

Richard III Dramaturgical Notes:

The Real Richard?

The Tudor dynasty had good reason to smear the reputation of the last Plantagenet king, Richard III. The Plantagenets had ruled England for over three hundred years when the “upstart” Tudors took the throne by force by killing Richard III in the Battle of Bosworth Field. They had to establish their legitimacy by any means possible. One of the ways they did this was to construct the narrative that King Richard III was an evil and destructive king, unnatural in his violent appetites and ambition, and that Henry Tudor was a liberating hero who, rather than stealing the throne from its rightful king, freed England from an evil tyrant. Shakespeare, writing for the Tudors and using Tudor sanctioned sources, is absolutely a part of this propagandistic smear campaign. His Richard is difficult to like. He is manipulative, calculating, and feels no pangs of conscience at the murder of his friends, brother, wife, and young nephews. While he has moments of humanity (we feel for him when he expresses the traumatic othering and alienation he has experienced because of his disability), these are overshadowed by the capering delight he takes in violence. But this is propaganda. The real Richard was more complex and intriguingly elusive.

The historical Richard was, like all kings of his age, a man of violence. His successes on the battlefield and his ruthless handling of his enemies can't be denied. He was not, however, **more** violent than his noble peers, and his ruthlessness was rather unremarkable in the context of the time. His marriage to the Lady Anne seemed to be a happy one (and evidence suggests she died of tuberculosis, not Richard's poison). He worked to keep the peace. He ran the country effectively and efficiently and, far from what one would expect from a tyrant, instituted court reforms to protect citizen's rights. He was no hero, but he wasn't a monster either.

Part of the Tudor campaign against Richard was to exaggerate his physical disability. People both in Richard's day and in the Tudor era believed that inner moral corruption was reflected by the body. People with physical disabilities were often persecuted and feared as being evil or unwholesome. This hateful superstition was exploited by Richard's detractors, who made a point to describe his body in sensationalized, even lurid terms. We have a very clear understanding of Richard's true physical condition since archeologists discovered Richard's skeleton buried in a London parking lot in 2012. His bones bear horrific slash marks: evidence

of his violent death. They also reveal that he had significant spinal scoliosis. This condition would have caused him chronic physical pain, but it would not have kept him from being a successful warrior (an important kingly quality in the period). It is very possible that the trauma of being treated like a monster by superstitious peers was far more debilitating than his actual physical condition. Shakespeare's play exaggerates the physical extent of Richard's disability, but does not exaggerate the trauma of his alienation and othering. (if anything he downplays it).

Ultimately, perhaps it is the eschatology of Richard that is so relentlessly compelling. His end marked the end of so many other things. He was the last Medieval English king, the last Plantagenet king, the last English king to die in battle. The transition from Plantagenet to Tudor was more than a shift in leadership, it was a shift in culture and ideology as well. Richard's death signified the end of the English Middle Ages and the early beginnings of the English Renaissance.

The Script

This is a daunting play. Second only to Hamlet in length, and with a cast of over 40 characters, it is the final play in Shakespeare's eight play exploration of the lives of the late Plantagenet Kings. As part of a double tetralogy it is rather epic in scope, and it can be difficult to follow if not considered part of that larger whole. It is full of intrigue, murder, battle, and complicated (even Byzantine) loyalties.

The play presents us with no clear heroes. Henry of Richmond is rather two dimensional and saccharine. All the other nobles in the play act like vipers in a pit. The only voice of broken-hearted reason comes from the women, who are the only characters who consistently dare to speak truth to Richard's power. Shakespeare gives Margaret a gratifying amount of agency, even though she has been humiliated and deposed. In many ways, she is Richard's gravitational opposite in the orbit of this play, pulling characters and events towards herself and her own desire for revenge. She curses Richard to be haunted by his own actions, unable to rest, and tortured by his conscience, and this indeed becomes his doom¹. Queen Margaret, who says

¹ interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, Richard's doom is reminiscent of Macbeth's. Neither Macbeth nor Richard can peacefully sleep. Both are haunted by visions of murdered (or bloody) children. Both would have been better off had they ignored the prophecies about them. Richard is "in so far in blood that sin will pluck on sin" while Macbeth is "in blood stepp'd in so far that.. returning were as tedious as go o'er"

her powers to curse her enemies came from the agony of her loss, teaches the other women (her enemies) how to curse the men who kill their children. She and Queen Elizabeth share a couplet in which Margaret promises Elizabeth her grief will give her words power:

Elizabeth: My words are dull; O, quicken them with thine!

