

A KING, A HOUND,
A RIDDLE

*For Skye,
a gentle giant.*

A KING, A HOUND, A RIDDLE

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FOREWORD

For more than 500 years, people have been convinced that King Richard III of England was a monster. A deformed man with a hunchback and a clawed hand. A fiend who took great pleasure in sending friends and relatives to their deaths during his reign, a reign that - thankfully - only lasted two years. There was even a rumour that he had his two young nephews, who were lodged in the Tower of London, killed. That was considered bad behaviour, even for the Middle Ages.

As it turns out, the Tudor royal family, which came to power after the death of Richard III, were particularly keen to convince people, through clever propaganda, that this Richard III had been a horrendously bad king and that everyone should count their blessings for the new Tudor dynasty.

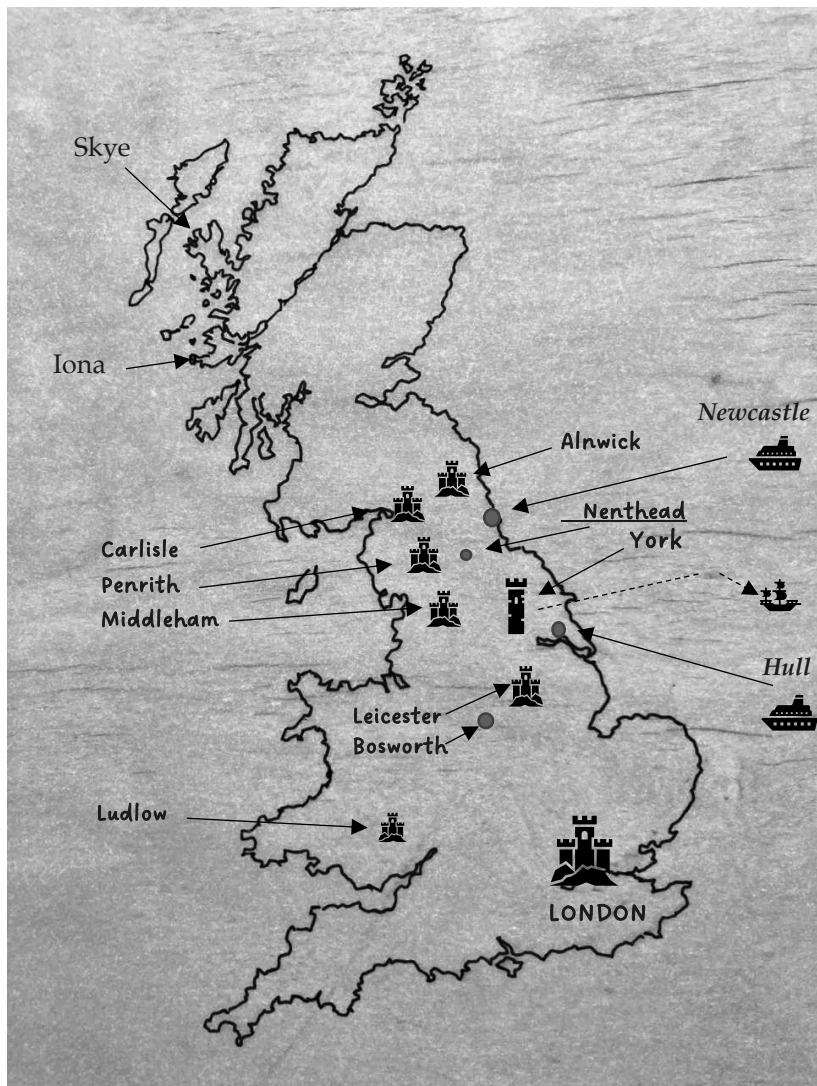
The gossip campaign was well orchestrated and spread like the plague until the vast majority began to believe it. And then there was William Shakespeare, a young successful writer who lived in the Tudor era and wrote plays about some kings in English history. And no king captured the imagination more than the despicable and deformed Richard III. Shakespeare collected all this malicious gossip and made a famous play out of it. And so, King Richard III went down in history as a monster.

In subsequent centuries, there have been those who doubted the evil character and repulsive physique of this king. Over the last century these doubts have finally been properly addressed. Historians and commoners alike have tried to find out the truth about Richard III as a person and what manner of King he was. Interest grew and a number of books and articles have been written on the subject, for to this day the man, his reputation and his legacy continue to fascinate people.

Did Richard wrongfully take the crown from his young nephew Edward? Did Richard kill the boy and his little brother? Was Richard really physically deformed and mentally deranged? After more than six centuries such questions are obviously difficult to answer, but discoveries have been made that paint a very different picture of King Richard III from Shakespeare's version.

