

# The Mystery of Richard de la Pole

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## A Report from Venice.

ON 6 OCTOBER 1506, Marino Sanuto<sup>1</sup> noted in his diary various items of news from Zuan Francesco di Beneti, the Venetian Secretary in Buda. Among these he wrote:

*Rizardo rosa bianca di Ingalterra e zonto li, qual e inimico al re d'Ingalterra, unde dito re manda do oratori in Hongaria per dimandarlo, quali e zonta in Corvatia.*<sup>2</sup>

Richard White Rose of England has arrived there (i.e. in Buda) who is an enemy of the King of England, wherefore the said King has sent two ambassadors to Hungary to demand him, who have arrived in Croatia.<sup>3</sup>

This item of news could be construed as meaning that Sanuto and Beneti thought (rightly or wrongly) that Richard, younger son of Edward IV, was still alive in 1506 and in the Hungarian capital. *The Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1202-1509*, however, identifies the subject as Richard de la Pole.<sup>4</sup> What is known otherwise of Richard de la Pole's career makes probable enough that he should have been in Buda in 1506. What is surprising is to find him styled 'White Rose', a title by which he was commonly known after 1510, and which seems to denote the Yorkist claimant to the English throne. That he should have been described as such at any time in his career is astonishing, but there is a particular mystery surrounding the use of such a title before 1513.

## The Yorkist Succession.

This is not the place to discuss whether either (or both) of Edward IV's sons might have been still alive in 1506. If either survived, he would have been the natural Yorkist claimant. Tudor partisans of course regarded the Yorkist succession as having passed through Edward IV's eldest daughter Elizabeth to her children by Henry VII — Prince Henry (later Henry VIII); Margaret, Queen of James IV of Scots; and Mary, wife successively of Louis XII of France and Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk.<sup>5</sup>

If, however, the children of Edward IV be discounted, the next in line were the children of Edward IV's brother George, Duke of Clarence. Despite Clarence's attainder, his son Edward, Earl of Warwick, was strong enough a

claimant to be considered by Richard III as a possible successor after the death of his own son in 1484.<sup>7</sup> It was probably his youth which prevented Warwick emerging as heir presumptive at this time. Henry VII regarded him as sufficiently dangerous a rival as to keep him in close imprisonment in the Tower, possibly from his accession, certainly from Lambert Simnel's rebellion in 1487. In 1499, it appears that Ferdinand of Aragon insisted on Warwick's death as a precondition of allowing his daughter Katharine to marry Prince Arthur.<sup>8</sup>

Tudor apprehensions regarding Warwick seem not to have been passed on to his sister Margaret, or not until much later. This is surprising. After Warwick, the Yorkist succession passed through one or other of Edward IV's female relatives, and a good case could have been made out for preferring his niece. Margaret Plantagenet was born in 1473. She was married about 1491<sup>9</sup> to a firm Tudor supporter, Sir Richard Pole.<sup>10</sup> This marriage produced four sons and one daughter. The eldest son Henry, later Baron Montague, was possibly born as early as 1492. Even if Margaret, as a woman, was considered ineligible for the throne, her sons, particularly as they approached manhood, were potential Yorkist claimants. Yet Henry VIII had so few fears from this quarter that in 1513 he created Margaret Countess of Salisbury, restored to her the extensive lands of the earldom, and in the Parliament of 1513/14 reversed Warwick's attainder and restored the family's rights.<sup>11</sup> Margaret's daughter Ursula married Lord Stafford, son of the Duke of Buckingham, in 1516. The Poles came under a temporary cloud in 1521 when Buckingham was attainted, and were under suspicion after Henry VIII's break with Rome.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the family were in no real danger until after the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. Belatedly (it seems) their proximity to the throne was found to be dangerous. Lord Montague was executed in 1539, Margaret, Countess of Salisbury in 1541.

Following the strict laws of succession, after the Poles came the de la Poles, the children of Edward IV's eldest sister Elizabeth and John de la Pole, second Duke of Suffolk. The couple had no fewer than seven sons listed as follows:

1. John, Earl of Lincoln, born 1462, named by Richard III as his heir presumptive in 1484, who was killed at the Battle of Stoke in 1487, ostensibly fighting for the Simnel-Warwick cause.

