



## Richard III and the Murder in the Tower

*Peter A. Hancock*

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Richard III is accused of murdering his nephews—the "Princes in the Tower"—in order to usurp the throne of England. Since Tudor times he has been painted as the "black legend," the murderous uncle. However, the truth is much more complicated and interesting. Rather than looking at all the killings Richard III did not commit, this book focuses on the one judicial murder for which we know that he was responsible. On Friday, June 13, 1483, Lord Hastings was hustled from a meeting of the Royal Council and summarily executed on Tower Green within the confines of the Tower of London. This book solves the mystery of this precipitate and unadvised action by the then Duke of Gloucester and reveals the key role of William Catesby in Richard's ascent to the throne of England. It explains his curious actions during that tumultuous summer of three kings and provides an explanation for the fate of the "Princes in the Tower."

## **Richard III and the Murder in the Tower Details**

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## From Reader Review Richard III and the Murder in the Tower for online ebook

### Gaja says

As much as I adore English history, I had the hardest time getting into this book. Not already being in possession of a strong knowledge base on the reign of Richard III, a lot of the text came off as a string of names and dates that all blended together and kept the immersion level low enough that pretty much anything worked to be a distraction. I'm actually rather sad that I didn't like this more.

The paper quality, though, was stellar.

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### John says

The title is misleading. The deaths of the Princes, held in the Tower, were scarcely mentioned. The main subject of the book appears to be the summary execution of William, Lord Hastings (without trial) and the reasons for this, which I don't find entirely convincing. Much is made of Richard's loyalty to his brother Edward IV and the importance of loyalty to Richard himself. Hastings' loyalty to Edward IV's memory, led him to withhold from Richard information that his late brother had been betrothed to Eleanor Butler, prior to his subsequent marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. Legally it could therefore be argued that the issue of the Woodville "marriage" were illegitimate and Richard was the rightful King. The author argues that this sin of omission on Hastings' part cost him his life on the orders of an enraged Richard.

We are led to believe that William Catesby, a rather astute and wily lawyer in the mould of the later Thomas Cromwell, was the villain of the piece. We learn much about Catesby in this book and that is very interesting but we do not learn anything about the untimely deaths of Edward V and his brother.

Hancock is a Ricardian. I agree with him that RIII hasn't had a fair press but I'm not convinced by his sketch of Richard, interesting though it is. However his portrayals of Catesby, Hastings, Stillington and Jane Shore make the book worth reading and has fuelled my interest in Richard III.

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### Kara says

Hancock is a little too pleased with himself with the fake-out of the title and beginning of the book, heavily implying it's another examination of what happened to the Princes in the Tower. Surprise! It's all about the death of Lord Hastings, whose head was chopped off on Richard's orders under murky circumstances.

After the fake out beginning, Hancock gets down to brass tacks and does a heavy scrutiny of all the players involved, examining primary sources, timelines of when people's physical locations crossed, putting together some well-reasoned character analyses, and asking over and over *Cui bono?*

It might seem like an almost silly thing to spend a whole book examining this one death, but Hancock makes a good case for how much the entire history of Richard III, and the kings right before and after, were all

connected to it.

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### **Pam Shelton-Anderson says**

I am a long time student of this era of English history and will also state that I would identify with the Ricardian camp of those that believe he has been unjustly smeared by history. I very much liked this book. He focuses in minute detail on the events surrounding Richard's decision to take the throne. He uses and analyzes all of the existing sources and makes an excellent case for his position that Hastings execution was related to his knowledge of Edward's pre-contract. I will be reading this again.

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### **Richard Wright says**

I picked this book up while researching a short story, and found it engaging and well laid out. It's dense with names and dates in places, and outside of the central question it tries to answer (at what point did Richard decide that he wanted to be king?) glosses over a lot of details, but there's just enough to follow along with the arguments, which are sourced and cogent. In the end, I didn't use a jot of what I discovered here, but I enjoyed following the detective work and sound reasoning of the author a great deal.

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### **Gaele says**

AudioBook Review

Stars: Overall 4 Narration 5 Story 4

Familiar with the story of the young Princes in the tower, conventional wisdom states that Richard III was the engineer of their demise. Hancock however, finds that the clear evidence that could definitively state that Richard, commonly known as the hunchbacked tyrant from Shakespeare was the culprit. Instead, Hancock takes us on a twisty (and the Yorks, Tudors and Plantagenets were all twisty) tale of a certain death laid at his feet: that of Lord Hastings: executed on Tower Green in 1483. How could Richard, with eyes on the throne, be driven to such an act, and ignore those around him who cautioned restraint?