The chapters in this book alternate between historical events and contemporary adventures in a free interplay of fact and fiction. The enigma of the young princes' disappearance and their fate may never be solved, and although we do know a great deal about King Richard III and his achievements, there will always be aspects of his life that are shrouded in mystery. What is very likely however is, that he had a Scottish Deerhound by his side.

MAP OF ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES



PROLOGUE 1489

No one knew exactly what happened, ...

but the Earl of Northumberland's horse reared up and Earl Henry fell from his saddle. He was only slightly injured, but for a brief moment he lay helpless on the ground. The Earl's horse and those of his bodyguards were justly feared. Trained warhorses. No stranger dared to come close to their large teeth and iron-clad hooves. But on 28 April 1489, in the city of York, the unexpected happened. Bystanders fell upon the helpless Earl in a frenzy. Shortly after falling from his horse, the Earl was dead.

That evening, it was the talk of the pubs. As the beer flowed, everyone felt obliged to give their opinion as to what had really happened. The consensus? The people of the city of York had never forgiven the Earl for not intervening at the Battle of Bosworth four years earlier. For standing by while King Richard was betrayed and killed. The Earl's procrastination when he was commander of a key part of King Richard's army was seen as a form of treason. The people of York were delighted that the Earl, who became a close friend of the new King, the victor at Bosworth, had finally received his deserved reward. Of course, it did not bring back their beloved King Richard, but at least some sort of justice was done.

Some people wondered how it was possible that the Earl's mighty horse had suddenly reared up and thrown him off. Those who were there to witness the incident swore they had seen a large, impressive grey dog suddenly appear in the middle of the road. It was not just any dog. It was a Deerhound. Such dogs were kept only by men of nobility, by a marquis, an earl, a duke, a prince or king. Ordinary people were not even allowed to own them. Deerhounds lived in castles and you would rarely, if ever, see them on the street. No one knew where the Deerhound had come from, but suddenly it was there.

The huge dog just stood there, about ten metres from the approaching horse. She looked an impressive and menacing sight. The hair on the back of her neck stood up, making her even taller. Her eyes were focused with unwavering intensity on Earl Henry. His horse stopped abruptly and reared up. That was what the people in front had seen. It all happened very quickly. As the Earl lay on the ground, the commoners saw their chance and attacked. At last, they had a chance to settle the score. In the ensuing chaos, the Earl's bodyguards fled. No one saw the grey dog again.

1 SHALL WE THEN?

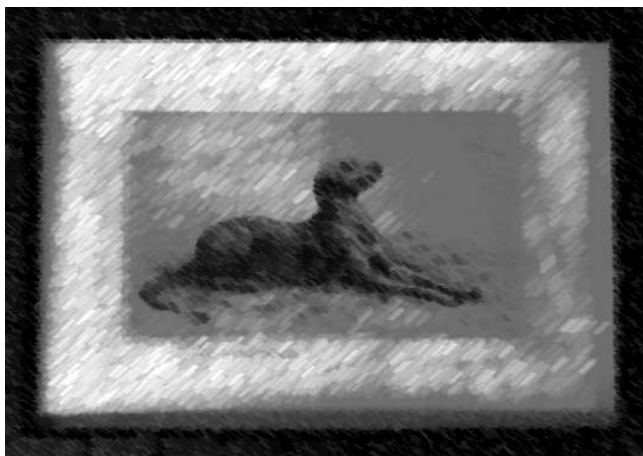
"Are you going to walk the dog?" Rina asked. She was comfortably nestled in the armchair by the stove. "Um, but I already did the morning walk," Peter sighed and moved the bookmark to the page he was reading. "So shouldn't it be your turn?" "Hmm, maybe we should go together," Rina suggested smiling. Peter pretended to peer into the dark night. "Well..." The driving rain rattled the windows of their house. Typical autumnal Dutch weather. Rina shivered and fastened an extra button on her cardigan. They smiled at each other, settled into their chairs a little more snugly and continued to read their books.

Peter and Rina didn't actually have a dog, but every now and then one of them would ask the other to walk the dog, just to get used to the idea.

They wanted a dog and had researched their preferred breed. Why that particular breed?

Once on a trip to London, Peter had bought, at a street market, a framed drawing of a beautiful dog. Not just any dog, but a type of dog that was rarely seen on the street. A dog, more frequently seen in paintings on castle walls in England or Scotland.

At the time, the conversation with the market stallholder went as follows:



“What is it?”, Peter asked.

The market trader looked thoughtfully at the picture and said, “It's neither a rat nor a cat, but just a beast on a mat.” And with a grin and a wink, he handed the picture back to Peter. Hmm, this gentleman was probably a so-called London Cockney, known for their rhyming speech patterns. Peter immediately rose to the challenge, replying in kind. “Sure, but then, I think, at least, ... this is clearly a GIANT beast,” and cheerfully placed a few coins in the merchant's hand. They both had a good laugh.

