

# Richard III murdered the princes in the tower.

New research lends credence to the account of Sir Thomas More.

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*Vintage engraving (1876) depicting the murderers of the "Princes in the Tower".*

England's [King Richard III](#) is at the center of one of the most famous assassination legends in history, immortalized in one of William Shakespeare's [greatest tragedies](#). It's quite the tale: a power-hungry duke seizes the throne when his brother unexpectedly dies, and he orders his young nephews (one the rightful heir) murdered in the Tower of London to cement his claim to the throne. But was he really a murderer? The debate over Richard III's presumed guilt has continued for centuries. Now, a British historian has compiled additional evidence of that guilt, described in [a recent paper](#) published in the journal *History*.

Although no bodies were produced at the time, historians largely agree that the princes were likely murdered in late summer of 1483. Two small human skeletons were found at the Tower of London in 1674, but there is no conclusive evidence that these were the princes, despite a perfunctory examination in 1933 concluding that the remains were those of children roughly the same ages. Two more bodies that may have been the princes were found in 1789 at Saint George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. Forensic scientists have been unable to gain royal permission to conduct DNA and other forensic analysis on either set of remains in order to make a proper identification.

Rumors began circulating almost immediately that the princes had been murdered by order of Richard III. Even today, Richard remains the most likely culprit, based on various accounts written in the ensuing years, including the only contemporary account (penned by an Italian friar named [Dominic Mancini](#)); the [Croyland Chronicle](#); an account by French politician [Philippe de Commines](#); [Thomas More's](#) *The History of King Richard III*; and [Holinshed's Chronicles](#)—the latter written in the late 16th century, and one of Shakespeare's primary sources for his play.



*The princes in the tower as envisioned by Paul Delaroche, circa 1831.*

However, Richard III was never formally accused of murder. His successor, [Henry VII](#) (House of Tudor), made only general accusations of "unnatural, mischievous and great perjuries, treasons, homicides, and murders, in shedding of infant's blood, with many other wrongs, odious offenses and abominations against God and man." Other possible culprits include [Henry Stafford, 2nd Duke of Buckingham](#) and Richard III's right-hand man, or Henry VII, supposedly to strengthen his claim to the throne. The case for Richard III's innocence was even memorably popularized in mystery writer Josephine Tey's classic 1951 novel [The Daughter of Time](#), which claims that the rumors were the result of highly effective Tudor propaganda. (It's a great read, but it hardly qualifies as a scholarly argument.)

But it's Thomas More's account that provides this latest evidence in favor of Richard III having ordered the princes killed, according to Tim Thornton, a historian at the University of Huddersfield.

More specifically identifies the culprit as [James Tyrell](#), an English knight who fought for the House of York and confessed under torture to the murders on the king's orders. Before he was executed, Tyrell also implicated two accomplices. More alleges that these two men were Miles Forest and John Dighton.

Many of Richard III's defenders have dismissed More's account as mere Tudor propaganda, given More's clear Tudor loyalties; his account was also written many years after the disappearance of the princes.

Thornton begs to differ with that assessment, arguing in his new paper that More based his account on information gleaned from sources who, in More's words, "much knew and had little cause to lye." Through painstaking research, Thornton has identified two of More's fellow courtiers between 1513 and 1519 as the sons of Forest—Edward and Miles—and he believes they are the sources that More refers to in his history. There is even mention of one of them in More's correspondence to [Cardinal Thomas Wolsey](#). This strengthens the credibility of More's account and the case for Richard III's guilt.