**The Perkin Warbeck Imposter**

**Introduction**

Perkin Warbeck posed to be Richard, Duke of York, who was the youngest of the princes in the tower, over a period of 8 years. Warbeck was used by Yorkist conspirators. His story was that the eldest brother was killed whilst “he” was spared and allowed to escape to Europe. Warbeck first appeared in 1491 at the Court of Margaret of Burgundy.

**Threat**

Warbeck became a real threat because he attracted foreign patronage to believe him. In fact, he had support from the Scots and married the cousin of the King of Scotland, Lady Katherine Gordon. Even the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximillian, as well as the King of France, Charles VIII, began to recognise Warbeck as the rightful King. In 1492, Henry had to make a deal with the French, “The Treaty of Etaples” to stop them from supporting Warbeck. Henry had only been accepted as King because Britain had presumed the princes were dead. With a reappearance, instead their loyalties were torn.

**Attacks**

In 1495, Warbeck arrived with a Burgundian force in Kent which Henry’s army crushed. Henry had already been informed by one royal agent, Sir Robert Clifford. Warbeck was quickly defeated and fled to the court of James IV of Scotland. A few months later, in 1496, an army from Scotland invaded England to help Warbeck’s case as the rightful King. The most challenging was the Cornish Rebellion in 1497 when the people of Cornwall were opposed to Henry due to his increase in taxes. Warbeck was caught and arrested.

**Result**

Warbeck was at first allowed to stay in court but he absconded so was sent to the Tower of London. At court, he was tortured and finally confessed that he was the son of John Osbeck from Flanders. However, there is no primary evidence from the court case and he was under duress so we can’t be definite on the truth of this.

Warbeck allegedly attempted to escape with the Earl of Warwick so both were executed for treason. This was highly convenient for Henry VII since the Earl of Warwick was the most likely claimant for the throne.

**Involvement of Sir William Stanley**

Historian, Bennett, states that Stanley wanted to rebel due to his failure in obtaining the Earldom of Chester. It also likely that he felt Elizabeth, sister of Richard III, was the rightful heir to the throne instead of Henry VII. Apart from that, Stanley additionally felt no loyalty to the Tudors.

It is speculated that Stanley joined Warbeck in 1493. One story states that Stanley agreed on Sir Robert Clifford’s signal that he would assist Warbeck with resources needed. Conversely, Virgil, an “official” historian of the Tudor Dynasty as well as Bacon, said that Stanley told Clifford that “if he were sure that the man was Edward’s son he would never take up arms against him.”

Apparently, this comment was used in court when convicting Stanley who used the hypothetical “if” to lesson his charges of treason. We are not sure how much of a role Stanley had but he seems to have tentatively joined Warbeck.

Either way, Stanley was executed on the 16th February 1495.