Margaret: Thy woes will make them sharp, and pierce like mine.

Ultimately the curses of these grieving women do come to fruition and Richard and his allies come to violent ends. Margaret gets the last (bitter and broken) laugh.

The play covers a period of about 14 years, from Henry VI's death in 1471 to the Battle of Bosworth Field in August of 1485. Shakespeare's script condenses this time frame a great deal, and we have condensed it even further in our attempts to keep the show's run time under two and a half hours. We have cut characters or merged them in order to bring the named characters down from over 40 to 24. Every cut hurt. We hope that this abbreviated and simplified version of Shakespeare's magnificent play inspires people to read his script in its entirety, and to explore the fascinating and larger-than-life real lives of the Plantagenet era.

Summary:

Act One:

~The Lancastrian Henry VI and his "Warrior Queen" Margaret of Anjou have been defeated in the battles of Barnet and Tewksbury (and their son Edward slain). The Yorkist Edward IV and his "Commoner Queen" Elizabeth Woodville have recently been crowned in their place. Henry VI is imprisoned in the Tower of London, and Margaret wanders the castle, debased and humiliated.

~Richard, Duke of Gloucester and brother to King Edward IV, begins the play by explaining how happy everyone is now that his brother is king, but that he is too ugly and "deformed" to join in the festivities. He announces that "since he cannot be a lover" he will be a horrible villain instead and destroy the peace. He explains that he has convinced his brother King Edward that their other brother, George Duke of Clarence, is a traitor.

~George enters under guard and tells Richard that Edward has gone crazy and is throwing him in The Tower. Richard pretends to sympathize. Lord Hastings, newly released from The Tower, enters and tells Richard that King Edward is overwrought and unwell. Richard feigns concern.

~Lady Anne, widowed daughter-in-law to Henry VI and Margaret, enters following the corpse of the newly dead Henry VI. Richard woos her.

~Queen Elizabeth Woodville and her brother and son (by her first marriage) enter and discuss their fears about King Edward IV's declining health. They worry what will become of them if the King dies. They do not trust Richard and believe he is turning the opinion of the nobles against them. The Lords Buckingham and Stanley enter and report on the King's health. Richard enters, feigning outrage, and blames Elizabeth and her family for the fact that George is imprisoned in the tower. They argue about who is more loyal to the King and about who is plotting behind his back. Margaret, who has been listening all this while, tells all present that they are ALL traitors since the true King and Queen are she and Henry VI. She curses those present for stealing the throne, killing her son and husband, and debasing her in such a way. She curses Elizabeth to outlive her children and to "die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen." She curses Hastings, Rivers and Grey to die young, with their "natural age...by some unlook'd accident cut off." She prophesies that Buckingham will be "bitten" by Richard's false friendship. She curses Richard himself to be destroyed by his own conscience, unable to sleep without being tortured by horrible visions of his diabolic deeds.

~Richard hires two murderers to slay his brother Clarence. Clarence tells Brakenbury, the Tower Keeper, about his nightmares. The murderers enter the Tower, dismiss Brakenbury, and murder George by stabbing him and drowning him in a butt of malmsey wine.

~King Edward IV enters with his family and the Lords Hastings, Buckingham, and Derby. He is proud of establishing oaths of peace between them. Richard enters and announces the death of George, blaming Edward. Edward collapses in shock. Richard plots with Buckingham to destroy Queen Elizabeth and her family.

~The Duchess of York, mother to Edward IV, Richard, and George, laments the death of George. Queen Elizabeth enters and announces the death of Edward. They grieve. Richard and The Lords enter and convince Elizabeth to send for her young sons. Her oldest son, Edward, is to be crowned King Edward V and Richard feigns fear for his safety. He offers to protect Both Young Edward and Elizabeth's other son, Young Richard of York. Richard and Buckingham set off to fetch the Young Princes.

