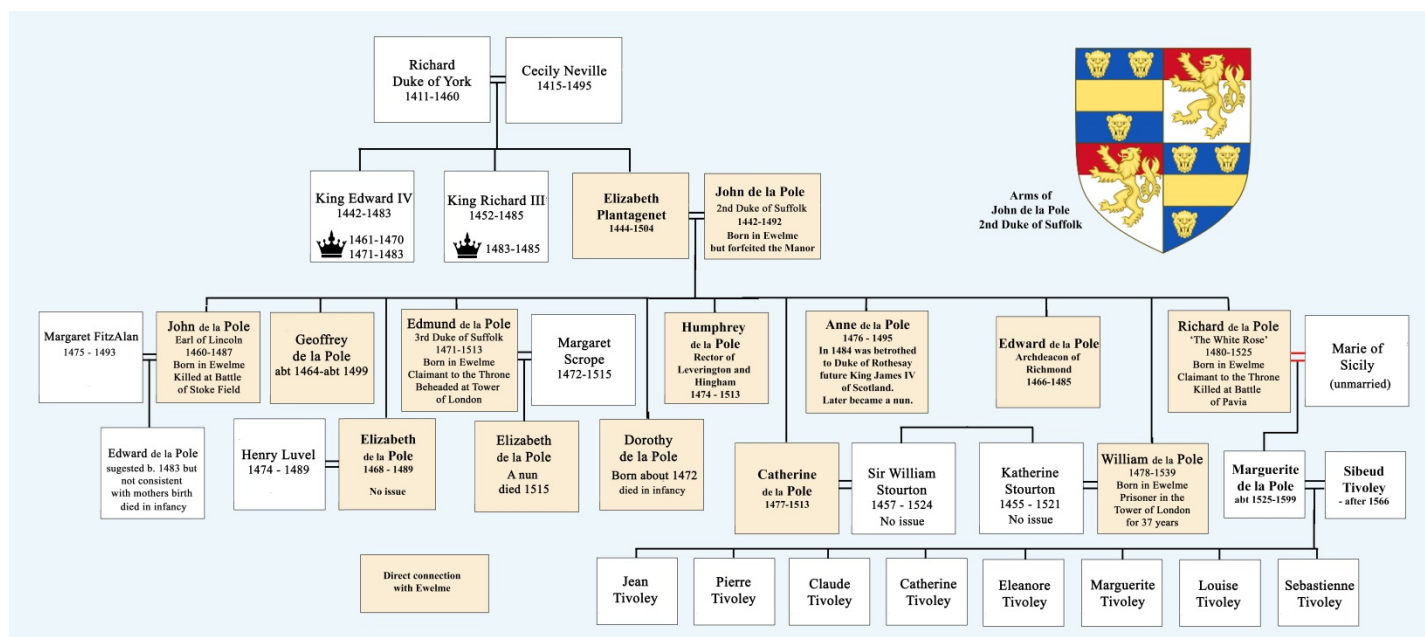


# The Tragic Grandsons of Alyce Chaucer

By Carol Sawbridge



## John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln (1462-1487)

### The Lost Heir of York

John, the son and heir of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke John de la Pole and Elizabeth Plantagenet, daughter of the Royal Duke of York and was born in 1462. He earned a reputation as an able and charming young man, in high favour with his uncle King Edward IV. At a ceremony on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1467, King Edward created the 5-yr old John, Earl of Lincoln. On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1475, at the age of 12, he was made a Knight of the Bath at Westminster, together with his cousins the King's sons Prince's Edward and Richard. At age 18 he married Margaret FitzAlan, the daughter of the Earl of Arundel.

### Service to Richard III

Edward IV who died suddenly in 1483, and the crown passed to his younger brother Richard III. Earl John carried the orb at Richard's coronation in 1483 and subsequently accompanied the King on his entire Royal Progress around the realm. Richard had been a popular and just ruler of the North for Edward IV and was eager to continue that stabilising influence, so in 1483 he appointed Earl John to serve the Crown and the interests of the northern people. Earl John was also given charge of the Royal Nursery at Sherrif Hutton, overseeing the care and education of his young Royal cousins.

In April 1484 King Richard's only son Prince Edward died, and Richard III approved his nephew Earl John, to be heir presumptive to his throne!

