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## What Happened to the Grandsons and Great-grandsons of the House of York?

James H. Forse

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*Josephine Tey, in her famous murder mystery centering on Richard III, The Daughter of Time, asserts that Richard was not a murderous tyrant determined to eliminate any challengers to his throne; rather it was the aim of Henry VII and Henry VIII to eliminate most of the male descendants of Richard Duke of York. Do the fates of those male descendants actually demonstrate that such was the policy of the first two Tudor monarchs?*

Shakespeare's *Richard III* portrays a king diabolically evil and hideous to see. A hunchback, with a withered arm and a limp, Richard schemes to gain the throne of England, murdering anyone in his way, including his own brother George duke of Clarence and his young nephews, the sons of Edward IV, "the princes in The Tower." In Shakespeare's own day his play and its depiction of Richard became so pervasive that a seventeenth-century tour guide at the site of the Battle of Bosworth cried out: "A horse! a horse! he Burbage cry'ded"<sup>1</sup>—confusing the world of play with the actual events, and King Richard with Richard Burbage, the actor famed for his portrayal of the king.

Shakespeare's version still is the popular perception of King Richard III. However, Shakespeare did not create the character out of whole cloth. He simply combined accounts of Richard and the Wars of the Roses from various Tudor sources. Those sources treated the Wars as brought about by the ambition of Richard's father, Richard duke of York to seize the throne from the Lancastrian King Henry VI. The Tudors, according to Tudor propaganda, brought an end to 30 years of civil war between the Houses of York and Lancaster, merging the two families through Henry VII's marriage to Elizabeth of York, the eldest daughter of the Yorkist King Edward IV, the son of Duke Richard.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, as early as the seventeenth century Richard III had his defenders. He was rehabilitated in 1619 by Sir George Buck,

1 Nungezer, "Burbage, Richard," 77.

2 For Tudor historians and historiography see Fussner, *Tudor History and the Historians* and Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*.

Master of the Revels under James I. In the following century Horace Walpole, Whig politician and antiquarian, defended Richard in his *Historic Doubts* (1766), and in the twentieth century Richard was defended by the historian Clements Markham (1906), and the American scholar Paul Murray Kendall.<sup>3</sup> Richard's "cause" drew enough "fans" to create branches of the Richard III Society in the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia. Most of the extensive historical fiction dealing with Richard III also is sympathetic. The many news stories detailing the discovery of Richard's remains beneath a parking lot in Leicester in 2012, and the royal funeral accompanying his reinternment in Leicester Cathedral on 26 March 2015 reveal the widespread interest still surrounding Richard III.<sup>4</sup>

No doubt Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* has something to do with the growth of the Richard III Society, as well as more sympathetic depictions of Richard III. Her famous murder mystery, centered on a hospital-bound Scotland Yard Inspector Grant investigating the character of Richard III, has brought the issue to a far larger audience than those who read history books. The genre of "murder mystery" allows her to use Inspector Grant's research and conclusions to put forth Markham's arguments exonerating Richard from several of his supposed murders (including the princes in The Tower). Tey also points out the tendency of historians to favor "winners," in this case the Tudors. Pointing out that historians have criticized Richard for killing those threatening his reign, she notes that those same historians praise the Tudors for similar actions. Tey quotes from a school history book: "It was the settled and considered policy of the Tudors to rid themselves of all rivals to the throne, more especially those heirs of York who remained alive on the succession of Henry VII. In this they were successful, although it was left to Henry VIII to get rid of the last of them."<sup>5</sup> Since Tey has argued so successfully to rehabilitate Richard III, has she

3 See Buck, *Richard the Third*; Walpole, *Historic Doubts* (in Kendall, *Great Debate*); Markham, *Richard III*; and Kendall, *Richard III*.

4 See the following web sites: <http://www.richardiii.net> (United Kingdom, accessed 13 April 2016), <http://www.r3.org> (United States, accessed 13 April 2016), <http://www.r3.org> (Australia, accessed 13 April 2016). For examples of historical fiction that center on Richard III see <http://www.goodreads.com/group/bookshelf/12605-richard-iii?shelf=historical-fiction> (accessed 30 April 2016).

