over the throne was not in the interest of Phillip or his father Charles V, or even parliament.

Mary became pregnant in the autumn of 1554. On 17 April 1555, Elizabeth was recalled to court to attend the final stages of Mary's pregnancy. If Mary and her child died, Elizabeth would become queen. If, on the other hand, Mary gave birth to a healthy child, Elizabeth's chances of becoming queen would recede sharply. Mary gave birth to a healthy boy in May 1555. The boy was named Henry after his grandfather.

With the succession established, Elizabeth was no longer needed as a safeguard against Scottish and, more importantly, French claims to the throne. Elizabeth was returned to the Tower of London to remove her from public gaze as a figurehead for further protestant rebellion.

In early January 1557 Elizabeth was finally charged with treason through her involvement in the Wyatt rebellion and inevitably found guilty. On 26th February 1557 Elizabeth Tudor was executed in the grounds of the Tower of London and her body and head were interred under the chancel of the royal chapel of St Peter ad Vinucala joining that of her mother Anne Boleyn.

The strong Catholic bond between the now Catholic House of Tudor and the Hasburg dynasty was firmly cemented with the alliance of the English and Spanish thrones. The union of the houses of Tudor and Hasburg proved to be too powerful for the French house of Valois and the Protestant princes of Northern Europe. Protestantism withered over the years to become a minor religious movement in Europe. France remained a minor country of little political influence.

Phillip became king of Spain in 1556 and, with Mary, ruled Spain and England jointly for the next two years.

Mary died on 17 November 1558 leaving Phillip as the Regent for the three year old Henry IX until Henry came of age. On the death of Henry's father in 1598, Henry IX of England succeeded to the Spanish throne as Henry I, King of Spain, thus joining the two kingdoms for all time under one Catholic throne.

Tuesday 2nd July 1953. Cardinal Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, carefully placed St Edward's crown on the head of Queen Elizabeth The First of Spain and England.