Meanwhile, the Wars of the Roses (the Cousins War) between the Lancastrians (Red Rose) and Yorkists (White Rose) was continuing. Lady Margaret Beaufort had been plotting for years for her son Henry Tudor to invade and depose the Yorkists and restore the Lancastrian royal line. In 1484, to strengthen ties with Scotland, Richard III arranged for a meeting to be held in Nottingham with a Scottish delegation to discuss plans for a marriage alliance with the Scottish heir Prince James. It is believed the bride was to be Earl John's sister Anne de la Pole. Richard showed great trust in his nephew, appointing him to lead the newly established Council of the North at Sandal Castle. This role gave John significant authority, allowing him to sign letters '*per Consilium Regis*' on behalf of the council without requiring Richard's prior approval—a remarkable privilege for someone so young.

All these plans came to nought when Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. (Earl John was still in his position in the north and did not take part in the battle). With a questionable claim to the throne, King Henry VII sought to neutralise potential Yorkist threats by bringing Earl John into his court. John appeared to accept his new position, initially serving Henry loyally and even accompanying him on royal progresses and the king accepted him as a close friend. Elizabeth de la Pole, Earl John's mother was the aunt of Henry VII's new queen and was also granted prominent positions at her coronation and in her court. Whatever Earl John or his family felt about the new regime they kept a low political profile and their opinions to themselves.

### **The plot to overthrow Henry Tudor**

Meanwhile, in 1486 on the Continent, plans to overthrow the detested Tudor regime were being led by Earl John's boyhood friend Francis Lovell with support of other Yorkist nobles and sympathisers. Earl John took out a loan of £20 from the Ewelme Almshouse to pass to the Abbot of Abingdon to send to the Yorkist cause, all the while keeping his favoured place at court by Henry's side.

However, in mid-February 1487 Earl John openly rebelled. He sailed to Burgundy to his aunt, Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, a key Yorkist supporter, and met other Yorkist dissidents. Earl John became the leader of the Yorkist cause and with help from Margaret's stepson, Maximilian King of the Romans. they raised an army mainly of Flemish and German mercenaries under a military commander Martin de Zwarte. In May 1487 they took a 15-yr old boy to Dublin who was crowned on 24<sup>th</sup> May in Christ Church Cathedral as King Edward V.\* The full coronation ceremony was attended by two archbishops and twelve bishops. A parliament was held in King Edward's name on 4<sup>th</sup> June before they set sail for England. [Henry VII subsequently ordered all the Irish Parliament records to be destroyed!] The invasion failed at Stoke Field, near Newark on 16<sup>th</sup> June, where they met the King's army in the final pitched battle of the Wars of the Roses. Although hard fought, it ended in defeat for the Yorkists. Earl John, acknowledged as a good and courageous fighter, was killed. Whether his body was thrown unceremoniously into the communal burial pit or returned to his father Duke John is not known.

Despite this act of treason, Henry VII showed remarkable restraint toward the de la Pole family. Earl John's father was allowed to retain his son's lands and titles until his own death in 1492, when they reverted to the Crown. However, the de la Pole claim to the throne would continue to haunt the Tudor dynasty through Earl John's younger brothers – Edmund and Richard.

*[\*The mystery of Earl John's motive in supporting the 'Lambert Simnel' claimant. The identity of the boy has never been proved, and now modern researchers are challenging the traditional version of events that he was a lowborn boy called 'Lambert Simnel'. Newly discovered medieval manuscripts in Holland and elsewhere on the Continent imply the 'Princes in the Tower' were sent to Burgundy, and the boy could have been King Edward V. The Yorkist faction acknowledged Earl John as a capable and experienced leader, accepted as Richard III's heir presumptive. So why was he prepared to pass over his rightful claim to support, fight, and possibly die for an imposter, unless it was for his Royal cousin who was still alive? Also, in a religiously superstitious age would the coronation clergy, the Earl and the Yorkist supporters have risked their eternal souls in a Holy ceremony to anoint, crown and swear allegiance to a fraud, who would eventually have to be repudiated? Another claimant from the House of York appeared a few years later when a young man, claiming to be Prince Richard, the younger brother of Edward V, gained support on the Continent and in Scotland in plots to overthrow Henry VII. He was captured and executed as 'Perkin Warbeck' in 1499. Until permission for the bones buried in Westminster Abbey under the Princes names can be DNA tested, the divisive debate on the fate of the princes will continue].*