Later he understood that it was a Scottish Deerhound, known to be gentle giants. Centuries back this type of dog was only found in aristocratic circles, used for hunting deer. Deer hunting was the exclusive preserve of the nobility and the common man was not even allowed to own a Deerhound. But that was a long time

ago and besides, it could not be against the law to have a drawing of a Deerhound on the wall, Peter thought, smiling, as he held the print in his hand.

Now, years later, he and Rina had made a tentative plan to start looking for a real Deerhound. Some time ago Rina had read a book about an Irish Wolfhound, very similar to a Deerhound and the dog in the book had made a deep impression. A Wolfhound is slightly bigger than a Deerhound and has a more solid build. The hound in Peter's picture, the Deerhound, was more noble and stately, Rina decided.

The Internet provided a few places where they could start looking. And so, one day they drove up to a kennel where they were supposed to have Deerhounds, just to see what those special creatures looked like in real life. "Do you think we're in the right place?" Rina asked Peter as she rolled down the car window. "It's the right address but I don't hear any barking. Where are the dogs?"

The owner of the kennel joined them soon enough and showed them the dogs. "Yes", he laughed, "that's another reason why I love these big grey monsters so much, you can't hear them." He toured them proudly around the kennels and told them a bit about the inhabitants. Peter and Rina were not disappointed. The dogs were even more beautiful than they had imagined. The owner stopped and pointed. "This young lady here was born a year ago. Her siblings have all found homes. We're still hesitating

whether to keep her for breeding, but if there are any interested parties, she can go too.”

That was a big leap to take all of a sudden, but maybe that was a good thing. They had thought about it long enough. Perhaps it was time to do some real dog walking, and why not? They had already agreed that maybe they shouldn't start with a puppy as the first dog in their lives. They both had jobs and hoped that the new member of the family would be able to stand on his or her own four feet. And this one-year-old beauty, well, it felt really good right away. But this was not planned as a buying trip.

Peter and Rina silently observed the potential new member of the family, letting the questions bubble up inside them. Very exciting all in all. What an adventure, what a responsibility, but right now? Just as they were beginning to feel rather anxious, the protagonist of the adventure walked towards them, or rather, danced. That's a better description of the Deerhound's wonderful, springy gait. She sniffed Peter and Rina's hands for a moment, raised her head, looked first at one and then the other, then tilted her head slightly, and it really seemed - as they later told each other - as if she said, “Shall we then?”

A cup of coffee was drunk as is the custom in Holland, all the other formalities were arranged and many questions were asked and answered. The kennel owner wanted to be sure that the Deerhound would be well cared for and Peter and Rina wanted

to know all sorts of things about diet, exercise, grooming, and medical issues such as vaccinations, etc. During this lengthy process enthusiastic but also nervous glances passed between Peter and Rina. Was this really happening? It was a great responsibility, but most of all they both felt an unexpected, unfamiliar kind of warmth, happiness and pride.

Fleur was the name on the Deerhound's passport, but Peter and Rina had already decided that their Deerhound should have a Scottish name. They thought the name of the Scottish island where they had spent their honeymoon was beautiful, and somehow appropriate. So, from then on, the young lady's name was Skye.



2 Nenthead, a small former mining village in the north of England

If you travel through England on the A689 from the city of Durham, with its beautiful old and spectacularly located cathedral, you will pass through Weardale. The River Wear has carved out a valley, and the road follows the river to its source, then rises to a high hill. Only folks like Peter and Rina who were born and raised in the Netherlands would call it a mountain. On the other side of the hill, another river flows westwards. This is the Nent, which eventually travels through the village of Nenthead.

But first you travel downhill and motorists are warned to be careful. The area has long been known as Alston Moor. It is a wild, rugged and inhospitable area, often beset by strong winds, fog and pouring rain. In the old days, if you were caught out here in stormy weather without shelter you would not fare well. Nowadays, in all seasons, Alston Moor is breathtakingly beautiful. The views are magnificent and the dominating sky is constantly changing.

So, drive carefully downhill and soon you will come to a bend in the road and the village of Nenthead, which is said to be the highest village in England, not counting Scotland or Wales. For ages there used to be only one sheep farm here. Then a couple of

centuries ago iron ore deposits were discovered. A small mining village sprang up and because of its location at the source of the Nent, it was called Nenthead.

That single farm, Cotterill Farm on Alston Moor, remained a ruin until 2020. In that year it was completely demolished and a new house was built. The former hay barn, which was also a ruin until 2009, had already been converted into a holiday cottage. The layout of the cottage was based on the original walls, which were still largely intact. The large old flat tiles of the roof were reused and carefully placed on the new wooden roof structure. The cottage retained the thick stone walls.