2. Edward, who took holy orders, and was made Archdeacon of Richmond in January 1484. He died on 8 October 1485 when he can still have been only in his early twenties.

3. Edmund, who succeeded to the Suffolk title on his father's death in 1491, but as from 1493 was only allowed the dignity of an earl as the decline in the family fortunes left their estates no longer sufficient to support a dukedom.

4. Humphrey, born in 1474, the second of the brothers to take holy orders. He died in 1513.

5. William, born c.1478. He was arrested in 1502, a suspected accomplice in the conspiracy which ruined his family. He spent the rest of his life in the Tower. He was still alive there in October 1539, but was apparently dead by November 1540.<sup>13</sup>

6. Geoffrey, who is known to have been a scholar of Gonville Hall in Cambridge. Little else is known about him save that he is buried (at an uncertain date) at Babraham, near Cambridge.

7. Richard, supposedly the youngest of the seven.<sup>14</sup>

In 1506, therefore, even discounting any direct descendants of Edward IV, there stood between Richard de la Pole and any claim he might make to the throne the four sons of Margaret Pole and at least two, probably three, possibly even four of his own elder brothers.<sup>12</sup> Yet in that year he was described in diplomatic correspondence as 'White Rose of England' and came to be regarded by some as rightful King of England.

### **Richard de la Pole.**

The date of Richard's birth is uncertain. If he were indeed the youngest of his brothers, he can hardly have been born before 1480. Some date between then and 1485 seems the most likely. Apart from one unlikely tradition which will be discussed below, nothing seems to be known about him for certain before 1500 when he appeared at Court. Even coming from so distinguished a family, he need have attracted little attention until his mid or late teens. His brother William was about sixteen when he entered the service of Henry VII in 1494.<sup>13</sup> Again, he was described as 'young' in 1510 which for those days suggests someone not much over twenty-five rather than someone of thirty or over.

Only a year after Richard's first appearance, the family which (apart from John, Earl of Lincoln) had hitherto been quietly loyal to the Tudors, fell under suspicion of conspiracy and treason. Edmund, Earl of Suffolk, and his brother Richard, fled to the Continent. At Calais they encountered Sir James Tyrell who was arrested in 1502 and executed as their accomplice. William de la Pole was arrested the same year and began his long internment in the Tower. Edmund, William and Richard de la Pole were attainted in 1504 and by name excluded from pardon at Henry VIII's accession in 1509.

Edmund and Richard went on from Calais to the Court of their aunt, Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy. Earl Edmund went on from there to the Tyrol where he met the Emperor Maximilian, from whom he hoped for assistance. The attitude of Maximilian and his son the Archduke Philip towards the de la Poles was ambivalent. On the one hand, they offered them refuge and some prospect of material support. On the other hand, they were anxious not to offend Henry VII who was important to them in their European-wide ambitions. By the treaty of Augsburg in 1502, Maximilian promised Henry VII to give Suffolk no more assistance. But he allowed him to settle in the Imperial city of Aix-la-Chapelle, where Richard joined him. The Count of Hardech lent Suffolk 20,000 gulden.<sup>14</sup> Unable to repay the loan, Suffolk left Richard behind as his security at Aix and in 1504 returned to the Netherlands. Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, however, had died the previous year, and her domains were no longer a safe haven for Yorkist exiles. Suffolk was seized by a local nobleman and imprisoned in the castle of Hatten. The following year, the Archduke Philip took Suffolk into his own hands.<sup>15</sup> In 1506 when Philip was in England, Henry VII put pressure on him to hand Suffolk over. To this Philip agreed, but only on a promise that Henry would respect Suffolk's life.<sup>16</sup> Suffolk was kept in the Tower until 1513. Henry VIII clearly did not feel bound by his father's promise, and had him executed under the attainder of 1504. According to some accounts, Henry did not want to leave Suffolk alive in England while he was on campaign in France; according to others, it was Suffolk's correspondence with his brother Richard which brought him to the block.<sup>17</sup> Richard had assumed greater importance since he and Suffolk

