

The Princes in the Tower (WWWW)

TEXT 1:

Last seen alive in the autumn of 1483, WWWW have generally been presumed to have been murdered. But were they? Nobody really knows. On the death of Edward IV (1442-1483), King of England, in April 1483, his brother Richard became Lord Protector of the realm. The king was survived by his two young sons.

Far from being a nice, avuncular figure to his nephews, Uncle Richard had the juveniles housed in the Tower of the London and it soon became apparent that Richard wanted the throne for himself. Richard had Edward dethroned as illegitimate and had himself crowned king on 26 June 1483.

WWWW meanwhile were still in the Tower and before long rumours began to spread throughout England and then Europe that the youths were dead. Richard was undoubtedly ruthless – he had several opponents executed upon ascending the throne and was rumoured to have been involved in the deaths of Henry VI and his own brother George, who was executed by being drowned in a butt of wine – but would he have resorted to murdering his two young nephews?

A second theory is that Henry VII – the great progenitor of the Tudor royal dynasty and a talented king, nicknamed 'The Huckster King' for his shrewd handling of overseas trade deals, after his famous victory at Bosworth in 1485, was clearly determined that he and his descendants should possess the throne. Dispatching his enemies on the battlefield and with the executioner's axe was one thing, but was he capable of having two innocent children murdered in cold blood to secure power?

In 1674, builders at the Tower unearthed the skeletal remains of two people, 10ft below the foot of a staircase. These were declared to be the bones of the princes and were reinterred in Westminster Abbey a few years later, despite Tyrrell's confession to More that the bodies had been moved from there.

A controversial 1933 analysis of these remains was ultimately inconclusive, and the bones remain unidentified to this day.' So, what if the boys were never murdered at all?

One leading theory maintains that Richard left the Tower and survived into adulthood but that Edward died of ill-health in custody. Others have contended that WWWW were smuggled out and given new identities.

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TEXT 2:

Here we look at some of the main theories for what happened to WWWW : after the death of Edward IV in April 1483, the Duke of Buckingham, Henry Stafford (1455-1483), supported the Duke of Gloucester in his successful royal coup. By November King Richard had had him killed. He was attainted (executed and stripped of lands and titles) for his leading role in the failed 'Buckingham's Rebellion' of that autumn. What had made Henry jump ship? Perhaps Richard had in fact had WWWW killed and Henry, finding out about the horrendous crime, turned against Richard?

Or perhaps, as some have hypothesised, it was actually Henry who had had WWWW killed, unknown to Richard, and that Henry wanted WWWW out of the way. But, if this is true, for whom did he do this? For himself? He did have a claim to the throne. Or did he act in support of another powerful figure, such as his aunt, Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of the future king Henry VII?

A contemporary Portuguese source says that WWWW were in Buckingham's custody and that he was responsible for their deaths. If this is true, was he acting for or against Richard? Possibly both.

Some evidence suggests that Buckingham killed the princes in what he *thought* was an act favourable to Richard, but that this was the cause of their having fallen out. If Buckingham did in fact carry out the dreadful deed, it is thought highly unlikely by historians that he could have done so without Richard's knowledge.

Another theory is that Henry VII slew WWWW. Henry VII (1457-1509) was the great progenitor of the Tudor royal dynasty and a talented king, nicknamed 'The Huckster King' for his shrewd handling of overseas trade deals.

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It has never been proven that WWWW were murdered, or how they died and when, and their remains have never been conclusively located and identified.. It would certainly have been possible for one or both of the boys, had they somehow escaped the Tower, to live out their days in secret. Most of the public had probably never seen their faces, and as they grew up they would have been harder to recognise, especially in the provincial home of a sympathiser or even in the palace of a foreign ally. On the balance of probabilities, it seems that the evidence points to the man who's been the prime suspect all along: Richard III of England. DNA analysis of the remains at Westminster Abbey would undoubtedly tell us more, but permission to re-examine the contents of the urn has been consistently refused.

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