VINTAGE

THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER

ALISON WEIR

Contents

About the Author

Alison Weir was born in London and now resides in Surrey. Before becoming a published author in 1989, she was a civil servant, then a housewife and mother. From 1991 to 1997, whilst researching and writing books, she ran a school for children with learning difficulties before taking up writing full-time. Her non-fiction books include *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Lancaster and York*, *Children of England*, *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Henry VIII: King and Court*, *Isabella* and, most recently, *The Lady in the Tower*. She is also the author of three best-selling novels, *Innocent Traitor*, *The Lady Elizabeth* and *The Captive Queen*.

ALSO BY ALISON WEIR

Non-fiction

Britain's Royal Families: The Complete Genealogy

The Six Wives of Henry VIII

The Princes in the Tower

Lancaster and York: The Wars of the Roses

Children of England: The Heirs of King Henry VIII 1547–1558

Elizabeth the Queen

Eleanor of Aquitaine

Henry VIII: King and Court

Mary Queen of Scots and the Murder of Lord Darnley

Isabella: She Wolf of France, Queen of England

The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn

Fiction

Innocent Traitor

The Lady Elizabeth

The Captive Queen

List of Illustrations

the Queen)

13 Engraving after a painting of the burial of the Princes by James Northcote. (Guildhall Library, Corporation of London)

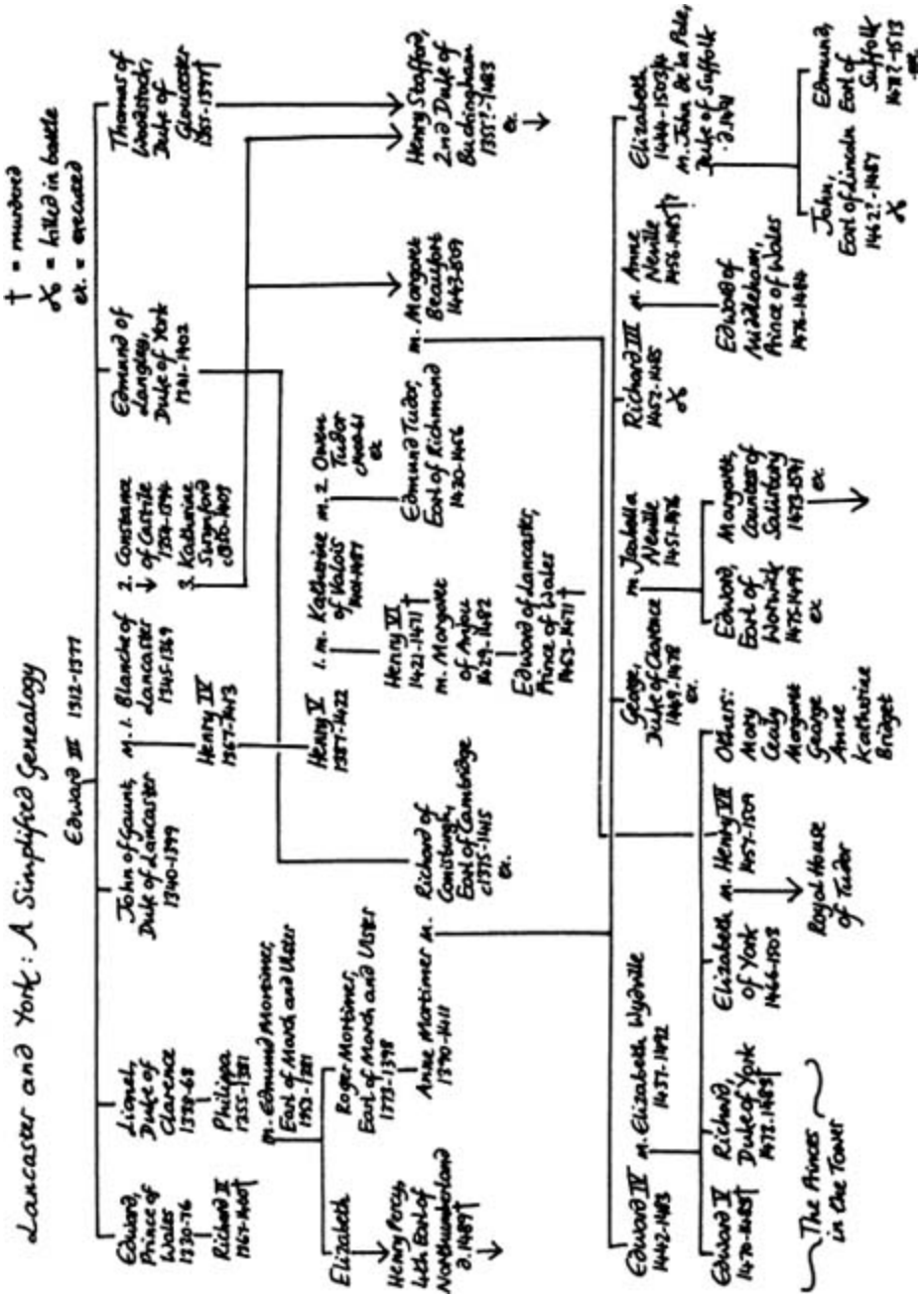
14 Ruins of the Minoresses' Convent at Aldgate. (By permission of the British Library)