~The Young Princes are brought to the tower. Young Edward is suspicious of his uncle Richard and protective of his younger brother. He is only a child, however, and so Richard is able to convince both Young Princes to enter The Tower to wait for Young Edward's coronation. Buckingham and Richard are prepared to put Richard on the throne instead of Young Edward but they need to first get rid of Queen Elizabeth's family and to test the loyalty of Lords Stanley and Hastings. They send Elizabeth's family, Lord Rivers and Lord Grey, to Castle Pomfret to be executed on made-up charges. They send Catesby to determine whether Lord Hastings is loyal to the Young Edward or if he could be convinced to back Richard instead.

~A messenger in Lord Stanley's employ arrives at Lord Hastings' house and tells him that Lord Stanley had a prophetic dream about a murderous boar. Lord Stanley interprets this as meaning that Richard, whose crest is a boar, is not to be trusted and means them harm. Stanley urges Hastings to leave the city with him. Hastings scoffs at the very idea. Catesby enters and tells Hastings that Richard commanded the execution of Lords Rivers and Grey, long-time enemies of Hastings. Hastings is happy at this news. Catesby then suggests that Richard should be king instead of Young Edward. Hastings is outraged at the very idea and is emphatically loyal to the Young Prince. Catesby quickly pretends to agree. Lord Stanley enters and expresses more misgivings about Richard. Hastings dismisses all concerns, emphasizing that he and Richard are friends and Stanley is worried over nothing. Buckingham enters and summons both lords to a council meeting to determine when Young Edward will be crowned.

~Sir Ratcliff, Richard's go-to-executioner, beheads Lords Rivers and Grey at Pomfret castle. They remember Queen Margaret's curse.

~The Lords Stanley and Hastings, The Bishop of Ely, and Buckingham arrive to the council meeting. Richard welcomes them and sends the Bishop out for strawberries. Buckingham informs Richard that Hastings won't support Richard but will remain loyal to Young Prince Edward. Richard and Buckingham withdraw to figure out how to move against Hastings. Stanley again expresses his misgivings about Richard. Hastings pooh-poohs them. Richard returns with an entourage, feigning horror and outrage, and accuses Queen Elizabeth of being a witch and using magic to injure his arm. Hastings is confused about this and hesitates to agree that Queen Elizabeth is a witch. Richard uses his hesitation to accuse him of being a traitor to England and tells Ratcliff to behead him. Buckingham and Ratcliff drags Hastings to his death while he bewails his fate and remembers Margaret's curse. Richard feigns grief at Hastings' betrayal. Ratcliff returns with the heads of Hastings, Rivers, and Grey and fixes them on spikes on the ramparts. Bishop Ely is terrified and promises to tell the people of England that the execution of Hastings was just and that Elizabeth had used witchcraft to curse Richard's arm. Stanley, full of misgivings, leaves in silence. Buckingham and Richard eat the Bishop's strawberries while planning their next move. Buckingham will spread more lies around all of England, saying that not only did Queen Elizabeth use witchcraft against Richard, she was also an adulteress and therefore Young Prince Edward is a bastard and not eligible to inherit the throne. Once England believes that lie, Richard can then assume the throne as the rightful heir. Richard promises Buckingham rich rewards once he is crowned.

Act II

~The Duchess of York, Queen Elizabeth, and Lady Anne (now married to Richard) meet in front of The Tower, bearing gifts for the Young Princes. They are excited about Young Edward's coronation. Brackenbury will not grant them access to the tower, saying that Richard has forbidden anyone from accessing the children. Catesby enters and tells the women that Elizabeth, due to her witchcraft and adultery, has been deposed and Young Edward's claim to the throne erased. He announces that Richard is the rightful legitimate King of England and demands that Anne follow him to Westminster to be crowned Richard's Queen. The women lament.

~The newly crowned King Richard enters his throne room in pomp and glory. He is full of suspicion and worries that some of his Lords are still loyal to Young Prince Edward. He is worried about rumors that Lord Stanley's stepson, Henry of Richmond, is planning to steal the crown. He asks Buckingham to murder the Young Princes in The Tower. Buckingham is shocked and asks for time to think. Richard is furious. He locates Sir Tyrrel, a desperate knight, and commissions him to murder the children. He tells Catesby to announce that his wife Anne is sick and will shortly die (it is implied that Richard will poison her). Buckingham returns and asks for the rich rewards Richard promised him. Richard ignores him and tells Lord Stanley to keep a better eye on his wife (Stanley's wife was Margaret of Beauford, who was mother to Henry of Richmond by her first marriage). Richard insults Buckingham, who leaves to support Henry of Richmond. Tyrell returns to inform Richard that the Young Princes in the Tower are dead. Messengers arrive to tell Richard that Henry of Richmond's armies are approaching, that Buckingham is headed to join his strength to Henry's, and that many other lords are withdrawing their support from Richard and offering it to Henry instead. Richard leaves to appraise the situation for himself.