had parted company. In 1506, the Bishop of Liège, Erard de la March,<sup>21</sup> intervened to enable him to leave Aix. It was from there, presumably, that he went to Hungary. King Ladislaus VI refused Henry VII's demands for his extradition, and instead gave him a pension. Richard had returned to Imperial territory by 1510 when he was at Freiburg.<sup>22</sup> It is from this time that Richard de la Pole, by whatever right, came to call himself, and to be called, Duke of Suffolk and 'White Rose'. He seems also to have been allowed facilities for recruiting mercenaries in the Empire, and this had an important bearing on the rest of his career.

### **In the Service of the King of France.**

Knowledge of Richard's career before 1512 is sketchy, but from that year until his death in 1525, it can be plotted closely. Some time between his appearance at Freiburg in 1510 and 1512, he entered the service of King Louis XII of France, who granted him a pension of 6,000 crowns.<sup>23</sup> In 1512, he commanded a band of German mercenaries (*landsknechts*) in an unsuccessful invasion of Navarre. They incurred heavy losses, but Richard distinguished himself by sharing the privations of his troops, and the campaign won him the friendship of the immortal Chevalier Bayard.<sup>24</sup> In 1513, he commanded 6,000 troops against his fellow-countrymen at the siege of Thérrouanne. In 1514 he had command of 12,000 in Normandy to prepare an invasion of England. England and France, however, concluded peace, a peace sealed by the marriage of Louis XII and Henry VIII's sister Mary. Louis, however, refused Henry's demand to hand over Richard de la Pole.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, he gave Richard letters to the civic authorities of Metz, then virtually a free city within the Holy Roman Empire, requesting them to give him a good reception. On 2 September 1514, Richard entered Metz with an escort of sixty cavalry and a guard of honour provided by the Duke of Lorraine. The city gave him a present of wine, oats for his horses, and a safe-conduct renewable at his convenience.

Louis XII died in 1515. His successor, Francis I, renewed Richard's pension. The new King's ambitious policy in Italy soon embroiled him with other European powers, including England. Richard again became useful to create a diversion for Henry VIII. On Francis's return from Italy in 1516, Richard visited him at Lyons, and at Christmas secretly came to the King in Paris. In the Summer of 1517, Richard went to Milan and Venice, though his purpose is not known. In 1519, Francis sent him to Prague as his emissary to King Louis of Bohemia whose support he sought in contesting the election for the Imperial Crown.

Until February 1519, Richard enjoyed the use of a house at Metz called *Passe-Temps* lent him by his friend the Chevalier Baudoire. Baudoire then resumed possession,<sup>26</sup> and Richard rented from the Cathedral Chapter a mansion called *La Haulte-Pierre*. For this, he paid only a peppercorn rent, but undertook to repair its considerable dilapidations. At *La Haulte-Pierre*, he lived in great magnificence on the pensions he received from Hungary and France. He introduced horse-racing to Metz, but gave up the sport himself after losing heavily on his bets. He also amused his leisure by seducing the wife of a worthy goldsmith of Metz, Nicholas Sébille. This amour (which put his biographer in mind of the adventures of Edward IV)<sup>27</sup> caused a public scandal. Richard seems to have regarded it all as a passing flight of fancy, and left Metz for Toul. Here the

Cardinal of Lorraine" placed a house at his disposal where he lived between 1519 and 1522.

