

# Did Richard III kill the Two Princes?



King Edward IV, father of Edward V, brother of Richard III

**Truth alone is the daughter** of time. Now is the winter of our discontents made glorious summer by perceptions of Richard III.

History often mirrors fiction since both are concerned with notions about the truth and the reliability of interpretation or memory. Both illustrate the “Rashomon effect,” the situation in the 1950 Japanese film exploring the issue of

historical relativism and the objective search for truth. In the film, the same event, a murder, is described in significantly contradictory, equally plausible, ways by four different people all witnesses of the incident. The parties describe events in a contradictory way, reflecting subjective interpretation and a self-interest. It indicates the unreliability of witness testimony, perhaps self-serving, and the fallacy of memory, and the context of incomplete information and incompatible perspectives.

It is enticing to contemplate the Rashomon effect concerning subjective versions of historical events, of the unsolved mysteries and disappearances of people in history. Controversy still rages over the real nature of Emperor Nero, the supposed violin fiddler who murdered his own mother, the identity of Jack the Ripper; the assassin of Swedish prime minister Olaf Palme; the true burial ground somewhere in New Jersey of Jimmy Hoffa; the unidentified person in The Iron Mask in French prisons in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the fate of the Marie Celeste, the American merchant ship that was discovered adrift, with no crew and no lifeboat, in the Atlantic Ocean in December 1872; the historical myth that troops had fired on the public at the 1910 Tonypandy, Wales, Riot; the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770 when a group of nine British soldiers killed three people in a crowd of 300 or 400 who were abusing them; the death of actress Natalie Wood in the Pacific Ocean in November 1981; and the real killer of the wife of O.J. Simpson in Los Angeles in 1994.

In a poll in 2020 conducted by the BBC History Magazine, the crown for the greatest mystery in history was given to the disappearance or murder of the Princes in the Tower of London in 1483. The general belief was that the Duke of Gloucester, soon to be Richard III, murdered the two princes, Edward V, aged 12. and his brother Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, aged 9.

The basic facts are clear if complex. In 1483 King Edward IV died unexpectedly, leaving his brother Richard Duke of Gloucester, as Lord Protector. Edward's two sons were due to inherit the throne, but the marriage of their parents was declared invalid and the children were thus barred from getting the throne. Instead, the two boys were locked in the Tower, and never seen again, by their uncle who was crowned King Richard III at Westminster Abbey.

In 1485 Henry Tudor who had been in exile in Brittany and France invaded Britain with his French troops, army of 5,000 and flying the Welsh flag of the red dragon, fought and beat the force of 8,000 of King Richard at Bosworth field in Leicestershire. Richard was killed in the battle, the last king of England to die on the battlefield, the last king of the House of York, and the last of the Plantagenet dynasty. This battle ended the bloody dynastic Wars of the Roses over control of the British throne. Henry Tudor whose legal claim to the throne was weak, became Henry VII, king by "right of conquest," and united the two houses, the White Rose of York and the Red of Lancaster by marriage to the daughter of the former Queen Elizabeth.

The image of Richard III has largely been popularized by Shakespeare who portrays him as a ruthless villain, "one determined to prove a villain, "though one of wit and courage. Incorrect views have been passed on as fanciful history, the fabrication of Tudor propaganda and the writings of Thomas More and Holinshed's Chronicles. Starting with the 1951 crime novel, *The Daughter of Time*, by Josephine Tey, attempts have been made to refute the allegation Richard III was a murderer or he was a deformed hunchback, and to rehabilitate him as a ruler who was concerned with peace, stability, and order, and that he had blue eyes and fair hair.

The body of Richard III was buried without ceremony in a church in the Franciscan Greyfriars friary in Leicester which was later destroyed. After suggestions that the remains of the

body were found, disputes arose over how to rebury a king. Finally, the high court agreed that reinternment of the body should be in Leicester Cathedral.

The historian Philippa Langley headed a team in Leicester in August 2012 that was looking for Richard and uncovered a skeleton with spinal curvature under a car park on the site of a church of Greyfriars parish, and concluded it was with the DNA of remains of Richard III, a skeleton showing the person had suffered scoliosis of the spine which would have made one of his shoulders slightly higher than the other. It was identified as the result of radiocarbon dating, and comparison with the DNA of descendants of his sister, Anne.

No conclusive evidence of the bodies of the two princes has ever been found, though suggestions have been made. In 1674 two small skeletons were found in the Tower of London, and two others were found in 1789 in the chapel in Windsor Castle, but these have not been identified as remains of the princes.

In December 2021 Langley organized a research team, a Missing Princes Project, that concluded it had uncovered what it believed are clues to the survival of one of the princes, Edward who would have become King Edward V, in the village of Coldridge in Devon. The team followed a paper trail including medieval documents that led them to this small town Coldridge where the local church has royal Yorkish symbols carved in the walls.

For centuries, Richard III has been suspected, though never formally accused, of murdering the two boys to seize the throne for himself, though other suspects have been nominated: Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII and had a disputed claim to the throne; Henry himself; Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham; and Sir James Tyrrell the English knight who confessed to the murders. Now comes the assertion that the princes were never killed, and that at least one of them may have been allowed to live under a false name.

Researchers have found what they believe are the remains of Richard III. Headed by Philippa Langley the team in the Missing Princes Project is exploring what happened to the Princes, The new alleged discovery is that the former Queen, Elizabeth Woodville, mother of Edward , the heir to the throne, reached an agreement with King Richard to allow her 12 year old son Edward to leave the Tower, to travel south and live in a farm a secluded life under an alias "John Evans," in the rural village of Coldridge where he built a chantry at the local church.

These new allegations are reminiscent of the story of the Da Vinci code, in the book by Dan Brown published in 2003 presenting a series of clues about a conspiracy relating to the possibility of a secret marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and as byproduct that the Merovingian kings of France are descended from their offspring. Like the character in Brown's book, the Richard team followed a paper trail including secret symbols and medieval documents, one that led them to Coldridge. Evidence includes a rare portrait in the Coldridge church. This is claimed to be one of Edward, and is like an effigy of John Evans with a scar on his chin. This effigy is similar to a face in a stained glass window that depicts Edward V holding a royal crown. Were clues left in the church for future generations to find?

The debate on the fate of the two princes and the true nature of Richard III continues.