5 Tey, *The Daughter of Time*, 185-86.

perhaps overly blackened the reputations of Henry VII and Henry VIII? Do the fates of male descendants of Richard Duke of York actually demonstrate that such was the policy of the first two Tudor monarchs?

Eight (perhaps ten) grandsons of Richard Duke of York were alive in 1485 when Richard III was killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field and Henry VII Tudor became king of England. Two grandsons were the illegitimate sons of Edward IV, Arthur Plantagenet, and of Richard III, John of Gloucester. A third grandson was the young Edward earl of Warwick, the legitimate son of George duke of Clarence, brother of Richard and Edward IV. The five remaining grandsons were John, Edmund, Richard, Humphrey, and William de la Pole, the sons of Richard of York's daughter Elizabeth.

“Perhaps ten” refers to the mystery surrounding “the princes in The Tower,” Edward IV's legitimate sons, thirteen-year-old Edward prince of Wales and his ten-year-old brother Richard duke of York. The two were lodged in The Tower in June 1483, and bastardized by an act of parliament, which bestowed the crown on their uncle, Richard III. After the summer of 1483, there are no recorded sightings of the princes. Most scholars assume they probably were killed by order of Richard III.<sup>6</sup> A few, like Clements Markham, from whom Tey takes much of her information, believe they survived into the reign of Henry VII. Markham opines that it was Henry who dispatched the princes because once he had seen to the repeal of the parliamentary act of 1483 bastardizing the children of Edward IV (to legitimize his intended bride Edward's daughter Elizabeth) their continued existence would be a dire threat to his title. S. B. Chrimes surmises that if still alive after Bosworth, the princes would not have survived long.<sup>7</sup>

Within the first five years of Henry's reign he faced two pretenders—Lambert Simnel, who claimed to be the earl of Warwick

6 See Ross, *Richard III*, 96-104.

7 Markham, *Richard III*, 169, 236-37, 254, 269-70; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 72.

(the ten-year-old son of the duke of Clarence), and Perkin Warbeck, who claimed to be Richard duke of York, the youngest son of Edward IV. Both youths gained some support from Edward IV's sister, Margaret Duchess of Burgundy, and the kings of France and Scotland, the duke of Brittany, and the Emperor Maximilian. Though Henry's court "historian" Bernard André seems to dismiss these two pretenders as of no threat to Henry's reign, the fact that almost one-fourth of André's unfinished *Life of Henry VII* is devoted to these two episodes indicates that Henry took these threats seriously.<sup>8</sup>

In 1487 the ten-year-old (probably) Simnel was crowned king of England in Dublin and landed in England with an army comprised of discontented Irish and English nobles, led by John de la Pole earl of Lincoln, and 2000 German mercenaries. The army was defeated at Stoke by Henry's forces; the earl of Lincoln was killed in battle; Simnel was captured and set to work as a spit-turner in Henry's kitchens, later becoming one of Henry's falconers.<sup>9</sup>

Perkin Warbeck put forth his claim to be Richard duke of York in 1491. Though he never was able to put together a force as large as Simnel's, he was received in the courts of Burgundy, France, and Scotland as "Richard IV." The king of Scotland arranged his marriage to one of his own kinswomen. Even Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain—staunch supporters of Henry VII, having betrothed their daughter Catherine to Henry's heir Prince Arthur—hedged their bets by referring to Perkin as the "so-called Duke of York." Perkin's story was that his older brother Edward (V) had been killed, but that because of Perkin's tender age he was spared and spirited across the Channel to Flanders. He seemed to know intimate details about the court of Edward IV, and according to some resembled his purported father. André writes that Perkin was "brought up in England by Edward (Brampton), a former Jew, later baptized by King Edward IV." That upbringing in Edward's court, so André wrote, is where Perkin learned "everything about the times of Edward the Fourth," and "the names of all the king's close friends and servants" and "details about places, times and individuals."<sup>10</sup>

8 Hobbins, *Bernard André.*, xxxvii, xxxviii; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 69-73.

9 See Gordon Smith, "Lambert Simnel and the King from Dublin," *The Ricardian*, X (1996), 498-536 argues that the person crowned in Dublin actually was Edward IV's oldest son, Edward V, who was killed at Stoke, and Simnel was substituted for him to make claims for the legitimacy of the "King from Dublin" look ludicrous.

