

REBELLION, SEDITION AND THE LEGEND OF RICHARD II'S SURVIVAL IN THE REIGNS OF HENRY IV AND HENRY V

PETER MCNIVEN*

JOHN RYLANDS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OF MANCHESTER

Richard II has always been one of the most controversial and enigmatic of English kings. It is therefore perhaps in keeping with this image that he was one of the select band of historical figures who were the subjects of claims that they survived the officially-accepted dates of their deaths. The story of his survival, current throughout virtually the whole of the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V, was a peculiarly persistent example of its kind: yet its significance as a political phenomenon has received comparatively little attention from historians. Who believed it, or claimed to do so, and what were their aims and motives? Was there a coherent and continuous 'movement' or campaign, or did the story serve a variety of different causes in turn? An attempt at a comprehensive analysis of this aspect of opposition to the first two Lancastrian kings would entail a detailed study of every recorded manifestation of rebellion and sedition between 1400 and 1422 which would lie well beyond the scope of a single article. The aims of the present study are to provide an overview of the course of the 'Ricardian' legend and to consider the light which it may cast upon the nature of the problems faced by Henry IV in particular and the Lancastrian kings in general.

According to the official version of events, Richard died of natural causes at Pontefract shortly after the failure of a rebellion by his surviving supporters which broke out early in 1400. This insurrection had aimed to reverse the events of September 1399, when Richard had been deposed and supplanted by his cousin Henry, duke of Lancaster. Precisely how Richard met his death will presumably never be known, but it is not unreasonable to suspect foul play, and it is advisable to bear this in mind when considering the way in which Henry IV chose to deal with the aftermath of his predecessor's death and with the emergence of the survival legend.

* I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of Dr Dorothy Clayton and Dr Philip Morgan during the preparation of this article, while taking full responsibility for interpretations and opinions which are in some instances necessarily speculative.

The body which was allegedly that of Richard was conveyed some 200 miles from Pontefract to London and shown to 'the people' both at stopping-places on the journey and during a lying-in-state in St Paul's Cathedral. If contemporary chronicles are to be believed, positive efforts were made to allow the body to be identified as that of the late king. Thomas Walsingham specifically states that Richard's face was shown as 'that part of his body by which he could be recognized'.¹ Adam of Usk, who had a far greater propensity than the more formal chroniclers for reporting the scandalous and the controversial, simply records that Richard's face was 'not covered, but shown openly to all'.² Furthermore, Walsingham's account almost certainly derives partly from the fact that Richard's body was kept overnight at St Albans, and even if his information was not obtained as a result of first-hand observation, it is reasonable to assume that his fellow monks were among those who had the opportunity to recognize the late king. These accounts were consistent with the terms of an order of Henry IV's council in the first week of February 1400, when it was agreed that if Richard were to be dead, his body should be shown to the people 'au fin quilz ent puissent avoir conissance'.³ The pragmatic arguments for pursuing this course of action may have been reinforced in Richard's case by the recollection of the rumours of the survival, seventy years earlier, of Edward II, whose fate had already been echoed to a remarkable degree by that of his great grandson.⁴

The circumstances of Richard's burial, after a 'normal' funeral service in London, might be said to have provided rather more material for the sceptical observer. Although a tomb had been 'reserved' for Richard in Westminster Abbey, he was buried unobtrusively at night at King's Langley, in Hertfordshire, and it was specifically recorded that those present were not invited to a meal afterwards.⁵ These features might reasonably be regarded as unusual in the laying to rest of a king, but the circumstances surely make it impossible to pronounce on their exact significance. Richard had been removed from his throne by a cousin who was not even his undisputed heir-presumptive. Three months after his deposition, his friends had risen in an attempt to restore him, and

¹ T. Walsingham, *Annales . . . Henrici Quarti in Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneфорde...chronica et annales*, ed. H.T. Riley (London: Rolls Series, 1866), 331.

² Adam of Usk, *Chronicon, A.D. 1377-1421*, ed. and trans. E. Maunde Thompson, 2nd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 205.

³ *Proceedings and ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, ed. N.H. Nicolas, 7 vols (London: Record Commission, 1834-37), i. 111-12.

⁴ For notes on Edward's alleged survival in exile after 1327, see e.g. G.P. Cuttino and T.W. Lyman, 'Where is Edward II?', *Speculum*, 53 (1978), 522-44, especially 526-7; N. Fryde, *The tyranny and fall of Edward II, 1321-1326* (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), 201-6, 224-5.

⁵ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 331; Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H.T. Riley, 2 vols (London: Rolls Series, 1863-64), ii. 246.

he had conveniently died in the aftermath of their rebellion. These traumatic events provided ample reason for a particularly unobtrusive burial. Indeed, it could be argued that Henry IV steered a remarkably astute course between proving that Richard was dead and avoiding public opportunities for demonstrations of hostility towards the new regime or of sympathy towards the late king.

Any claim that Richard survived these events⁶ therefore rests on the premise that a body was put on display which was so similar to Richard that it deceived people who appear not only to have been allowed quite adequate access, but to have been positively encouraged to view it. In trials for sedition in 1402 and 1413, the jurors made a point of noting the vast number of people, in London and elsewhere, who had seen the late king's body.⁷ It has been suggested that this body was actually that of a priest named Maudelyn, a close friend of Richard who was also said to have resembled him in appearance.⁸ It does, however, seem unlikely that the body would have been put on display quite so openly if there had been a risk that this deception might have been discovered or suspected. It is noteworthy – all the more so if Richard had a known 'double' – that no-one in England who subsequently claimed that Richard was alive is said to have mentioned such a substitution. The conclusion must be that such people had somehow eliminated from their minds, assuming that they had ever been aware of it, what seems to have been an elaborate and convincing effort to prove that Richard was dead. It is only by the deliberate performance of the same exercise that it is possible to give any credence to accounts of the late king's survival.

The first, and what might therefore be expected to be the most informative manifestation of Ricardian sentiment appears to have occurred in 1402, two years after the king's presumed death. Early in that year, or possibly towards the end of 1401, a Franciscan friar in Norfolk spread the rumour that Richard was alive, and was handed over to the master of his order to be disciplined.⁹ This incident appears to have been treated as an isolated aberration, and might not have figured in a major chronicle if it had not been seen retrospectively as

⁶ For a sometimes stimulating but ultimately unconvincing nineteenth-century thesis in favour of Richard's survival, see P.F. Tytler, *History of Scotland*, 2nd edn, 9 vols (Edinburgh: Tait, 1841–43), iii. 279–330. The arguments presented here were substantially accepted by B. Williams, editor and translator of the *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richart Deux roy Dengleterre* (London: English Historical Society, 1846), l–lxxiii. Cf. T. Amyot, 'A reply to Mr Tytler's "Historical remarks on the death of Richard the Second"', *Archaeologia*, 23 (1831), 277–98.

⁷ See R.L. Storey, 'Clergy and common law in the reign of Henry IV', in *Medieval legal records edited in memory of C.A.F. Meekings*, ed. R.F. Hunnisett and J.B. Post (London: H.M.S.O., 1978), 341–408, specifically 360; *Select cases in the Court of King's Bench under Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V*, Vol. I/II, ed. G.O. Sayles, Selden Society, 88 (1971), 212.

⁸ Jean Creton, 'French metrical history of the deposition of Richard II', ed. and trans. J. Webb, *Archaeologia*, 20 (1824), 213–14, 221.

