

# Like Father, Like Son: Richard, duke of York, and Richard III

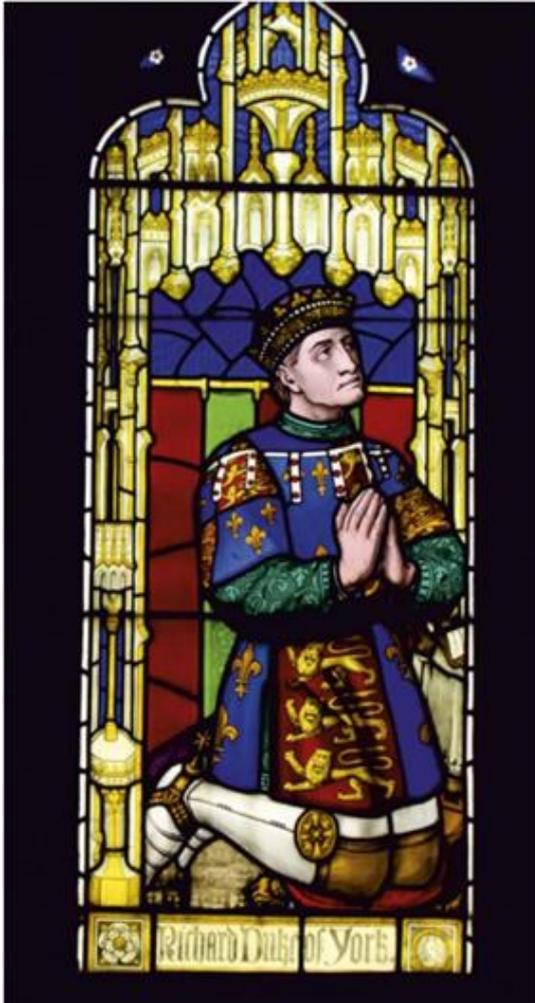
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*In the grand sweep of an era like the Wars of the Roses it is easy, tempting even, to polarise and simplify the opposing sides into Hollywood-esque goodies and baddies. Part of the pleasure of researching a biography of a single figure during such a period is delving into their world and pushing away those preconceptions to uncover the more human stories.*

Richard, duke of York, is frequently viewed as the pyromaniac whose lust for the crown ignited civil war and burned down the House of Lancaster. The last decade of his life is well documented as conflict drew closer, but I was concerned that this presents him out of context. He did not simply explode into being in 1450 aged 39. He arrived back from Ireland with four decades of baggage, experience, hopes and fears. His youngest son is also often considered to have sprung into being in 1483, his previous character unconsidered, and the similarities didn't end there.

One interesting snippet that I came across was a mandate from 1423 for payment to be made to Robert Waterton in part for the care of 'our very dear cousin Richard, duke of York', but Waterton also had custody of several high-profile prisoners taken at Agincourt, including 'the count of Ewe, Arthur de Bretagne, the marshal Bursigaud [Boucicaut], Perrin de Luppe, and Guichard de Sesse'. These men represented the flower of French chivalry at a time when French chivalry was the benchmark throughout Europe and the most striking name in the list is that of Marshal Boucicaut. While there is no direct evidence that Richard spent time with these men, it is at least tempting to consider that the young duke might have grown up in contact with such knights. Richard had been placed in Waterton's care in March 1416 as a 5-year-old boy and remained his ward until shortly after Henry VI's accession, when his wardship was sold to Ralph Neville, earl of Westmorland, for 3,000 marks. Boucicaut was possibly the most famous knight and pillar of chivalry in Christendom and surely had tales to tell a young duke about a country floundering under a weak king that ultimately led to disaster in battle at Agincourt and the unseating of a ruling house by a foreign invader. Could it be that those stories rang alarm bells years later? Sadly, at present, that can be no more than speculation.