Richard, however, far from being a mere dilettante, was sufficient of a rose-thorn in the flesh of Henry VIII and Wolsey for them to attempt his assassination.<sup>21</sup> In 1520, he was reported to be planning another attempt to invade England, this time via Scotland with the help of the Duke of Albany,<sup>22</sup> and he was reported (probably wrongly) to have landed at Dunbar.<sup>23</sup> In 1522, when war was resumed between France and England, Richard joined Francis in Paris. In 1523 he and Albany went to Brittany and this time certainly did set sail to invade England. What went wrong is not clear, but they parted at sea on 21 September, Albany sailing on to Scotland and Richard returning to France. Richard then went to Switzerland to recruit mercenaries for King Francis. They joined up again at the siege of Marseilles.<sup>24</sup> In 1525, Richard accompanied Francis on his Italian campaign. On 24 February, the French army was virtually annihilated by the Hapsburg forces at the Battle of Pavia. King Francis himself was taken prisoner. Among the thousands slain, in the thick of the fight, was Richard de la Pole.<sup>25</sup> He was buried at the Augustinian Priory at Pavia. His monument and inscription were noted by the essayist Joseph Addison on his travels in Italy.<sup>26</sup> The Cathedral Chapter of Metz, obviously bearing him no ill-will for the Sébille affair, established an annual requiem for his soul.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Mystery.**

The use made of Richard de la Pole by Louis XII and Francis I as a weapon in the war against England seems to anticipate the use made by Louis XIV and XV of the exiled Stuarts. But there is a significant difference: James II, his son and grandson were without question the lawful successors to the English throne by hereditary right, whereas the youngest son of the Duke of Suffolk was never higher than sixth, and for most of his life eighth, in the Yorkist line. The French, unlike the English, were sticklers when it came to hereditary succession. Yet Louis XII in 1512 treated Richard de la Pole 'as King of England'.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, when Francis I received him at Lyons in 1516, he acknowledged, 'I know your title to be good to the Crown of England.'<sup>29</sup> There never seems to have been an attempt to get William, Richard's brother, out of the Tower. Henry VIII and Wolsey could (for the moment) leave him safely alive while attempting to assassinate Richard.<sup>30</sup> When Henry VIII heard of the latter's death, he exclaimed, 'All the enemies of England are gone.'<sup>31</sup> The mystery is how successive kings of England and France (with the King of Hungary and various noblemen for good measure) came to attach such apparently exaggerated importance to a minor Yorkist claimant. It may be assumed from his friendship with the Chevalier Bayard that Richard had a proper sense of chivalry. Yet he apparently forgot family duty so far as to style himself Duke of Suffolk in 1510 in despite of the rights of three elder brothers then still living. The question seems to pose itself whether Richard de la Pole was really the seventh son of Edward IV's sister Elizabeth, or whether under that name there was not concealed someone more senior in the Yorkist succession.

### **A Hypothesis.**

It may be mentioned at this point that whereas English sources are silent on Richard de la Pole's career before 1500, a succession of French historians<sup>32</sup> state

that he entered the service of Charles VIII of France in 1492, fought for him at the siege of Boulogne, and was promised a pension of 7,000 crowns. As the *Dictionary of National Biography* points out, this French tradition is unlikely, though it fails to observe the real grounds of improbability, viz., that if the estimate of Richard's age is within any degree accurate, it would postulate a boy of at most twelve years fighting under the French banner. That authority suggests the tradition as having mistaken Perkin Warbeck for Richard de la Pole — again an unlikely suggestion, and it fails to comment on how Perkin Warbeck can have been mistaken for *both* Richard de la Pole and Richard, Duke of York. The French tradition remains a tantalising and apparently inexplicable piece of evidence.

Neither this French tradition nor the ambiguity regarding the subject of Sanuto's note give much grounds for supposing that Richard de la Pole might have been the missing younger son of Edward IV. As with Perkin Warbeck, there was probably an age-difference of at least ten years. Apart from the difficulties of concealing Richard, Duke of York until 1500 and then introducing him at Court, such a hypothesis would need to explain why from 1510, Richard chose to call himself Duke of Suffolk rather than any other title.

