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## Richard's Bones: Inside the Body of Richard III and the Twenty-First Century Discovery of a Medieval King

Isabel M.R. Long  
Skidmore College, [ilong@skidmore.edu](mailto:ilong@skidmore.edu)

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**Richard's Bones:**  
**Inside the Body of Richard III and the Twenty-First Century Discovery**  
**of a Medieval King**

Isabel M. R. Long

Skidmore College History Department, Senior Thesis 2021

Advised by Professors Erica Bastress-Dukehart and Eric Morser

## Introduction: Encountering Richard

My first encounter with Richard III was through reading Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* with my family. Written in 1951, *Daughter of Time* follows Inspector Alan Grant as he recuperates in the hospital, where a portrait of Richard III starts Grant on investigating the centuries-old mysterious deaths of the princes in the tower and the assumed guilt of Richard. As a way to pass time, Grant becomes increasingly invested in uncovering the truth of a maligned figure. I must have been twelve, maybe thirteen, and at the time *Daughter of Time* was just another book we read aloud. But the thing about Richard III is he is everywhere. He's in high school history classes, he's on unsolved murder mystery lists, he's included in galleries of famous villainous kings, he's a figure who appears in Shakespeare and in crime novels and historical fiction. Every time Richard III popped up, I struggled to remember the name of the book where I had first read his story. And I always asked myself, wasn't he wrongly accused? Why do I keep running into him all over the place?

I remember more clearly reading in high school in 2015 about the discovery of Richard's bones in the newspaper. My mother, knowing my interest in European history, had saved that page of the *New York Times* for me on the dining table. How exciting, I thought, that we can continue making new discoveries about this infamous king.

When I first mentioned to friends and family that I intended to do my senior college thesis on Richard III, I received three types of reactions: "who is that again?" "wasn't he the one found in a parking lot?" and "it will be great to see him redeemed." More than the mixed responses themselves, I found who gave the different types of responses interesting. A wide range of people did not know who Richard III was, but my peers tended to associate the name

with the discovery of his remains, while older individuals expressed interest in his redemption and portrayals in fiction. My aunt, who is in her sixties, told me about the historical fiction books on Richard III she has read and enjoyed – and kindly loaned me the weighty doorstop *The Sunne in Splendor* by Sharon K Penmen. I was struck by the generational divide in the responses of the people I talked to. Yet another friend of mine responded to my topic after he searched for Richard III online, and his response echoed that of an older generation: he was glad I was setting the record straight, giving Richard his proper due, reclaiming his reputation from villainous ruin.

Does the record need to be set straight? The discovery of Richard's skeletal remains in August 2012, offers the most significant increase in accessible information on Richard since Polydore Vergil finished his (quite biased) *Anglica Historia* in the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Modern scientific analysis opens new sources of information to our historical understanding, potentially shedding new light on old topics, and we would be remiss to ignore them. Each successive generation to interact with a history shapes it differently from the context of their own experiences and intellectual realities, with literature and art further complicating popular understanding of historical figures, "ghost[s] brood[ing] everlastingly on the [inter]national stage" – a phenomenon of which Richard III is a prime example.<sup>2</sup> Before he stepped onto the battlefield where he would die, Richard already had a polarizing legacy, one he and others actively shaped.

Richard III was the last Plantagenet king and the last English king to ride into battle. His defeat and death at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 marks the end of the Wars of the Roses and the beginning of the Tudor era. Others have discussed at length whether Richard really poisoned

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<sup>1</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, Comprising the Reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, K.H. (New York, New York: AMS PRESS, INC., 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Edward G. Lengel, *Inventing George Washington* (New York, New York: Harper, 2011) ix.