Richard would spend the next five years in the household of the Nevilles, marrying Ralph's youngest daughter Cecily. In 1425, at the age of 13, Richard inherited another huge patrimony when his uncle Edmund, earl of March, died, leaving him lands in Ireland, Wales and the Marches that would prove hugely significant. Parallels with his youngest son are already plain to see, with a father lost young, formative teenage years spent in a Neville household and marriage to a youngest daughter. As the son of a relatively minor figure executed as a traitor, Richard of Conisbrough, whose parentage has been questioned, the dukedom of York was an unlikely inheritance swollen by the Mortimer lands and titles. Similarly, as the fourth son of a duke, the younger Richard's propulsion onto a national stage as duke of Gloucester at the age of 9 when his brother became king was by no means likely at his birth. This means that neither man was born to the title they held, though neither was an obscure noble either. Rather, both had uncertain futures that took radical upturns in fortune at an early age.



**Nineteenth century stained-glass window depicting Richard, duke of York, in St Lawrence's church, Ludlow.** *Photo courtesy of Matthew Lewis.*

The duke of York served two terms as Lieutenant-General of France, the first in succession to John, duke of Bedford, from 1436 to 1439 and the second following the death of his own successor Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, from 1440 to 1445. By this point, two factions had existed at Henry VI's court for years, one led by Cardinal Henry Beaufort, the king's great-uncle, who sought to promote the interests of his family. The cardinal had bankrolled the government for years, holding the rich see of Winchester, and was aligned to the peaceful aims of the king as he emerged from his minority, not least because they suited his own interests in the wool trade that had been so disrupted by war. The figurehead of the opposing faction was the king's paternal uncle Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, who championed the war party that remained committed to completing Henry V's conquest of France, perhaps driven by the fact that Henry V had saved Humphrey's life at Agincourt. Richard seems to have been co-opted to Humphrey's cause when Gloucester unleashed a tirade against Henry Beaufort in which he berated the exclusion of many senior nobles from government, naming Richard, duke of York, first on his list. There is no evidence that Richard had aligned himself to Humphrey, but as Gloucester

became more isolated he may have drawn York to him, making him Gloucester's candidate to take over from Bedford as Cardinal Beaufort tried to get the post for his nephew John Beaufort, father of Lady Margaret Beaufort. It also meant that when Gloucester fell and died in 1447, York became the new focus of hope for Humphrey's adherents and of the government's suspicion of Gloucester's aims. Loyal opposition was now focused outside the house of Lancaster as a result of its own paranoia and that, I believe, marked the real beginning of the end.

During York's time in France he managed a solid period without spectacular success but also without losing ground, in spite of being perennially starved of men and money. When York returned to England in 1445 he seems to have expected his office to be renewed, only to see it given to John Beaufort's younger brother Edmund, John having died following a disastrous incursion into lands held by the French king that veered into friendly territory in Brittany. Charles VII would write to Henry VI to complain that Edmund was rude and difficult to deal with, drawing a comparison with a far more cordial and productive relationship with York. Perhaps this tells us little, since Charles was meant to be the enemy, but Edmund was supposed to represent the peace faction and York, by association with Humphrey, the war party, yet the opposite seems to have been the case in France.

Richard was sent to Ireland in what is traditionally viewed as an ignoble exile, but the position of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was a prestigious one to which York, with his Mortimer heritage, was ideally suited. It was doubtless a demotion from France, probably as a result of Cardinal Beaufort's efforts, but it was not exactly disgrace and exile. Much of this work is utterly forgotten in tales of the Wars of the Roses and the duke's youngest son would endure a similar fate in relation to 1483. More than a decade of loyal and solid service, not to mention concern for justice, slipped from memory, to allow Richard III to be remembered as a cruel, ambitious man who only wanted the throne.

