

The Duke of Buckingham's Sons, October 1483—August 1485

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HENRY, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM, had two sons: Edward, his heir, born 3 February 1473, and Henry, born about 1479.¹ The eldest, 'Lord Stafford', is the subject of a intriguing document purporting to describe how he was hidden from Richard III and his men in 1483 after the news of his father's rebellion broke. It immediately raises the question of what happened to him and his brother in the remaining months of Richard's reign. This document only exists in a copy among the Bodleian Manuscripts made in 1575 and was printed in Hugh Owen and J. B. Blakeway, *A History of Shrewsbury* in 1825.² It was written for Duke Edward after the rebellion by Lady Elizabeth Delabere, second wife of Sir Richard, who describes herself as a 'servant' in her future husband's household at Leardesley, Herefordshire, in 1483. From other sources she can be identified as Elizabeth, daughter of William Mores, Serjeant of the Hall to Henry VII.³ The tone of the account is generally hostile to Richard III, as one would expect, and it states that the rebels suffered entirely in the cause of the future Henry VII. It is dated from a time when the young Duke Edward was old enough to appreciate her story and presumably reward her for her zeal so it cannot be much later than 1497 when he entered on his inheritance. Similarly the references to Henry VII. read in such a way as to convince the reader that he is still alive so it is likely to be later than 1509. It is not an orderly or particularly lucid story but the details are remarkably circumstantial and all the main characters of any importance are given roles that can be substantiated or are quite possible. Their names are also correct except for minor errors: Tyler for Tyrrel and Hurlleston for Hurlston. In view of the rarity value of this document for the fifteenth century and the comparative inaccessibility of Owen and Blakeway's *History* it has been thought worthwhile to print a transcript, kindly made by Miss Elizabeth Blakeway.

[f.241] A copy of an old role of paper found out in the threasory at Thornber Castle amongs the evidences there, mensis Julii anno xxi, 1579.

Memorandum: the seconde yeare of King Richard the Thirde Duke Henrie of Buckingham came from Brecknocke to Webbleie and with him brought my Lorde his wyfe, my Lorde Stafforde and my Lorde Henrie, and there taried one weeke and send for the gentelmen of the countrey unto him and when he had spoken with them departed thens. My Lorde his father made him a frysse coat, and at his departing he delivered his sonne and heyre to Sir Richard Delabeare knight for to kepe until he sent for him by a token, etc, et tu es Petrus et super hanc petram.

Item: John Amyasse that went with my Lorde away, delivered my Lorde Stafforde the litle parke of Webbley to Richard Delabeare knight, and then came after Sir William Knevet and Mistres Cliffe, and so the came to Kynnardesley all to gether. And when the came to Kynnardesley theare were xxⁿ of my Lordes servauntes at the place.

Item: at that tyme Dame Elizabeth Delabeare being servant to Sir Richard Delabeare knight tooke my Lorde Stafforde on her lappe and bare him amongs and throughte them all into a chamber of the place of Kynnardesley, and then went againe and fat Sir William Knevet and the gentelmen and brought them onto the chamber to my Lorde Stafford.

Item: or ever my Lorde of Buckingham departed onto of Webbley, Brecknocke was robbed, and fat owte the younger Ladies and gentlewomen and brought them to Sir Thomas Vaughams place, the Treatoure, which was Captaine of the said Robbery with Roger Vaugham of Talgarthe, his brother, and Wakin Vaugham, his brother and John Vaugham, beinge feede with my Lorde everie ycheon of them, and the leaste of them hadd xⁿ of fee of my Lorde with other dyverse gent[lemen], was some byne alyve and some bin deade.

