

Princes mystery finally laid to rest

Jack Blackburn History Correspondent

A writer and historian who played a key role in uncovering Richard III's remains in a Leicester car park claims to have proved that the Princes in the Tower were not murdered.

After ten years of investigation, Philippa Langley believes she has built a case for the boys' survival that needs to be disproven. She says her Missing Princes Project has uncovered a large number of documents that, when considered together, create an irrefutable body of evidence.

Others say, however, that her findings are far short of proof and do not contradict the conventional narrative.

The traditional view on the Princes in the Tower — Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, the sons of Edward IV — is that the elder brother was deposed in 1483, weeks into his reign, by his uncle, who took the throne as Richard III.

Consigned to the Tower of London, Edward, 12, and Richard, 9, never emerged. The simplest explanation is that their uncle had these threats to his reign removed. Proponents of this view have never pretended that this can be proven because there are large gaps in the record.

Others believe the lack of evidence is because the boys were not murdered but lived on to try to regain the crown.

After Richard was deposed in 1485 by Henry Tudor, who became Henry VII, pretenders to the throne emerged, at least one of whom claimed to be one of the princes. Although two pretenders, Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, confessed to being impostors, Langley and others insist these were false confessions extracted by Henry VII and the men were in fact the princes.

Langley and hundreds of freelancers have uncovered documents that, she believes, prove their identity. These include receipts supporting a rebellion by "Edward IV's son" in 1487, the year of Simnel's uprising.

As part of that uprising, Simnel was crowned in Dublin. Langley has found fresh references that say the boy in that case was "called" or said to be "a son of King Edward". She believes these point to Simnel being Edward V.

More evidence points to the survival of the other prince, Richard: three items signed with his seal have emerged in Europe, as well as letters by him and other third-party references.

These include letters from James IV of Scotland and even a document from the Pope. There is also a detailed biography of his life as an escaped prince, though the authorship is not clear.

A large amount of material exists



about Richard and, seemingly in some cases, by him too. Langley claims this throws everything into a new context.

Asked if this amounted to proof, she said: "Had we supplied this amount of evidence in this book to say Richard III had murdered the Princes in the Tower, would you be asking me that question?"

Few would deny that her case is within the realms of possibility but many will point to flaws. The evidence around the boy crowned in Ireland is far from conclusive, for example.

The sources report a supposed identification, and "a son of King Edward" is but one of many names ascribed to this figure. Many accounts say Simnel was a pretender to be Earl of Warwick but other sources have him as the Earl of War-

Philippa Langley insists that the young Edward V and his brother Richard of York, right, survived after being sent to the Tower by Richard III, below



wick or as a false Prince Richard.

In this confused matter, it is impossible to know who the boy was supposed to be, let alone who he actually was. As for the findings con-

cerning Richard, Langley's detractors point out that this evidence is consistent with it being produced by the pretender Perkin Warbeck and his retinue.

It has always been maintained that Warbeck went through Europe trying to acquire support with the influence of Margaret of Burgundy, the aunt of the

missing princes. Such an effort would produce evidence of this sort.

Langley dismisses this argument, however, and suggests either that Margaret was lying or that Henry VII concocted the idea of pretenders to protect his throne.

Ultimately, Langley wants the debate to boil down to burden of proof. She believes the evidence she has amassed is proof the princes survived the Tower, and that it cannot be explained away.

"I would say that they now have to prove that Richard III murdered the Princes in the Tower," she said.

Adopting the standard of a historical missing-persons case, however, is an unusual approach with history. With so much evidence unavailable, things are usually judged on the balance of probabilities. That will steer many towards the extensive evidence for the pretenders narrative, upon which the traditional view is based, though Langley may have shifted the dial for others.

A hunch it's time we gave Richard III a break, leading article, page 27