Anne Neville, killed Henry VI, and his nephews, and possessed a withered arm and hunched back, or if he was ruinously misrepresented.<sup>3</sup> These "facts" have been the center of a Great Debate for hundreds of years, beginning in earnest after the end of the Tudor reign. In the mid-twentieth century, Josephine Tey wrote a compelling account of a police detective going through archival records and history books about Richard III and coming to the conclusion that the king had long been maligned, and that joining the effort to get out the true narrative was a worthy crusade. The interest in Richard's story did not remain confined to fiction, however. Paul Murry Kendall wrote the historian's version of Tey's work – carefully researched, footnoted, with extensive appendixes – in 1965, only to have his conclusions hotly contested by Desmond Seward nineteen years later. Indeed, every historian who writes about Richard forms an opinion of him and the mythos surrounding his character. Dan Jones strongly implies in his 2014 book, *The Wars of the Roses*, that Richard either personally killed or ordered the death of Henry VI, setting his Richard up to kill in the Tower again.<sup>4</sup>

Since its founding in 1924 the Richard III Society works to "promote a more balanced view" of the monarch, and it has gained members from Tey's sympathetic portrayal as well as the controversy around Richard's legacy from the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> From as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, individuals have revisited Richard's story with the view that he has been grievously slandered; a

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<sup>3</sup> For a general summary of the historiography, I recommend Jeremy Potter's "Richard III's Historians: Adverse and Favorable Views," Richard III Society – American Branch, <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/jeremy-potter-richard-iiis-historians-adverse-and-favourable-views/>. While written in 1991, this offers a great summary through the 20th century.

<sup>4</sup> Sharon D. Michalove, "The Reinvention of Richard III," *The Richardian* (December 1995), <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/sharon-d-michalove-the-reinvention-of-richard-iii/>. Josephine Tey, *Daughter of Time* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 175. Dan Jones, *The Wars of the Roses: The Fall of the Plantagenets and the Rise of the Tudor*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2014), 240, 277.

<sup>5</sup> "ABOUT US," Richard III Society, accessed September 11, 2020, [www.richardiii.net/aboutus.php](http://www.richardiii.net/aboutus.php). For a late-20th century understanding of perceptions of Richard III, I recommend Sharon D. Michalove's "The Reinvention of Richard III," *The Richardian* (December 1995), <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/sharon-d-michalove-the-reinvention-of-richard-iii/>.

clear case where victors writing history took the opportunity to make their defeated foe into a monstrous figure for their own political gain. They argue that near-contemporary sources intentionally warp our understanding of Richard III and that we need to remove the layers of deception to uncover the real man behind the myth. Other historians and writers assert there is validity to the descriptions in sources compiled in the decades following Richard's defeat. A straight-forward element of this debate is the extent to which descriptions of Richard III's appearance were accurate, something uncovering his remains could verify, and therefore of supreme interest to his advocates, especially the Richard III Society. The Society's sustained interest has become essential for the discovery of Richard's mortal remains: over half of the funds for the archeological dig came from the Society.<sup>6</sup> But when archeologists dug Richard out from under a parking lot in 2012, a new question arose: can the discovery of an (in)famous body change history? The answer is yes. Their discovery potentially proves or disproves assumptions motivated by contemporary concerns – both medieval and modern – about the treatment of Richard's mortal remains. Richard's bones have changed his history.<sup>7</sup>

Bringing scientific understanding to the story of Richard III helps us understand the last Plantagenet king and raises questions about the intent and impact of portrayals of Richard across the centuries. Mitochondrial DNA analysis positively identified the remains as Richard's through a match with a two living female-line descendants, while studies of bones and teeth revealed Richard's diet throughout his lifetime. Studying the position of the spine reveals adolescent onset idiopathic scoliosis, while the leg bones and arm bones reveal no withered arm,

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Pitts, *Digging for Richard: The Search for the Lost King* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2014), 87. Understanding the Richard III Society – how it formed, who joined it, and why – could be a thesis in and of itself. It is an interesting organization that emerged in a complex moment in early-twentieth century Britain, and its continued existence, popularity, and ongoing mission deserve discussion, but are beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, Jones uses the information from Richard's bones to discuss how he died in battle. A farther analysis of the information from Richard's remains seems beyond the scope of Jones book, and thus a subject we will spend time on in a later section. Jones, *The Wars of the Roses*, 299.

