



PRINCES IN THE TOWER

‘Case closed’

After nearly ten years of work, the final report of The Missing Princes Project is now here – providing more evidence than ever that the traditional story of the Princes in the Tower was a tissue of Tudor lies.

Philippa Langley and **Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal** here tell Alec Marsh about the latest findings

For more than 500 years the fates of King Edward V and Richard, Duke of York – the so-called Princes in the Tower – remained one of history’s most enduring mysteries. Then in November 2023 Philippa Langley announced that she and the volunteers of The Missing Princes Project had found no proof that the boys did in fact die during the reign of their uncle, Richard III.

In her book, *The Princes in the Tower: Solving History’s Greatest Cold Case* and an accompanying Channel 4 documentary, Philippa unveiled the evidence upon which she based this dramatic assertion – not least a receipt from Lille for 400 pikes for Edward V dated to 1487 and the Gelderland document which offers what is believed to be a biographical account of the life of Richard, Duke of York, from 1483 to 1492/93.

Not only did the book, drawing on the discoveries of the first five years of The Missing Princes Project, go far to prove an absence of any evidence for the deaths of the sons of Edward IV prior to the battle of Bosworth, it also went a long way to convince people that both Edward and Richard had survived into the reign of Henry VII. It also provided a decisive challenge to the historical tradition that identifies these individuals by their Tudor monikers, Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck. But, despite the findings, not everyone was convinced.

Fortunately, the work of The Missing Princes Project investigation continued and now, as it approaches its tenth anniversary in 2026, Philippa has published what she says will be her final book on the subject: *The Princes in the Tower: How History’s Greatest Cold Case Was Solved*. The significance of the use of the past tense in the title won’t be lost on Ricardians.



Perspectives: The man known to history as Perkin Warbeck, whom evidence now shows was Richard, Duke of York, left. A stained glass image of older brother, Edward V, right

At the heart of the new book is a string of important documentary discoveries and rediscoveries which are together as eye-popping as those of the original book. They all leave Philippa feeling more convinced than ever that it is ‘case closed’ on the traditional accusation against Richard III. ‘The reason I am satisfied is because of the totality of evidences that we now have that shows both boys went on to live lives after the death of Richard III and we can see their activities in the end of the fifteenth century,’ Philippa tells the *Bulletin*. ‘The obverse of that is we have still not found in ten years of searching archives everywhere, not one single piece of evidence that one or more of the boys died during the reign of Richard III.’

Which is compelling enough, because even if Richard were able to keep a lid on the secret during his reign, after he was gone the cat would surely have been out of the bag. Except, of course, it wasn’t. ‘There’s nothing,’ says Philippa of the documentary



silence over the deaths of the sons of Edward IV. 'There's absolutely nothing, when there should have been everything. Elizabeth Woodville also never requested or initiated any inquiry into what happened to her young sons. Nor, had she thought them dead, is there any record of any Requiem Masses being said as would be a very necessary requirement. Nor did she erect any kind of memorial to their memory or chantry for their souls, all or any of which would have offered much needed comfort for herself and her family, and significantly closure and security for the new regime.' Philippa adds: 'The evidence is telling us the boys lived on and we can see the evidences of their later lives.'

The totality of evidence

Chapters 18 and 19 of the new book have been 'completely revised and updated', while an all-new chapter, Chapter 21, has been added, updating readers on 'everything that we've found since the book was published', says Philippa.

The entry point of Chapter 21 is two documents brought to the fore by Society member and Missing Princes Project member Randolph Jones that provide further proof that the 'Dublin king' who was crowned at Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin in May 1487 was in fact Edward V, the eldest son of Edward IV. The first of these documents, from the *Register of the Mayors of Dublin with other Memorable Observances* 'says that in this year, 1487, the Lords of England did crown a lad, not a boy, but a lad in Christ Church, and said he was a son of King Edward,' reports Philippa. 'And it talks about the lords being Lovell and Lincoln – so this is Lovell and Lincoln saying that this is a son of Edward IV.' What's more this was a contemporary or near-contemporary source, written up to 1538 and copied in 1640, according to Philippa.

The second break-through document is *A Discourse on Ireland* by a Robert Cowley, who was part of the secretariat of the eighth Earl of Kildare, a key powerbroker in Ireland at this time. 'Cowley was a Geraldine and very Yorkist, but then he got sacked by Kildare's son, the ninth earl, and he went over to the Butlers who were staunch loyalists for Henry VII,' explains Philippa. In his discourse in 1526, Cowley says that 'an organ-maker's son



History hunters: Dutch Missing Princes Project researcher Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal (left) and Philippa Langley, right

named one of King Edward's sons came into Ireland, was by the Geraldines [dominant landowners in Ireland] received and crowned king in the city of Dublin'. This again provides evidence countering Henry VII's version, that the Edward crowned was a boy named Lambert Simnel who was an imposter for Edward, Earl of Warwick. 'Everything we're finding – from courtiers at Henry VII's court, to privy councillors to Henry VIII, and writers in Ireland – they are all totally contradicting that view,' says Philippa.

'Many of them will say he was an imposter, but they will say that he was an imposter for Edward V, the son of Edward IV.'

