

A 'Forgotten Prince' no more

By Jan Hunter

Correspondent

A MOVING service took place this week to commemorate the life of a "Forgotten Prince," more than 500 years on from his death aged just seven.

St Mary and St Alkelda's Church in Middleham hosted the service of prayer and the unveiling of a plaque for Edward of Middleham, Prince of Wales, son of Richard III and Anne Neville.

Edward, who died aged seven in 1484, is known by some as the "Forgotten Prince," but this historical wrong has been righted thanks to the joint efforts of writer, producer and historian, Philippa Langley, who is best known for her discovery of Richard III's grave, Graham Mitchell, present chair of the Richard III Society, and Amanda Geary, former chair. The society has more than 3,500 members worldwide and works to reassess the character and career of Richard III through research into his life, while members are encouraged to raise awareness of his role in history.

Amanda, who was the society's first female chair in its 100-year history, took up and developed the plaque initiative, which has been fully funded by the society.

Graham says: "Before Richard became king, he was regional governor of Northern England for over a decade, from his base at Middleham Castle, and other castles in the surrounding area.

"Edward IV had sufficient trust in him to give him this central role. Richard was a social reformer and was loved by the people as he lay down clearly to the Justices of the time, that he wanted equal justice for both rich and poor.

"Prince Edward was born at the family home in Middleham and died there aged seven. The terrible grief his parents suffered was profound and has been well documented. He was a dearly loved only child, but the loss of Richard's heir was politically as well as humanly significant."

After the unexpected death of Richard's brother, King Ed-



From left, Graham Mitchell, chair of the Richard III Society, Philippa Langley MBE, Iain Paed-Jowett mayor of Middleham and Rev Jeff Payne with the new plaque
Pictures: STUART BOULTON

ward IV in 1483, the Three Estates of Parliament found through investigation that his heirs were illegitimate, and presented Richard with a petition asking him to accept the throne. This made the young Prince Edward heir apparent to the throne, and on September 8 – the significant date chosen by the society to unveil the plaque – he was invested as Prince of Wales in the Archbishop's Palace, followed by mass at York Minster.

"No specific tomb has been located for Edward yet," says Graham, "but we can only imagine his place of rest would be near his home, Middleham Castle, at the church of St Mary and St Alkelda's."

Philippa Langley unveiled the plaque, which stands on a beautiful plinth of English oak, made by skilled volunteers from the charity, The Lions Den Shed of Keighley.

"This year was chosen for its significance," says Philippa, "as it is 550 years since his

birth. I have done the forensic deep dive and there is so much evidence on Prince Edward's life, which is illuminating for me. I got a real sense of his life; an apparent happy childhood with devoted parents. I think it was lucky he did not survive into the reign of the Tudors, as he would have been imprisoned and executed when he got to adulthood, as happened to Yorkist male children with a claim to the throne.

"Richard's son has always been a footnote in history, and through this plaque, and its accompanying leaflet, people will know him.

"It has been intimated he was a sickly child, but there is no evidence for this. He was known as a devout little boy who had his own horse and travelled to local religious sites to give offerings. None of the contemporary sources mention anything about an illness, he seemed to be a normal little boy who died, 'after a short illness', no suspicion intimated."



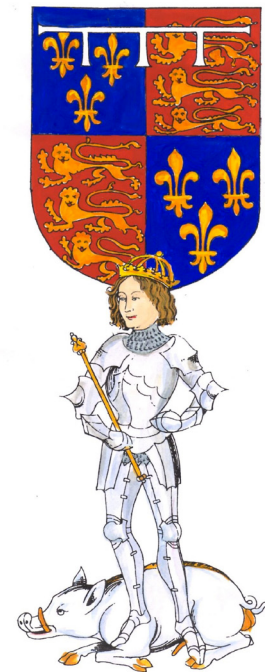
Historian Philippa Langley, who grew up in Darlington, unveils the plaque

Evidence points to him being buried locally at St Mary and St Alkelda's. A contemporary source, John Rous, does confirm that Edward died and was buried at Middleham.

The church was made into a collegiate church by Duke Richard and shortly after he became king, it became a Royal Peculiar, subject only

to the direct jurisdiction of the monarch. Copies of these documents adorn the church walls.

Philippa says: "It makes sense that he would be buried in a place where people knew and loved him, and his parents could visit him privately. There may have been a plan to bury him later at York Minster, but we don't know that.



A contemporary image of Edward of Middleham from the Rous Roll (1483-1484)

What we do know, from a contemporary source, is that when Anne and Richard arrived home, Richard had documents to sign at Nappa Hall, which is 12 miles from Middleham, but the day afterwards, the signing of documents stopped, so this may have been the official mourning day at Middleham.

"Later Richard did create a chantry for 100 priests at York Minster, which was a special place where the priests could 'sing in the worship of God and our lady'."

Philippa concludes: "This is my last event for The Richard III Society. I feel very honoured to be a part of it, and it means a lot to me. I feel Edward is no longer the Forgotten Prince."

The Rector of the parish, the Revd Jeff Payne, who conducted the service, says there had been talk of a plaque in the church for nearly 10 years, and the Diocesan Advisory Committee eventually agreed to it, as it would not be just a museum piece but of benefit for the church. "It was really my wife's idea, as we wanted the plaque to benefit the community as a focal point for parents who have lost children, hoping they may find some comfort here," he said. "Richard sought comfort through the church in his trauma of bereavement; his closest friends saying the couple were 'mad with grief' at the loss of their son. In our Mothering Sunday service, we include mothers whose children have died, those who are struggling to have children, and children who have lost mothers. We want to be inclusive of everyone."

The service was gentle, poignant and very moving. People from near and far came to pay their respects, amongst the white roses.



It is hoped the plaque will also be a focal point for parents who have lost children



A service of prayer was held alongside the plaque unveiling at St Mary & St Alkelda's Church