⁹ *Eulogium historiarum*, ed. F.S. Haydon, 3 vols (London: Rolls Series, 1858–63), iii. 389.

foreshadowing an apparently coordinated Ricardian movement which came to a head during May 1402. No coherent account of Richard's movements or strategy emerged: according to the legal proceedings against his alleged supporters, he was said to have reappeared in Scotland, in Wales, and even in the city of Westminster. On 9 May the authorities in Cumberland and Westmorland were ordered to arrest and imprison anyone who maintained that Richard was alive in Scotland, and on 5 June all the sheriffs of England were commanded to suppress rumours of his survival.¹⁰ There was something of a consensus that Richard would show himself to his supporters on or about Midsummer Day, and a group of Franciscans from Leicester were arrested on a charge of conspiring to meet outside Oxford on 23 June, with other rebels, to set out to look for him.¹¹ Others who were the subjects of various legal proceedings included Sir Roger Clarendon, an otherwise virtually unknown illegitimate half-brother of Richard II; Walter Baldock, the recently-dismissed prior of the Augustinian canons of Launde, in Leicestershire; John Norwich, prior of the Dominican friars of Cambridge, and one of his subordinates; Franciscan friars from Aylesbury, Northampton, Nottingham and Stamford as well as Leicester; three monks of Westminster and a former monk of St Albans; various secular clergy including Clarendon's servant John Calf; and a number of apparently insignificant laymen. The number of men dealt with comprised a minute fraction of the 4,000 who were said to have assembled in Richard's cause.¹² By 18 June a directive had been issued to the sheriffs to proclaim that the danger had passed and that no-one should fear retribution for involvement in the recent disturbances, as only the leaders would be punished.¹³ There were a few swift trials and possibly sixteen executions.¹⁴

While more detailed investigation of the backgrounds of this assortment of alleged malcontents might reveal further suggestions as to their aims and motives, three intriguing features of the Ricardian activities of 1402 stand out from the information offered by readily accessible contemporary chronicles and official records. First and most obvious, most of those named were in clerical orders, and of these, the ringleaders appear to have been friars, and more especially Franciscans. Secondly, there is little suggestion that any of them – including Clarendon – had any significant personal or political ties

¹⁰ *Foedera, conventiones, litterae, etc.*, ed. T. Rymer, 20 vols (London: 1704–35), viii.255, 261; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1401–05*, 125; *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1399–1402*, 570.

¹¹ *Eulogium*, iii. 391.

¹² For details see Storey, 'Clergy and common law', 353–61; J.H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry IV*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1884–98), i. 270–9; *C.C.R. 1399–1402*, 527–9, 532–3; *C.P.R. 1401–05*, 125–6; *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 339–40; *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 249; *Eulogium*, iii. 389–92.

¹³ *C.C.R. 1399–1402*, 577.

¹⁴ Storey, 'Clergy and common law', 353–61; Wylie, i. 270–1, 275–9; *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 339–41; *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 249; *Eulogium*, iii. 389, 391–4; Usk, 255.

with Richard. On the contrary, the only reference in accounts of these events to those who had prospered under the late king comes in Walsingham's mention of a priest and informer whose inclusion of such people in a list of alleged conspirators was shown to be without foundation.¹⁵ Thirdly, the statements attributed to those genuinely involved in sedition – some of which are reported in unusually precise detail – do not suggest either that their authors were firmly convinced that Richard was alive or that the political stance on which they based their defiance of Henry IV depended to any real degree on the possibility of the late king's survival. Thus, when a master of theology from Leicester, the apparent instigator of the troubles there, was asked whether he claimed that Richard was alive, he is actually said to have replied that he did not say that this was the case, but that if he was alive, he was the rightful king. Moreover, he was also said to have maintained that if Richard was dead, Henry was responsible for his death. Between these two statements, he was alleged to have accused Henry of seizing Richard's throne by force, imprisoning him, and compelling him to abdicate. He argued that an abdication secured by coercion was invalid, and that Henry had had no legal right to claim that he had been 'properly elected' while the rightful king was still alive.¹⁶ In this devastatingly targeted assault on Lancastrian legitimacy, the possibility that Richard had survived all these indignities was almost a peripheral issue. Likewise, the statements attributed to a friar from Aylesbury that, given the choice, he would fight for Richard against Henry, and that he would have the latter reduced to the rank of duke of Lancaster,¹⁷ seem more indicative of his opinions as to Henry's lack of title than of a belief that he might be called upon to put his convictions to the test. Another account states that a friar – perhaps the same man – declared that he would fight to the death for Richard, but this was merely recorded as his answer to the specific question of how he would act if the late king was definitely alive,¹⁸ and cannot be taken as implying that he believed that this was the case.

It is also pertinent to note the totally different line in sedition reported by John Draycote, who claimed at Coventry in November 1402 that Sir John Curson of Essex and others had written to him inviting him to rise to avenge Richard's murder.¹⁹ Although some of those accused of sedition in 1402 were said to have claimed to have received letters 'as if from Richard',²⁰ it may be suspected that their sentiments were Ricardian only in the sense that they took the

¹⁵ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 339.

¹⁶ *Eulogium*, 391–2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹⁸ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 340.

¹⁹ Public Record Office, KB9, 178, m. 19.

²⁰ 'tanquam ab eodem missae' (*Eulogium*, iii. 389).

outward form of a belated unease about the validity of the process by which the late king had been deposed, and about his probable fate at the hands of his successor. It does not, however, seem very plausible that these men were simply experiencing an awakening of consciences which had been dormant for the past two years, and it is necessary to look beyond the survival myth to attempt to fathom their motives.

In any consideration of the general issue of sedition against Henry IV, it is essential to appreciate the very unusual nature of Henry's kingship. The reaction of numerous twentieth-century historians against popular simplifications of the views of William Stubbs and his followers has substituted for the claim that Henry IV was a prototype of the English constitutional monarch the opposite doctrine that the events of September 1399 did not amount to a 'revolution' in the true sense of the word. However, the troubles of the English monarchy during the fifteenth century tend to obscure the fact that the royal succession had followed a remarkably regular course for nearly two centuries before 1399. Despite the nominal element of 'election' in the title of English kings, the 'modern' concept of representative male primogeniture was in practice well established.²¹ The obvious deviation from the norm during these years occurred in 1327, but there were at least three major differences between the initially equally traumatic replacement of Edward II by Edward III, and the events and aftermath of 1399. First, Edward III was the heir-apparent, whereas Richard II not only had no heir-apparent, but no unanimously-accepted heir-presumptive. Secondly, Edward III was soon helped in putting the nature of his succession behind him by becoming, by the criteria of his time, a 'success'. Most crucial, however, was the fact that Edward III, who was under age in 1327, was put forward by others simply as the legitimate heir to a displaced king; he was not in any positive sense offering *himself* as a more acceptable alternative. The truly radical aspect of Henry's kingship was that his claim to the throne rested, in practice, on the argument – his own argument – that he would make a far better king than Richard. All other claimants to the English throne since the Conquest, with the much later exception of William III, based their claims on their own versions of superior hereditary legitimacy. Henry's situation was almost precisely the opposite of this. He was the 'best all round candidate', but he lacked a sound hereditary title. That he claimed to enjoy the same prerogatives as his predecessor, while technically correct, did not alter the fact that he was king primarily by consent, or at least by assent; because he had convinced a sufficient number

²¹ See e.g. P. McNiven, 'Legitimacy and consent: Henry IV and the Lancastrian title, 1399–1406', *Mediaeval Studies*, 44 (1982), 475–6.

of people not only that Richard was unfit to rule, but that he could 'do the job' better.²² Any hint that the sacred rôle of kingship had become an appointment for which one presented one's credentials was infinitely more revolutionary in its implications than any supposed constitutional change.