It may be noted that Richard called himself Duke, and not Earl, of Suffolk. That suggests that he did not regard himself simply as the heir of Edmund de la Pole, particularly as he assumed the style while Edmund was still alive. The question arises whether Richard could have been an otherwise unknown son and heir of John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln. No children are recorded of John, Earl of Lincoln. On the other hand, considerable obscurity surrounds his married life. It is uncertain whether he married twice, or only once. John was only about twenty-three at the time of his death in 1487. If he had had a son after Richard III's fall in 1485, there would have been policy in keeping his birth secret, or better still, passing the child off as his much younger brother; John, as Richard III's heir presumptive was certain to constitute a threat to Henry VII, and the young child would inherit his father's perilous position. It must be stressed that this is no more than a hypothesis, but Richard de la Pole, son and heir of the Earl of Lincoln, could have legitimately claimed in 1510 to have been the heir of John, second Duke of Suffolk. As heir to Richard III's heir presumptive, his claim to the English throne might have been strong enough to convince Louis XII and Francis I. It may be noted that in 1522, Richard de la Pole also started to style himself Earl of Lincoln. He also — more problematically — called himself Earl of Pembroke. This title had been borne by William de la Pole, first Duke of Suffolk, but it lapsed in the family on his death in 1450. The last legitimate holder of the title, in Yorkist eyes, had been Edward, elder son of Edward IV.<sup>4</sup>

Two further questions complete the mystery surrounding Richard de la Pole. His affair with Mme. Sébille shows that he was not immune from amorous adventures. Did he ever marry? Did he leave any children, legitimate or illegitimate? It is strange that the report of only one amour should have come down to us. Perhaps the least attractive feature of Richard de la Pole was his readiness to take up arms against his fellow-countrymen.<sup>5</sup> Sportsmen will applaud his enthusiasm for horse-racing. But his outstanding quality seems to have been his gallantry as a soldier. His biographer compares him with his friend the Chevalier Bayard.<sup>6</sup> That surely is a glory which nothing can take away.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Marino Sanuto (alias Marin Sanudo) was a Venetian historian and man of letters. He began his diaries 1 January 1496, two years before entering public life. On his career and the importance of his diaries see the article under his name in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*.
2. *Diarii di Marino Sanuto* (Venice 1881), vol. 6, p.438.
3. My own translation.
4. The payment in cloth 'to a woman that was norice to the Prince brothere to the Queenes grace' on 1 December 1502 suggests that one or other of Elizabeth of York's brothers may still have been alive then — unless it were for services rendered nineteen or so years before. N. H. Nicolas, *Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York* (London 1830), pp.74-5.
5. No. 889, p.325. Published London 1864.
6. Their elder son, Prince Arthur, had died in 1502.
7. Paul Murray Kendall, *Richard the Third* (London 1956), pp.290-1.
8. *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*: Edward, Earl of Warwick. The Spanish ambassador De Puebla in a letter to Ferdinand and Isabella 11 January 1500 rejoiced that there was none of the blood royal left in England apart from the children of Henry VII and his Queen. *Letters and Papers illustrative of the reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, ed. J. Gairdner (London 1861), vol. 1, pp.113-4.
9. Possibly as late as 1494. See *DNB*: Margaret Pole.
10. It should hardly be necessary to point out that the Poles and the de la Poles were only related by their mutual marriages to members of the House of York. But Richard de la Pole's biographer, F. des Robert in *Un pensionnaire des rois de France à Metz* (Nancy 1878), confuses them to the point of thinking that it was Richard de la Pole who married Margaret, Countess of Salisbury. Sir Richard Pole died in 1505.
11. *DNB*: Margaret Pole. The article suggests that Henry (possibly prompted by Katharine of Aragon?) felt some remorse for his father's judicial murder of Warwick.
12. Margaret's third son Reginald, Cardinal Pole, wrote *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione* (1536) attacking the break with Rome. Margaret and Lord Montague disavowed his views.
13. It may be noted that Edward died within two months of Bosworth Humphrey three months before Suffolk's execution, William between the execution of Montague and Countess Margaret. It is difficult to avoid a suspicion of political murder surrounding these deaths.
14. On the de la Pole brothers, see the *Complete Peerage*, edited by H. A. Doubleday and Lord Howard de Walden (London 1929), vol. 12, appendix 1. Note is drawn to Richard being listed after William in the Official List of 1500, the Attainder of 1504, and the exemption from pardon of 1509. In 1510, Richard was described by the Emperor Maximilian as 'the young Duke of Suffolk'. William was then over thirty — hardly young by the standards of the time; Richard was presumably younger.
15. Humphrey de la Pole's being in holy orders would not have debarred him from the Suffolk title or the throne. Cardinal Henry, the last of the House of Avis, succeeded to the throne of Portugal 1578-80.
16. *Complete Peerage*, as above. He was knighted at the Battle of Blackheath in 1497.
17. The gulden was a silver coin worth 1s. 8d. (10p). Hardech, otherwise Hardegg or Hardecke is a town on the Ruhr, sixteen miles south of Dortmund.
18. Philip was ruler of the Netherlands through inheritance from his mother, Mary of Burgundy, daughter of Charles the Bold. Margaret, sister of Edward IV, was Charles's second wife.
19. Philip's wife Juana of Aragon was sister to Henry's daughter-in-law Katharine.
20. *Letters and Papers Domestic and Foreign for the reign of Henry VIII (L&P H.VIII)* (London 1862), vol. 1, no.4324, p.637. *DNB*: Edmund de la Pole, notes that Suffolk, whose learning as a youth had been praised by the dons of Oxford, was writing letters which were virtually illiterate after his captivity. This creates a suspicion that he was tortured, or like Warwick subjected to mental cruelty.
21. Philip of the Duc de Bouillon. His brother Robert de la March was friendly with Richard at Metz.