15 Photographs of the remains taken at the time of their exhumation in 1933.

16 The urn in which the bones repose. (Courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster)

17 The skull of Anne Mowbray. (Hulton Picture Co.)

Genealogical Table: Lancaster and York



This book is dedicated to
my cousin,
Christine Armour,
and in loving memory of
Joan Barbara Armour

Alison Weir

THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

‘ . . . look back with me unto the Tower. –
Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes,
Whom envy hath immured within your walls!
Rough cradle for such little, pretty ones!
Rude, ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow
For tender princes . . .’

Richard III, Act IV, Scene I

‘Ah me, I see the ruin of my House!
The tiger now hath seiz’d the gentle hind;
Insulting tyranny begins to jet
Upon the innocent and aweless throne:-
Welcome destruction, blood and massacre!
I see, as in a map, the end of all.’

Richard III, Act II, Scene IV

Author's Preface

This is a book about the deaths, in tragic circumstances, of two children. It is a tale so rich in drama, intrigue, treason, plots, counterplots, judicial violence, scandal and infanticide, that for more than five centuries it has been recounted and re-interpreted in different ways by dozens of writers. And it is easy to see why: it is a mystery, a moral tale, and – above all – a gripping story. More compellingly, it is the story of a crime that has never been satisfactorily solved.

There are few people who have not heard of the Princes in the Tower, just as there are few people who do not relish a good murder or mystery story. In the case of the Princes, we have an especially fascinating mystery, not only because they were royal victims who lived in a particularly colourful age, nor because there are plenty of clues as to their fate, but because speculation as to what happened to them has provoked controversy for so many hundreds of years. Even today, the battle still rages between those who believe that the Princes were murdered by their uncle, Richard III, and the revisionists, who have forwarded several attractive theories to the contrary.

It has to be said, at the outset, that it is unlikely that the truth of the matter will ever be confirmed by better evidence than we already have. We are talking about a murder that was committed in the strictest secrecy half a millennium ago in a period for which sources are scanty and often evasive. It is true that documents occasionally come to light which add yet another tiny piece to this extremely complex jigsaw-puzzle, but a historian can rarely hope to produce, in such a case, the kind of evidence that would

convince a modern court of law of the identity of the murderer. The historian's job is to weigh the evidence available, however slender and circumstantial, and then – on a balance of probabilities – reconstruct what probably happened. Thus are history books written, and we should not hope for anything better.

For three centuries and more, the revisionist view of Richard III has prevailed, and in recent years the efforts of the Richard III Society have ensured that textbooks are now being cautiously rewritten to present a kinder view of the last Plantagenet king. Yet since the discovery in 1934 of Dominic Mancini's contemporary account of Richard III's usurpation, which corroborated many details in the *Croyland Chronicle* and other contemporary works hostile to Richard, the majority of serious historians have rejected the revisionist view and stressed the huge amount of circumstantial and other evidence against Richard III.