These two documents, both housed in the British Museum in London, build therefore upon the evidence of the Lille receipt unearthed by Dutch Research Group member Albert Jan de Rooij in the Archives Departmentales du Nord in Lille in May 2020. Dated to December 1487 and recording a purchase of long pikes made that year by Maximilian, King of the Romans, the Habsburg ruler of the Low Countries, for use in a military campaign 'across the sea' in the service of Margaret of York, the dowager duchess of Burgundy, 'to ➤

"The totality of evidences shows both boys went on to live lives after the death of Richard III ... we can see their activities in the end of the fifteenth century,' Philippa tells the *Bulletin*"



Max identification: Habsburg ruler Maximilian I supported both claims





PHOTOGRAPH: REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE
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Fighting stuff: The Tournament Tapestry from the Museum of Fine Arts in Valenciennes from c. 1494. Figures in the background gallery include Archduke Philip the Handsome, Margaret of Austria, children of Maximilian, as well as a man identified by the research project as Richard, Duke of York, shown above right



serve her nephew, son of King Edward, late her brother, who was expelled from his dominion.'

The second set of finds made since the Project's five-year update relates to the individual identified as Richard, Duke of York, and have been unearthed by Dutch Missing Princes Project-member Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal, who has supplied the foreword to the new book. For Ricardians who believe that the royal claimant Richard of England was exactly who he said he was, these are arguably the most sensational finds yet.

During the first five years of The Missing Princes Project, a document pledging repayment of 30,000 florins to Duke Albert of Saxony from October 1493 was found in the Dresden Archive bearing the seal and sign manual or personal signature of Richard of England. At the time this was believed to be the only surviving example.

Now two Latin charters dated April 1494, signed 'Richard of England' with his royal sign manual and bearing his royal seal have been found at the Wolkenstein Rodenegg family archive in Nuremberg in Germany. 'They are exquisite and revealed that the young duke was supported with advice by two of Maximilian's most trusted councilors: Veit and Michael of Wolkenstein,' explains Nathalie who notes that members of the Wolkenstein family were important confidants of the king during his reign. Nathalie learned about the archive in April 2024.

The other discoveries consist of a further charter and letter ➡➡



Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin: The new evidence suggests that the Edward crowned here in May 1487 was Edward IV's son

from 'Richard of England' with his royal seal, and two letters from King James IV of Scotland and one from Henry VII, all found in the Nuremberg State Archive. 'The letters are addressed to a young man from Nuremberg, named Ludwig Wolfgang Tetzel, who we now know was part of Richard of England's entourage in the years 1495 and 1496,' explains Nathalie.

'Each of the newly found documents provide new information about Richard of England's stay at the court of James IV in Scotland, especially about the festivities surrounding Richard's marriage to Katherine Gordon in Edinburgh in January 1496,' says Nathalie. 'Their contents also show that Tetzel was a beloved servant of the young duke, to whom he entrusted the safety of his body and life and that he was highly respected by both Richard of England and James IV.'

Nathalie adds: 'Of all these, the personal and moving letter, written by Richard of England to Ludwig Wolfgang Tetzel on 15 November 1496, is the most special one for me. The words offer a rare glimpse into the character and feelings of the Yorkist claimant, which is quite exceptional. While still expressing his high hopes to regain the throne of England, reading between the lines, one can feel the fear and vulnerability of the young Prince Richard.'

The letter from Henry VII is signed in his own hand and is an attempted approach to Tetzel in 1501 after the execution of 'Perkin Warbeck' in which he is trying to bring him into the fold. 'These are remarkable discoveries,' agrees Philippa, 'because they're

telling us more about Richard, Duke of York's, movements, who he was, who was around him.'

Gelderland revisited

The project has also carried out further investigations into the Gelderland document. 'It's been under forensic investigation, and we now know a couple of things,' explains Philippa. A watermark of a raised hand with sleeve and a quatrefoil above it in the middle of the paper it's written on has helped date the paper to the 'exact period that we were looking at'. What's more, the Tournament Tapestry in the Museum of Fine Arts in Valenciennes from c. 1494, in which the Project has identified as an image of Richard, Duke of York, shows him with his hand held in a similar fashion as in the watermark. The man is beside a figure identified as Margaret of Burgundy who holds a gillyflower to his heart. That flower, notes Philippa, was the emblem of Elizabeth Woodville, his mother. 'It seems to be saying, the story I've told you is who I am, and I've written it, and you have the proof of it,' she says.

The project has concluded that the Gelderland document was written in the language of the ducal court of Gelders, Middle Dutch. 'What we've also been able to discover is that Charles II, Duke of Gelders, was with Maximilian and his court at Grave, which is on the borders border of the duchies of Brabant and Gelderland Flanders, in July and August 1494 and Richard, Duke of York was presumably also there,' says Philippa. 'The timeline



seems really suggestive that the Gelderland document was written for Charles, Duke of Gelders, in order to support what Richard was saying to him.' Importantly, she adds: 'The Gelderland manuscript is not a propaganda leaflet that would have been disseminated everywhere. It seems to have been specifically written for the Duke of Gelders at that time.'