22. *Complete Peerage*, as above.
23. *DNB*: Richard de la Pole.
24. *Le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*.
25. Louis's conduct is remarkable in that, if anything untoward had happened to Henry VIII, who was still childless, he could have claimed England in the right of his new wife. Louis was married to Mary by proxy in 1508, but the marriage only became a reality in 1514 after the peace with England.
26. Baudouin resumed the house for his own use, not through any quarrel with Richard.
27. Des Robert, *op.cit.* (n.10), pp.28-31.
28. Jean, brother of Claude de Lorraine, first Duc de Guise. Mme. Sébille followed Richard to Toul, but was persuaded to return to her husband.
29. *L&P H. VIII*, vol. 2, part 1, nos.609 (p.166), 1581 (p.437).
30. John Stewart, second Duke of Albany. An opponent of English influence in Scotland and particularly of the Queen-Mother Margaret. Though Regent of Scotland, he preferred to live in France.
31. *L&P H. VIII*, vol. 3, part 1, no.995, p.364.
32. Des Robert, *op.cit.*, p.31. Marseilles was under siege by the Constable de Bourbon.
33. A remarkable painting in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford shows Richard lifeless in the thick of the fighting with the inscription, *Le Duc de Susfoc dit Blance Rose*.
34. Joseph Addison, *Remarks on several parts of Italy* (London 1705), p.21.
35. Des Robert, *op.cit.* (n.10), p.34.
36. *L&P H. VIII*, vol. 1, no.3320, p.379.
37. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, part 1, no.1973, p.573. At the time, Francis I was at the height of his power after the Battle of Marignano and the Concordat of Bologna, and had little need of a pretender of dubious credibility.
38. *supra*, n.29.
39. J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (London 1968), p.136 n.
40. André Duchesne, *Histoire d'Angleterre* (2nde. édition, Paris 1634), p.975; Des Robert, *op.cit.*, p.6.
41. *DNB*: John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln; *Complete Peerage*, vol. 7, pp.689-90 notes that there is no known evidence for Doyle's statement (*Official Baronage*) that Lincoln married as his second wife a daughter of Sir John Galafre. Margaret (née Fitzalan, daughter of the twelfth Earl of Arundel) his widow was still alive in 1493 — unless Lincoln married two wives, both called Margaret.
42. *Complete Peerage*, vol. 10, pp.397ff.
43. This did not, however, deter some dissident English soldiers at Tournay from considering enlisting under his banner. *L&P H. VIII*, vol. 2, part 1, nos.325/6, p.104.
44. Des Robert, *op.cit.*, p.33.