I have therefore tried to approach this book with as open a mind as possible. I have studied all the contemporary works on the subject, as well as dozens of modern ones, and I have collated all the evidence available. I am now confident that the solution to the mystery presented here is the only plausible one. In my research, I have analysed every sentence written about the disappearance of the Princes in original sources, even rearranging information into its correct chronological sequence, and I have found – somewhat to my surprise – that it is indeed possible to reconstruct the whole chain of events leading up to the murder of the Princes, and to show, within the constraints mentioned above, how, when, where, and by whose order, they died. The truth of the matter is there in the sources, for those who look carefully enough. We are dealing here with facts, not just speculation or theories, which I have tried very hard to avoid.

I realise, of course, that my claims are highly contentious, but I am confident that they can be substantiated by good

evidence, as I will demonstrate in the text. Thus I hope to entertain, inform, and convince all those who read this book.

Alison Weir

1
Richard III and the Chroniclers

MODERN WRITERS ON the subject of the Princes in the Tower have tended to fall into two categories: those who believe Richard III guilty of the murder of the Princes but are afraid to commit themselves to any confident conclusions, and those who would like to see Richard more or less canonised. It is time therefore for the evidence to be re-evaluated and the events surrounding the disappearance of the Princes in 1483 to be reconstructed with greater confidence, because there does exist a considerable amount of contemporary evidence for a solution to this mystery.

It has been said by several writers that both the traditionalist and revisionist views of Richard III fit the known facts, but this is not the case: there are many blind alleys in this mystery, and many authors who have made the mistake of wandering up them. There also exist a great number of misconceptions about Richard III and the Princes, and because the subject still provokes furious debate, one gains the impression that to venture a firm view on the matter is to step into a minefield. However, this book was not written with the intention of fuelling the controversy, but because there is a need for the subject to be dealt with from an objective viewpoint based on common sense and sound research.

The subject of the Princes in the Tower cannot be studied without first evaluating the reliability of the few surviving original sources – virtually all we have to rely on. The late fifteenth century is a poorly documented period of English history. Few contemporary chronicles survive and some official records still await examination. Thanks to a growing

interest in the period, however, much research has been done over the last century and many excellent books have been published. Nevertheless, the second half of the fifteenth century remains in some respects very much a twilight world to the historian.

This book is mainly about the years 1483–5, the period spanning the reigns of Edward V and Richard III. Nearly all the narrative sources for this period have a partisan bias: most were written in the south of England and reflect anti-northern sentiment, for Richard III was identified very much with northern interests.

Few royal letters survive, and of the great collections of letters of the period – the *Paston Letters*, the *Cely Letters* and the *Stonor Letters* – fewer than ten refer to Richard III's usurpation of the throne in 1483. Much of what we know about the period comes from later sources, because for the years 1483–5 there are very few reliable contemporary narrative sources, and only two major ones.

The first of these is Dominic Mancini's account of the events leading up to July, 1483 – *De Occupatione Regni Anglie per Riccardum Tercium* (*The Occupation of the Throne of England by Richard III*). Mancini was an Italian monk who lived in France and died after 1494. *De Occupatione* was his only prose work. Mancini came to England late in 1482 in the suite of the French ambassador. His brief was to report back to the Archbishop of Vienne on English affairs. He remained in London until July, 1483, leaving England the week after Richard III's coronation.

Mancini's book, which he completed on 1st December, 1483, at Beaugency, was an official report on recent events in England. His stated intention was 'to put in writing by what machinations Richard III attained the high degree of kingship', and he fulfilled this in the most vivid and objective manner. It is Mancini's objectivity that makes his book an invaluable source; he had no reason to write anything hostile to Richard III. A man of integrity, he confined himself

only to the facts, and avoided falling into the habit affected by so many contemporary writers, that of using historical facts to illustrate a lesson in morality. Furthermore, he avoided referring to Richard's accession as a usurpation: 'occupation' is his preferred word.

Mancini's credibility as an historian is further reaffirmed by independent corroboration of his account by other sources, notably the *Croyland Chronicle* and the later accounts of Polydore Vergil and Sir Thomas More, none of whom had access to Mancini's book. Indeed, it was lost for centuries; no one knew of its existence until 1934, when it was discovered by Professor C.A.J. Armstrong in the archives of the Bibliothàque Municipale at Lille, and subsequently published.