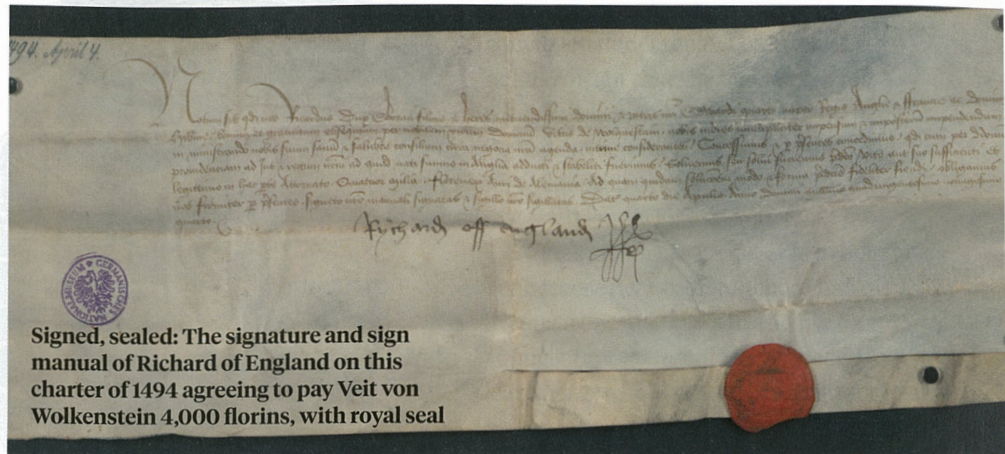
This is based in part of the fact that having looked at all of the chroniclers in and around Holland no other copies or version of it have been found. 'If it had been a propaganda leaflet, it would have been given out everywhere,' says Philippa. 'So it shows that he wasn't telling people. He was keeping everything close to his chest, because he was naming names, and many of the people that he named were still alive. Certainly, their families were still alive, and you can imagine that he would be reliant upon them for when he made his claim to the throne.'

Nathalie has also found an entry in a contemporary Nuremberg chronicle, which states that on 20 October 1493 the young king of England was present in Nuremberg and that he had been expelled from his kingdom. 'So that is not only confirming Richard's story, it's also very similar to what we have in the Lille receipt and Edward V being the young king of England who was expelled from his kingdom,' adds Philippa. 'So we're finding both stories. They are mirroring each other, but they're supporting everything that we know.'

Back to Dublin

So what happened to the elder brother, Edward, presuming he was crowned in May 1487 in Dublin? Philippa points to the 'very strange behaviours' of the Earl of Kildare and the Irish lords and bishops in 1488 when Henry VII sent his envoy Sir Richard Edgecombe to Ireland to obtain their oaths of fealty, of loyalty, to him. 'What you see is the Earl of Kildare and the Lords and bishops delay seeing Richard Edgecombe for 10 days,' she states. 'They put him off. They say that the Earl of Kildare is at a sanctuary, and then when he comes back, he's busy and he can't see him for another five days. And then Edgecombe gives Kildare and the Irish Lords a secret verbal message from Henry VII. And then Kildare goes to the council, the Irish council with this secret message, and they discuss everything. It takes a good few days, and only then do they then give Henry VII their oath of fealty.'

Philippa believes with confidence that Edward's rule was over in Ireland by July 1488. She then points to 'strange behaviours' from Sir Richard Harliston, the vice admiral under Edward IV

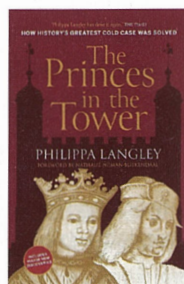


Signed, sealed: The signature and sign manual of Richard of England on this charter of 1494 agreeing to pay Veit von Wolkenstein 4,000 florins, with royal seal

and Richard III, whose ships were being chased by Edgecombe's, 'but he completely outwits them'. Next, Philippa points to the removal of Edward V's garter stall in St George's Chapel in May 1491 in Windsor and its reallocation to Arthur, Prince of Wales. 'We have no idea, but what we can say is that Edward V was deemed to be politically dead, in May 1491, and what happened at that time?' says Philippa. 'That's when the youngest, the younger brother, Richard, Duke of York, started his claim. That's when he arrived in Ireland, and the Irish Lords recognised him.'

So what next?

'I said I would give The Missing Princes Project ten years,' explains Philippa. 'That time is pretty much up with this book, but I am still going to continue because I've got so many incredible researchers around the world and here in the UK who are looking at particular lines of investigation. So I am going to continue quietly behind the scenes, and help them, support them.' Several will publish papers, articles, maybe even books, she thinks. 'So it continues, it goes on,' says Philippa. 'The most important point is we have to look in archives that Henry VII couldn't get to, to destroy materials. And that is why the European archives are so important.' So it's not the end, not by a long chalk. Meantime, the world has more evidence to consider, evidence that shows the version of history told for 500 years is even shakier than ever. 🍷



The Princes in the Tower: How History's Greatest Cold Case Was Solved by Philippa Langley is published by The History Press priced £20. It will be reviewed in the September edition of the *Bulletin*