10 Hobbins, *Bernard André.*, 60, 61.

André's description of Perkin's origins does not appear in the version of Perkin's origins that became the "official" story line after he was captured in 1497. In that narrative, before he was hanged, Perkin confessed that he was born to a Flemish family, and later was taught English, (*twice*, once on the Continent and again in Ireland), and details of Edward's court by those using him as a pretender.<sup>11</sup> Probably André's version of Perkin being raised in Edward's court was seen as dangerous, suggesting to disgruntled Yorkists that he might actually be Richard of York. Sir William Stanley, brother to Thomas Earl of Derby, who was stepfather to Henry, was executed in 1495 for treason, purportedly for saying that if Perkin were Richard of York he would not raise his hand against him.<sup>12</sup> Besides, Henry's aim was to make Perkin's claim look totally ludicrous. (It is interesting no pretender claimed to be Richard of York's elder brother Edward V. It seems that it was generally accepted that he was dead.)

Historians generally accept that Simnel was an imposter, since Henry VII held the young Earl of Warwick in The Tower and produced him to prove the imposture. Some, however, suggest that Perkin Warbeck really was what he claimed to be—Edward IV's younger son, Richard duke of York. Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard III* notes that after he first appeared many high and low-born in England believed Perkin's story.<sup>13</sup> In 1619, in his *History of Richard the Third*, not only did Sir George Buck believe the two princes survived into the reign of Henry VII, he asserted Perkin Warbeck was Richard of York.<sup>14</sup> Buck's great-grandfather, Sir John Buck, was executed by Henry after the Battle of Bosworth for fighting for Richard III, and the Buck family had close ties to the Howard dukes of Norfolk.<sup>15</sup> As such Buck may have had what we call "inside

11 Hobbins, *Bernard André*, 60, 61. Wroe, *The Perfect Prince*, 361-420. For a briefer account of these pretenders see Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 69-93.

12 Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 85.

13 Kendall, ed., *Thomas More's History of Richard III*, in *The Great Debate*, 147-48. See also Smith, "Lambert Simnel," 498-536.

14 Buck, *Richard the Third*, xii-xiii, 139-40, 159-61.

15 Buck, *Richard III*, Introduction, xii-xiii.

information” about matters at the Tudor courts. Horace Walpole’s *Historic Doubts* (1768) argues that Perkin truly was Richard, noting that among several other inconsistencies in Henry’s “official” version, the absurdity that Perkin had to be taught English twice.<sup>16</sup> D. M. Kleyn’s *Richard of England* (1990) asserts Perkin was Richard of York. Anne Wroe’s recent *The Perfect Prince* (2003) exhaustively examines most of the sources, English and Continental, for the Warbeck episode. From that examination Wroe concludes it seems impossible to determine conclusively whether he was, or was not, Richard of York.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, given the disappearance of the princes in The Tower, after Richard’s death at Bosworth in 1485, the only legitimate paternal descendant of the House of York was ten-year-old Edward earl of Warwick, the son of George duke of Clarence. In June 1485, as rumors of Henry Tudor’s invasion surfaced, Richard III had sent Warwick (and possibly Richard’s own bastard son John, and Edward’s bastard son Arthur) north to Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire.<sup>18</sup> After his victory at Bosworth, Henry Tudor immediately took steps to secure young Warwick’s person. He was brought back to London kept in what we might call “protective custody” in The Tower.