~The Duchess of York and Queen Elizabeth enter in despair about the murder of the Young Princes and the death of Anne. Elizabeth begs Margaret to teach her how to curse. Margaret tells her that the power to curse comes from overwhelming grief and anguish. The Duchess and Elizabeth decide to confront and curse Richard. The Duchess of York curses Richard to die a bloody death in the upcoming battle with Henry of Richmond. Elizabeth begins to curse Richard as well, but Richard forces her to send for her young daughter, also named Elizabeth. Richard tells her that unless the houses of York and Lancaster are united by a marriage between Richard and Young Elizabeth, England will continue to be torn apart by war and millions more will die. Elizabeth must give her daughter over in marriage to Richard "for fair England's peace." Ratcliff and Catesby enter to announce more army movement. Buckingham has added his soldiers to Henry of Richmond's army. Stanley enters and Richard confronts him, accusing him of siding with Henry. Richard tells Stanley that Stanley's young son, George, will be held in ransom for Stanley's loyalty. More messengers arrive and inform Richard of troop movements. They all depart for the battlefield.

~Lord Stanley secretly sends messages to Henry of Richmond, promising to fight on his side in the upcoming battle. He tells Henry that he has to conceal his loyalty until the last minute in order to protect his son, George.

~Henry of Richmond arrives and begins to organize his armies. Richard builds his camp on one side of the field. Henry confirms Stanley's loyalty. They all prepare for the next day's battle.

~Richard, asleep in his tent, is visited by the ghosts of all those he has slain. They curse him to die in despair on the battlefield the following day. He wakes up in horror and considers what he has become. The battle begins. Henry is victorious and Richard is killed. The women's curses have been fulfilled. Henry announces the unification of the white and red roses, and the end of tyranny.

People in the Play:



King Henry VI

King of England and husband to Queen Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI was of the Lancastrian line. Appears as a ghost in this play. Contemporaries describe him as sensitive, studious, and pious. He had several bouts of mental illness that kept him from ruling but his wife, Queen Margaret, picked up the slack. He died in The Tower (on Edward IV's orders? By Richard's hand? Shakespeare blames it all on Richard but the history is unclear).



badge: Antelope chained



Queen Margaret of Anjou

Queen of England and wife to King Henry VI. Edward Hall, writing some decades after her death, describes her as "This woman excelled all other, as well in beauty and favour, as in wit and policy, and was of stomach and courage, more like to a man, than a woman." Another contemporary described her as "a tiger in a woman's skin." She ruled in Henry VI's place when he collapsed under the strain. She led armies (though probably not actually into combat).



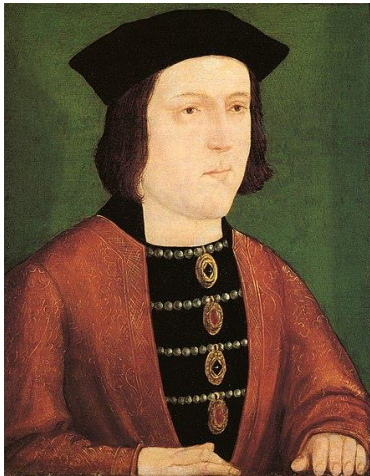
Prince Edward of Westminster (aka Edward of Lancaster)

The only surviving child of King Henry VI and Queen Margaret of Anjou. Appears only as a ghost in this play. The York and Warwick coups led to the Act of Accord, which disinherited him and named Richard Duke of York (Richard III's father) next in line to the throne. In response, Prince Edward and his mother Margaret led armies against Richard Duke of York (King Henry VI couldn't lead the armies because he had collapsed under the strain). He was briefly married to Anne Neville in an attempt to sooth tensions between the Lancasters and Warwick Kingmaker. He was killed (legend says by Richard III) at the Battle of Tewkesbury, just months after his marriage to Anne. He was around 18 years old.



