

One Prince or Two? The Family of Richard III

MICHAEL A. HICKS

IN 1986 I STATED THAT RICHARD III WAS THE FATHER OF CHILDREN rather than a single child, Edward of Middleham.¹ This comment was subjected to the most rigorous and thorough scrutiny of the evidence from Richard's reign by Muriel Smith. Her investigations were inconclusive: 'The question remains open, unless indeed Dr. Hicks has evidence which he did not cite in his study'.² Actually I did have some specific evidence in mind, which I cite below. Unfortunately, like so many facts about Richard, the more one probes the less certain one becomes ...

As Lady Despenser and heiress of the De Clare Earls of Gloucester, Richard's mother-in-law, Anne, Countess of Warwick, was patroness of the De Clare's Abbey of Tewkesbury. Consequently the monks of Tewkesbury were interested in Anne's daughters, Isabel Duchess of Clarence and Anne Duchess of Gloucester, and recorded some details about them in the founder's chronicle. This chronicle was stored in the abbey treasury until the dissolution and is now in the Bodleian Library. It is of late fifteenth century date and may indeed have been completed in 1477: it records the funeral of the Duchess Isabel early that year, but neither the trial of Clarence early in 1478, in which Abbot Strensham was involved, nor the fact that Anne later became queen and her husband king in 1483. It seems hardly credible that it could record Isabel's death without alluding to the fate of her husband unless it were written in 1477 and most probably before his arrest in May 1477. There are two sixteenth century versions of the chronicle in the British Library, but neither contains as much as the original. It is from one of these, Cotton Ms Cleopatra C iii, that Dugdale long ago printed the crucial final entries.³

After recording the births of Isabel's last three children and her funeral, Dugdale's text states [in Latin]:

And Lady Anne, the second daughter of Richard Neville and Anne his wife, was married to the Lord Prince Edward, son King Henry VI. And after his death she was married to Richard Duke of Gloucester, the son of Richard Duke of York and brother of King Edward IV, by whom she bore a son named [blank] at the castle of Middleham, in the year of our lord 1476.⁴

The name of the son is left blank. So it was too in the original, but there the name

George was inserted in the gap.⁵ So the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester had at least two sons: Edward of Middleham, later Prince of Wales, born 1473, who died in 1484; and George, born in 1476, also at Middleham, to whom Clarence as godparent may have given his name. This son George, we may deduce, died sometime before his brother Edward, probably before the accession of Richard III – how else could the King's son pass unnoticed? – but presumably after the last entry made in the chronicle, which does not mention his death. Thus Muriel Smith's rhetorical question is answered.

But is it as simple as that? If the name was left blank in the original, should we not suppose that the Tewkesbury Abbey chronicler was referring to Richard's only known son, Edward of Middleham, and merely mistook his date of birth? After all, he clearly has less information for Richard's children than for Clarence's, for whom he records precise dates and locations of birth and even the identities of the godparents. The name George is a later interpolation: how late? how reliable? It was added in what appears a fifteenth century hand – but how difficult it is to be sure of a single word! – and surely after the sixteenth century versions were made or the copy was made from which they were taken. One later version is much later than the interpolation and must therefore be a copy of a copy. How long after was the name George added, by whom, and on what authority? We can never know. We cannot discount the existence of a second shortlived prince but there need have been only one.

Which one? Edward of Middleham is usually held to have been born in 1473 but there is no direct authority for this: *the Rous Roll* knows nothing of his date of birth but merely states that he was born at Middleham.⁶ Historians have deduced that if his parents were married by February 1472 – itself a matter of some doubt – that logically their only child was born soon after. Again the parliamentary acts dividing the Warwick inheritance in 1474-5 may assume the existence of a child to their marriage. Even if they do, does it necessarily follow that it was Edward that had been born? We know that he was born at Middleham. We know that he was born by February 1478, when he was created Earl of Salisbury.⁷ Might he not be the son recorded in the founder's chronicle under 1476? In which case, of course, he was even smaller and less useful to his father as Prince of Wales than is commonly supposed.

So, to follow Muriel Smith, the question remains open. We know that Richard and Anne had one son, Edward of Middleham. Most probably they only had one, who now looks most likely to have been born in 1476. Possibly there were two princes. If so, the second one *may* have been called George.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M. A. Hicks, *Richard III as Duke of Gloucester: A Study in Character*, Borthwick Paper 70, (1986), p. 32.
2. M. Smith, *The Family of Richard III, The Ricardian*, vol. 92 (1988), pp. 102-3.
3. Bodleian Library Ms. Top. Glouc. d. 2; C. H. Bickerton Hudson, *The Founders' Book of Tewkesbury Abbey, Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, vol. 33 (1910), pp. 60-5; W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley and others, 6 vols., London 1846, vol. 2, p. 65.
4. Dugdale, vol. 2, p. 65.
5. Ms. Bodl. Top. Glouc. d. 2, f. 40.
6. *The Rous Roll*, ed. W. H. Courthope, reprint Gloucester 1980, no. 64. The Latin version says even less.
7. M. A. Hicks, *False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence*, rev. edn. Bangor 1992, p. 136.