It is probable that Henry also secured the persons of Richard’s and Edward’s bastard sons. Information about John of Gloucester and Arthur Plantagenet is sparse; even their respective ages in 1485 are uncertain. Based on a few items concerning them in sources, “guesstimates” put John’s and Arthur’s ages somewhere between 15 and 20. Their whereabouts before and after 1485 also are uncertain, but most likely after Bosworth both were kept in or

16 Kendall, *Great Debate*, 209-15, 237-38.

17 D. M. Kleyn, *Richard of England* (Oxford: Kensal Press, 1990), *passim*. Anne Wroe, *The Perfect Prince* (Random House, 2003), *passim*. Though he does not claim that Warbeck was Richard of York, David Baldwin’s *The Lost Prince*, (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2007), *passim* also demonstrates how more recent histories suggest the possible survival of young Richard of York into the Tudor era. Baldwin explores the possibility that a bricklayer called Richard Plantagenet, who was buried in 1550 at Eastwell, Kent, *could* have been Richard of York. In particular Baldwin stresses the relative silence in English sources about the fates of the sons of Edward IV.

18 Kendall, *Richard III*, 400.

near Henry's court. John received a pension of £20 per annum in 1486. In 1501 Arthur officially became a member of the household of Queen Elizabeth of York, Arthur's half-sister. In 1509 he was named a squire of the bodyguard of the young prince of Wales, Henry. Despite their age differences, Arthur became a close friend of Henry. In 1523 he was created viscount Lisle.<sup>19</sup>

The maternally descended grandsons of Richard of York were the five de la Pole brothers, sons of Richard of York's daughter Elizabeth and John de la Pole (Sr.), earl of Suffolk. Most were youths: Edmund, aged 14, Humphrey, aged 11, William, aged 7, and Richard, aged 5. Only John (Jr.), earl of Lincoln, aged 24, was an adult in 1485. He may have been named Richard's heir after the death of Richard's legitimate son Edward in 1484.<sup>20</sup> Lincoln was part of Richard's army at Bosworth, and survived the battle, though Henry's proclamation lists him as a casualty. He made his peace with Henry. Lincoln is listed in Henry's coronation procession, and present at a Privy Council meeting in February 1487.<sup>21</sup>

Henry may have been practicing the old adage: "keep your friends close and your enemies closer," but in these first two years of his reign he seems to have had no intentions to kill off the male descendants of Richard of York. In fact, the first fatality amongst those descendants might be viewed as "self-inflicted." By March 1487 Lincoln had become deeply involved in the Lambert Simnel conspiracy. As noted above, Lincoln was killed at the Battle of Stoke. Hence his death was only indirectly at Henry's hands, and only after he had risen up on open rebellion. The pretender Simnel, was treated leniently. There were no wholesale executions of rebels, and Irish lords who supported Simnel were pardoned after making oaths of allegiance to Henry. Nor did Henry take any measures against the rest of the de la Pole brothers. In fact, Henry made Edmund, the

19 <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/back-to-basics-for-newcomers/bastards-of-richard-iii/> (Accessed 19 May 2015). Penn, *The Winter King*, 101, 113; Baldwin, *The Lost Prince*, 131.

20 Kendall, *Richard III*, 349-50; Penn, *Winter King*, 22.

21 "Proclamation of Henry Tudor, 22-3 August 1485," 3; Ross, *Richard III*, 225; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 51, 59, 76. *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLV, 399-400.

eldest surviving brother, a knight of the Garter in 1496, and earl of Suffolk in 1498.<sup>22</sup>

In 1490 Henry faced yet another “pretender” whom history calls Perkin Warbeck. As mentioned above, probably we will never know if he were Richard of York, the legitimate younger son of Edward IV. We do know that he was a political and diplomatic embarrassment to Henry. Crowned heads of Europe at one time or another recognized Perkin’s claim to be rightful king of England. His two attempts to overthrow Henry by force of arms, 1495 and 1497, failed, and he and his wife were captured in the 1497. Both were taken to Henry’s court in London. As with the Simnel supporters, the Cornishmen who supported Warbeck were treated fairly leniently. Ringleaders were executed, but most were sent home after paying stiff fines. Irish lords who had voiced support for Warbeck were given a general pardon.