The popular element in the defeat of the Ricardian rising of January 1400 only served to accentuate this potentially destabilizing development. While the support which Henry received was obviously gratifying, by reinforcing the element of consent in Henry's kingship it implicitly signalled that consent might also be withdrawn. Henry was thus extremely vulnerable to any suggestion that he was not performing his royal duties properly. When such a charge had been levelled against previous kings, it had conventionally been cloaked in the fiction that they were the victims of 'bad advisers'. In the case of Henry IV, there was a distinct suggestion that someone who had only just risen from the ranks of those who might serve as 'good' or 'bad' counsellors must take the blame himself if things went wrong; as indeed they very soon did. In the first two years of the reign, relations with France and Scotland worsened; Owain Glyndwr's Welsh rebellion broke out; and there were economic problems which were not necessarily attributable to the change of ruler, but for which Henry was predictably held responsible. These troubles led Henry to resort to conventional taxation²³ and then to even less acceptable financial expedients.²⁴ Perhaps most relevant in the present context, contemporaries believed that there was a decline in public order, which could very plausibly be attributed to the atmosphere of uncertainty created by the upheavals of 1399.²⁵ Thus people who may have held no strong views for or against Richard, but who had been encouraged to believe that the new regime would be an improvement, found instead that the situation was becoming visibly worse. The first conventional parliament of the reign, which met early in 1401, while presenting no trace of opposition to Henry's title, was distinctly critical of his government.²⁶ Even more telling was the letter to the king, dated 4 May 1401, from his own confessor Philip Repingdon, in which the king was charged with failing to live up to his initial promises. Those who had welcomed Henry's accession, Repingdon added, were now weeping and wringing their hands.²⁷

²² McNiven, 'Legitimacy and consent', 470–81.

²³ For Henry's early troubles, see McNiven, *Heresy and politics in the reign of Henry IV: the burning of John Badby* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987), 158–64.

²⁴ Note e.g. 'dicebant quod ipse cepit bona eorum et non solvebat' (*Eulogium*, iii. 389), possibly a reference to royal abuse of the practice of purveyance.

²⁵ See e.g. Wylie, i. 196–9.

²⁶ See e.g. A. Rogers, 'The political crisis of 1401', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 12 (1968), 85–96.

²⁷ Usk, 231–6.

Constructive advice was succeeded by overt sedition. John Sparrowhawk of Cardiff was convicted on 13 April 1402 and executed for repeating gossip, heard on 19 March and said to have originated with a 'friar or hermit', casting aspersions on Henry's parentage, criticizing him for not keeping his promises on taxation, blaming him for the weather, and asserting that the earl of March ought to be king.²⁸ Immediately before the continuator of the *Eulogium historiarum* began his account of the disturbances of 1402, he recorded that people were complaining about Henry's exactions and had begun to 'wish for Richard'.²⁹ The implication seems to have been not that they expressly wanted Richard, or thought that he was 'available', but that they were disillusioned with Henry. It is surely significant that two very different lines of sedition – advocacy of Mortimer legitimacy and of the survival story – emerged virtually simultaneously. A degree of popular discontent evidently pre-dated, by up to a year, any claims that Richard was alive, and there seems to be little doubt that malcontents found the story of the late king's survival a useful peg on which to hang their dissent, assuming that some of their number did not simply invent it.

There appears to be no obvious single explanation for the strong clerical, and especially Franciscan, element among the known or alleged instigators of sedition in 1402. The obvious temptation is to conclude that Richard had been particularly well disposed towards the friars, and vice versa. Richard had indeed awarded them special protection in 1385,³⁰ but this had been endorsed by Henry IV on 15 April 1401.³¹ The accusation of the master of theology from Leicester that Henry was hostile to the Church before his accession³² may be a case of the sins of the father being visited on the son, as John of Gaunt had been a patron of John Wyclif, whose heresies had inspired the emergence of Lollardy. However, as Henry had not only paid due respect to the Lollards' arch-enemies the friars, but had authorized the first burning of a Lollard early in 1401,³³ the charge might appear somewhat unjust. So might a claim that Henry was taxing the clergy too severely, as although clerical taxation later became onerous, only one convocation had levied taxes before the spring of 1402, and the friars did not pay taxes at all.³⁴

²⁸ *Select cases in the Court of King's Bench*, 123–4. Edmund Mortimer, earl of March, was descended from Lionel, duke of Clarence, an elder brother of John of Gaunt, Henry IV's father. Although aged only about eleven in 1402, he had arguably a better claim than Henry to be regarded as Richard II's heir.

²⁹ *Eulogium*, iii. 389.

³⁰ *Foedera*, vii. 458–9.

³¹ *C.P.R. 1399–1401*, 485.

³² *Eulogium*, iii. 392.

³³ See McNiven, *Heresy and politics*, 88–91.

³⁴ See A.K. McHardy, 'Clerical taxation in fifteenth-century England: the clergy as agents of the Crown', in *The Church, politics and patronage in the fifteenth century*, ed. B. Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), 179, 183.

There are a number of suggestions, both in official documents and in the chronicles, of links between seditious ecclesiastics and the troubles in Wales. Up to the time of Glyndwr's rising in the late summer of 1400, there had been much social integration between the English and the Welsh, especially among clergy and scholars, and the outbreak of rebellion posed at least two potential threats to Henry IV. First, Welshmen might persuade Englishmen of the rightness of their cause, and therefore the injustice, and perhaps the illegitimacy, of Lancastrian rule. Secondly, malcontents of all persuasions might see in the Welsh revolt a convenient cause which they might adopt to embarrass the king. The possibility that sedition might arise in England in association with the Welsh troubles was surely accentuated rather than diminished by the enactment of punitive anti-Welsh legislation early in 1401 aimed at driving a wedge between the two peoples.³⁵ The accounts of the events of 1402 contain several hints of a Welsh dimension. While the royal commands issued early in the crisis concentrated on the claim that Richard was in Scotland, the subsequent indictments placed greater emphasis on the supposed alliance between Richard and Glyndwr.³⁶ Adam of Usk, who was at least emotionally involved in the Welsh rising, refers in his chronicle to eleven Franciscans, who were executed in London for sedition, as 'confederates of Owain'.³⁷ The *Eulogium* states that a friar who informed on his fellows for sedition was subsequently murdered by a Welshman, and that the rebellious friars of Leicester were accused of hearing 'false confessions' and telling people to go to look for Richard in Wales as a penance. They were also said to be collecting money by begging and sending it to the rebels.³⁸ The connection between Oxford, supposedly an intended Ricardian rallying-point in 1402, and the Welsh rebels, was made in the record of the parliament of 1401, where it was reported that Welsh scholars had already withdrawn from that university and from Cambridge to support the rebels at home.³⁹ An order of 18 July 1402 instructed Henry Beaufort, chancellor of Oxford, to enquire into the report that many Welshmen in Oxford 'assemble nightly . . . for the purpose of rebellion'.⁴⁰ On 29 July, the sheriff of Oxford was commanded to head a further enquiry into treasons committed by Welshmen.⁴¹

It appears, moreover, that certain clergy had very specific reasons for being especially hostile to Henry IV as a result of his

³⁵ *C.P.R. 1399-1401*, 469-70.

³⁶ Storey, 'Clergy and common law', 359-60.

³⁷ Usk, 255.

³⁸ *Eulogium*, iii. 394; 392-3.

³⁹ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, ed. J. Strachey, etc., 6 vols (London: 1767-77), iii. 457.

⁴⁰ *C.P.R. 1401-05*, 132.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

attempts to suppress the Welsh rising. Glyndwr had secured support from Welsh clergy at an early stage in his rebellion, and this support evidently included that of the Franciscans of Llanfaes in Anglesey. According to the *Eulogium*, these friars offered resistance to Henry's forces, and the king's men killed or captured them and plundered their convent.⁴² The latter detail is confirmed in essence by an entry on the Patent Roll in January 1401 which refers to the restoration of the convent, presumably with the intention of installing new friars loyal to the Crown.⁴³ It may be significant that the author of the *Eulogium* places these events immediately before his account of the outbreak of English sedition in the spring of 1402, whereas they actually occurred eighteen months earlier. Later suggestions of an affinity between Glyndwr and the Franciscans appear in the same chronicle's account of the capture of Cardiff in 1403 or 1404, when the rebels destroyed the whole town except the district where the friars lived.⁴⁴ The Monk of Evesham records that one of the Cistercians of the abbey of Strata Florida was beheaded for bearing arms against the king, and that the monks were turned out of the abbey. Adam of Usk records that by the autumn of 1401 it was being used as a military base.⁴⁵ There is no reason to assume that the anti-Lancastrian sentiments for which these friars and monks were being 'punished' stemmed from a continuing loyalty to the memory of the late king. There was no obvious Ricardian element in Glyndwr's rising, and it seems probable that these men were acting in solidarity with the local Welsh rebels. Whatever the original reasons for their involvement, dispossessed and dispersed clergy had both the opportunities and the motives for spreading sedition, and it would be understandable if the survivors of Llanfaes and Strata Florida sought and obtained the support of some of their fellows in England in seeking revenge against Henry.

