

# The Three Richards

*Richard I, Richard II and Richard III*

NIGEL SAUL



THE THREE RICHARDS





The reverse of the second great seal of Richard I

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The idea of writing this book was suggested to me by Tony Morris. I am very grateful to him for his initiative. The inspiration for the title is Michael Prestwich's study *The Three Edwards*, published in 1980. Prestwich's book offered a continuous history of England for the period of the three Edwards from 1272 to 1377. A continuous history of the same sort cannot be undertaken for the three Richards because of the long gaps between the reigns. Instead, a decision has been taken to adopt a comparative approach. Attention is focused on a set of themes common to all three reigns. These are the kings' piety, their lack of legitimate surviving issue and their violent deaths. At the same time, and perhaps unexpectedly, an overarching theme emerges. This is the influence of the first Richard's example and fame on the careers of the other two – indeed, on the development of English medieval kingship more generally. There is a sense in which all medieval English kings lived under the first Richard's long shadow.

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The dedication, as usual, is to those who have shown such understanding while I have been at work.

*For Jane, Dominic and Louise*

There were three Richards whose fortunes were alike in three respects, but otherwise the fate of each was his own. Thus they had in common an end without issue of their body; a life of greed and a violent fall; but it was the greater glory of the first that he fought in the Holy Land; and returning home he was struck down, in a foreign land, by the bolts from a crossbow. The second, deposed from his kingdom, after he had been shut up in prison for some months, actually chose to die from hunger of his own will rather than bear the dishonour of ill fame. The third, after exhausting the ample store of Edward's wealth, was not content until he suppressed his brother's progeny and proscribed their supporters; at last, two years after taking violent possession of the kingdom he met these same people in battle and now has lost his grim life and his crown. In the year 1485 on the 22nd day of August the tusks of the Boar were blunted and the red rose, the avenger of the white, shines upon us.

*The Crowland Chronicle Continuator*

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## What's in a Name?

Europe's rulers in the middle ages were generally conservative in their choice of names for their offspring. With a few exceptions, they gave their first-born son their own name. In this way, particular names came to be handed down in dynasties. In France Louis and Charles were used many times over, in Sweden Carl and Gustav (or the two together), in Spain Alfonso, in Habsburg Austria Albert. Naming became an expression of dynastic continuity.

In medieval England the pattern of naming was broadly the same. A handful of royal names predominated. The most common of these were Henry and Edward. In the period between 1100 to 1485 there were no fewer than six Henries and five Edwards. Other names, such as John, Stephen and Richard, only appeared when there was a break in the direct line of descent.

Personal names have always been charged with cultural meaning. Names convey messages and imply associations. Parents choose them with care. We see this in the naming of England's medieval kings. Whenever major cultural change occurred, there was a change of nomenclature. In the late eleventh century, in the wake of the Conquest, there was a switch from Anglo-Scandinavian or Old English names to Frankish ones. Out went Æthelred, Harold and Edgar, and in came William, Henry and Robert. The newcomers brought their own personal names with them.

Henry, the name which was to become commonest over time, actually entered the repertory by accident. It was the name that William the Conqueror gave to the youngest of his three sons. At first, it seemed that there was little prospect of it entering the royal repertory – for the simple reason that there was little prospect of Henry becoming king. William and Robert, Henry's two brothers, were both vigorous and had every expectation of siring heirs. As it turned out, however, fortune was

to be on Henry's side. In 1100 William, who had succeeded his father in England, died prematurely, the victim of a notorious hunting accident, and Henry was able to take his crown; while a few years later, after defeating Robert, he was able to annex Normandy too. But no sooner had Henry's name entered the repertory of royal names than it was to leave it again. Henry died without surviving legitimate male issue. His immediate successor was his nephew – his sister's son, a member of the house of Blois called Stephen. The name Henry, however, was certainly not banished for good. On Stephen's death in 1154 the throne was taken by Henry's grandson, another Henry. Henry I's daughter Matilda, that boy's mother, was determined to keep the name alive. For her, it was proof of dynastic right. So Henry entered the repertory of favoured Angevin royal names.

Edward, the other name much favoured by the English royal line in the middle ages, was, by contrast, English in origin. Before the Conquest there had been several Edwards – Edward the Elder, Alfred the Great's son, in the tenth century and Edward the Confessor in the eleventh, to name but two. 'Edward' re-entered the repertory of English royal names relatively late. Henry III christened his first-born son Edward in 1245 in 'honour of St Edward the Confessor, to whose cult he was devoted. The choice reflected the reawakening of interest in the country's pre-Conquest past. There was a revival of interest in the cults of the pre-Conquest saints generally. The cult of St Edmund at Bury, for example, enjoyed a new flowering, and Henry called his second son Edmund. At the same time, there was a growing interest in St Ætheldreda's cult at Ely. Edward became increasingly popular as a royal name in the century or more after 1250. Each of the three kings after Henry III was called Edward, and if Edward, the Black Prince, had lived there would have been a fourth. In the fifteenth century there were two more Edwards. By the end of the middle ages the pattern of naming was beginning to settle into the French pattern. Just two or three names competed. Alongside Louis and Charles in France, can be set Henry and Edward in England.