According to Henry’s historians, in 1499 after about 18 months in “house arrest” at Henry’s court, Perkin tried to escape, and in July was imprisoned in The Tower near the quarters of the earl of Warwick. In August, again according to Henry’s historians, the two prisoners entered into a plot to escape The Tower. As a result, both were accused of treason and executed in November. What seems to have been the chief motive in disposing of Warwick and Perkin was pressure from Ferdinand and Isabella. The Spanish monarchs refused to send their daughter to England until Henry could assure them that there would be no more threats to his rule.<sup>23</sup> The deaths of Warwick and Perkin seems to have satisfied them; in 1501 Catherine of Aragon was sent to England to marry Prince Arthur.

Before 1499 Henry also may have disposed of John of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of Richard III. Some sources suggest some sort of correspondence between John and some Irish lords. If true, given Henry’s experiences with Ireland and Simnel and Perkin, he certainly might have taken action against this Yorkist grandson.

22 Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 69-79; Penn, *Winter King*, 22-24; *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLVI, 21-22.

23 Penn, *Winter King*, 24-39; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 69-73, 79, 81-94, 117, 269. Wroe, *Perfect Prince*, 473-75.

John disappears in the sources after 1491. Sir George Buck writes that Henry imprisoned him and put to him death.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, it was the executions of Warwick and Perkin that led the Spanish ambassador, Rodrigo De Puebla, to assure Ferdinand and Isabella that now there was “not a drop of doubtful royal blood” in England.<sup>25</sup>

Puebla may have spoken too soon. In August 1499 Edmund de la Pole, grandson of Richard of York through his mother Elizabeth, and younger brother of John earl of Lincoln (killed at Stoke) fled to Flanders. He was coaxed back by Henry VII, but in 1501 again fled to the Continent along with his brother Richard, seeking support from Maxmilian of Austria for his claim to the English throne.<sup>26</sup> Henry certainly viewed this as a serious challenge to his reign and dynasty. In 1502 he committed the last de la Pole brother still in England, William, to The Tower, where he remained until his death in 1539. He paid Maxmilian £10,000 on condition of Maxmilian’s promise not to support the claims of any English rebels, and in 1504 Henry nullified most restrictions on the Hanseatic League’s trade in England. Most likely this was to prevent the Hanse from giving Edmund any support. Henry finally did get possession of Edmund. Since 1504 Edmund had been in the Low Countries. In 1506 Edmund was surrendered to Henry, upon receiving Henry’s promise that he would not be executed. Edmund was committed to The Tower; he still remained there at Henry’s death in 1509.<sup>27</sup>

One side-event of the de la Pole defection was the execution in 1502 of Sir James Tyrell, the captain of Calais. Tyrell was executed for treason, for allowing Edmund and Richard de la Pole to shelter in Calais on their way to Austria. It seems, Henry informed some at court that before his execution, Tyrell also confessed to murdering the princes in The Tower under orders from Richard III. Obviously Henry sought to quash any further thought that a legitimate son of Edward IV still survived.<sup>28</sup>

24 Buck, *Richard III*, 254-55.

25 Penn, *Winter King*, 39.

26 *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLVI, 21-23; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 92-94.

27 *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLVI, 22. Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 236.

28 Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 93.

Henry VII does not seem to have been excessively blood-thirsty. He did not execute Lambert Simnel; indeed Simnel was taken into the king's household and ended up in the respectable position of king's falconer. Perkin Warbeck also was not summarily executed. After "confessing" he was not Richard of York he was housed at court for the next 18 months. Edmund and William de la Pole were imprisoned in The Tower, but not executed. Their elder brother, John, died fighting against Henry at Stoke, but he and his younger brothers actually received favor at Henry's court until they turned against him.

Thus Henry's personal role in the deaths of Yorkist descendants during his reign totals only one, Edward earl of Warwick (or perhaps two if Perkin Warbeck were Richard of York), and at most five (if Henry ordered the deaths of the princes in The Tower and John of Gloucester). He was lenient with the supporters of Simnel and Perkin. To be sure, a few ringleaders were executed, and hefty fines levied on commoners who rose up in their favor, but Henry meted out no punishments like the "superfluous cruelty," as A. F. Pollard puts it, inflicted by Henry VIII upon those involved in the so-called Pilgrimage of Grace.<sup>29</sup> Given these facts it seems it was not "the settled and considered policy" of Henry VII to extinguish the heirs of the House of York.