There are also hints, albeit tenuous, of links between the activities of the friars, the Welsh rising, and the emergence of the story of Richard's reappearance in Scotland. The *Eulogium* claims that at about the time of the disturbances in England, the king of Scotland wrote to his French counterpart that two Dominicans were maintaining that a man who had appeared in Scotland was Richard.⁴⁶ Adam of Usk records that Glyndwr attempted to enter into negotiations with the Scots and with native Irish lords during 1401.⁴⁷ It is at least possible that Welsh emissaries seeking Celtic solidarity brought back rumours from Scotland which could be

⁴² *Eulogium*, iii. 388.

⁴³ *C.P.R. 1399-1401*, 418.

⁴⁴ *Eulogium*, iii. 401.

⁴⁵ *Historia vitae et regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. G.B. Stow (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 170; Usk, 237.

⁴⁶ *Eulogium*, iii. 394.

⁴⁷ Usk, 239-41.

used to embarrass Henry IV, or that friars who were already at odds with the king over his Welsh policy heard the story on their travels and put it to the same use. However, against these suggestions of clerical participation in a network of Celtic nationalism and international intrigue may be set the likelihood that Henry's government and its supporters were over-emphasizing the involvement of domestic malcontents with the external enemies of the Crown in order to justify a decisive response to perhaps more defensible criticism of the king's still uncertain rule. In the absence of conclusive explanations for the apparently high level of clerical involvement in these disturbances, the obvious point should perhaps be made that clergy who were implicated in such activities were bound, by virtue of their status as preachers, teachers and leaders, to attract the particular wrath of the authorities.

An intriguing foretaste of the direction which was eventually to be taken by the Ricardian phenomenon came in a legal deposition concerning the involvement of William Balshalf of Lancashire in seditious activities in 1402. Balshalf was said to have claimed that 'Serle', who was 'with Richard', had made the necessary arrangements for the latter's return from Scotland.⁴⁸ This is the earliest suggestion of the involvement of William Serle, a gentleman of the bedchamber to Richard who had been nominated as an executor of that king's will. Serle's main claim to notoriety was that he was believed to have been personally responsible for the murder of Richard's (and Henry's) uncle, Thomas duke of Gloucester, at the late king's instigation. This murder was regarded as the greatest 'atrocitiy' of Richard's reign, and Serle was accorded the status of the most wanted criminal in England after the revolution of 1399.⁴⁹

There are two versions of how he came to be in Scotland, both dependent upon chroniclers' accounts of a confession which he was said to have made in 1404. One maintains that when Richard had surrendered to Henry in Wales in 1399, Serle had stolen his master's signet and fled to Scotland, where he used the signet to seal letters which purported to come from Richard. If this was the case, his activities might have accounted for the forged letters which were said to have been in circulation in 1402.⁵⁰ However, the other version is that Serle was originally granted asylum in France, and that he only crossed to Scotland, at an unspecified date, on hearing the story of his master's survival.⁵¹ This version suggests that, far from being the instigator of the disturbances of 1402, Serle may have been stirred to action by hearing of a movement which may have had its origin in England or Wales rather than Scotland. It is

⁴⁸ *Foedera*, viii. 262; *C.P.R. 1401-05*, 99-100.

⁴⁹ *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 418, 452-3.

⁵⁰ *Eulogium*, iii. 402; 389.

⁵¹ *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 264.

perhaps unnecessary to add that there are no good grounds for giving positive credence to either account.

There is no hint that Serle was involved in the next major outbreak of disaffection in England – the revolt of the Percies in 1403. In military terms, this was predominantly a Cheshire rebellion.⁵² Cheshire had been particularly favoured by Richard, and the leader of the rebel army, the earl of Northumberland's son Henry 'Hotspur', is said to have raised troops there by proclaiming that Richard was alive and about to return to lead his supporters against the usurper.⁵³ It may be a mistake, however, to assume that any such proclamations played a crucial role in rallying Cheshire to Hotspur's cause. The story that Richard was said to be about to arrive in Chester does not square easily with suggestions that the rebels' itinerary took them well to the east of the city,⁵⁴ and there is no doubt that Cheshire troops maintained their allegiance to Hotspur up to their participation in the battle of Shrewsbury, long after any claim that Richard's arrival was imminent had been proved false. They did not need to believe in Richard's survival to be willing to fight against the king who had deprived them of their privileged status. Moreover, other propaganda attributed to the Percies implied that they placed no credence in the rumours which had been circulating in the previous year. The manifesto quoted by the chronicler John Hardyng, who was in the Percies' service, specifically accused Henry IV of Richard's murder. The Percies' declared aim in this manifesto was to uphold the claim of Edmund Mortimer, earl of March,⁵⁵ who was Hotspur's wife's nephew, so Richard's survival would hardly have assisted their cause. It may have been of even greater relevance that the Percies could have been, since the autumn of 1402, better placed than almost anyone to assess the survival story. At the battle of Humbledon Hill, Hotspur had captured Lord Montgomery, who was said to have been the first Scottish lord to provide asylum for the fugitive king.⁵⁶ It seems reasonable to assume, in the light of the Percies' subsequent actions, that Montgomery had nothing of substance to tell them.

However, one of the legacies of the Percies' rebellion was an atmosphere of increased unease and instability, and it was perhaps

⁵² McNiven, 'The men of Cheshire and the rebellion of 1403', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 129 (1980), 1–29; *idem*, 'The Scottish policy of the Percies and the strategy of the Shrewsbury campaign', *Bulletin*, 62 (1980), 500–1, 514–17.

⁵³ E.g. 'Dieulacres chronicle', published as an appendix to 'The deposition of Richard II' by M.V. Clarke and V.H. Galbraith in *Bulletin*, 14 (1930), 177; *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 363; *Proceedings and ordinances*, i. 208.

⁵⁴ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 363; *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 256; McNiven, 'Men of Cheshire', especially 12.

⁵⁵ J. Hardyng, *Chronicle*, ed. H. Ellis (London: 1812), 351–3.

⁵⁶ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 346; *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 487.

this, rather than any more specific factors, which fuelled the second phase of concerted Ricardian activity. This time the centre of sedition was East Anglia, where lawlessness of the sort lamented by Philip Repingdon in 1401 seems to have been transformed during 1403 into positively anti-Lancastrian sentiment. John Russell of Suffolk was said to have 'preached', a month before the battle of Shrewsbury, that Richard was alive and would return with Glyndwr and the French.⁵⁷ This charge typified the marked shift in emphasis in Ricardian propaganda which developed in 1403–04. Claims that a regular correspondence was taking place between Richard and his English supporters were combined with the expectation that the French were planning to invade England on behalf of the deposed king and his queen Isabella, who had been returned to her native country in 1401.

This combination of the survival legend with hopes of French assistance represented a peculiarly perverse or ill-informed perspective. While the French were predictably outraged by the deposition of Charles VI's son-in-law, and understandably reluctant to recognize Henry IV as king, virtually all the evidence points to their acceptance of the fact of his death in 1400.⁵⁸ The appearance of the theory of the 'substituted corpse' in a French chronicle⁵⁹ is evidence that the survival story was known in France; yet in the wake of the first Ricardian 'movement' in 1402, French hostility towards Henry focused not on this theme but on the charge that Richard had been murdered. The duke of Orléans, Charles VI's brother, while addressing Henry as 'king of England' in March 1403, referred to 'your liege lord lately deceased (God knows by whose orders). . .'.⁶⁰ Orléans was soon to confirm his belief that Richard was dead by marrying his son to the late king's widow.⁶¹ The more outspoken Waleran, count of St Pol, who had married Richard's half-sister, had written to 'Henry duke of Lancaster' in February 1403 of Richard 'whose destruction you are notoriously accused of and greatly blamed for'.⁶² Both these lords were soon to be claimed as allies by 'rebels' whose cause was based on a totally different view of Richard's fate. This basic anomaly was almost sufficient in itself to ensure the failure of the enterprise.