Item: a proclamacion came to Harreforde for the said Duke his sonnes and Sir William Knevet that whosoever wold take them he should have for the said Duke fower thowsand pounce, for my Lorde Stafforde a thowsande markes, for my Lorde Henrie fyve hundreth poundes and for Sir William Knevet fyve hundreth markes. The which proclamacion Sir William Knevet redde him self and prayd that hit should not misse but be procleamede. And then was there great serche made where this saide companye was become. And so all the gentelmen of Harrefordeshyre were send for by pryvie seale to King Richard to Salisbure by that tyme Duke Henrie of Buckingham was brought by Sir James Tyler the thirde daie where he was pittifull murdered by the said Kinge for raisinge power and bringe in King Henrie the Seventh. [f.242] And after the saide Duke was taken Sir William Vaughams made great serche after my Lorde of Stafford and for the said Sir William Knevet which Lorde Stafforde and Sir William Knevet were in the keepinge of Dame Elizabeth Delabeare and William ap Symon. In the mean tyme she shaved the said Lorde Staffordes heade, and put upon him a meadens raine and so conveyed hym owte of Kynnardsley to New Church. And then came Christopher Wellsborne from Sir James Tyler to Kynnardsley, and said his father

commanded to have the said Lorde Stafforde delivered. And then answered the said Dame Elizabeth Delabere and William ap Symon that theare was none suche Lorde theare and that shall ye well knowe for ye shall see the house serched. And then went he to Webbeley to my Ladie and theare mett with Sir John Hurtlestons brother and fat my Ladie of Buckingham and brought her to the King to London. And the said Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon fat the said Lorde againe to Kynardsley and the said Sir William Knevet and brought them into the place Kynardsly and theare kept them untill Daivid Glin Morgan came thether from Kyng Richard and said Master Delabere was arested and said theare he should abyde untill he delivered Lorde Stafforde And then said Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon that ye shall well knowe theare is none suche heare and ye shall come and see the place and hit please yow and so in great mallisse he departed thens.

Item: the night beffore that David Glin Morgan came to Kynardsly the said Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon convaied my Lorde Stafford and Sir William Knevet to a place called Adeley, the perrishe of Kynardsley, and theare rested the fower daies, and then the said Lorde Stafford and Sir William Knevet ware fat againe to Kynardsley by the said Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon for because the could not convaye meate and drinke to them aright. And the kept them theare Sennight and then theare came a gicat crye owt of Wales and then the said Dame Elizabeth took my Lorde Stafforde in her lappe and went through a brooke with him into ye parke of Kynardesly and theare satt with him fower houres untill William ap Symon came to her, and told her how the matter was that noe man came nighe the place. And the meane tyme Sir William Knevet went owt with one William Pantwall into the feeldes, and lefte mistres Cliffe in in [sic] the place all this whyle. After this Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon toke the said Lorde Stafford and went to Harrefford in the midste of the daie. And he rydinge behinde William ap Symon asyde upon a pillowe like a gentel woman, ridde in gentelwomans apperell, and I wisse he made the fearest gentelwoman and the best that ever she had in her daies or ever shall have, whome she prayeth God [f.243] dailie to preserve from his enemies and to send him goode fortune and grace. And then the said Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon lefte my Lorde Stafforde in a widowse howse, a frend of hers, at Harrefforde, and Mistres Cliffe with him, and at that tyme Sir William Knevet departed from my Lorde Stafforde.

(Punctuation and the use of capitals have been modernised in this transcript)

A reconstruction of Elizabeth Mores' story with dates, corrections and additions from other sources' seems to be as follows. The Duke and Duchess of Buckingham came with their two sons to Weobley on about 18 October and stayed for about a week during which the Duke called up his men. During this week Brecon Castle was taken and robbed by Sir Thomas Vaughan of Tretower and others of his family, all feed men of the Duke but hostile to his increasing power in Wales and loyal to Richard III. The Duke left Weobley, on learning of the collapse of much of the rebellion and left 'Lord Stafford' in the keeping of Sir Richard Delabere. At some point after this the child was conveyed to Kynardsley, the manor of Sir Richard, and came into the care of Elizabeth Mores. The younger child had presumably been left with the Duchess. At Kynardsley at this time was Sir William Knevet, a leading councillor of the Duke. On 23 October a proclamation was issued at Leicester by the King offering rewards for several rebels including £1000 in money or £100 in land for the Duke and 500 marks in money or £40 in land for Sir William Knevet. Elizabeth's version exaggerates the

