

Who killed King Richard III?

King Richard III, the last Plantaganet king, died during the decisive Battle of Bosworth on 22nd August 1485. He was two months short of his 33rd birthday. He had fought bravely and had nearly managed close combat with his adversary Henry Tudor, who, as the victor, succeeded as King Henry VII. Henry Tudor's standard bearer was killed in the encounter. Then Richard's attempt to close with Tudor ended with his own death ... but who actually killed King Richard?

The French poet and composer Jean Molinet (1435-1507), was noted for his prose version of the Medieval poem: *Roman de la Rose* [1]. For many years, from 1463, he was also a chronicler of events for Charles, Duke of Burgundy. In about 1490 he stated that:

The king [Richard] bore himself valiantly according to his destiny, and wore the crown on his head ... His horse leapt into a marsh [marsh] from which it could not retrieve itself. One of the Welshmen then came after him, and struck him dead with a halberd, and another took his body and put it before him on his horse and carried it, hair hanging as one would bear a sheep.

What can be accurately construed from this is that Richard was at a disadvantage due to the churning up of the land, a natural result of a hard-fought battle. What is also clear is that Molinet, writing five years after Bosworth, records that a Welshman killed him with a halberd. This exact injury was found on Richard's recently excavated skull [2].

More details of Richard's death are found in a poem by the respected Welsh bard Guto'r Glyn who wrote at least 124 poems [3]. He was highly regarded, especially in the 1430s-1493, and regularly visited a circuit of the houses of the nobility, two Deans of Bangor and the Abbot of Shrewsbury. One of his most important patrons had been Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1st Herbert creation) whose rise to power he witnessed. Henry Tudor, when young, was a ward of this Sir William Herbert, a Yorkist, at Raglan Castle. Guto'r Glyn was an honoured guest at each house he visited and his listeners would have been well informed about the events his poems described. Therefore, Guto'r Glyn's description can be confidently taken as primary evidence for the Battle of Bosworth:

In praise of Sir Rhys ap Tomas of Abermarlais lines 35 to 42 [4]

*Cwncwerodd y Cing Harri
Y maes drwy nerth ein meistr ni:
Lladd Eingl, llaw ddiangen,
Lladd y baedd, eilliodd ei ben,
A Syr Rys mal sŷr aesawr
Â'r gwayw 'n eu mysg ar gnyw mawr.*

*King Henry won the day
through the strength of our master:
killing Englishmen, capable hand,
killing the boar, he shaved his head,
and Sir Rhys like the stars of a shield
with the spear in their midst on a great steed.*

*Brain o'i henw yw'r brenhinwaed,
Ni bu'r drin heb euro'i draed.*

*Those of royal blood are ravens of the same name as him,
the battle did not pass without dubbing him a knight.*

Guto'r Glyn's evidence certainly pre-dates that of Jean Molinet, internal evidence suggesting 1485 or 1486 making it nearly contemporary with Richard's death. It identifies Jean Molinet's *Welshman* as Sir Rhys ap Tomas (1449-1525) of Abermarlais, who was knighted for services rendered on the battlefield of Bosworth. His father, Tomas ap Gruffudd ap Nicolas (the Welsh 'ap' means the 'son of') had extended the family fortunes by judicious marriage. He had also taken Rhys with him to the Burgundian court when Jean Molinet was there. The family

affiliation was Lancastrian so, despite an accommodation with Edward IV when the fortunes of the Yorkists were in the ascendant, Rhys was in contact with Henry Tudor and was his most prominent Welsh supporter. His continuing loyalty to Henry VII, which resulted in his appointment as a Knight of the Garter in 1505, was transferred to his son, Henry VIII.

Therefore, Guto'r Glyn's evidence, supported by that of Jean Molinet, shows without doubt that it was the men controlled by Rhys ap Tomas [5] who killed King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485.

©Ruth E. Richardson 2014

Notes:

[1] *Chroniques de Jean Molinet (1474-1506)*, ed. G. Doutrepont and O. Jodogne, 3 vols. (Academie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques. Collection des Anciens Auteurs Belges, Brussels, 1935-7), I, pp. 434-6. (French; Michael Bennett's translation with assistance from Professor I.H. Smith, Department of Modern Languages, University of Tasmania).

[2] See: Fern, Susan, *The Man Who Killed Richard III: Who Dealt the Fatal Blow at Bosworth?*, Amberley Publishing, 2014.

[3] See: www.blancheparry.com for details about Welsh bards.

[4] See: *Poem 14: Guto'r Glyn.net*, edited by Dafydd Johnston. He includes the following note: The phrase *lladd y baedd* refers to the white boar which was King Richard III's emblem. The use of the verbal noun *lladd* is a means of avoiding specifying who was responsible for killing him on the battlefield at Bosworth, but this passage suggests that he was killed by a troop of soldiers led by Rhys ap Tomas. (Welsh 'Tomas' is often given as 'Thomas' in English).

[5] See: Griffith, Ralph, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his family: a study in the Wars of the Roses and early Tudor politics*, University of Wales Press, 1993, p.43. Also Wales Biography Online.