A couple of centuries earlier, however, the position had looked very different. At that time there was no regular succession of names. In the years after 1066 William looked as if it was going to sweep the field. Between 1066 and 1100 there were the two Williams – the Conqueror

and his son Rufus. But then other names crowded in – Stephen, John and Richard – before in the thirteenth century things settled down again. The unusual variety in the twelfth century is to be explained by a number of factors. In the first place, there was the acute dynastic instability. As we have seen, it was normal for a change of dynasty to bring a change of personal names. So, with the coming of the Normans came new names; and with the accession of the house of Blois and then of the house of Anjou there were changes again. But there was a second factor. Within dynasties there was no regular succession from father to eldest son and heir. Henry II's eldest surviving son predeceased him, while in the next generation Richard I had no son at all. The succession, in other words, passed from father to younger son, or younger son to younger brother. There were similar complications of descent towards the end of the fourteenth century, when the crown passed from Edward III to his grandson and from the latter to his cousin. These periods of irregularity had few parallels in France. In France not only was there less dynastic change, for just two dynasties ruled between the tenth century and the sixteenth; within those dynasties there was a more regular succession from father to eldest son.

Richard was one of the minority names. Like Henry, it entered the nominal lexicon by one of those accidents of descent. Henry II's first two sons, William and Henry 'the Young King', had predeceased him.<sup>1</sup> Thus his heir became his third son Richard. The name was a French one – to be precise, a Norman French one. Three early medieval dukes of Normandy had been called Richard – Richard I, who had ruled from 943 to 996, Richard II, his son (996–1026), and Richard III (1026–27). When Henry II revived the name Richard, therefore, he was acknowledging the Norman inheritance of the Angevin comital line. Through his mother, Henry I's daughter Matilda, Henry was descended from the Norman dukes, the descendants of Rollo the Viking. The Normans and the Angevins had long been enemies and rivals. For generations they had fought over such border territories as Maine and La Flèche. Yet now the two dynasties had come together. When Henry II and his wife called their third son Richard, they were recognising the union – the consummation – of the two lines.

When later kings and princes chose the name Richard for their sons, it was quite deliberately to associate them with this first and most

celebrated Richard. Richard I left behind him a powerful historical legacy. He was one of the most celebrated and heroic figures of his age. Through his achievements he had added to the collective fame of the house of Anjou. He generated a new wave of enthusiasm for the crusade. Every later king of ambition aspired to pay acknowledgement to the Ricardian inheritance. In the light of Richard's distinction it is perhaps surprising that there were not more kings named after him. The main reason for the relative lack is that Richard himself produced no legitimate issue; he was succeeded by his brother John, who named his own son after their father – Henry. There were just two later kings named Richard. In the fourteenth century, after the run of Edwards, there was Richard II. Richard was the younger son of Edward, the Black Prince, someone who would be expected to take the first Richard as a role model. Richard's elder brother was another Edward. This Edward – known as Edward of Angoulême – died young, however, and Richard became king as Richard II. But, like the first Richard, he left no son to succeed him. A little under a century later the last Richard, Richard III, came to the throne. Richard was a member of the house of York, which in most generations had shown a preference for the name Edward. Richard was a younger son – and, of course, came to the throne as a usurper. Appropriately he was someone of soldierly ambitions, so his name suited him. It is interesting that both of the most popular Yorkist names – Richard and Edward – reflected the martial, chivalric values which the Yorkist family espoused.

The name Richard, then, was not one of the commonest in the English royal lexicon. It was used more often for younger sons than for the firstborn. In 1306 the elderly Edward I had toyed with the name Richard for the youngest of a large brood.<sup>2</sup> If circumstances had brought more younger sons to the throne, there could have been more kings called Richard. Henry III had an ambitious younger brother in Richard, earl of Cornwall, a couple of years his junior. Earl Richard did in fact become a king, but of Germany, not England, where his nephew succeeded. In the fifteenth century, when the Lancastrians ruled, a collateral called Richard – Richard, duke of York – had designs on the throne. He could have become king since he had been designated Henry VI's heir in parliament in 1460. In the event, however, he was killed in battle at Wakefield before he could realise his claim. A quarter of a century later,

yet another Richard stood in the wings. This was Richard of York, Edward IV's second son – the junior of the two princes in the Tower. This promising youth, however, was done to death on the probable orders of yet another Richard, his own uncle.