Mancini was reluctant to name his sources, but his account suggests that he had contacts at court, some of whom were apparently hostile to Richard III. The only source mentioned by name is Dr John Argentine, physician to Edward V, who could speak Italian. Mancini could also have made use of Italians living in London, in particular Pietro Carmeliano, a court poet to both Edward IV and Henry VII.

There are flaws in Mancini's book, of which he himself was aware, stating his reluctance to commit his account to paper as he did not know the names of some of those mentioned nor their motives. He admitted his account was incomplete in details. He lacked an understanding of English and a knowledge of English geography, and he paid little regard to chronology, although, in fairness to him, this was a period when recording dates was not considered of prime importance by historians. Nor is there in his book any physical description of Richard III – perhaps we should assume he never saw him. This, and the fact that the latter part of the account is less detailed, suggests that Mancini was no longer able to make use of some of his former court informants.

The second major source for the period 1483–5 is the *Second Continuation of the Croyland Chronicle*. The magnificent Abbey of Croyland (now spelt Crowland) in Lincolnshire was at this time the most important and wealthiest religious foundation in the east of England, and its mitred abbot ranked with the bishops. Royal visitors to the abbey in the late fifteenth century included Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III when he was Duke of Gloucester. Several chronicles detailing the history of England and of the abbey were written at Croyland. Those prior to 1117 are spurious, but the three anonymously written continuations, spanning the periods 1144–1469, 1459–86 and 1485–6, are genuine.

The author of the *Second Continuation* (1459-86) states that it was written in the ten days ending on 30th April, 1486. The last events he describes are the marriage of Henry VII and the northern uprising of that spring. His work is without doubt the best source for the period. Where verifiable, it is highly accurate, and its author was a man who could write authoritatively and from personal knowledge of many of the events he describes. It is clear too that he withheld information that was politically sensitive: his silence on certain subjects sometimes speaks volumes. Much of what he did write is substantiated by other writers, such as Mancini, Vergil and More, who never read his manuscript.

The author of the *Croyland Chronicle* did not approve of Richard III. As a churchman, he was shocked by Richard's behaviour, denouncing him for sensuality, holding an execution on a Sunday, and overspending. However, he declared his intention of writing his history 'in as unprejudiced a manner as we possibly can', asserting that he was presenting the reader with 'a truthful recital of the facts without hatred or favour'. And he was indeed a surprisingly objective, if ironic, observer for his time.

Who was he, this anonymous author to whom we shall refer merely as ‘Croyland’? He described himself as a doctor of canon law and a member of the royal Council. We know also, from the text, that he was a southerner who resented northern interlopers in the government. He was a cultivated man who was well acquainted with the workings of Council, Parliament, Convocation and Chancery. Thus there is every reason to identify him with John Russell, Bishop of Lincoln (1480–94), Keeper of the Privy Seal (1474–83), and Lord Chancellor of England under Richard III (1483–5), an erudite and wise man who earned the praise of Sir Thomas More. Croyland Abbey lay within Russell’s diocese, and the *Third Continuation* of its *Chronicle* records his month-long visit there in April, 1486, when the *Second Continuation* was written. The Bishop could well have dictated his history to a member of his retinue of twenty persons or to a monk living in the abbey. Most telling is the fact that the Bishop’s own involvement in the events described is never referred to.

Croyland’s manuscript was immediately suppressed when Henry VII, in the interests of dynastic security, ordered the destruction of all copies of the Act of Settlement known as ‘Titulus Regius’ (1484), which set forth Richard III’s title to the throne: the text of this was incorporated in Croyland. Several copies of the manuscript were destroyed. A few survived, being hidden, but Croyland was not used as a historical source until 1619. The earliest surviving copy is that in the Cottonian Library (British Library MS. Cotton Otho B. XIII), which was seriously damaged by fire in 1731. There is a seventeenth-century transcript in the Bodleian Library (Corpus Christi College MS. B. 208). The full Latin text was published by W. Fulman in 1684, and the standard translation remains that by H.T. Riley (1854).