Cecily, Duchess of York

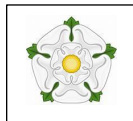
The aunt of Richard Neville of Warwick (Kingmaker); wife of Richard Plantagenet; and Mother of Edward IV, George of Clarence, and Richard of Gloucester. She was the grandmother of the Tower Princes. She was also a member of one of the most powerful families in all of England. In fact, her family was behind the scenes, orchestrating much of what went on during the Wars of the Roses. She was known by some as “Proud Cecily.” In her later years she was renowned for her piety.



King Edward IV

King of England and husband to Queen Elizabeth (Woodville). Of the house of York, he was the oldest surviving son of Cecily Duchess of York and Richard Plantagenet. He was father to the Tower Princes. He alienated the powerful Richard Neville of Warwick (Kingmaker) by marrying the relatively lowborn Elizabeth Woodville (for love, not money or politics. Never a good move for a king). The marriage caused the Kingmaker to change his allegiance from York to Lancaster, and further exacerbated the conflict between the two houses.

badge: White Rose within Sun in Splendor



Queen Elizabeth (Woodville)

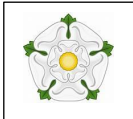
Queen of England and wife to King Edward IV. Sister to Anthony Rivers; mother to Grey, Young Prince Edward, Young Duke of York, and Young Princess Elizabeth (future bride of Henry VII and Tudor Queen). She was a widow with 2 sons (to Sir John Grey, a supporter of the Lancasters) when she married Edward IV. Because of her middling birth and previous marriage she was considered a poor match for King Edward IV. After Edward IV's death she was accused of witchcraft and adultery (with no evidence) and her young sons, the Tower Princes, were declared illegitimate. After the disappearance of her young sons in The Tower, she allied herself with Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond and was influential in bringing about the fall of Richard III.



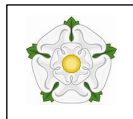
Young Prince Edward, briefly and nominally King Edward V
 Prince Edward was the son of King Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth (Woodville). He was never actually crowned since, shortly after his father's death (and when he was only around 12), his Uncle Richard of Gloucester imprisoned him in The Tower. Nobody knows what actually happened to him and his brother. They may have been murdered, they may have escaped and lived out their lives incognito. There were, however, two small skeletons found under a staircase in The Tower in the 1600s...
 badge: Falcon Argent in a gold fetterlock



Young Duke of York (Richard of Shrewsbury)
 (this painting is an imagining of both Tower Princes and was painted by John Everett Millais in 1878)
 The Young Duke of York was the son of King Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth (Woodville). He was only around 9 when he disappeared with his brother, Young Prince Edward, in The Tower.



Anthony Woodville, Earl of Rivers (second from left)
 Rivers was the brother of Queen Elizabeth (Woodville). Originally a Lancastrian, he changed sides to support his sister when she married Edward IV. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, had him and his nephew, Richard Grey, arrested and beheaded at Pontefract (Pomfret) castle. Also pictured are King Edward IV, Queen Elizabeth (Woodville), and Young Prince Edward (V).



(Sir) Richard Grey (this image is an artist's depiction) was the son of Queen Elizabeth (Woodville), stepson of King Edward IV, and half brother to the Tower princes. Richard of Gloucester executed him and his uncle, Anthony Rivers, at Pontefract (Pomfret) castle in 1483.



George Duke of Clarence

The middle surviving son of Cecily Duchess of York and Richard Plantagenet, he revolted against his older brother King Edward IV and argued violently over land with his younger brother Richard Duke of Gloucester. Ultimately Edward IV sentenced him to death. According to legend he was allowed to choose the manner of his execution, and he chose to be drowned in a butt of malmsey wine.

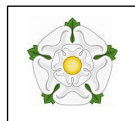


King Richard III (Duke of Gloucester)

King of England, husband to Queen Anne (Neville), and a member of the house of York, Richard was the youngest surviving son of Cecily Duchess of York and Richard Plantagenet.

Archeologists have discovered his skeleton (this image is of a forensic facial reconstruction made of his skull) and were able to determine that he had relatively severe spinal scoliosis, had a diet rich in imported wines, and died extremely violently.