The three Richards ruled at widely separated times – Richard I at the end of the twelfth century, Richard II a couple of centuries later, and Richard III a century after that. At first sight, the kings do not appear to have had a great deal in common. It is tempting, indeed, to say that they had little if anything beyond the same name. They inhabited very different cultural worlds. Richard I was easily the most cosmopolitan of the three; although English by birth, he belonged spiritually to the elegant, sophisticated world of the aristocracy of France. He was in reality a southerner, an Aquitanian. Richard II, although born in Aquitaine, was far more an Englishman. He had a sense of English identity which his predecessor lacked, and his court was the first at which English was regularly spoken. Richard III a century later was English through and through: he had been born in England; he lived in England; and he died in England. These differences are closely paralleled by differences in the kings' experience of the world. Richard I was the most widely travelled of the three. He went east on crusade and suffered imprisonment in Germany and Austria; he knew the Mediterranean world well. Richard II, although known from birth as Richard of Bordeaux, was actually far less familiar with Europe. He crossed the Channel only twice as king and then never in arms. None the less, he was knowledgeable about the British Isles. Richard III knew very little of either Britain or Europe. He prided himself on his Englishness.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to these differences of background, there were differences of personality and taste. Richard I, the southerner, was a man of culture and sophistication. A considerable musician, he had written troubadour lyrics and he took a keen interest in the music of the liturgy. Richard II, though aesthetically ambitious, lacked his predecessor's natural grace and cultivation. His court was among the most brilliant of his day, yet his own contribution to its achievements is hard to identify. Richard III appears to have shown no particular cultural accomplishment at all. Equally striking is the difference in the kings' engagement with chivalry. Richard I donned the mantle of the chivalric king *par excellence*. A brave knight and a gifted commander, he accorded chivalry a key role

in his kingship. Richard II, who by contrast did not excel in arms, treated chivalry differently. While he revelled in chivalric ritual, he strove for peace with France and wanted Christians to unite against the infidel. Richard III's attitude was different again. Richard III, it seems, aspired to a reputation in arms. The signs are, however, that he was lacking the soldierly gifts of his namesake and forebear.

It is clear, then, that there were many differences in the tastes and experiences of the three kings. Yet, at the same time, there are striking parallels. In the first place, all three were younger sons. At birth, not one had an expectation of succeeding to the throne (although Richard II did so from fairly early childhood); each of them took the place of an elder brother. Secondly, as Giovanni Biondi was to note in the 1640s, 'All the [Kings] Richard ... came to violent ends'.<sup>4</sup> The first Richard was killed by a stray arrow shot in the course of a siege in the Limousin, while the other two were done to death by challengers who usurped their thrones. Thirdly, as the Crowland chronicler was to note after Richard III's death, all three lacked issue of their bodies (or surviving issue of their bodies) and had to endure debate among their contemporaries about the succession. Fourthly, all three were men of intense piety, for whom religion and political action were closely connected. And fifthly, and finally, all three were men who aroused strong feelings among their contemporaries – and who continue to arouse such feelings today.

These parallels provide a justification for looking at the three kings together. The kings have far more in common than the mere coincidence of the same name. They shared similarities of background, circumstance and experience. A study of the three kings will admittedly be a somewhat unconventional one. It will not be a continuous history under another name. The three Richards cannot be treated in the same way as, say, the three Edwards or the four Georges – as a convenient coat hook on which to hang a study of an eponymous period. The three Richards have to be treated differently, as the subject of a group study. Narrative history will certainly play a part. A summary overview will be provided of all three reigns. But alongside the overview will be set chapters of a thematic nature. The themes covered will, for the most part, be the obvious ones: how the kings responded to the challenge of their relative kinlessness; how they came to meet violent deaths; and how their piety affected their political actions. But other aspects will be considered

too: for example, the way in which the three projected themselves as kings and the uses to which they put chivalry as a weapon of political management. And a theme constantly in the background will be the influence of the first Richard's reputation on the other two.

The three Richards have not been lacking in historians. All three have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Richard I, indeed, has a place in historical myth. But attitudes to the kings have not been unchanging over time. In different periods people have seen them in different lights. So how have their reputations fared over the centuries?

Richard I's reputation is the one which has experienced the most dramatic shifts over the centuries. To admiring contemporaries, Richard was quite simply the greatest of kings – a brilliant soldier and a champion of the crusade. According to an anonymous versifier, 'his deeds were so great as to bewilder everyone'.<sup>5</sup> Even his enemies admired him: Ibn al Athir, an Islamic writer on the crusades, said that he was 'the most remarkable man of his age'.<sup>6</sup> There were grumblings in England, particularly in his later years, about the heavy burden of taxation which he imposed. None the less, opinions of Richard were broadly favourable.