Several Tudor sources provide accounts of the period 1483–5. The main problem facing any historian studying Richard III is how much to rely on these Tudor accounts, which are so rich in detail and so hostile to Richard, and

which sometimes contradict each other. This problem may be solved by evaluating each on its own merits, taking into account the circumstances in which it was written and the sources used, if known. We must also consider the difficulties Tudor historians faced in gaining access to sources and information.

The earliest Tudor writer of note was John Rous (1411–91), an artistic Warwickshire chantry priest and antiquarian. He was clearly not an eyewitness to most of the events he describes, and not averse to recording gossip as fact. Rous's writings show with striking clarity how the accession of Henry VII in 1485 affected the recording of contemporary history. Rous was first and foremost a chronicler of the Beauchamp and Neville families, earls of Warwick, to whom he was devoted. In 1483–5, he compiled the *York Roll*, an illustrated history in English of these families, which is now in the British Library. Richard III appears in this as the husband of Anne Neville, to whom the *Roll* was dedicated and given, and is referred to by Rous as 'a mighty prince and especial good lord; . . . a most virtuous prince'.

Rous made two copies of the *York Roll*; he could not retrieve the first after Richard III's death, but he altered his own Latin copy (now in the College of Arms, London), mutilating it wherever a picture of Richard appeared. His laudatory description of him was deleted and in its place were just the words '*infelix maritus*' – the 'unhappy spouse' – of Anne Neville. Rous also wrote a history of England dedicated to Henry VII, which was completed in 1490; in it, he portrays Richard III as a deformed monster and tyrant, likening him to the antiChrist. It has been suggested, however, that Rous's hostility towards Richard derived not so much from his desire to win the favour of Henry VII as from his conviction that Richard had murdered his heroine, Anne Neville.

Pietro Carmeliano of Brescia (d.1527) was an Italian cleric who came to England in the reign of Edward IV and became

a court poet, later earning the approval of the great humanist scholar, Erasmus. In 1483–5 Carmeliano wrote a *Life of St Catherine* (Bodleian Library, Oxford, Misc. 501), which he dedicated to Sir Robert Brackenbury, then Constable of the Tower of London. In its introduction, he praised Richard III lavishly, but in September 1486, under Henry VII, he wrote a poem to mark the birth of Henry's son Arthur, in which he savagely accused Richard of murdering the Princes in the Tower and Henry VI, amongst other crimes. This seems to have won him the King's favour, for that same month Henry granted him a pension and made him his Latin secretary, chaplain and lute player.

The third writer of note of the early Tudor period was Bernard André (who died after 1527), a blind poet from Toulouse who became Henry VII's official historian and tutor to his sons after coming to England in 1485. From 1500–1502, André worked on a life of Henry VII which he never completed. This undoubtedly presents the official version of recent history, as approved by the King, but it seems that André also used earlier works which are now lost. He portrays Richard III as an utter villain and Henry VII as God's messenger come to avenge his predecessor's crimes. Erasmus knew André but was unimpressed with his work.

The chief foreign source for the Yorkist period is the *Mémoires* of Philippe de Commines, a French politician and diplomat who moved in the highest circles of the courts of France and Burgundy. He compiled his memoirs after his retirement in 1490, and they cover the period 1464–98. After 1480, however, Commines no longer enjoyed the confidence of those who ruled France, although he had met Edward IV and later knew Henry Tudor during his exile. There are obvious flaws in his work, yet he did record the gossip then circulating on the Continent and may well have had access to more reliable sources of information for the later period.

The so-called *London Chronicles* provide us with an observant and detailed record of events in the late fifteenth century. The first is that chronicle known as B.L. Cotton MS. Vitellius AXVI, written during the early years of Henry VII's reign and published by C.L. Kingsford as *Chronicles of London* in 1905. Then there is a fragment from the commonplace books of a London merchant which was discovered in the College of Arms in 1980, and published as *Historical Notes of a London Citizen, 1483–1488* in 1981. The other *London Chronicles* were written, at least in part, by Robert Fabyan (d.1513), a wealthy London clothier and alderman of the City of London. He made a compilation of several London chronicles (the originals of which are now lost) which is known as the *Great Chronicle of London* and is in the Guildhall Library. This is a major source for the period, for all its errors and confused chronology. It is an eyewitness account, clearly based on first-hand knowledge of some of the events described and reflecting the public opinion of its day. The section dealing with the period ending 1496 was written before 1501–2 and possibly earlier. Although the *Great Chronicle* is pro-Lancastrian in sympathy, it is unlikely that its author had access to the works of Rous, André and Carmeliano.

