



Case Closed?

Fresh doubt has been cast on whether Richard III was as wicked as his reputation

The twisted spectre of King Richard III, a monarch either villainous or horribly maligned, has materialised once more, beckoning Britain to weigh his contested past. His most recent appearance is due to Philippa Langley, a Ricardian researcher. She argues that her evidence strongly suggests that Richard did not in fact murder the “princes in the tower”, the young Edward V and his brother Richard of Shrewsbury, in 1483: instead the children survived and went on to lead a rebellion against Richard’s successor Henry VII.

Ms Langley has form in this area, since she was the driving force in uncovering Richard III’s re-

mains in 2012 in a Leicester car park, on the ancient site of the Greyfriars church where the Yorkist king was entombed after his 1485 death at the battle of Bosworth. Before then the conventional wisdom was that, during the later dissolution of the monasteries, his remains were thrown into the nearby River Soar. But when a skeleton with a curved spine, battle scars and a DNA link to Richard’s descendants was unearthed a few hours into the car park dig, such wisdom proved quite wrong.

Richard has long been depicted as an abominable uncle, who ordered his nephews’ assassination to usurp the throne. Such a view was confirmed in

the popular imagination by the skilful pen of William Shakespeare. Is it the truth, or simply Tudor propaganda? Ms Langley says the latter: she is ending her investigation in the belief that Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, two “pretenders” to the throne who confessed to being imposters, were in fact the princes themselves, forced into false confessions by Henry VII. Others will continue the research, and others still will dispute it. But there’s a chance that, in the court of public opinion, the last Plantagenet king may have been subjected to one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in history — or in history plays, at least.