Richard's reputation continued to flourish in the years after his death. The St Albans chroniclers, Roger Wendover and Matthew Paris, in the 1220s and 1230s described him as the wisest, most merciful and most victorious of kings, while for Geoffrey of Vinsauf his glory spread afar with his mighty name.<sup>7</sup> For much of the middle ages, indeed, Richard's kingship was held up as a model to his successors. Whenever a new king ascended the throne and made an impression on contemporaries, he was hailed as a new Richard. In the 1270s, for example, the young Edward I was said to 'shine like a new Richard'.<sup>8</sup>

At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, a change set in. Samuel Daniel in his major work, *Collection of the Historie of England* (1621), sounded a critical note. Daniel complained, as Richard's contemporaries had, of his avarice: 'he exacted and consumed more of this kingdom than all his predecessors from the Normans'. He also added a new string to the bow of complaint – Richard's neglect of England. Richard, he wrote, 'deserved less than any, having neither lived here, neither left behind him any monument of piety or any other public work, or ever showed love or care to this Commonwealth, but only

to get what he could from it'.<sup>9</sup> Daniel's critique struck root. His comments were to be picked up and followed in many later discussions of the king. Sir Winston Churchill, for example, in 1675, described Richard as 'the worst of the Richards', 'an ill son, an ill father, an ill brother and a worse king'; and 'that which renders him most unworthy of the affections of his subjects was not only making himself a stranger to them, but leaving them to be governed by a stranger'.<sup>10</sup> A generation later, Laurence Echard argued much the same. 'Though {Richard} had many noble Qualifications, yet England suffered severely under his Government, through the constant occasions he had for money, and the great rapacity of his Justiciaries during his absence from England, where he never spent above eight months of his whole reign.'<sup>11</sup> The key assumption which underpinned all these criticisms was that Richard's priorities were wrong. Although he was king of England, he neglected England in favour of lands elsewhere. This was not a criticism which had been heard in the middle ages. For many writers, indeed, the fact that Richard had foreign ambitions counted in his favour. By the early modern period, however, attitudes to European empire were changing. As English national identity strengthened under pressure of attack from external foes, so a 'little Englander' mentality set in. Among writers of patriotic hue like Echard and Fuller there was a growing sense that the English were 'an island race'. Against this background of narrowing horizons Richard's reputation was bound to suffer.

By the post-medieval period, a second factor began to count against Richard's reputation: his involvement in the crusade. In the world of pre-Reformation religion Richard's commitment to crusading had counted as one of his strengths; indeed, his success against the infidel was cited in sharp contrast to the French king's failure. In the world of reformed Protestantism, however, attitudes were very different. Crusading was unfashionable. It was associated with bigotry and papalism. It was condemned as a barbaric, savage movement. For the arch-rationalist David Hume, the crusades were 'the most signal and most durable monument of human folly that has yet appeared in any age or nation'.<sup>12</sup> With crusading frowned on, there was little hope for the reputation of the king most closely associated with it. Richard's stock sank to new lows. Not only was he accused of draining his country's wealth through taxation; still worse, he was condemned for spending those taxes on a cause of no worth.

These criticisms of the king held the field until quite recent times. As late as 1951, A. L. Poole in his volume in the Oxford History of England could write censoriously: '[Richard] used England as a bank on which to draw and overdraw in order to finance his ambitious exploits abroad'.<sup>13</sup> In 1955 Frank Barlow could write in a similar vein: '[Richard] had merely exhausted his own empire.'<sup>14</sup> Today, these verdicts strike us as anachronistic. They seem more illuminating about the authors' assumptions than about Richard's failings. In the last generation or two, historians have attempted to be more dispassionate. They have embarked on the valuable exercise of looking at Richard's achievement in the light of contemporary opinion. They have addressed such questions as: what expectations did contemporaries have of a king, and how far did Richard live up to them. Attempting to evaluate Richard's achievement in these terms is not easy. It takes more than an effort of imagination to shake off the heavy burden of received opinion. The knots in which an historian can easily tie himself can be sensed in James Brundage's equivocal judgement of Richard. Richard, Brundage began positively, 'judged by the standards of his times and own class of knightly warriors ... was a fine monarch and a very great man, for he exemplified virtues which they most admired'. But then he added the measured qualification: 'the clergy [however] deplored [his] moral failures; and the bourgeoisie were appalled by the insanity of his fiscal policy'.<sup>15</sup> Brundage conspicuously lacks the courage of his convictions. If Richard 'by the standards of his times' was a great king, then why attach such weight to the views of the clergy and bourgeoisie? The most thoroughgoing reassessment of Richard has been made by John Gillingham in his *Richard the Lionheart* (1978), a book which viewed Richard firmly from a continental perspective. This book was revised, and the process of rehabilitation taken further, in the second edition of *Richard I* (1999). Gillingham's arguments, however, have by no means persuaded all of his fellow scholars. R. V. Turner and R. Heiser, for example, in a jointly written study of the king (2000), while recognising Richard's achievement, offer a more qualified judgement. The king was 'brutal and unrelenting in his financial exactions', they write. Although widely admired as a knightly exemplar, he could be oppressive, and he suffered from 'a prickly personality', given to 'outbursts of anger'.<sup>16</sup> Turner and Heiser's Richard is much less of a paragon of virtue than Gillingham's.