Fabyan also wrote *The Book of the Concordance of Histories*, a history of England from the Conquest to his own time, which was printed in 1516 as *The New Chronicles of England and France*. It was based in part on Fabyan's own diaries but is not as comprehensive as the *Great Chronicle*.

One controversial source is the *Song of the Lady Bessy*, a colourful and proven to be mainly fanciful account in verse of the conspiracy that led to Richard III's overthrow. It was probably written before 1504 by Humphrey Brereton, a squire to Lord Stanley, and while it grossly exaggerates the role played by Elizabeth of York in the plot, it contains some apparently authentic details.

The chief narrative source dating from Henry VII's time is the *Anglica Historia* of Polydore Vergil. Vergil, a cleric from Urbino, Italy, came to England around 1501–2 and stayed. He was a renowned Renaissance scholar and humanist, and a friend of Erasmus and Thomas More. He quickly attracted the attention of Henry VII, who made use of his talents and rewarded him with benefices. After the accession of Henry VIII, however, he made an enemy of Cardinal Wolsey and fell from favour. He left England in 1551 and died in Italy in 1555.

In 1507, Henry VII commissioned Vergil to write an official history of England. Vergil spent six years researching this project, and wrote the first draft in c. 1512–14. But it took him a further nineteen years to complete and revise all the twenty-six books in the *Anglica Historia*. The finished work, dedicated to Henry VIII, was published in 1534 in Basle. Vergil's was therefore the first account of Richard III's usurpation to appear in print: in fact, it is the most detailed extant account of his reign.

Vergil followed the Renaissance tradition of using history to teach a moral lesson, whereby the reader might benefit from learning about the past. A skilful historian and writer, he used an innovative approach that had a profound influence on later Tudor writers. He could be maddeningly vague at times, and selective about what he wrote, yet he was no sycophant. He was criticial of Henry VII in places, and raised a storm by his rejection of the time-honoured notion that the Arthurian legends were based on fact. Thus he was no mere propagandist, but an objective writer who drew his own conclusions.

Vergil seldom states who his sources were, but Henry VII gave him unrestricted access to official records and personally imparted details of his exile and early years as king. Vergil tells us that other contemporaries also passed on their recollections of previous reigns, some of which they may, of course, have deliberately falsified. He also says he

consulted a great number of chronicles and other documents; in 1574 it was alleged by John Caius of Cambridge that Vergil had destroyed cartloads of ancient manuscripts so as to ensure that the flaws in his history would not be detected. This may well be the reason why so few sources for Richard III's reign have come down to us – those that have survived were either hidden or abroad. However, Vergil himself says that he could find very few written sources for the period after 1450.

There is no proof that he ever saw the *Croyland Chronicle*; it had been suppressed long before his time, but the two accounts do corroborate each other to a great extent. Vergil's account of recent times also substantiates in many respects that of Sir Thomas More (see below), but is less detailed. Vergil never saw Mancini's history, yet again the two accounts often agree.

Vergil worked under constraints. He was capable of suppressing the truth where it was politic to do so, and was well aware that certain subjects were highly sensitive. He claimed he was presenting a truthful picture, yet he had to be tactful and avoid offending his royal patron and other powerful persons. He may well have been briefed to follow the 'least said, soonest mended' policy adopted by Henry VII himself. In the circumstances, therefore, he wrote, to his credit, a remarkably balanced work.

The first – and the most controversial – biography of Richard III was written by Sir Thomas More. Entitled, *The History of King Richard III*, it was written around 1514–18 and revised in the late 1520s. More's account is rich in compelling, authentic, eye-witness detail – which in itself argues its reliability – and shows familiarity with the workings of the royal household in Richard's time. Approximately one-third of it contains eloquent speeches invented by More for his characters but based on authentic source material. This was an accepted practice in an age when history and literature were almost indivisible.