However, the second part of Tey's quotation, "it was left to Henry VIII to get rid of the last of them," does have merit. Henry VIII does seem to have been "proactive" in eliminating his York-descended cousins. It was Henry VIII who oversaw the demise of the de la Poles, grandsons of Richard of York by his daughter Elizabeth. On 30 April 1513 Edmund, who had been in The Tower since 1506, was executed, apparently without trial. Hall's *Chronicles* suggests that Edmund's execution was a piece of deathbed advice Henry VII gave his son. Yet if so, why did Henry VIII wait four years to carry out his father's advice? Two other reasons seem more likely. The first is that Edmund's brother, Richard de la Pole, was fighting with

29 Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 286. See also Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds*, 128-29.

the French, then at war with England.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps more significant was that Henry's queen was pregnant. This was her third pregnancy; in 1510 she gave birth to a stillborn daughter, and in 1511 she gave birth to a son, but he died within a month. Unlike his father, who had a strapping young heir in the person of the future Henry VIII and two healthy daughters, the now reigning Henry VIII had no heirs of his body.<sup>31</sup>

Technically that made Edmund de la Pole Henry's presumptive heir. During his time on the Continent, Edmund already had claimed his right to the throne was superior to that of Henry VII (and by implication superior to that of Henry VIII). And, since Henry was planning to campaign personally in France, leaving his pregnant queen as regent,<sup>32</sup> he may well have believed that it was risky to leave Edmund alive. Edmund's only issue was a daughter who was a nun. William de la Pole, who had been imprisoned in 1502, was not killed, but remained in custody until he died in 1539. Humphrey de la Pole, died in 1513; Richard de la Pole died on the Continent in 1525, fighting in the army of King Francis I at the Battle of Pavia. Humphrey, Richard, and William had issue.<sup>33</sup> Their deaths took care of all the legitimate grandsons of Richard of York.

In 1521 Henry executed Edward Stafford duke of Buckingham. Stafford does not appear to have plotted against the king, but he was the descendant of Thomas of Woodstock, youngest son of Edward III. At that time Henry's only legitimate heir was his daughter Mary, just three years old, and Queen Catherine's last pregnancy in 1518 had ended in a daughter who lived only a few days after birth. Perhaps it was Henry's lack of legitimate heirs, especially males, that led Henry to think that Buckingham might be plotting to seize the throne. Even in Henry VII's time Buckingham's lineage had some "saying that he was a noble man and woldbe a ryll ruler." Whatever

30 *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLVI, 21-23.

31 Starkey, *Six Wives*, 119-23.

32 Starkey, *Six Wives*, 137.

33 *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLVI, 22, 23, 46; Starkey, *Six Wives*, 160.

Henry's reasons, Buckingham's death certainly served to give young Princess Mary a safer position as heir presumptive.

Yet there still remained legitimate great-grandsons of Richard of York. There were Henry's three Pole cousins (not to be confused with the de la Poles), the sons of Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury who was the daughter of George duke of Clarence, and Henry's Courtenay cousin, Henry marquess of Exeter, son of Edward IV's daughter Catherine.

Between 1538 and 1541 Henry dispatched most of the great-grandsons of Richard of York. One, Reginald Pole, was a cleric, and out of reach, having lived on the Continent since 1531. Reginald broke with Henry over "The King's Great Matter," opposing Henry's break with Rome and marriage to Anne Boleyn. His mother and brothers also, privately, opposed the break. Henry was incensed when Reginald was made cardinal in 1538. Shortly after, Reginald's brothers in England—Sir Geoffrey and Henry baron Montague—were arrested, along with Henry's eleven year-old son and Geoffrey's nine year-old son. Geoffrey was pardoned and released sometime soon after his brother Henry was executed in 1538, but Henry's young son remained in The Tower until his death in 1542 (rumored to have been starved to death), and Geoffrey's son also remained in The Tower until he was released in 1552.<sup>34</sup>

Hoping to lure Reginald back to England, in 1540 Henry arrested his seventy year-old mother Margaret countess of Salisbury. Failing to achieve that goal, Henry in revenge had his mother beheaded in 1541. Fearing now for his own life, Geoffrey Pole fled to the Continent. Like his brother Reginald, Geoffrey remained there until the reign of Queen Mary.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time Henry moved against his Yorkist Courtenay cousin, descended from Catherine, the youngest daughter of

<sup>34</sup> *DNB*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., v. XVI 24-26.