Gillingham's view has also been subjected to criticism by David Carpenter. Using Coggeshall's chronicle as a gauge of opinion, Carpenter argues that there were at least some contemporaries to whom John's accession came as a relief, Richard's rule being seen as oppressive. How Richard is viewed depends on which sources are used and what questions are asked. Doubtless the debate will go on.

The reputations of the two later Richards have also been subject to the vicissitudes of changing opinion. Over the centuries the two kings' stock has either risen or fallen, according to the swing of the historical pendulum. By a coincidence of history, the two kings' reputations have been linked. In the work of the early Tudor historians the two Richards were placed at opposite ends of a definable historical sequence. That sequence was held to begin with the fall of Richard II in 1399 and to end with Richard III's death at Bosworth in 1485. Richard II's fall, the Tudors believed, plunged England into a period of bitter dynastic strife from which it was only to be rescued by Henry VII in 1485. The terminal dates of the sequence – 1399 and 1485 – according to this view, were milestones: staging posts in the course of history. As the event which brought the sequence to an end, Richard III's bloody death was invested with especial significance. It was seen as marking the end of the middle ages. The age of darkness was over. A new era of hope had dawned. England could look forward to renewal under the Tudors.

This view of the past encapsulated more than a little myth-making. At its heart, however, there was just enough conviction for it to win acceptance. It was a view that was to find its classic exposition in the works of Shakespeare. Shakespeare interpreted the fifteenth century as a period of disaster.<sup>17</sup> Henry IV's usurpation in 1399, he believed, brought a curse on the Lancastrian dynasty. Henry himself was condemned to an 'unquiet' reign, punctuated by rebellion, while his successor Henry V suffered an early death. In the third generation, in the reign of Henry VI, the full horror of the curse was to be realised. The kingship of Lancaster fell apart. Henry VI was displaced by his Yorkist cousin Edward IV, but Edward, like Bolingbroke before him, was a perjurer. Accordingly, the Yorkist line, like the Lancastrian, was blighted; it could not survive. Punishment came in the next generation with the murder of the two princes and the usurpation of Richard of

Gloucester. But at Bosworth in 1485 the awful misery was brought to an end. The victory of Henry Tudor and his subsequent marriage to Elizabeth of York reconciled the competing lines and brought peace to a disturbed and troubled land.

Shakespeare popularised and lent authority to this Tudor view of the past. However, he was by no means its original begetter. He relied heavily on the authority of earlier writers. He owed a particular debt to a mid-Tudor compilation, Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*, published in 1548 and a work which was itself a recycling of two earlier histories – Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* and Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*. Vergil and More were the real inventors of the Tudor view of the past. Vergil's work was particularly influential. Vergil offered an overarching vision of the fifteenth century. What he did was bring together the fates of the two Richards, demonstrating that the second Richard's fall was the cause of the period of chaos which came to an end at Bosworth. Vergil's view of the past was one that was to hold good for three centuries.

In Tudor historiography Richard II's fate was thus inseparably linked to the story of the fifteenth century. As a result of the king's fall, it was believed, England was plunged into the horror of the Wars of the Roses. This linkage had a distorting effect on later study of the reign. It led to a concentration on the king's final two years – the period from 1397 to his overthrow. What interested the Tudor historians was Richard's quarrel with Henry of Lancaster. Everything before that was irrelevant. It had no bearing on his eventual fate. When Shakespeare began his play in 1398, therefore, he was merely following Hall and the others. He began the story where his audience expected him to begin it.

The Tudor approach to Richard affected interpretations of his reign in a second way. Inevitably, the king was seen as a capricious tyrant. He had to be. Dynastic logic required it. The ruling Tudor dynasty traced its descent from Henry of Lancaster, and Henry of Lancaster had deposed Richard. It followed, then, that Henry must have been in the right and Richard in the wrong. The early literary portrayals of Richard reflected this train of thought. Richard was seen as an immature and irresponsible youngster. No impression was given that he ever grew up. To Vergil he was a weak-willed youth lacking in strength of character, while to Samuel Daniel in the 1590s he was a young effeminate

over-influenced by others.<sup>18</sup> In the histories of Hall and Hayward he was made to attribute his downfall to youthful misjudgement. The Tudor typecasting of character was reinforced by reference to his personal appearance. Richard was widely regarded as a man of outstanding good looks. In the Wilton Diptych and in the Westminster Abbey portrait he is shown as elegant and handsome. The very attractiveness of his features now conspired against him. He was condemned as effeminate. His weakness was seen as physical as well as mental. He was considered lacking in strength. Richard was launched on his career as a fop. The looking-glass scene in Shakespeare's play reflected this. As Margaret Aston has so rightly said, the scene is not history, but is linked to the Tudor view of it.<sup>19</sup>