sums involved and contrary to her assertion there is no mention made of the children in the proclamation, not surprisingly as they could not be described as rebels.⁶ A copy of this proclamation would perhaps have reached Kynardsley about 26 October. At the same time a privy seal letter arrived from the King summoning the men of the county to meet him at Salisbury. Searches were instituted for Knevet, and Lord Stafford. The Duke himself was captured and taken to Shrewsbury where on 31 October he was handed over to Sir James Tyrrel and Christopher Wellsbourne, a known associate of Sir James, to be taken to Salisbury. There he was executed on 2 November. Lord Stafford and Knevet remained in hiding in various places under the care of Elizabeth and a fellow servant, William ap Simon. Elizabeth gives a vivid description of various devices used to hide the child such as taking him into the fields, dressing him as a girl, shaving his head, taking him to New Church on one occasion, to Adeley and to Hereford. At Hereford he was placed in a widow's house and there Sir William Knevet left him. Sir William later made his peace with Richard III for a substantial fine of 700 marks to the King, 100 marks to the Queen as well as lands in Norfolk.⁷ Christopher Wellsbourne made one effort to find the boy and then occupied himself in conducting the Duchess to London with the brother of Sir John Huddleston, presumably Sir Richard. This family was conspicuous in its support of Richard III, and Sir John had extensive interests in the West.⁸ A later attempt was made by David Glyn Morgan, also unsuccessfully. Morgan was, like Delabere, a local notable who continued on commissions throughout Richard III's reign.⁹ The malice attributed to him by Elizabeth does not appear to have affected the smooth continuance of Richard Delabere's career.

After the abrupt conclusion of this manuscript leaving 'Lord Stafford' at Hereford there is no evidence in Richard's reign for his whereabouts until he was placed in Margaret Beaufort's care by Henry VII. There is no sign of further hue and cry for the missing heir and it is certain that Sir Richard Delabere never suffered for his reception of the boy and was never a supporter of the Duke in his rebellion. He remained on local commissions throughout the reign. It seems likely that he was not involved in the over zealous escapades of his future wife and not at Kynardsley at the time. In due course it may have been he who handed over the boy to the proper royal officials. The wardship of neither child was granted out by Richard III so it seems they either remained in his Household or possibly that of his Queen, just as their father had been in the care of Elizabeth Woodville during his minority. Their mother was given an annuity of 200 marks from her late husband's lordship of Tonbridge on 20 June 1484 and there is no indication that it was intended to include provision for any children.¹⁰

From the point of view of costume history this manuscript is particularly interesting for the mention it makes of children's clothes and as an example of dressing a boy as a girl to conceal his identity.

The story has appeared in *Notes and Queries*. In a letter published on 19 April 1926, discussing various reasons for the dressing of children in the clothes of the opposite sex, G. H. White mentioned that 'in times of peril young boys have been disguised as girls for purposes of concealment or escape; e.g., Edward Stafford, afterwards third Duke of Buckingham, and James Stuart, afterwards King James II.'¹¹ The escape of James Stuart is well known but not that of Edward Stafford.

Incidentally, G. H. White (1873–1969) was Editor of *The Complete Peerage* from 1942 to 1959, specializing in the Norman period. He was, however, interested in the Princes in the Tower and contributed an Appendix about them to *The Complete Peerage*.¹²

Information about children's clothes in the middle ages is hard to come by. The usual sources are memorial effigies and brasses, illuminated manuscripts, wardrobe accounts and inventories in wills. Here we have a narrative in which the clothes of both a boy and a girl are mentioned, however briefly, in a matter-of-fact way. We thus get a tantalising glimpse of their ordinary costume as opposed to the formal and expensive wardrobes of royal children. The manuscript represents an unusual and welcome addition to our sources for the period. Two important points are confirmed. The dress of boys and girls of five in 1483 was different. Secondly, the clothes of a young girl were the same as or similar to those of a young woman.

The references to Lord Stafford's clothes are as follows: 'my Lorde his father made him a frysse coat'. 'In the meane tyme she shaved the said Lorde Staffordes heade and put upon him a meadens raiment'. 'And he rydinge behynde William ap Symon asyde upon a pillowe like a gentelwoman, ridde in gentelwomans apperell.'

So we see Lord Stafford, who was aged five years and eight months at the time of his father's rebellion, first dressed as a boy and then as a girl. His father made him a coat of 'frysse' or frieze, which is a coarse woollen cloth. The 'coat' was presumably a boy's over-garment, something to wear over his tunic in winter.

