

Richard Rewritten

SANDRA WORTH PAINTS A ROSIER PORTRAIT OF A SHAKESPEAREAN VILLAIN

ONE OF HISTORY'S GREATEST love stories is that of King Richard III and Lady Anne Neville, but readers don't know this. Blame William Shakespeare. His play *Richard III*, written a hundred years after Richard's death, presents a scheming, evil and hideously deformed king who meets, marries and then murders Anne so he can wed his niece.

It's quite a story, but the reality is closer to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where two young lovers from feuding families are swept apart by hatred and war, but then love prevails.

The wonderful thing about Richard and Anne is that they didn't die tragically like their fictional counterparts. They eloped, married and lived happily together for many years.

Why then did Shakespeare depict Richard III as a reviled and cowardly king? Perhaps because the first Tudor killed Richard III and took his throne. The Tudors rewrote history to justify their usurpation, and Shakespeare, to keep his head, wrote to please the Tudors.

I spent 10 years researching my Rose of York trilogy, which tells the true story of Richard and Anne. (The finale, *The Rose of York: Fall From Grace*, is out this month from End Table Books.) I found plenty of adventure, intrigue and betrayal, even a mad king and an evil queen who was thought to be a sorceress. Not to mention a murder mystery that endures to this day — the disappearance of Richard's nephews, the princes in the tower.

This was the time of the Wars of the Roses, a tumultuous era of peril and intrigue, when the passions of a few determined the fate of a nation. It was also the time when Sir Thomas Malory

wrote his tales of King Arthur's court, with knights riding about rescuing damsels and fighting injustice.

Richard of Gloucester was one such knight. He rescued Anne, an earl's daughter, from the kitchen where she'd been hidden away as a scullery maid. Richard was the king who authored the legal concepts that flowered into our democracy. He was a valiant warrior praised for his courage, even by his enemies. He died as bravely as he lived, like the true knight he was.

I've been fascinated with knights since reading Anya Seton's *Katherine* at the age of 11. Her book gave me a passion for history. When it came to writing my own book decades later, I took Seton's lead, and in telling the spectacular love story of Richard and Anne, I followed the historical record whenever it is known. So when a 17-year-old high school senior wrote to say she was changing her major from English literature to history after reading my book, you can imagine how moved I was!

My next book, *Lady of the Roses*, will be released as part of a two-book deal with Penguin. It tells the true love story of John Neville, Earl of Northumberland. John was a secondary character in *The Rose of York: Love and War* and captured the hearts of many.

For more on this author, go to SandraWorth.com