More's history has its obvious flaws: some names and dates are incorrect or missing, and some of its content may well be based on inaccurate sources or – as More admits – the result of 'divining upon conjectures'. Nevertheless, it has been verified in so many respects, and by so many other sources – such as Mancini and Croyland, who were not known to More, and Vergil, who was – that there is little reason to doubt its overall authenticity.

Sir Thomas More was a lawyer, a humanist scholar, and a politician, a man whose reputation for integrity was famous throughout Christendom. He served for a short time as Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor before resigning because his conscience would not allow him to condone Henry's break with Rome. He was executed for his defiance in 1535, and later made a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

More brought to his history of Richard III the benefit of his fine legal mind, his truthfulness and his intellectual judgement, and there is little doubt that he went to great trouble to find out the truth about the Princes in the Tower, whose fate was the central theme of his book. Roger Ascham, the great Elizabethan scholar, described the book as a model of historical writing, and there is no evidence that he or his contemporaries ever considered it satirical, which it has been called by at least one modern writer.

It was never More's intention to write propaganda for the Tudors, although many have accused him of doing just that. In fact, he had good reason to hate Henry VII: in 1504 he had risked a charge of high treason when he opposed the King in Parliament. Henry VII realised that Thomas could not pay the fine his offence merited, so he imprisoned and fined his father, Judge Sir John More. Nor was More any sycophant to Henry VIII, who for many years valued his opinion because he knew it was an honest one. More also risked offending his powerful friend, the third Duke of Norfolk, by his brief portrayal of the roles played by the first and second dukes under Richard III. With More, the truth came first.

More’s work was never intended for publication but was written purely for private intellectual recreation. Nor was it finished. It may be that More was persuaded by someone influential to abandon it because of things in it that could have proved embarrassing to those of Richard’s contemporaries who were still alive, or their descendants. Or More may simply have lost interest in the project or lacked the time in which to complete it.

More’s work has value, therefore, because it was relatively objective. He had no motive for lying. He used a wide variety of sources and obtained first-hand information from those courtiers and others who had been alive in Richard III’s time. These people are not named, but we may hazard a guess as to who they were.

It has been asserted by numerous writers that More’s chief source of information was Cardinal Morton, Henry VII’s Lord Chancellor, who suffered imprisonment and exile under Richard III. More was in Morton’s household from the age of twelve to fourteen, but it is hardly likely that the great Cardinal would have favoured such a young boy with so many confidences. This is not to say that More did not pick up some information at that time from Morton; he greatly admired him, and must have had some personal contact with him. And Morton was the one man who could have known the truth about some of the events of which More writes: More speaks of his ‘deep insight into political worldly drifts’. However, the notion that More’s information came from Morton was not mooted until 1596, when Sir John Haryngton suggested in *The Metamorphosis of Ajax* that Morton might even have been the author of More’s book. This theory was later embellished by Richard III’s apologist, Sir George Buck, but both Buck and Haryngton incorrectly assumed that More was an adult when he was in Morton’s service. There is no contemporary evidence to suggest that Morton had anything to do with the work, and no serious historian nowadays believes that anyone other than More

wrote it. The style of the work alone argues strongly in favour of his authorship.

There were many other sources that More could – and probably did – make use of. His own father, a judge of the King's Bench, had been a keen political observer in Richard's reign. Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, More's 'singular dear friend' according to More's son-in-law William Roper, could have told More about the involvement of his family in the events of the time. It is perhaps significant that More makes hardly any reference to these important persons in his book, even though they had been prominent at court: to have done so would have been to compromise both the Duke and More's friendship with him. More may also have obtained information from Dr John Argentine, Robert Fabyan, Polydore Vergil (whose work he knew in manuscript form), Richard FitzJames, Bishop of London – Edward IV's chaplain and friend – Sir Thomas Lovell, Speaker of the Commons under Henry VII and a friend of More, Sir John Cutte – Richard III's receiver of crown lands in six counties and More's predecessor as Under Treasurer – Sir John Roper, Richard's commissioner of array for Kent, and Sir Reginald Bray and Christopher Urswick, both of whom were involved in the plot to depose Richard and set Henry Tudor on the throne; Urswick was another friend of More's. As a lawyer and Under-Sheriff of London, More had access to the legal records of Richard III's reign. He also used the *Great Chronicle*.