When York returned to England in the wake of Cade's rebellion, he found that Edmund Beaufort had beaten him to Henry's side. Efforts to assert what he believed to be his rights only caused more suspicion, culminating at Dartford in 1452, when York was duped, arrested and forced to swear a humiliating oath at St Paul's Cathedral. Things suddenly changed when Henry fell ill. Queen Margaret, according to the Paston Letters, made a bid for power as Henry's regent, something fairly commonplace in her native France but which demonstrates a lifelong failure to fully understand the kingdom and people of England. The notion of a woman holding such power terrified the great men of England, who were left with two choices; Edmund Beaufort or Richard, duke of York. York was perhaps seen as the lesser of the two evils, and probably as the most senior candidate. He became Lord Protector, a curiously English notion drawn from Henry VI's minority which gave York military power and responsibility for the defence of the realm from both external and internal threats. York's power within the government came from a prominent position that he was given on the Council, which was to rule. Those wary of York held their breath, but must have been pleasantly surprised by his even-handed and inclusive approach. This was the constitutional settlement revived in 1483, when Richard, duke of Gloucester, was given the military role of Protector, the Council was to govern with Richard as a senior member and care of the person of Edward V at least nominally rested with his mother's family.

In 1483, Richard perhaps saw lessons to be learned from his father's example. Henry's unexpected recovery had abruptly ended the Protectorate and plunged York back into the wilderness as Edmund Beaufort was released from prison, where he had languished accused of treason by John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk. York had put off dealing with Somerset, perhaps fearing repercussions or uncertain of his right to try the king's favourite. What followed was the first battle of St Albans, which had nothing to do with Henry's right to be king and everything to do with the right to advise him. Beaufort apparently blocked York's letters from reaching the king and in the parlay before the battle, York at least appears to have done all that he could to avoid a fight. He had learned a lesson from Dartford, though, and in the end left himself with little alternative but to attack. After the battle, York was appointed Protector once more, though it remains unclear whether Henry was ill again or simply side-lined. Either way, when York supported an attempt from the Commons to bring an Act of Resumption before Parliament, those who stood to lose in a big way wheeled Henry out to end York's authority and push him into effective exile, mostly at Ludlow, again. When York began gathering a force in 1459, Henry's army forced him to flee from Ludlow at the battle of Ludford Bridge and the subsequent Parliament, dubbed later the Parliament of Devils, attainted York and his allies.

It is only after this that York pressed his own claim to the throne, the shadow of a Mortimer supremacy that had long hung threateningly over the Lancastrian regime and had led to suspicion of that family and added to fears around York as the heir to it. The evidence suggested very strongly to

me that this was an action of last resort, a previously unthinkable step taken by a man who had lost everything he and his family possessed and who had no chance of redemption. York had served the king for over a quarter of a century by this point. He had been opposed to a court faction led by the Beauforts and Queen Margaret for a decade without even a hint that his intention was to unseat Henry. In 1455, he had loomed over a wounded Henry in a tanner's shop in St Albans with only a handful of witnesses. If he wanted the throne, all he needed to do was widen the gash in the king's neck. Instead, he dropped to his knee and pledged his loyalty. In 1460, with some evidence that York might have planned to lay down permanent roots in Ireland and only a visit from Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, to collect his mother to speculate upon, York suddenly returned to England and laid his hand on the throne to a disastrously stunned silence. What resulted was the acknowledgement of York as heir, a situation similar to that which Henry V had secured in France. Once more, this would hardly suit the needs of a ruthlessly ambitious man, since York was a decade older than the king. The ultimate result, though, was York's death at Wakefield.

As Richard, duke of Gloucester, arrived in London on 4 May 1483, he cannot have been ignorant of the events that had torn a country apart and cost him a father. A decade of careful manoeuvring ended in death. Wielding the power of a Protector could all too easily end in death. Making a bid for the crown might result in death. I believe that the lives of these two fascinating men followed some striking parallels, even down to their deaths in battle when York might have awaited reinforcements safe inside Sandal Castle and Richard III might not have charged across the field to try and end opposition to him once and for all. I also suspect that as Richard approached London, those similarities rang alarm bells in his mind and counselled him about the risks he faced. There would be no decade of uncertainty for him and I suspect that this drove his decisive actions. Like his father, he has been viewed as harbouring a burning desire for the crown. I suspect that like his father, taking it was an action of last resort rather than first.