



## Robin Maxwell

**To the Tower Born**  
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**Q: As a follower and historian of English royalty, which is your favorite period, and why? What is it that inspires you about the history of the royal families in England?**

A: By the time I'd finished my fourth book, *The Wild Irish*, I believed I'd pretty well "done" the 16th century Tudors, but the family still held a fascination for me. When I turned to their immediate ancestors I found, of course, the greatest mystery in English history—*what had happened to the little princes?* I loved this idea and knew it hadn't been "mined" in the fiction genre for a long time, but when I started my research I was frankly doubtful that the Yorks and Lancasters would be anywhere

near as colorful, scheming and bloodthirsty as Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and "Bloody Mary." How wrong I was! The 15th century figures made their descendants look like downright wusses.

**Q: There are some women in English history who undoubtedly exercised a great deal of power. What do you think made this possible?**

A: Certainly my books are "female heavy," and some might take issue with that. In the case of *To the Tower Born*, the tragedy of the boys' disappearance started because of the actions of a woman, their mother, Queen Elizabeth Woodville, who decided on her own volition, to dismiss her dead husband's wishes about who was to be young Edward's "Protector." She didn't like or trust Richard and moved to push him aside. Everything followed from that fateful decision.

It was Edward IV's sexual escapades with a woman (Eleanor Butler) that led to the bastardization of his children with Elizabeth Woodville, the circumstance that placed Richard III legitimately on the throne.

And it was Margaret Beaufort's conspiracies that led not only to two rebellions (one that failed and one that succeeded) landing her son, Henry Tudor, on the throne in 1485. But it was Margaret's plotting with Elizabeth Woodville that led to the uniting of the Yorks and the Lancasters in marriage (Bessie and Henry Tudor), thus ending the "War of the Roses."

I feel the female influence in this period has been grossly ignored by historians. There are a couple of biographies about Margaret Beaufort (both "valentines" about the "Venerable Margaret"). She was, in my estimation a tiny dragon-lady who stopped at nothing to get what she wanted. There is one good book that I found about Elizabeth Woodville by David Baldwin. There is only one (completely abysmal) "pseudo-biography" about Elizabeth of York (Princess Bessie), and a tiny bit of material about her on the Internet. Unlike the later Tudor period and the endlessly written-about individuals like Elizabeth I and Anne Boleyn, a writer in the earlier period is forced to "mine" the histories and biographies that exist on the men, for *tidbits* about the women. And virtually no one gives them credit for being the *driving force* behind historical events.

While I personally "dislike" Margaret Beaufort for her treatment of Bessie after she became queen, I have more than a grudging respect for Margaret because it is she, more than any of the women I've studied, who had the most profound effect on the royal women and children of later generations. She not only patronized William Caxton and several colleges of Cambridge University, but she founded a school for royal and noble children during her son Henry VIII's reign. Both boys *and* girls were given amazing humanist/classical educations. The females of this school learned, too, that women could accomplish much using their brains, and not just what was between their thighs. They and their daughters (Anne Boleyn, Catherine Parr, and the most famous granddaughter of all, Elizabeth I, were products of this early feminist line). What's more, the men (like Henry VIII) learned that the women could be intellectual sparring partners. The greatest families of the 16th century—the Boleyns, Howards, Seymours, Dudleys and Parrs—all benefited from Margaret Beaufort's royal school.

**Q: If you could visit any historical time and place, when and where would it be, and why?**

A: If I had to choose, I suppose I'd would have wanted to be a "fly on the wall of history" in both the Henry VIII/Anne Boleyn period; or the Richard III/Princess-Queen Bessie/Henry Tudor/Margaret Beaufort period. These were such pivotal moments in time, when personal and sexual relationships—the same as we have today between lovers, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers with their children, aunts and uncles with their nieces and nephews—actually changed the course of western civilization.

There was so little standing in the way of certain incidents having gone in the opposite direction than it did. What if King Edward IV had not caught a chill while fishing, and died in 1483? I do believe that if his brother Richard of Gloucester had never been called upon to take control of England at the time he did, he'd have lived out his life as a family man who enjoyed the country and the castles of his childhood, the "Lord of the North," who stayed far away from the court and its bloody politics, which he deeply loathed. If he'd been allowed to continue his clean, stress-free existence surrounded by loved ones, he'd probably have made it to a ripe old age.

Another scenario I like to imagine is if, after King Richard's wife Anne died, he had been able to marry his niece, Princess Bessie, and then had triumphed at Bosworth Field instead of Henry, how different history would have turned out. Bessie was fertile (13 births, 4 living children). I wonder what Bessie's offspring would have been like without weird old Henry Tudor's genes.

**Q: How do you find a balance between historical research and pure imagination in your work?**

A: I found it stimulating coming up with a brand new solution to the 500-year-old mystery of the princes' disappearance, and making it work within the bounds of the historical facts as we "know" them. With this kind of writing you always have to have a discerning eye, as the old adage is true—"History is written by the victors." And no one had better "spin doctors" than Henry Tudor did after he took the throne. So the contemporary history books all make him look heroic, and Richard the villain.

I've always written using a technique I call "filling in the holes in history." Especially this far back in time, history is loaded with giant factual chasms. As a writer of fiction, there are liberties I allow myself, like expanding a character (such as Nell Caxton, from a few

sentences in one history book about her father, into a full-blown protagonist) or a piece of information (like the huge storm that hit during the "duel rebellion" that turned into a major plot device). There are techniques I refrain from, such as *changing* facts or chronology that are generally accepted by most historians, simply to fit my story or make it more dramatic.

So I study, study, study what I *do know* about the characters, their circumstances, surroundings, known historical events, their relationships, the lead-ups to, and outcomes of their decisions. Then I put myself in their shoes. Using my own understanding of motivation, psychology and human nature, as well as my own experiences, emotions, logic and extrapolation, I make the people I'm writing about move and speak. If things are going really well with the creative process, the characters literally "write their own dialogue." Sometimes they even surprise me and take themselves in directions that I had not planned in my story outline. These are "magic moments," ones that, as an author, I live for.