Most of the evidence for the Ricardian troubles of 1403–04 comes from legal proceedings, and it is therefore probably impossible, amidst the attempts of those accused to excuse

⁵⁷ Wylie, i. 419.

⁵⁸ See e.g. *Foedera*, viii. 124, 196, 198; *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys*, ed. M.L. Bellaguet, 6 vols (Paris: 1839–52), ii. 738–41.

⁵⁹ Creton, 'French metrical history', 221.

⁶⁰ Enguerrand de Monstrelet, *Chronicles*, trans. T. Johnes, 13 vols (London: Longman, 1810), i. 68; see also *Eulogium*, iii. 395.

⁶¹ Monstrelet, i. 159.

⁶² *Ibid.*, i. 84.

themselves and shift the blame to others, to identify the true instigators, let alone to determine their motives.⁶³ However, there appear to have been features, in addition to the East Anglian and French dimensions, which differentiated these events from those of 1402. First, there were more 'people of substance' among those implicated. Secondly, there was more evidence of the involvement of people who had had close connections with the late king. Thirdly, there were suggestions of links with those who had supported the Percies' rising. Finally, a case can be made that more people than in 1402 actually believed that Richard was in communication with his supporters. This would be understandable if William Serle was now systematically issuing authentic-looking letters in Richard's name.⁶⁴

The identity of the principal participants was presumably the main reason for the concentration of sedition in East Anglia, and especially in Essex, while this location in turn may have been instrumental in making the rumours of French naval intervention more plausible. The most distinguished person to be implicated was Maud, dowager countess of Oxford, the mother of Richard's favourite, Robert de Vere.⁶⁵ John Prittlewell, of Barrow Hall, near Wakering, in Essex, had been retained by the late king, and the earl of Huntingdon had been captured at his house after the unsuccessful rising of Richard's aristocratic friends in 1400.⁶⁶ While there was clerical involvement in 1403–04 as in 1402, the leading figures were now not friars, monks and clerks of modest status, but men such as the abbots of Colchester, Beeleigh and St Osyth's, and the prior of St Botolph's, who were figures of secular as well as ecclesiastical importance in their localities. Moreover, whatever assumptions may be made about Maud's loyalty to Richard's memory, she was certainly involved in the ecclesiastical politics of Essex, where she had supported one of the contending parties in a dispute over the office of prior of Earls Colne.⁶⁷ Geoffrey, the abbot of Colchester, was also inclined to take the law into his own hands, and was engaged in a running battle, probably literally, with the prior of the abbey of Snape, in Suffolk.⁶⁸ If Roger Boleyn and John Sumpter, two of the countess's agents in her attempts to enforce her will at Earls Colne, were kinsmen of Robert

⁶³ This complex series of episodes merits a detailed study in its own right. For a selective coverage of the documents, see Wylie, i. 417–28; *Traïson et mort*, 267–77. The text of the indictments in Public Record Office, KB27/575, Rex mm. 4d.–5d. appears to place some of the plotting in November 4 Henry IV, i.e. 1402, but the overall context, comparison with other sources, and the appearance of the 'correct' date of 5 Henry IV elsewhere in the text, seem to point to a scribal error.

⁶⁴ *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 263.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 262–3; Wylie, i. 417–18.

⁶⁶ Wylie, i. 422–4; *Traïson et mort*, 252, 269–73, 275.

⁶⁷ Wylie, i. 418–19; *C.P.R. 1399–1401*, 414–15.

⁶⁸ Wylie, i. 419.

Boleyn and William Sumpter, who performed a similar service for Geoffrey in his disputes,⁶⁹ their affinity may be a hint of links between the entourages of Maud and the abbot which made them as likely to unite in Ricardian sedition as in acts of local coercion. The unrest within Essex, and the dubious activities of some of those who should have been the county's most respectable inhabitants, clearly preceded the Ricardian disturbances of 1403–04.

One man who seems to have been genuinely fomenting rebellion in Richard's cause provides a possible link with the contemporaneous troubles in the North. William Blyth, allegedly a retainer of the Percies who had taken part in the Shrewsbury campaign, was said to have been instrumental in bringing together three of the leading East Anglian 'rebels', John Prittlewell and the abbots of Colchester and Beeleigh. Blyth allegedly claimed to have seen Richard in Scotland in December 1403 and to have been in regular correspondence with him early in the following year.⁷⁰ The account of Blyth's activities provided by Prittlewell's 'confession' contains the earliest known description of 'Richard's' fate since 1400, including details of his escape from Pontefract, his journey to 'an isle in the sea' and his transfer to the custody of Lord Montgomery.⁷¹ This story, with embellishments and with the addition of 'developments' subsequent to 1404, was substantially the same as that provided by the main Scottish chroniclers.⁷² It was also sufficiently similar to an account of Edward II's supposed flight from a parallel situation⁷³ to arouse suspicions that Blyth and his fellows were imposing a well-tried formula upon a hitherto generalized rumour.

There is no evidence that Blyth was actually acting on behalf of the Percies, but it would have been understandable, if he was still attempting to uphold their cause, that he should offer encouragement to known malcontents in southern England on his own initiative early in 1404. The refusal of the earl of Northumberland's commanders to surrender their castles to Henry IV's agents after Shrewsbury was a standing threat to the authority

⁶⁹ Ibid.; *C.P.R.* 1399–1401, 414–15.

⁷⁰ Wylie, i. 421–4; *Traïson et mort*, 269–77.

⁷¹ Ibid., 270–1.

⁷² Andrew of Wyntoun, *Original chronicle*, Vol. 17, ed. F.J. Amours, Scottish Text Society, 57 (1908), 390–1; Joannes de Fordun, *Scotichronicon, cum supplementis ac continuatione Walteri Boweri*, ed. W. Goodall, 2 vols (Edinburgh: 1759), ii. 427; W. Stewart, *The buik of the croniklis of Scotland; or a metrical version of the history of Hector Boece*, ed. W.B. Turnbull, 3 vols (London: Rolls Series, 1858), iii. 488. It is significant that Wyntoun, after providing the most detailed account of these 'events', was not prepared to commit himself to endorsing the claim that the man in question was definitely Richard. His description of him as 'indifferent to religion' and 'half mad or wild' tallies well with later references to 'the fool', a feeble-minded, possibly confused nonentity who was inadvertently caught up in a web of political intrigue.

⁷³ See Cuttino and Lyman, 'Where is Edward II?', 526–7.

of the Crown⁷⁴ which was far from being resolved when parliament met in January 1404. It was in this parliament that the pseudo-Richard was given a name. Thomas Ward of Trumpington, Cambridgeshire, 'who pretends to be Richard II', was bracketed with Serle and the otherwise unknown Amye Donet in a very select list of exceptions to a general pardon.⁷⁵ It may be noted in passing that while the story of discovery on a Scottish island has a certain plausibility in the case of a fugitive king, it is rather less convincing when applied to an obscure East Anglian imbecile, and it would probably be unwise to take this element of the legend too literally regardless of the identity of the man who eventually found his way to the Scottish court.

As the crisis over the northern castles grew in the wake of parliament's frustratingly lenient attitude towards the earl of Northumberland's misdeeds of 1403, the East Anglian threat appeared momentarily alarming before it began to fall apart as successive deadlines for Richard's appearance were not met. While some conspirators evidently lost their nerve, other men (with local scores to settle?) began to pass names to the authorities in response to proclamations similar to those issued two years earlier. As a succession of East Anglian suspects were taken into custody,⁷⁶ Serle finally came out into the open. He crossed into England and presented himself to Sir William Clifford, a leading supporter of the Percies and one of the key figures in the continuing illegal occupation of the Percy castles. Serle is said to have confessed that he had decided to abandon his campaign of claiming that his master was alive, and saw Clifford as someone who might pay his passage to France.⁷⁷ However, granted the current hostility between England and Scotland, one might have expected that he could have found a benefactor without crossing the border, and his motives were probably more complex. He may have been encouraged by the persistent defiance of Northumberland's retainers to believe that an anti-Lancastrian alliance could be forged between northern and southern factions. Alternatively, he may have realised that the cause in Essex was collapsing and have hoped to persuade the northerners to go to the assistance of fellow 'rebels'.