More wrote both English and Latin versions of his history. A 'corrupt and altered version' was first printed by Richard Grafton in 1543 in *Hardyng's Chronicle*; it appeared again in *Hall's Chronicle* in 1548. The full Latin text was printed by More's nephew William Rastell in 1557, with a note that it was taken from a holograph manuscript found by Rastell amongst More's papers; the original text is in the College of Arms, London (MS. Arundel 43). More's *Richard III* was widely read and became very popular, and it was the chief

inspiration for Shakespeare's *Richard III*, with which, of course, dramatic liberties were taken.

Above all, More gives a credible and consistent portrayal of Richard that can hardly have been based on fiction; anyone reading his manuscript, which was privately circulated amongst his friends, some of whom had known Richard III, could have spotted any inconsistencies. And More himself had several means of checking his facts.

Later Tudor chroniclers such as Hall and Holinshed all relied on Vergil and More. But in 1611 the antiquary John Speed discovered a draft of the suppressed Act 'Titulus Regius', which outlined the grounds on which Richard III had claimed the throne. This discovery shed what appeared to be new light on the fate of the Princes. Speed printed the original draft of the Act that year, and six years later Sir William Cornwallis published *The Encomium of Richard III*, the first of the revisionist works, which was in effect a defence of Richard against the charge that he had murdered the Princes.

Cornwallis's theme was taken up even more enthusiastically in 1619 by Sir George Buck, who was described by William Camden as 'a man of distinguished learning'. Buck was of an old Yorkist family, the great-grandson of John Buck, a member of Richard III's household who was executed after having supported Richard at Bosworth. The Howard family had later used their influence to prevent his family from losing everything, and more than a century later Sir George was still grateful to them. He had risen to prominence at the court of Elizabeth I, and became Master of the Revels to James I, licensing several of Shakespeare's plays in this capacity. Tragically he went insane in 1621 and died the next year.

Buck's *The History of King Richard III* was written in 1619. It was a vast work, carefully researched from early manuscripts preserved in the Tower of London, Sir Robert Cotton's library – which contained an original copy of the

Croyland Chronicle – the College of Arms, and the private collection of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, to whom the work was dedicated. It is also possible that Buck used family information handed down from Richard III's time.

Buck's aim in writing his book was to proclaim Richard III's innocence of the crimes laid at his door by earlier writers. He was not entirely impartial – his family had supported Richard and he felt this needed justification. He claimed that More's biography was too full of errors to be reliable. Many people found Buck's portrayal attractive and credible, and it was at this point that the controversy over Richard III that persists to this day began in earnest.

Buck's holograph MS. (Cotton MS. Tiberius E.xf.238) – 'corrected and amended on every page' – was damaged in the Cottonian fire; only fragments remain in the British Library. Another version of the first two books of the manuscript is British Library Egerton MS. 2216–2220, but this is a copy. Buck's nephew, another George Buck, printed an abridged and censored version of the work in 1646, the only version available until 1979, when A.N. Kincaid published his splendid edition of the original text, which revealed several convincing details and exposed the deficiencies in the 1646 edition.

The last of the 'original' narrative sources was *The History of Henry VII* by Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626), published in 1622. This excellent, erudite work by a lawyer, statesman and Lord Chancellor, was for centuries the standard biography of Henry; well-researched, objective, and advanced for its time. Even today it stands up well in the face of modern research. Placed as he was, Bacon had access to official records, some no longer extant, and his work has value for this alone.

The sources discussed above are so integral to the subject of the Princes that, as will be seen in the following chapters, they are indeed part of the plot. All these writers have, in their various ways, influenced the controversy about the

Princes, and so we need to know about them, and their loyalties and prejudices, before we can consider what weight to give to their evidence. This is a crucial factor, because in that evidence lie the vital clues to the fate of the Princes.