### **Edmund – 3rd Duke of Suffolk and 6th Earl of Suffolk (circa 1471-1513)**

Edmund de la Pole was likely born at Ewelme Manor where his parents, John de la Pole and Elizabeth Plantagenet were staying with the aging dowager, Duchess Alyce. Edmund was knighted the day before the coronation of his uncle Richard III in 1483, and in 1489 his parents arranged his marriage to Margaret Scrope, daughter of 4th Baron Scrope of Bolton, a close ally of Richard III. (Circa 1490 they had a daughter Elizabeth, the 2nd Duke and Duchess's only legitimate grandchild from their son John, who became a nun and died of plague in 1515).

#### **Reduced rank from briefly the 3rd Duke of Suffolk to Earl of Suffolk**

After the death of his father in May 1492, Edmund de la Pole inherited a much-weakened title. Some of his elder brother Earl John's confiscated lands were released to Edmund, but Henry VII demanded an extortionate sum, £5,000, to buy back his dead brother's property. The once-powerful Dukedom of Suffolk was further reduced in stature by Henry VII. As a condition for keeping some of his estates, Edmund was reduced to the lesser rank of Earl.

The reasoning was simple—Edmund lacked the financial means to sustain the prestige of a dukedom.

### **Rebellion against Henry VII**

Edmund initially kept serving the Tudor regime, taking part in the Siege of Boulogne in 1492 and entertained Henry VII at Ewelme Manor in 1495, but the loss of status and wealth did not sit well with him. He had the reputation of being hot-headed and in 1498 was indicted (but subsequently pardoned) of the ‘rash and unprovoked murder of a mean man in his rage and fury’. He and his brother Richard fled to Guisnes in France in 1499 but were persuaded to return to England after 2 months. However, in August 1501 without the consent of the King he and Richard again left England to join Emperor Maximilian in the Tyrol who was still keen to restore the English Plantagenet line. There Edmund assumed the title Duke of Suffolk and was known as the White Rose of York. Their actions were a direct challenge to Henry VII, who responded by declaring them outlaws and immediately had their innocent brother William imprisoned in the Tower.

### **Betrayal, imprisonment and execution**

The support of Emperor Maximilian was withdrawn in 1502 when Maximilian signed a treaty not to aid the English rebels. In 1506 Philip of Burgundy, seeking to maintain good relations with Henry VII, agreed to hand Edmund over to the English king on condition he was not executed. Henry VII imprisoned him in the Tower, and he kept his word but, in his Will, he directed his successor, Henry VIII to have his head. In 1513, King Henry VIII ordered Edmund’s beheading on Tower Hill, eliminating the last serious Yorkist claimant.

The death of Edmund de la Pole marked the end of his family’s regnal ambitions and a final victory for the Tudor regime over the house of York.

## **William de la Pole (1478?-1539)**

### **The innocent brother - a prisoner in the Tower for 37 years!**

William was in royal service when his brothers Edmund and Richard rebelled against Henry VII. Although not accused of being involved in treasonable intentions, he was a Plantagenet claimant. The Tudor’s played safe and imprisoned him in the Tower until his natural death 37 years later!

His years of imprisonment are the longest in the Tower’s history!

## **Richard de la Pole (1480-1523)**

### **‘Le duc de Suffolk, dit Blanche Rose’**

#### **Richard de la Pole – the mercenary soldier**

Richard de la Pole is thought to be the last of the 13 children born to the 2nd Duke and Duchess of Suffolk. He accompanied his older brother Earl Edmund when he fled to Burgundy in 1501 Henry VII when declared them to be outlaws. In 1504 the brothers were attained as traitors and their English possessions seized by the Crown

Richard gained a reputation as a brave soldier as a ‘Lanzknecht Captain’ a mercenary selling his military prowess to fighting for France in Spain and in the Netherlands. He used the title Duc de Suffolk on the continent and the French added ‘Dit Blanche Rose’ the White Rose. Louis XII recognised him as King of England in 1512.

After the peace treaty between France and England in 1514 he lived at Metz until 1519, and in 1523 prepared to invade England in league with the Scots. He was killed in 1523 at the Battle of Pavia fighting by the side of the French King Francis I. His bravery brought praise from friend and foe alike.