Non-fiction, particularly history can often feel as if it is little more than a recitation of facts and events, with only the most skilled bringing those two elements into concert to create a story that is readable, informative and engaging. What emerges from this near forensic detailing of people, locations, motivations and connections to recreate the events leading to Hastings' execution and extrapolating his theories from there: most of which seem eminently plausible, even if the real truth is yet unknown. Clearly the power struggle was in constant flux, as everyone seemed to be jockeying for a step up or along that ladder of power, and Hancock's clear presentation of volumes of information never felt overburdened or confusing.

Narration for this title is provided by Anne Flosnick, and while there weren't characters portrayed per se, she did keep a sense of the intrigue and 'behind closed door' moments separate from the open and often showy displays from each of the people we meet. Clear and precise phrasing highlighted the text, never losing that sense of a story unfolding before you: a wonderful way to introduce the author's work and conclusions, and never feeling as if this is 'just another history' lesson. A wonderful combination of events and writing that

brought the late 15th century to light and encourages my digging more into the years before the Tudors.

I received an AudioBook copy of the title from Tantor Audio for purpose of honest review. I was not compensated for this review: all conclusions are my own responsibility.

Review first appeared at I am, Indeed

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### **Rebecca Hill says**

Informative and interesting!!

Peter Hancock goes outside the normal "murder" in the tower, to look at one that we know for sure did happen. The beheading of Lord Hastings during the council meeting in June 1483 was one that took everyone by surprise. He and Richard were friends. They had shared exile and more together. So when Richard ordered that his head be cut off with cries of treason, the reasons seemed murky and unclear.

Through this book, Hancock goes through the facts, the times leading up to the fatal council meeting, and what events led the protector to proclaim treason against a friend. The precontract between Edward IV and Eleanor Butler is examined, along with many other pieces of evidence.

While no one can say for sure whether the princes in the tower were killed or if they were spirited away to a safer location, whether Richard III or someone else could have had a hand in their demise, and the Woodville clans trying to keep a hold on power following the death of Edward IV - evidence is laid out as to the THREE nephews that Richard III had in the tower, but the main concern is the death of Lord Hastings. Follow the trail of evidence and come to your own conclusions as to the actions on that fatal day. Peter Hancock does a very good job of keeping his personal bias out of the text, unless otherwise stated, but he also delves deeper into some of the actions of the key people, who have been overlooked since Shakespeare and Thomas More did so much to disparage Richard III over the course of the Tudors. We move beyond the shadows that have been cast and look at the man himself, one who was loyal to his brother throughout his entire reign, without any hint of a darker personage underneath.

Read and decide for yourself! I for one LOVED this read. It is one of the better books written on Richard III, and one that I feel deals more fairly with him and some of those who surrounded him.

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### **Blair Hodgkinson says**

This book attempts to shed light not on the murder of the princes in the Tower, as the title might be reasonably expected to suggest, but rather on the execution of Hastings. This is all well and good, but as the author asserts several times, the evidence for why Richard executed Hastings so swiftly and without trial is sorely lacking. Now the author works up different explanations for the actions of others surrounding events and offers up his own reasons why this happened and what it meant for Richard's choice to usurp the crown. Unfortunately, again as the author asserts, this is mostly speculation. This book is not solid history, but personal interpretation... at least until further evidence presents itself either to prove or disprove it.

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## **Joan Szechtman says**

Review of *Richard III and the Murder in the Tower* by Peter A. Hancock.

One of the issues I have thought both puzzling and key to the events surrounding Richard, Duke of Gloucester's actions as Protector to Edward V on June 13, 1483 was his summary execution of William Hastings--an execution delivered without, it would seem, due process. From my point of view, this was uncharacteristic action by a man who was for most of his life, all about the rule of law. I struggled to tease apart this event in particular, and the subsequent actions taken by Richard that led him to be crowned king of England. Thus, it was with great anticipation that I opened this book that promised to offer a fresh and intriguing view of the possible motives and reasons that led to Hastings' execution and Richard's decision to go after the crown. Hancock did not disappoint.