If Serle was expecting honour among rebels, however, he was sadly mistaken. Clifford was an influential and calculating northern landowner who was firmly committed to ensuring that whatever happened in national politics, he would emerge on the winning side.

⁷⁴ *Proceedings and ordinances*, i. 209–17; *Royal and historical letters during the reign of Henry IV*, ed. F.C. Hingston, 2 vols (London: Rolls Series, 1860–65), i. 206–7; *Rotuli Scotiae*, 2 vols (London: Record Commission, 1814–19), ii. 165; *C.C.R. 1402–05*, 206.

⁷⁵ *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 544; *C.C.R. 1402–05*, 363–4.

⁷⁶ Wylie, i. 425–8; *C.C.R. 1402–05*, 328; *C.P.R. 1401–05*, 430–2.

⁷⁷ *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 264.

He and Northumberland had come to the conclusion that the time was not right for a full-scale renewal of hostilities, and that they would lull Henry IV's suspicions by temporarily submitting to his authority. As a token of his honourable intentions, Clifford decided to make a gift of Serle to the king. On 24 June 1404 he was handed over to be dispatched to London to his execution.⁷⁸ Nothing which Northumberland or Clifford may have learnt from Serle while he was in their hands seems to have given them any reason to believe that Richard was still alive. There is no evidence that the retribution against the rebels of 1403–04 was as severe as that of 1400 and 1402,⁷⁹ and this may have been consistent with an official perception of the East Anglian disturbances as manifestations of local discontent and disorder with few genuinely or seriously seditious elements.

The removal of Serle was a watershed in the life of the survival legend, as it disposed of the potentially dangerous issue of apparently authenticated letters from Richard (none appear to have been claimed after June 1404), and the whole story seems to have disappeared for a year or two. Early in 1405 there was an attempt by Constance, Lady Despenser, sister of Richard II's former baronial ally Edward, duke of York, to raise a revolt in the Mortimer cause by the initially successful kidnapping of the young earl of March and his brother.⁸⁰ Although York himself had allegedly been one of Richard's closest friends among the nobility, and although he was intermittently suspected of treasonable intentions during more than half of Henry IV's reign, it is significant that he was never accused of endorsing the claims of the late king's survival. Constance's conspiracy was followed a few months later by the far more serious second insurrection of the earl of Northumberland, which may also be assumed to have been in support of March's 'rights', even though this was far from being explicitly stated.⁸¹

It could be maintained that there had been a dual pattern of sedition between 1402 and 1405: serious rebellions with significant baronial involvement, aiming at Henry's deposition, took the form of support for the Mortimer cause, while less specific and more 'popular' dissent was mainly channelled into the Ricardian survival legend. In the whole of Henry IV's reign, in fact, sedition based on

⁷⁸ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 390.

⁷⁹ Two of them (Philip FitzEustace and Simon Ward) were in trouble again in 1409 (*C.P.R. 1408–13*, 177) in association with a certain Benedict Wolman (see below, p. 111).

⁸⁰ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 398–9; *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 268; *Eulogium*, iii. 402.

⁸¹ McNiven, 'The betrayal of Archbishop Scrope', *Bulletin*, 54 (1971), 173–213. Despite the allegation in the parliament of 1406 (*Rot. Parl.*, iii. 605) that the earl of Northumberland wrote to the duke of Orléans after the failure of the rebellion pledging his support to Richard 'if he was alive', there is no suggestion that Ricardian propaganda played any part in the actual rising. Here, as in 1403, the government may have been deliberately promoting a version of the rebels' motives which avoided the more dangerous issue of Mortimer 'legitimacy'.

this legend appears to have followed a largely separate course from aristocratic opposition to the House of Lancaster. Thus although Northumberland fled to Scotland after the failure of his rebellion in 1405, and was to remain a potential threat until his disastrous and fatal invasion early in 1408,⁸² there is no suggestion that he used the story to further his cause in that year. As he was said to have been in close contact in 1405 with Sir David Fleming, another of 'Richard's' custodians,⁸³ he was probably well placed to know the true situation.

From about the time of the death of Robert III of Scotland in 1406, 'Richard' was living under the supervision of the duke of Albany. The Scottish Chamberlain's Accounts for 1408 contain a record that Albany had 'neither demanded nor received' any reimbursement from the treasury for his expenses in keeping 'Richard king of England'. Similar memoranda appear at the end of the accounts for 1414, when it was noted that Albany's expenses dated back to 1406; 1415; and 1417, when it was stated that the duke's total expenses now amounted to £733 6s. 8d. This was a very substantial sum of money in a small, impoverished country, and it has been argued that Albany would not have paid this amount out of his own pocket to support an impostor.⁸⁴ However, granted that Albany *had* paid out a sum, for whatever reason, which was sufficient to provide an exiled king with comfortable accommodation, he could hardly make what amounted either to a polite hint for reimbursement or a statement of his magnanimity unless he continued to maintain that his guest really was Richard. It is even more relevant to consider, in the context of Albany's custody of 'Richard', the duke's political and personal circumstances and their likely influence upon his relations with England. Albany was the brother of Robert III, and had taken upon himself the government of Scotland after that king's death. Whoever Albany may have been keeping at his court, Henry IV had two 'guests' at *his* who were of very great interest to Albany, and there was no doubt at all about *their* identities. One was Albany's son and heir Murdoch of Fife, who had been captured by the English at Humbledon, and Albany, for perfectly natural reasons, was anxious to secure his release. The other was Albany's nephew James, Robert III's son and the legitimate king of Scotland, whom Henry had captured shortly before Robert's death; and the duke, for the only slightly less obvious reason that he wished to retain control of the government of Scotland, was almost as anxious that Henry should

⁸² 'Northern chronicle' in C.L. Kingsford, *English historical literature in the fifteenth century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 283; Walsingham, *St Albans chronicle, 1406-1420*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 27-8.

⁸³ *Annales Henrici Quarti*, 418.

⁸⁴ *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, ed. J. Stuart, etc., 23 vols (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1878-1908), iv. 71, 213, 239, 289; Tytler, iii. 289-91.

not send him home.⁸⁵ In any negotiations over hostages, Henry therefore held all the cards. If Albany really had custody of Richard, or believed that this was the case, he would surely have made far more use of him as a bargaining counter. It is perhaps a measure of Albany's intrinsically weak position in relation to Henry that he considered it worthwhile to pay good money to maintain a fake Richard in the hope that he might prove to be of some value. In fact, Albany had wasted his money, because Henry seems to have reasoned along similar lines to those suggested above, and showed no real sign of ever taking seriously the man who was contemptuously dismissed as 'the fool'. Archbishop Arundel's advice to Henry in March 1407 that the Scots should hand this impostor over as a condition for obtaining a peace settlement⁸⁶ was probably inspired more by that prelate's dislike of unresolved irregularities than by any belief that Albany's expensive guest constituted a real threat to English security.

Between 1406 and 1415 the survival story surfaced from time to time in England in the activities of a handful of persistent but minor rabble-rousers such as John Whitlock, a former groom to Richard, who seems to have fled to Scotland after being pursued by the authorities for sedition in about 1406, reappearing after Henry V's accession in 1413 to claim that he was prepared to swear a solemn oath that Richard was still alive.⁸⁷ An even more ubiquitous troublemaker was Benedict Wolman of London, who had regularly fallen foul of the law from 1404 at the latest, and who was accused with others in 1407 of spreading the rumour that Thomas Ward was Richard II and that he would soon invade England with the earl of Northumberland. In 1410 he was said to have been plotting to murder members of the royal family and sending out agents and letters on behalf of 'Richard'.⁸⁸ The suggestion that he was at liberty between supposedly serious acts of sedition may indicate that even in an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, he lacked a degree of credibility as an anti-Lancastrian campaigner.