He was the victim of a pretty profound pro-Tudor propaganda campaign, which worked hard to tarnish his memory and reputation in any way possible. In reality, he was not a terrible king, although he did probably kill the Tower Princes. badge: White Boar



Queen Anne (Neville)

Queen of England and wife to King Richard III, Anne was the younger daughter of Richard Neville "Kingmaker." Anne was an incredibly wealthy heiress from a remarkably powerful and influential family. She was first married (briefly) to Henry VI's young son Edward, but he was slain (by Richard III, allegedly), at the Battle of Tewkesbury mere months after their marriage. Shakespeare depicts their marriage as speedy, short, loveless and violent. In reality, Anne and Richard grew up together (Richard was sent to live at Warwick Castle, home of the Neville's, after the death of his father), married in 1472 (thirteen years BEFORE Edward IV died), and were happy together. She was not poisoned by Richard as Shakespeare claims, but died of disease (tuberculosis?) in 1485.



King Henry (Tudor) VII of Richmond

King Henry Tudor had the support of the Woodvilles after Richard wreaked havoc with Queen Elizabeth Woodville's family. He ultimately married Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of Queen Elizabeth (Woodville) and Edward IV, in order to help cement this alliance. His mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, was also instrumental in maneuvering him into position to take the throne. She was the second wife of Lord Stanley of Derby (after his first wife, Eleanor Neville, died in 1472). It is no surprise, then, that Lord Stanley fought for his stepson, Henry Tudor, instead of Richard III on Bosworth Field.
badge: red dragon of Cadwaladr



Thomas Stanley of Derby

Lord Stanley of Derby was the stepfather of King Henry VII. He had spent his life playing politics, balancing loyalties to both the Lancasters and the Yorks. His second wife, Lady Margaret Beaufort, was a "key conspirator" in the plot to replace Richard III with her son, Henry Tudor. Lord Stanley had to be delicate in his politics, however, since Richard III held his son George hostage. At the Battle of Bosworth Field, however, Lord Stanley revealed his true alliances to Henry Tudor, and fought against Richard.



Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham

An Enemy of Margaret Anjou and initial ally of Richard. Their relationship soured when Richard didn't reward him as generously as he had promised. He ultimately joined Henry Tudor against Richard and led "Buckingham's Rebellion." Richard executed him for treason in 1483. He was beheaded rather roughly and informally in the yard between the Blue Boar Inn and Saracen's Head Inn near Salisbury Marketplace.



William Hastings

Lord William Hastings was one of the richest and most powerful men in England. He was a supporter of Edward IV and, subsequently, Young Prince Edward (although he, like so many others, had complicated loyalties). His wife Katherine was a Neville (one of the Kingmaker's daughters), and so Hastings was not immune to the influences of Richard Neville "Kingmaker." Hastings did not back Richard III in his pursuit of the throne, instead remaining loyal to Young Prince Edward. Richard III, therefore, accused him of treason and beheaded him, perhaps right there on the tower green during the council meeting, as Shakespeare suggests.



John Morton, Bishop of Ely

History suggests that it was John Morton, Bishop of Ely, that helped persuade Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, to turn against Richard III in favor of Henry Tudor of Richmond. Powerful and influential even before the Tudor take over, his wealth and influence just increased after Henry VII was crowned. He ultimately became Archbishop of Canterbury, Chancellor of England, and a Cardinal.



Sir) Richard Ratcliff

Sir Richard Ratcliff was a trusted advisor to Richard III. He died with Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field. He was satirized in a rhyme (used by Shakespeare) written by Richard's enemy William Collingborn (who ended up executed for treason): "The cat, the rat, and Lovel our dog/Rule all England under a hog" (Ratcliff is the rat). Please note: This picture is NOT of Richard Ratcliff, but of Robert Ratcliffe, who was likely related.



(Sir) Robert Brakenbury

Sir Robert Brakenbury was the Lieutenant of The Tower. The level of his involvement in the disappearance of the Tower Princes is debated. Thomas More reports that Brakenbury was opposed to harming the princes and claims that he said he would never put them to death, even if it meant Richard III would kill him for refusing.



William Catesby

William Catesby trained as a lawyer and had a reputation as a good one. He was loyal to Richard III and fought beside him at Bosworth Field, where he was taken prisoner. About 3 days after the battle, Henry VII executed him at Leicester. He was satirized in a rhyme (used by Shakespeare) written by Richard's enemy William Collingborn (who ended up executed for treason): "The cat, the rat, and Lovel our dog/Rule all England under a hog" (Catesby is the cat).