At the other end of the historical sequence stands Richard III. Richard was on the throne for only a little over two years. He was crowned in July 1483 and killed in battle in August 1485. His reign was of little historical importance. It was marked by few legislative or constitutional achievements. And yet it continues to generate interest on a quite disproportionate scale. Many dozens of books have been written about Richard. Since the end of the Second World War there have been at least ten. And the number of articles runs into many thousands. The tide shows no signs of abating.

The popular view of Richard as a villainous schemer owes much to the first and second generations of Tudor historians. For a long time, these men have been dismissed as mere placemen: timeservers or partisan hacks who wrote narratives to order. Their history, it is said, was Tudor official history; it was propagandist. Certainly, a number of them enjoyed the direct patronage of the Tudors. On the whole, however, they were not party hacks. They were writers with minds of their own and, in some cases, were considerable scholars. They sought information as and where they could find it. They drew on contemporary written sources – chronicles and other narratives, for example. But they were also on the look-out for anecdote, reminiscence or gossip. They had a range of informants. There were men still alive who had served Richard in some capacity. But, most of all, there were those senior figures who had grown up under Richard and who were great in the government of his successor – men like Cardinal Morton, Sir Reginald Bray, Bishop Fox and Christopher Urswick. It was these men whose

view of the past did so much to determine how that past would be seen in the future.

The first writer to manifest a distinctly 'Tudor' view of the past was an unlikely figure, a Warwickshire chaplain by the name of John Rous.<sup>20</sup> Rous was an amateur antiquary and a minor clerk in the service of the earls of Warwick. If anyone deserves the title of party hack, it is he. In Richard III's lifetime he had written approvingly of the king. In his history of the earls of Warwick, he had paid tribute to Richard, hailing him as a good lord and mighty prince. But with the king's downfall he immediately changed tack. He now preferred to denounce Richard as 'Antichrist'.<sup>21</sup> Some of the stories he told were absurd. Supposing that Richard was born under Scorpio, he said that like a scorpion he displayed a smooth front and a vicious swinging tail. He invented the strange story of the circumstances of his birth: Richard, he said, was born with teeth in his mouth and hair down to his shoulders and lay sullenly in his mother's womb for two years. Some of his more believable yarns entered the Tudor canon: that Richard murdered his nephews, for example; that he was responsible for the death of Henry VI; and that he poisoned his wife and imprisoned her mother for life. His mind was nothing if not inventive.

Rous's work drew on stories circulating in the 1490s. In other works of Henry VII's reign, very little was added to his account. Even Bernard Andre's semi-official *Life of Henry VII* added nothing to the charge sheet. Indeed, in some respects it retreated: Andre's history did not charge Richard with the murder of his wife.

The Tudor tradition proper began with two works from the early years of Henry VIII, both of them famous: Polydore Vergil's *Historia Anglica* of 1513 and More's *History of King Richard III* of a year or two later. Vergil and More were both master technicians – humanistic scholars with a strong sense of the importance of their craft. More's *History* is perhaps the more vivid work. It has been termed 'the first piece of modern English prose'.<sup>22</sup> And certainly it lacks nothing in colour. The opening description of Richard sets the tone. The king, More says, was

little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard favoured of visage . . . he was malicious, wrathful, envious, and from afore his birth ever froward. It is for truth reported that the Duchess his mother had so much ado in her travail, that she could

not be delivered of him uncut: and that he came into the world with the feet forward ... and (as the fame runneth) also not untoothed ... He was close and secret, a deep dissimuler, lowly of countenance, arrogant of heart, outwardly companionable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he hoped to kill, dispiteous and cruel.<sup>23</sup>

More enlivens his narrative by working in many wonderfully described scenes – the entrapment of Hastings in the Tower being the most famous – and the dramatic power of his work is enhanced by the extensive use of dialogue. More's Richard is a terrible monster, evil incarnate – someone entirely removed from human life. More's exaggerations and inaccuracies devalue his work in the eyes of a modern reader. But More's aim was not to produce dispassionate history; it was to turn the spotlight on tyranny. More deliberately set out to write the life of a bad prince: to offer instruction by negative example. Very likely, he saw the works of Tacitus and Suetonius as models. When he over-coloured his narrative, it was always to underpin his moral purpose.