We then find him put into a 'meaden's raiment'. He would thus have exchanged his loose boy's tunic reaching to his ankles and his 'coat' for the girl's longer tunic or 'kirtle' and her trailing gown, fitted to the waist, low-necked and with tight-fitting sleeves. His head was shaved, perhaps partly to remove his own recognisable boy's hair, which would have been shoulder-length, but perhaps also to give him the feminine appearance of a high forehead, which was common at the time, and in the case of girls and women may have been produced by plucking rather than by shaving the hair. His head could then have been covered by a cap, a hood or some other form of feminine headdress.¹³

How Lord Stafford may have looked in his different costumes may be most readily seen in John Page-Phillips' *Children on Brasses*. Although the figures on brasses are simplified and stylised, general features are for that very reason more clearly shown. The girls have long hair and usually an elaborate 'butterfly' or other headdress; gowns trailing on the ground, fitted and often low-cut bodices; the boys, hair to the shoulder or shorter and bare heads; gowns of simpler cut reaching to their ankles, usually with collars.¹⁴

The disguise was certainly successful and boldly carried out. How long it lasted is not clear. Elizabeth Delabere does not say. Presumably Lord Stafford retained his disguise until it was safe for him to be released from hiding.

As to the nature of the disguise itself, we are reminded of Dionysus, sent by Zeus to be reared as a girl by Ino, wife of King Athamas of Orchomenus, to escape the wrath of Hera.¹⁵ Richard III takes the place of Hera in our narrative. The other example cited by G. H. White bears interesting similarities to the case of Lord Stafford. James Stuart was older; born on 14 October, 1633, he was fourteen and a half when he escaped from London dressed as a woman. He too had a female helper, Anne Halkett. She too left, in her autobiography, a full

account of her part in his escape. A tailor was engaged and he was surprised at the unusual shape of the young gentlewoman, whose measurements he was given. The prince, however, looked, we are told, 'very pretty' in 'the women's habitt that was prepared',¹⁶ a remark which echoes Elizabeth Delabere's reference to Lord Stafford as 'the fearest gentlewoman' she had known.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The Complete Peerage*, edited G.E.C., vol. 2, p.390, vol. 12 pt. 2, p.739.
2. Vol. 1, pp.240-1.
3. W. E. Hampton, *Memorials of the Wars of the Roses* (Richard III Society Upminster 1979), no. 119, for a biography of Sir Richard Delabere.
4. Thanks are also due to Mrs. D. Randall of the Staffordshire Record Office who clarified details of the original manuscript not clear in the photocopy.
5. The main sources consulted: Carole Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394-1521* (Cambridge 1978), especially pp.32-4, 206, 207, and A Tudor Nobleman as Archivist: the papers of Edward third Duke of Buckingham, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 5 (1976), pp.294-300. We are also indebted to Dr. Rawcliffe for confirming that she had found nothing to indicate the whereabouts of the boys at this time. W. H. Sewell, *Memoirs of Sir James Tyrell*, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, vol. 5 (1886), esp. pp.133-4. J. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament 1439-1509: vol. 2 Biographies* (HMSO 1936), for Knevet.
6. Thomas Rymer, *Foedera, etc.* (London 1704-37), vol. 12, pp.204-5.
7. W. Campbell, *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII* (Rolls Series 1873), vol. 1, p.131.
8. Hampton, *Memorials*, nos. 40, 92.
9. *Calendar of Patent Rolls: 1476-85*, pp.401, 491, 546.
10. *Ibid.*, p.436.
11. *Notes and Queries*, vol. 150, p.263.
12. *The Complete Peerage*, vol. 12, part 2 (1959), Appendix J. We owe this information about White to Mr. R. S. Lea, formerly assistant editor of *The Complete Peerage*.
13. Here we have relied mainly on Phillis Cunnington and Anne Buck, *Children's Costume in England*, Adam Charles Black, London 1965. We also thank Margaret Bodley for her comments.
14. John Page-Phillips, *Children on Brasses* (George Allen and Unwin London 1970), see figures 14 to 28, especially 15, the brass of Robert Ingylton, Thornton, Bucks., 1472.
15. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Penguin Books, revised edition 1960), vol. I, p.104.
16. J. G. Nichols (ed.), *Autobiography of Anne Lady Halkett* (Camden Society 1875), pp.20-23.