

1485:

Hello.

My name is Michèle Schindler, I'm the author of the book "Lovell Our Dogge", a biography of Francis Lovell, 1st Viscount Lovell.

Most of you probably know that Viscount Lovell was the closest friend of Richard III. The two of them met when Francis was only eight years old, and their relationship built from there. When Richard became king, Francis received many favours and positions from him. Most importantly, Francis was Richard's lord chamberlain.

So naturally, when Richard died on 22nd August at the Battle of Bosworth, it was a massive loss for Francis. Since he lost not only his best friend, but also his access to the inner workings of the government, one might think that the loss was a political one as well as a personal one, but it was soon to turn out that for Francis, the personal trumped the political by far.

Francis's first action after Richard's death at Bosworth was an unsurprising one. Seeing that the battle was lost, he, together with two other supporters of the Yorkist side, the brothers Humphrey and Thomas Stafford, escaped to avoid being taken prisoner by the victorious Tudor side. They went to St John's Abbey in the city of Colchester, where they claimed sanctuary.

That they went there, rather than finding an abbey somewhat closer to the battlefield was probably due to two reasons: for one, St John's Abbey, much like Westminster Abbey as well, had extended rights of sanctuary, which means that those seeking shelter there could stay for however long they chose, rather than the 40 days allowed by normal rights of sanctuary. The second reason was that St John's Abbey had an abbot who was known to strongly support the Yorkist side. His name was Walter Stansted.

It is quite possible that from the first, Francis and the brothers Stafford intended to make trouble for the newly made king Henry VII, and that they hoped they would find a supporter in Abbot Stansted, which indeed they later did.

It is equally possible that Henry VII feared they would take such an action and that this is why he, soon after his victory at Bosworth, offered Francis a pardon, a chance to continue living as he had before Richard III had come to the throne, as a rich nobleman. Perhaps, however, he made that offer not out of fear but simply because he wished to have a man as close to Richard as Francis had been within the fold, so to speak.

We do not know why he made the offer, but we do know that Francis rejected it. This was a significant decision for him. Francis had been a rich man even before Richard came to the throne. By rejecting Henry's pardon, he gave up immense riches. He also gave up the chance to live a quiet life, much as he had done under Edward IV, with his wife. By rejecting Henry's pardon, he chose to be attainted.

Yet this is what he chose. There was no bending the knee to the man who had killed his best friend for Francis. He would not swear fealty to him, and so, in Henry's first Parliament, Francis was attainted.

Henry may have thought that the matter was settled with this, but if so, he was very much mistaken. Francis was by no means content to simply try and flee the country, having made his opinion on Henry clear with his rejection. On the contrary; in the months after Bosworth, he and the brothers Stafford began planning a rebellion.

They were not the only discontent ones after Henry VII's accession, which must have given them hope. There were hotspots of trouble especially in the North of country and, interestingly, in Wales, with which Henry had to deal in the first months of his kingship. Perhaps, it helped Francis and his allies that the government was busy elsewhere. In any case, they, presumably with the help of Abbot Stansted, started recruiting men from the city of Colchester for a rebellion.

Interestingly, their search for supporters was not solely a local one. On the contrary, over the winter, they apparently managed to find a supporter who were quite close to Henry at court, namely John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln.

Lincoln had been Richard's heir presumptive after his small son had died, but he had come to terms with Henry, or at least had pretended to do so. Later, in 1487, it would come out that he had been in contact with Francis for a long while and supported his rebellion, but in early 1486, Henry apparently suspected nothing, which was to help Francis and the brothers Stafford immensely.

In early spring, a man called Hugh Convey, who had been party to the rebel's plans, betrayed them to Henry VII. Henry was said to not believe them for a while, but eventually he trusted Convey's words. Since the plans Convey betrayed to him included when Francis intended to leave sanctuary, this could have stopped the rebellion before it even started. However, Henry did not catch Francis, which suggests that he was told by someone at Henry's court his plans had been betrayed and he could change them accordingly. That someone was almost certainly Lincoln.

Henry did not know anything of this, and so Francis and the brothers Stafford could go ahead with their rebellion. After leaving sanctuary, they split up, the brothers Stafford going to the Midlands, where they had family connections, while Francis went to the north. In the Midlands, the brothers Stafford's plan appears to have been to convince people that the son of Richard's brother George, the Earl of Warwick, had been freed from the Tower, where Henry VII had imprisoned him since his victory at Bosworth. Francis, in the north, apparently had no such plans, and no figurehead. His only aim was killing Henry VII.

Despite this, he found quite a few supporters to try and help him assassinate Henry. The Croyland Chronicle reports that as Henry moved to York on his first progress through the country, Francis and some rebels waited to ambush him, kidnap him and execute him. Henry only escaped very narrowly. However, this did not make Francis give up.

Having arrived in York, Henry intended to hold a big celebration on St George's Day, that is the 23rd April, to celebrate both his victory, and his escape from the rebels. During this celebration, Francis and his fellow rebels made another attempt to kidnap Henry. This failed too and according to the Croyland Chronicle, several people were hanged for the attempt. Not Francis, though, who could escape.

The rebellion ended with that, though there were still occasional hotspots of trouble, not immediately connected with Francis or the Staffords though. The brothers Stafford fled to sanctuary again, from which they were taken by Henry VII's men. Humphrey Stafford was hanged, drawn and quartered for treason, though Thomas was pardoned.

Francis, however, had not chosen to go to sanctuary again, which was lucky for him. We actually don't know exactly where he went. According to Polydore Vergil, he went to hide with a supporter, a man named Thomas Broughton, in Lancashire, which might very well be true. Contemporarily, however, another version circulated. A letter written in May 1486 by the Countess of Oxford stated that Francis was on the Isle of Ely, seeking to find a ship to leave England.