Before the end of 1413, Henry V had Richard's body exhumed from King's Langley and reburied with great ceremony in its 'proper' place in Westminster Abbey.⁸⁹ It would probably be wrong to take the cynical view that his chief aim was to remind his subjects that Richard was indisputably dead. While the late king had finally been laid to rest in a tomb which had been reserved for that

⁸⁵ See e.g. E.W.M. Balfour-Melville, *James I, king of Scots, 1406-1437* (London: Methuen, 1936), 34-5.

⁸⁶ British Library MS Cotton Vesp. F VII, f.88, printed with T. Amyot's article (see above, p. 95), *Archaeologia*, 23 (1831), 297-8.

⁸⁷ *Select cases in the Court of King's Bench*, 212-14.

⁸⁸ *C.P.R. 1401-05*, 503; PRO KB9/196/1, m.13; M.E. Aston, 'Lollardy and sedition, 1381-1431', *Past and Present*, 17 (1960), 41-2.

⁸⁹ *St Albans chronicle*, 77.

purpose, the reburial proved nothing about the occupant of the coffin. These proceedings could still have prompted a revival of unwelcome speculation. It is not impossible that Henry had retained a genuine regard for Richard dating from their close contact on the Irish expedition of 1399, and that he was now according him the full respect due to a deceased king.

The summer of 1415 witnessed the only known aristocratic conspiracy against Henry V in the sequence of events which culminated in the 'Southampton Plot'. Although the surviving evidence of this enigmatic plot is fragmentary and frustrating, it still provides unexpected insights into the dilemmas faced by those who sought to challenge the rule of the House of Lancaster. Whatever mysteries have surrounded the plot, its purpose has generally seemed clear to historians: the protagonists intended to overthrow Henry V and the Lancastrian line and install the now adult 'legitimate' candidate Edmund Mortimer, earl of March. The ambiguities surrounding March's involvement, and his eventual exoneration, have done little to dispel the conventional impression that this was a serious attempt to put him on the throne. However, a combination of a reading of T.B. Pugh's work on the plot⁹⁰ with a broad examination of the events of the whole of the summer of 1415 arguably produces a somewhat different picture.

While Pugh's research is valuable in identifying reasons for the disaffection of the principal conspirators, highlighting the rigorous financial constraints and burdens imposed upon them by the new king, he is nevertheless unable to create a coherent picture of the conspirators' strategy (if indeed one existed) over the nine or so weeks of political confusion which their apparent machinations caused. One very remarkable point, however, may be noted. While there were certainly indications that March's credentials as the legitimate claimant were a major factor, there were several signs that 'Richard II' also figured in their calculations. The former king was mentioned in the confessions of two of the three 'Southampton plotters', Richard, earl of Cambridge and the northern baron Thomas Grey of Heton. Grey referred to 'King Richard' six times in his submissions after the exposure of the plot, and in only one of these instances was there the suggestion that there was doubt as to his survival. March, by contrast, appeared in Grey's accounts almost as an afterthought.⁹¹ He occupied a more prominent position in the statements by Cambridge, whose approach seems to have been that March should be proclaimed king if Richard were proved to be dead. There was a parallel suggestion that the 'Richard' in Scotland, whether real or false, would play a

⁹⁰ T.B. Pugh, *Henry V and the Southampton Plot of 1415* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1988).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 161–2, 165.

meaningful part in Henry's overthrow.⁹² Henry, Lord Scrope's accounts are less informative on either March or 'Richard', but as his defence was that he only became entangled with the conspirators at a late stage, and actually tried to warn off the other principal plotters,⁹³ these deficiencies are perhaps understandable.

The surprising degree of ambiguity as to who was to be the focal figure in the planned rising interlocks closely with the other relatively neglected element in the crisis of the summer of 1415 – the fact that it fell into two well-defined parts. The phase which gave the plot its name – that involving a frenetic burst of aristocratic scheming immediately before Henry V's planned departure for France – had been preceded by a sequence of events in the North which was apparently connected with the subsequent conspiracy and which is even more difficult to interpret. The northern rising was evidently meant to involve disaffected local lords and gentry; the Percy heir, who was still being held in Scotland after fleeing there with his grandfather in 1405; Scottish assistance in exchange for Murdoch of Fife, who was first to be kidnapped from royal custody; and 'King Richard'. The finer details of the plan, in so far as they can be fathomed, need not concern us here. What does seem worth emphasizing is that the northern scheme was apparently the first choice of Cambridge and Grey, and that the efforts to involve March only began after the earlier attempts had failed. There is a distinct impression that he was not even approached until the northerners' failure to retain Murdoch after their initial success in capturing him.⁹⁴ None of this proves anything about the conspirators' belief or otherwise in Richard's survival, but it says a great deal about their attitude to March. The early and active involvement of a man who was the 'legitimate' claimant to the throne and a kinsman of both Cambridge and Percy was evidently not considered essential for the success of the rising. The statement in Grey's confession that he described March as a 'hog' to one of the latter's retainers⁹⁵ thus acquires an air of authenticity. Moreover, after March had apparently first vacillated over whether to join the plot, and then saved himself by providing evidence without which the king would have had a far more tenuous case against the conspirators, it would probably not have been hard to find observers to endorse Grey's judgement. The rebels' use of the long-

⁹² Ibid., 166–7, 172–3.

⁹³ Ibid., 167–72. For contemporary comments on the plot in general, see *St Albans chronicle*, 86–8; *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 305–6; *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, ed. and trans. F. Taylor and J.S. Roskell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 18–19; Usk, 307.

⁹⁴ The account of the trial of the northern insurgent Henry Talbot (*Select cases in the Court of King's Bench*, 237–9) represents the earlier troubles of the summer of 1415 as a Ricardian conspiracy without mentioning Henry Percy or the three main figures in the 'Southampton Plot' proper. Tytler (iii. 320–5) is quite correct in emphasizing the prominence of 'Richard' in the whole affair.

⁹⁵ Pugh, 162.

discredited Ricardian legend, and their apparent contempt for the man who could have turned their conspiracy from a particularly incompetent and uncoordinated venture into the most promising scheme to date for the overthrow of the Lancastrian monarchy, suggests that they should probably be regarded simply as malcontents on a grander scale than those who had invoked Richard's name over the past thirteen years.⁹⁶

Despite Henry V's ruthlessly effective suppression of the Southampton Plot, and his great victories in his French campaigns, an undercurrent of sedition continued to surface from time to time. After the defeat of Sir John Oldcastle's rebellion in 1414, it was the turn of the Lollards to become involved in Ricardian propaganda. There is no suggestion that they were implicated in lay sedition before that date: it had been their old enemies the friars who had taken the lead in voicing opposition to Henry IV early in that king's reign. Now the Lollards were accused of entering into negotiations with the Scots to bring the pseudo-Richard into England,⁹⁷ and Benedict Wolman, described for the first time as a Lollard, finally tried the patience of the authorities once too often and was executed in 1416 for campaigning on behalf of Thomas Ward.⁹⁸ When Oldcastle was eventually captured in 1417, he maintained that he would not acknowledge Henry V's authority while Richard II was alive in Scotland.⁹⁹ The Scottish Chamberlain's Accounts suggest that the pseudo-Richard probably died in 1417, but even this did not stop the rumours. In 1420, an alleged Lollard was accused of promoting Ward's claim to be the rightful king of England.¹⁰⁰ Then, at last, the legend appears to have been laid to rest.