Vergil's *Historia Anglica* is a very different work.<sup>24</sup> It is a complete history of England down to Henry VII's accession. Its aim was to justify the Tudor dynasty to the *litterati* and *glitterati* of Europe. Vergil was an accomplished humanist. The quality of his artistry shows in all sorts of ways – in his stylistic mannerisms, his respect for literary precedent, and his skilful treatment of his sources. He avoided overcolouring his narrative; the crudities of characterisation that appealed to More were not for him. His writing style is moderate and measured. While he vilified Richard, he carefully refrained from wholesale blackening. He created his literary effects by a subtle combination of devices. One of his favourite tricks was to imply that Richard was a dissimulator, saying one thing and doing another – in this way suggesting that he concealed ambition behind a façade of reasonable behaviour. When recounting the events of 1483, he says, for example, that Richard, hearing of his brother's death, burned with ardour for the throne; and yet he swore loyalty to his widow and son. At an earlier point in his narrative, he made use of counterpoint. He recalled that in April Richard summoned all 'the honourable and worshipful' of Yorkshire to swear allegiance to Edward V. Richard, he said, 'was himself the first that took the oath: which soon after he was the first to violate'. Innuendo, smear and guilt by association were never far from Vergil's thoughts as he wrote.

For all his influence on later writers, Vergil said little that was new about Richard. In fact he said remarkably little about Richard at all. Richard's reign formed only a small part of his overall narrative. Vergil's contribution to the development of Richard's reputation is found principally in a different area. His achievement was to give meaning to his reign. He supplied it with a context. Previous writers had treated Richard's reign in isolation. They had seen his evil as unique evil. Vergil saw things differently. He showed Richard's reign to be the final stage in a grand historical sequence. That sequence had begun three-quarters of a century earlier with Henry of Lancaster's seizure of the crown; it had continued with the descent of the Lancastrian monarchy into anarchy; it had been made worse by Edward IV's seizure of the crown; and it had reached its terrifying climax in Richard III's career of infamy. It was Vergil, in other words, who invented the notion of the Wars of the Roses. It was Vergil who was the originator of the Tudor myth. Later in the century Shakespeare transformed these ideas into a dramatic historical cycle. In his characterisation of Richard he created a Macchiavellian, but engaging, stage villain. But the underlying idea was Vergil's.

It was not until the seventeenth century that a challenge was mounted to the picture of Richard as 'England's black legend'. The first to offer a revisionist view was Sir George Buck, an antiquary and courtier who was James I's Master of the Revels. Buck's *History of King Richard III* is a prolix and difficult work, poorly organised and marked by lengthy digressions.<sup>25</sup> None the less, it is a work of seminal importance. Drawing on manuscripts in Sir Robert Cotton's library, it offered one highly significant new insight. Richard had been suspected of pressing a marriage suit on an unwilling Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's daughter. Buck showed that Elizabeth, so far from rejecting a possible match with Richard, positively encouraged one. Buck's *History* drew on a range of contemporary sources – he was the first, for example, to make use of the manuscript of the Crowland Chronicle – and he rebutted the more extreme inaccuracies of Vergil and More. For its date, his book was a remarkable achievement.

In the eighteenth century, the assault on the Tudor orthodoxy was taken up by a vigorous controversialist, Horace Walpole. Walpole's *Historic Doubts*, published in 1768, was a work of dilettantism not scholarly research.<sup>26</sup> Its approach was essentially negative, assaulting the

Tudor tradition but putting little or nothing in its place. Its defence of Richard was thoroughgoing. Walpole acquitted Richard of all the main crimes of which he stood accused, from the stabbing of Henry VI's son, Edward, to the despatching of the princes. Whether he convinced many of his readers is another matter. In the nineteenth century the tempo of attack and defence quickened. A number of works maintained the assault on Richard. The most notable of these were John Lingard's *History of England* (down to the reign of Henry VII) and James Gairdner's *Life and Reign of Richard the Third* (1878).<sup>27</sup> Gairdner's was for long to remain a standard study. Outnumbering these books, however, was a flow of revisionist works. Sharon Turner's *History of England in the Middle Ages* (1830) adopted a moderate position, absolving Richard of some of his crimes, but charging him with the murder of the princes.<sup>28</sup> Caroline Halsted and A. O. Legge went much further in their championing of the king, even absolving him of the princes' murders.<sup>29</sup> Halsted's study, appropriately the work of the wife of a rector of Middleham, where Richard had lived in the 1470s, was actually of some value. Although written in an affecting, 'even melting', prose, it embodied solid research and made pioneering use of the king's letter book.<sup>30</sup>