First, I want comment on the style in which the book is written. It's like Hancock is speaking with me. This book is highly readable and thoroughly engaging, and whether you agree or not with the theory, it is logically constructed. Hancock was careful to present primary and secondary sources that both substantiated and countered his theory. In the instances where the sources were contrary to his hypothesis, Hancock showed why he thought the interpretation was incorrect or didn't hold up. He didn't dismiss these arguments out-of-hand. In all but a small handful of instances, Hancock gives sources to substantiate his position. I will not quibble with a couple of un-sourced statements that were thrown in because they had no effect on the book's premise.

The book set out to determine when did Richard first decide that he wanted to be King and not protector. The time span Hancock examines was from when Richard first learned his brother Edward IV had died to when Richard was made King on June 26, 1483. Although, Edward IV died April 9, 1483, Richard didn't learn of it until about a week later. From the time Richard learned of Edward's death to the council meeting on June 13th, Richard's actions were consistent with his role as protector. There was no outward indication that he was aiming for anything else. Hancock posits that something happened during that council meeting that changed everything. Per Hancock, Richard learned about the precontracted marriage between Edward IV and Eleanor Butler from William Catesby during a break in the meeting. He also learned that Hastings knew about the precontract. Enraged by this betrayal, Richard returns to the council and accuses Hastings, among others, of treason. However, Hastings was executed that day and the only one to lose his head. Even though I don't agree with the timing of the events for reasons I won't go into here, I think the scenario Hancock painted holds together very well.

What I like best about this book is that it is thoughtful and pointed out possible scenarios that I had not considered. Whether or not you will agree with the thesis Hancock lays out in his book, I think it is well worth reading.

Joan Szechtman

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## **Carole P. Roman says**

Interesting theory on the events leading to the murder of the Princes in the Tower. Professor Hancock takes you there with almost a "Time" magazine quality and puts everything into 15th century perspective. While

Hastings execution is given a compelling reason, I still believe Richard knew about Edward's pre-contract with Eleanor Butler, and he had to get rid of anyone who was sympathetic with Edward's children. Hastings was a King's man and had to have been duty bound to carry out his liege lord's wishes. The book is well written and as fast paced, with a feeling of an intense power struggle being decided as events unfolded.

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### **Vik says**

Really interesting read. I'm not 100% sure if I agree with Hancock's theory as to why Hastings was executed so suddenly, but as we don't know the real reason or what was going through Richard's head that morning, it's as good as any other theory there might be. I would be interested to read a book by Hancock about the Princes in the Tower, which he briefly touches on in this book.

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### **Tom says**

Despite the title, this book is not about the Murder of the Princes. Instead, Hancock takes a look at a death history knows for certain Richard was responsible for: William, Lord Hastings, ordered executed for some reason one day out of the blue before Richard assumed the kingship. As such, Hancock looks at the existing evidence and tries to posit why Richard did it, who set him on, and what this might mean for Richard's own ambitions.

Much of what Hancock says, by his own admission, is unknowable. He does at least admit as much, but that may put a damper on the work for some readers.

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### **Rita says**

Pure speculations with no evidences.

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### **Gilda Felt says**

A fascinating and informative book, it takes on this little discussed execution and turns it on its head (no pun intended.) Normally, either the writer glosses over the execution, or uses it as further reason to damn Richard. But this author dug deeper. Step by step, the reader is led through every bit of information, about the event, as well as the players. And while we'll never know if his conclusions are right, they certainly ring true, and make a lot of sense.

Unlike many, I wasn't disappointed that the book wasn't about the disappearance of Edward IV's two sons. *That's* the issue that has been done to death. We needed another book about it like a hole in the head. It is mentioned, and the author gives his opinion on their fate, but they aren't the focus. It was a refreshing change.

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### **John Gray says**

The murder in question here was not that of the two princes, but of Lord Hastings. Hancock has an interesting theory about this, which ties in to Richard's decision to usurp the throne. While the basic idea does seem to make sense it is founded on pure speculation, and has no tangible proof. Hancock spends a lot of time, quite repetitively, trying to gather support for his central thesis by tying various characters and events together but, again, it is entirely speculative. I would have liked to have been convinced by his arguments, as they do provide a potential explanation for Richard's behaviour in connection with Hastings' immediate execution, however I could not get past the lack of any element of supporting evidence. So, while I hope his thesis is true it would never stand up to any scrutiny, and so I was left disappointed by his arguments.

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