A pardonable reaction would be 'not before time': because if one looks back over the whole period covered by the survival rumours, one sees a very strange phenomenon. At its heart is a persistent story that Richard did not die early in 1400 when there seems to be particularly convincing evidence that he did. No-one appears to have shown the slightest sign of making any claim to the contrary until two years after the event. Most of those who purported to believe the story had no significant connection with the late king. The Percies had little motive for maintaining that Richard was alive, and good grounds for believing that he was dead, and gave strong indications that they were acting on the latter

⁹⁶ Pugh (e.g. xi-xii) may be too ready to dismiss the charge, made by virtually all contemporary sources, that the conspirators were incited to treason by French bribes, an explanation which is, at the very least, no less inherently credible than any other. If a French-backed coup, designed to sabotage Henry V's invasion of France, was the object of the exercise, it might not have mattered greatly who supplanted the king.

⁹⁷ *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 325.

⁹⁸ *Memorials of London and London life . . . 1276-1419*, ed. H.T. Riley (London: Longmans, 1868), 638-9; *St Albans chronicle*, 102.

⁹⁹ *Historia Anglicana*, ii. 328.

¹⁰⁰ R.R. Sharpe, *London and the kingdom*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, 1894-95), i. 248.

assumption. The Scots, who would have found it very useful to have had a real Richard in their hands, clearly knew that they had not. The French, who were gravely insulted by Henry's destruction of the Anglo-French truce which was symbolized by Richard's second marriage, never seem to have had any intention of coming to the aid of those who claimed that Isabella's husband had survived. The man who may have been providing apparently authentic documentary evidence for Richard's survival was disposed of little more than two years after the story attained widespread currency. Henry IV obviously never took it seriously: indeed, it may be argued that no-one of any consequence genuinely believed that Richard was alive after 1400. There is little to suggest that there was any continuous movement dedicated to the reinstatement of the late king. All the disparate groups and individuals who made use of the legend had motives for opposition to Henry which had nothing directly to do with support for Richard. Why, then, did this essentially implausible story persist for nearly twenty years?

One approach to this question is to consider what sort of person generates a survival legend. In response to any suggestion that the Ricardian legend was the product of a naive, credulous and ill-informed age, it is pertinent to note that very similar phenomena have occurred in the supposedly rationalistic and cynical twentieth century. Two well-known examples are those of the United States president John F. Kennedy, assassinated in 1963, and the internationally-popular American singer Elvis Presley, who died in 1977. Both deaths were regarded at the time as conclusively attested, yet both men became the subjects of passionately-maintained claims of their survival. As in the case of Richard II, there was a significant time-lag during which any inconvenient evidence authenticating their deaths could be forgotten. Kennedy and Presley had at least one important characteristic in common: they were regarded by a massive body of opinion, both in their own country and elsewhere, as standing head and shoulders above other men in their chosen fields. Presley, in fact, was regarded by his admirers as 'the King'. Now while Richard II has his apologists among modern historians, it has never been claimed that he enjoyed this sort of charismatic image. Indeed, one of the keys to his failure was that, with a few exceptions, he failed to retain the allegiance of his supposed friends and supporters when they were put to the test. It is also relevant to compare the perseverance of the survival myth with the absence of any cult of Richard as a secular martyr. He was simply not cast in the necessary heroic mould. So what was it which made this self-evidently 'failed' man the subject of a survival legend? Richard did have something 'special' in the context of early fifteenth-century English society and politics, which may be encapsulated in the word 'legitimacy'. What he had (and the past tense is crucial, because it was taken for granted until it was taken

away from him) was that he was 'the king'. In 1399 'the king' had been removed. However close the relationship of his successor had been, and however attractive his credentials, this was a profound shock to the political system. Anyone who was discontented with *anything* under Henry IV – and there was a great deal to be discontented about – had a very real problem. On the one hand, Henry's position as a usurper made him peculiarly vulnerable to attack. On the other, however, it has probably not been sufficiently appreciated that there was no clear or viable alternative to his rule.

Because the Mortimers' claim was eventually regarded as legitimate with the accession of the Yorkists in 1461, it is easy to see them as the dispossessed rightful claimants under Henry IV and Henry V. However, although the Mortimers were certainly a potential source of embarrassment for the early Lancastrians, disaffected subjects seeking an alternative ruler faced two serious difficulties. The more obvious was that for most of Henry IV's reign, Edmund, earl of March, was too young to govern in his own right, and his kingship would therefore have entailed the rule of others – such as the Percies – who would very probably not have commanded general support. The other was that while the Mortimers were the legitimate candidates by what were to become the established criteria of English royal succession, there was no written law of inheritance to the throne in 1399. It was possible to make an alternative claim from the fact that the House of Lancaster was descended from Edward III through males only, whereas the Mortimer claim was transmitted through a woman. One of Henry IV's many attempts to guarantee the succession of his descendants, the statute enacted in parliament in June 1406, was at least implicitly based on this principle.¹⁰¹ It is worth observing that despite all the various outbreaks of sedition and discontent under Henry IV and Henry V, no-one – not even the earl of March in 1415 – put *himself* forward as king. The point needs to be emphasized that no-one could claim legitimacy after 1399 in the way in which Richard II's legitimacy had been taken for granted. In that sense, Richard was irreplaceable: *no-one* could be king as he had been.

This almost certainly accounts for several anomalous aspects of rebellion and sedition under the early Lancastrians. For instance, the above accounts of the activities of minor dissidents only contain one mention of support for the Mortimer claim. Even more remarkable, there is no conclusive evidence that the Percies were committed to the Mortimer cause for its own sake. It appears rather that their policy was to dispose of the king first and resolve the question of his successor later. This was technically the procedure which was followed in the deposition of Richard and the accession

¹⁰¹ *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 574–6; McNiven, 'Legitimacy and consent', especially 476–7, 484–5.

of Henry, a procedure in which the Percies had played a major rôle. It may also be noted that when Edmund Mortimer, uncle of the young earl of March of the same name, defected to the Welsh rebels in 1402, he saw fit to proclaim to his tenants his allegiance to Richard, if he was still alive, before committing himself to the cause of his incontestably living nephew.¹⁰² Most crucial of all, the Southampton plotters made as much reference to Richard as to their supposed candidate the earl of March, for whom they appear to have had very scant respect. It is unlikely that all these men were using the name of the late king as an 'insurance policy': they were better placed than most of their contemporaries to know that he was dead. Their problem – and advocacy of the cause of a dead king may reasonably be regarded as an indication that one has a problem – was that none of them was sufficiently confident to invest anyone with the unequivocal legitimacy which Richard had possessed. Richard was not in fact available, but they found it virtually impossible to look beyond his name because the alternatives were too complicated and uncertain.

This almost total lack of belief in an alternative was perhaps the greatest single factor in ensuring that Henry IV kept his throne. The story of Richard's survival filled at least two vacant spaces in the troubled political circumstances of the early fifteenth century. It had its uses for the kings and their supporters. They could, as in 1403 and 1406, charge people with taking a treasonable stance which also had the merit of being based on nonsense, and use this claim to discredit more rational challenges to Lancastrian authority, or more moderate dissent.¹⁰³ For enemies or critics of Henry IV and Henry V, many of whom may have cared neither one way nor the other about Richard when he was alive, the late king's name still had the power to remind people of what the usurping Lancastrians could never have. It could serve as a rallying cry in successive and otherwise uncoordinated gestures of protest, directed against a particular king or against authority in general, but not necessarily carrying sufficient conviction, in the absence of a viable alternative, to pose serious threats to the occupant of the throne. Perhaps it was these 'protest movements', rather than Stubbs's 'Lancastrian constitutional experiment', which were the most distinctive and novel political development of Henry IV's reign. It would be ironic if Richard II, who had proved even more than Henry IV that he could not tolerate criticism, should have unwittingly lent his name to such a phenomenon.

¹⁰² *Original letters illustrative of English history*, ed. H. Ellis, 2nd series, 4 vols (London: Harding and Lepard, 1827), i. 24–6.

¹⁰³ It is surely significant that there do not appear to be any royal proclamations or injunctions ordering the suppression of propaganda on behalf of Mortimer, although the proceedings against John Sparrowhawk (see above, p. 100) and the major manifestations of treason in 1403, 1405 and 1415 suggest that it must have existed.