<sup>35</sup> *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XLVI, 19, 24-26, 29, 36-49.

Edward IV. Henry marquess of Exeter and his son Edward were arrested and housed in The Tower. The marquess was accused of plotting an uprising from Cornwall and Devon to restore the “Old Religion.” Henry Courtenay, like Henry Pole, was executed in 1538; his young son Edward remained confined to The Tower until the accession of Queen Mary.<sup>36</sup> Even Henry’s old friend, Arthur Plantagenet (Edward IV’s illegitimate son) was arrested in 1540 on suspicion of treason, and sent to The Tower. He died there in 1542.<sup>37</sup> By then Henry had eliminated almost all male descendants of the House of York save himself and his son Prince Edward.

What may have precipitated this rapid roundup and elimination of the male descendants of Duke Richard of York in 1538? The years 1536 and 1537 were tumultuous ones for Henry VIII. In May 1536 his marriage to Anne Boleyn was annulled, and Anne was executed for treason on 19 May; adultery and incest were purported to be her treasonable acts. Those actions bastardized his three-year-old daughter Elizabeth, leaving Henry now with three offspring, all of them royal, but all of them also bastards—the Ladies Mary and Elizabeth, and Henry Fitzroy duke of Richmond. Fitzroy, however, died in July 1536,<sup>38</sup> leaving only Henry’s two bastardized daughters as his potential successors. Henry hoped that his new wife, Jane Seymour, would present him with a legitimate, male heir.<sup>39</sup>

These events were court intrigues. A much more serious challenge to Henry was the widespread unrest in the North. In October of 1536, armed bands from Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Durham, Cumberland, Northumberland, and Westmorland comprised of commons, gentry, and even some lords advanced south. The movement came to be dubbed the “Pilgrimage of Grace.” This was grass-roots reaction to Henry’s religious reforms, especially the dissolution of the monasteries. By 1536 “unintended consequences” of that dissolution had surfaced. Traditionally, monasteries had been one of the

36 *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XII, 335-36; Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 300.

37 *DNB*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., v. IV, 1261-65.

38 Murphy, *The Bastard Prince*, 174.

39 Starkey, *Six Wives*, 569-83, 590-92.

chief sources of poor relief. Their dissolution coincided with two years of famine, in effect removing what we today would call the “safety-net” for the poor. The “pilgrims” demanded the restoration of the monasteries, and the removal of the king’s ministers Cromwell and Audley, and of bishops Cramner, Saxton, and Helsey—all were active in promoting Protestant reforms. The movement was so large and strong that Henry needed to “negotiate” to gain time to raise troops and defuse the situation. He invited one of the movement’s leaders, Robert Aske, to the court’s Christmas celebrations, and pretended to act upon the “pilgrims” demands. Most of the “pilgrims” were assuaged, but some doubted the king’s sincerity, and renewed armed rebellion in February 1537. Henry now had his excuse to move against the largely disbanded “pilgrims.” Their leaders were seized and executed, as were many of the commons. Henry’s forces brutally mopped up most of the resistance by May, but in the autumn new rumors surfaced about plans for uprisings in Cornwall and other counties in the southwest.<sup>40</sup>

The bright spot for Henry was the birth of a healthy son on 12 October 1537, who was christened Edward three days later. Along with official proclamations in October announcing the birth of Henry’s legitimate, male heir, Henry also seems to have used entertainers to advertise the status of the infant Prince Edward just as he had done for Princess Mary, as had his grandfather, Edward IV, and his father done for their heirs. *The Records of Early English Drama* reveal appearances in the provinces of the infant Prince Edward’s minstrels almost immediately after his birth.<sup>41</sup> His mother Jane Seymour, however, died 9 days after the christening. For some time after her death Henry seemed uninterested in a hurried search for a new queen.<sup>42</sup>

Taken together these events offer probable reasons for Henry’s taking action against the male descendants of the House of York. His

40 Starkey, *Six Wives*, 602-08; Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 128-29. Also see: Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 397; Fideler, “Poverty, Policy and Providence,” 205-08.