Whichever Francis did, wherever he went, he was not found by Henry VII and his men for well over half a year. We only know that by January 1487, if he hadn't left England already, he was making his way towards Burgundy, to the court of Margaret, Dowager Duchess of Burgundy, who was Richard III's sister.

Margaret had already after Bosworth given a home to those who fled from England. This was probably done not only out of personal reasons, but also political ones. While her brothers Richard, and Edward IV, had been supportive of Burgundy, Henry VII was indebted to France for helping him in seizing the throne and was therefore on the side of Burgundy's enemy.

Therefore, she was a natural ally for Francis in another rebellion, and it makes sense he left England for Burgundy a time point between May 1486 and January 1487. Margaret had the added advantage as an ally that her stepdaughter's widower – the man who would later become Maximilian I – had useful ties to the Holy Roman Empire, which was to help the rebellion immensely. Maximilian organised mercenaries for the rebels eventual return to England from what is today Switzerland and Bavaria.

Henry VII does not seem to have been aware of the rebellion until it was too late to try and prevent it, and all he could do was to try and do his all to see to it the rebellion would fail. To that end, he summoned a council in February 1487, in Sheen. However, things were to become worse for him, when the Earl of Lincoln, whom Henry had trusted, left his court to go to Burgundy. Henry, it seems, had not been aware of Lincoln's loyalties until after he had left. The fact that Lincoln and Francis had, apparently, been in contact during well over half a year while Francis was in hiding without anyone expecting anything is quite impressive.

Even more impressively, it seems that they also managed to rope Henry's own mother-in-law, Edward IV's widow Elizabeth Woodville, into the rebellion. In the same council from which Lincoln left to go to Burgundy, it was decided Elizabeth should go to a convent – or rather, a monastery – and be stripped off all her property. It is sometimes argued today this was simply

done because Henry needed money, but it seems very unlikely that if so, he would need the approval of the whole council, a council he had assembled to deal with the upcoming rebellion at that. At the time, it was accepted she was being punished for something.

Surely, if she was involved, this must have alarmed Henry VII a lot, and he did all he could to stop any more damage from happening. This included trying to discredit the pretender the rebels had as figurehead for their rebellion.

Who the pretender was and who he claimed to be is unknown today; the only thing we do know for a fact is that, unlike what is often claimed, it was not a boy named Lambert Simnel, as this was a codename made up by Henry VII's government.

The most widely accepted version today is that it was a lowborn boy pretending to be the son of Richard's brother, the aforementioned Earl of Warwick. However, this makes little sense, in the light of the Earl of Lincoln's involvement in the rebellion. Lincoln had been Richard III's heir presumptive. He had a doubtless claim to the throne, a better claim than even the real Earl of Warwick, much less a pretender. There would have been no reason for him not to instigate a rising in his own name unless it was in the name of someone who had a better claim.

There are only two candidates who did: Edward V and his younger brother Richard of Shrewsbury, the so-called Princes in the Tower. They had been barred from the throne due to their alleged bastardy when Richard ascended the throne, but Henry VII had overturned the Act of Parliament declaring them bastards when he married their oldest sister. As the law was at the moment of the 1487, the erstwhile Edward V had the best claim to the throne, and so it would make sense if he was the one whom the rebellion was meant to place on the throne. This is not just wishful thinking either; Bernard André, who was close to Henry VII, said that the pretender claimed to be one of the sons of Edward IV, so it is an idea that was around contemporarily.

Whoever the pretender really was, preparations for the rebellion were made in Burgundy and Ireland, where the House of York was extremely popular. After a couple months in Burgundy, the rebels left Burgundy for Ireland, where the pretender was crowned. Afterwards, there was even a Parliament held in Ireland, and coins minted.

All this must have happened in record time. The coronation was on 24th May 1487, and by early June 1487, the rebels had landed in England. Once there, Francis tried to attack as many of Henry VII's men as possible, to see to it they lost as much of their equipment and as many men as possible, weakening them for the doubtlessly upcoming battle, while Lincoln tried to recruit as many people as possible to their cause.

Francis was somewhat successful; he at least managed to attack the Earl of Oxford and steal his equipment. Lincoln, however, was less so. Perhaps because people were sick of fighting, or perhaps because they feared for the consequences should they back the rebels and the rebels lose, few people were ready to join them.

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Eventually, not quite two weeks after the rebels had landed in England, it came to a battle between their forces and Henry VII's. The so-called Battle of Stoke took nearly three hours, longer than the Battle of Bosworth had, and in hung in balance for a while before the Tudor forces once again emerged victorious. There are several theories why they won, in the end. According to Polydore Vergil, the Irish who had joined the rebellion were so badly armed that they did not have a chance against the more modern weapons of Henry VII's forces. However, the opposite has also been claimed; that the new-fangled firearms the Swiss and German mercenaries had were in the habit of backfiring, weakening their force fatally.

Whichever it was, the rebel forces lost. The Earl of Lincoln died in battle. Francis did not, but his fate afterwards is unknown. The last confirmed sighting of him was when he swam on horseback across the river Trent. What happened to him afterwards is unknown, but personally I think it most likely he went back to Burgundy. A year after the Battle of Stoke, a safe conduct was issued for him by the new King of Scotland, but there is no evidence he ever took it up. It is most likely to me, therefore, that he returned to Burgundy, where Margaret of York tried to get a safe conduct to Scotland for him, but that Francis died before it was issued.

1487:

Francis's flight

Arrival in Burgundy

The international connection (Ireland/ Holy Roman Empire/England)

Who was the pretender?

John, Earl of Lincoln's part in the rebellion

Preparations for the rebellion

Coronation in Ireland

Landing in England

The loss of the Battle of Stoke

Vanished