In the twentieth century the work of rehabilitating the king's reputation gathered pace. Sir Clements Markham, a one-time sailor and administrator turned amateur historian, mounted a vigorous defence of the king in his *Richard III: His Life and Character* (1906). Markham's intention was to write a book that was both scholarly and authoritative, and his work on the sources was certainly considerable. He had an unfortunate tendency, however, to ruin his case by overstatement. By the middle of the century, writers of fiction were joining in the campaign to clear the king's name. Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* (1951) and Rosemary Hawley Jarman's *We Speak No Treason* (1971) were perhaps the two most celebrated examples of the fictional genre, both of them arousing widespread popular interest. Josephine Tey's book, couched in the form of a detective story, directly addressed the issue of the murder of the princes, clearing Richard of blame and pointing the finger of guilt at Henry VII.<sup>31</sup> In 1955 a milestone in Ricardian studies was passed with the publication of Paul Murray Kendall's *Richard III*. This celebrated book, an intelligent if over-imaginative defence of the king, was for long to remain the standard biography.<sup>32</sup>

Just when Richard appeared to have scored a posthumous triumph over his opponents, the pendulum began to swing back. A reaction set in, and the king's critics found themselves triumphing in argument again. What, more than anything else, precipitated this shift was a new interest in the sources for the reign. Scholars were keen to discover the origins of Richard's early reputation. Since the time of Buck, it had been conventional to say that the Tudor historians had created the picture of Richard as a tyrannical monster. But what were the materials from which they had fashioned that view? And how had they gathered and sifted their information? In a notable study published in 1975, Alison Hanham turned the spotlight on the seminal works of Vergil and More. Searching their texts for evidence of the sources they used, and then analysing the sources themselves, she came to a surprising conclusion: Vergil and his contemporaries did not invent the view of the monster Richard; they found it in the sources they used. While it is true, she says, that they exaggerated the critical emphasis, they were by no means its first begetters.<sup>33</sup>

In the twenty years since she wrote, Hanham's conclusions have been broadly accepted by other scholars in the field. It is now virtually impossible for anyone to maintain that Richard's evil reputation was entirely the fabrication of the Tudor historians. As our understanding of the historiographical development has deepened, so it has become clearer that 'Black Richard' was a perception of some at least of the king's contemporaries.

The point can be illustrated by looking at one of the most familiar of the early sources – the so-called 'Second Continuation of the Crowland Chronicle'.<sup>34</sup> Hanham has shown conclusively that this chronicle was drawn on by Vergil. Its strength is that it is the work of an insider. The author shows a ready familiarity with the workings of government. He talks knowledgeably about defensive measures, royal finance and appointments to local office. It has been suggested that the narrative was written by Richard's chancellor, John Russell, bishop of Lincoln.<sup>35</sup> Russell was someone with long experience of government. However, a rival case has been made for the authorship of Henry Sharp, a councillor of Edward IV and a senior royal clerk.<sup>36</sup> Sharp is in many ways a more plausible candidate than Russell. Against his claims, however, can be set the fact that he was largely retired from administration by the 1480s.<sup>37</sup>

But, whoever the author (and it could have been either man), it is clear that he wrote fairly soon after the battle of Bosworth, perhaps as early as 1486. There are no indications that his thinking was influenced by Tudor propaganda. The date of composition will hardly allow for that. Yet its tone is overwhelmingly hostile to Richard. The message is clear: the criticism of Richard began in his lifetime.

The critical attitude of the Crowland Chronicler is evident right from the beginning. He makes clear his low regard for Richard as a soldier. He says that when, before he became king, Richard invaded Scotland in 1482 he returned to England empty-handed.<sup>38</sup> When he moves onto the events of the usurpation in the following year, his attitude becomes more critical still. Time and again, he stresses Richard's deceitful behaviour. He says that when Richard entered the capital, his expressions of goodwill to the queen and her elder son could not conceal 'a circumstance of growing anxiety' – that is, the detention of the young king's relatives and servants.<sup>39</sup> By mid-June, after Richard and Buckingham had secured the king's younger brother, he says, 'they no longer acted in secret but openly manifested their intentions'.<sup>40</sup> After the news of Rivers's execution, he records his condemnation: 'this was the second innocent blood which was shed on occasion of this sudden change'.<sup>41</sup> When Richard produced a story of the princes' bastardy, the author says this was merely 'the pretext for an act of usurpation'.<sup>42</sup> He continued to be scathing after Richard's seizure of the crown. He was particularly critical of Richard's intrusion of northerners into administrative positions in the south – the southern people, he said, longed for the return of their old lords in place of the 'tyranny' of the northern men.<sup>43</sup> He condemned the king's levying of 'forced loans' or benevolences, a form of taxation which, he says, Richard had previously condemned in parliament. He reports, with obvious disgust, that Richard's unscrupulous agents extracted immense sums from the king's subjects.<sup>44</sup> But then he apostrophises, implying that he knew far more than he could tell: 'Oh God, why should we dwell on this subject, multiplying our recital of things so distasteful, and so pernicious in their example that we ought not so much as to suggest them to the minds of the perfidious.'<sup>45</sup> The author of the Crowland Continuation, although probably one of Richard's ministers or clerks, was not to be numbered among his admirers.