41 Forse, “Advertising Status,” 69-75.

42 Starkey, *Six Wives*, 605-08, 611.

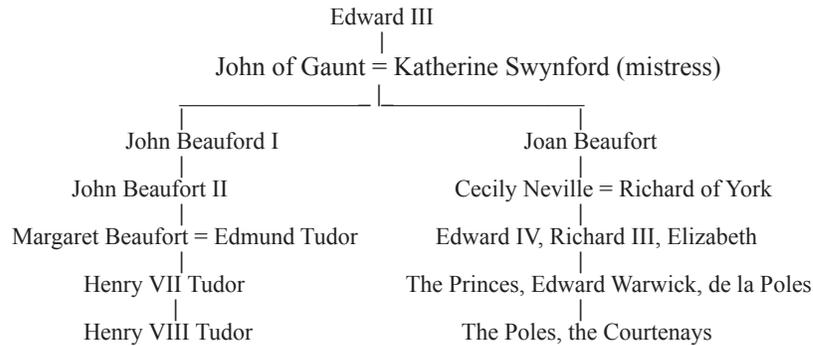
Pole cousins were known to be Catholic adherents. One, Reginald Pole, was a cardinal of the Church and out of reach on the Continent. Yet, his mother and brothers in England maintained communications with him. Though his cousin Henry Courtenay, marquess of Exeter, supported Henry's break with Rome and annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon,<sup>43</sup> Courtenay's wife Gertrude kept in contact with Catherine of Aragon until her death in 1536, and with the Nun of Kent, Elizabeth Barton, who purported to have divine revelations condemning Henry's break with Rome and his religious reforms. She was executed for treason in 1534.

Furthermore, rumors from Cornwall suggested there were demands that Henry name Henry Courtenay as his successor.<sup>44</sup> Henry had just put down a serious rebellion now termed "The Pilgrimage of Grace," when rumors arose of another such uprising in the southwest. Because of their connections to traditional Catholicism, Henry may have thought that his Pole and Courtenay cousins might become the foci of an attempt to depose him. The birth of his son Edward in November 1537 probably spurred Henry in 1538 to remove potential threats to himself and his heir. The genealogy below shows that Cecily Neville, whose mother Joan Beaufort, daughter of John of Gaunt, gave the progeny of Richard of York a claim to the Beaufort-Lancastrian claim to the throne as good, or better, than that of the Tudors. Ironically, Richard III, a great-grandson of John of Gaunt, actually had a better Beaufort-Lancastrian claim to the English throne than did Gaunt's great great-grandson Henry VII. Given the interest in genealogy and its use to assert "legitimacy," Henry VIII no doubt knew that fact.

43 Pollard, *Henry VIII*, 244.

44 *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. III, 345-46; *DNB*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., v. XII, 334-46, *DNB*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., v. I, 1265-66.

**Descent of the House of Lancaster: Beaufort Descendants of John of Gaunt**



Was it then “the settled and considered policy of the Tudors to rid themselves of all rivals to the throne, especially those heirs of York who remained alive on the succession of Henry VII?” As detailed above, such does not seem to be a policy of Henry VII. Yet, given the fragility of Henry VIII’s line--one legitimate son and two illegitimate (by Church of England law) daughters--it seems logical that Henry VIII would seek to eliminate potential challengers. Yet his actions do not look like “considered and settled policy,” Instead Henry seems to eliminated Yorkist grandsons and great-grandsons only when he perceived serious threats to himself and to his dynasty.

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