and that Richard likely did not have a limp. Examining perimortem trauma aids our comprehension of the battle of Bosworth and how Richard met his end. Focusing on conceptions of Richard's body during his life and directly after his death illuminate the significance of his physical form. Evidence from the grave site suggest a hasty burial, buried without a shroud or coffin in the choir of Grey Friars.<sup>8</sup> The contrast between Richard's first burial in 1485 and Richard's final burial five hundred and thirty years later provide an insight on the value of the dead monarch. While I have no interest in effecting Richard's legacy, exhuming his physical journey brings a valuable perspective, a wealth of information, and raises important questions about how and why we remember people and events from the past.

The discovery of Richard's bones helps us construct new stories about his world. Science provides data on his life and death, helping us to understand Richard and to challenge previously accepted stories about his life in new and important ways. With an understanding of Richard's physical being to compare with descriptions and depictions from past centuries, future studies may focus on how Richard has lived in historical memory. Scientific analysis may be the future of medieval studies, and we should embrace the variety of information available, bringing our attention to what we can learn about the lived experience of individuals that has previously been inaccessible. The first section of this thesis will provide background on Richard III's life, as we have perceived it through the late twentieth century, including late-fifteenth century descriptions of Richard's physical appearance and understanding the efforts of near-contemporary chronologers. The second section covers portrayals of Richard in the arts, including

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<sup>8</sup> Jo Appleby, Piers D Mitchell, Claire Robinson, Alison Brough, Guy Rutty, Russell A Harris, David Thompson, and Bruno Morgan, "The scoliosis of Richard III, last Plantagenet King of England: diagnosis and clinical significance," *The Lancet* 383, no. 9932 (May 2014): 1944, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)60762-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)60762-5/fulltext). Richard Buckley, Mathew Morris, Jo Appleby, Turi King, Deirdre O'Sullivan, and Lin Foxhall, "'The king in the car park': new light on the death and burial of Richard III in the Grey Friars church, Leicester, in 1485," *Antiquity* 87, no. 336 (June 2013), 533.

Shakespearean adaptations through the early twenty-first century, recent fictional works, and television adaptations, considering how popular media shapes our perceptions of the king. The discovery of the bones deserves proper discussion, covered in the following section. Digging through the information gained from modern scientific analysis, I discuss Richard's remains and how his physical body shapes the stories we tell and how we understand his place in history. Following the modern understanding of Richard's remains, I explore medieval understanding of the body, placing Richard's physical form within his experienced perspective. We finish where this all began: a body in a grave, but this time, in a coffin.



## Section One: History of the Covered

Richard III lay dead on Bosworth field, his army defeated. Helmetless and face down in the mud, the last Plantagenet king's just-over two-year reign ended with less pomp and dignity than it began with, but with more certainty. Richard was undoubtedly dead on that August day in 1485, and that is one of few facts of his reign everyone agrees on.

General understanding of Richard's life and how he arrived at Bosworth provides context for historiographic debate and the impact of his experiences on his physical form. Two distinct mythos spiral through the centuries. In one – labeled the "Tudor myth" – Richard III is a monstrous, villainous, crippled uncle, while the other reactionary myth asserts Richard was a loyal brother to his king who made the best of a challenging political situation. Having a base understanding of his childhood, adult life, and reign allow for engagement with different historical interpretations and improves our understanding of the effect of archeological evidence on our narrative of Richard's life.

Cecily Neville gave birth to her fourth son at Fotheringhay Castle on October 2, 1452, whom she called Richard, after his father. Young Richard was still a toddler when his father began his campaign to gain the throne in 1455, starting what we now know as the Wars of the Roses, a conflict that continued intermittently throughout Richard's life. The elder Richard led the York forces, while Queen Margaret, the wife of Henry VI, led the Lancastrian side. When young Richard was eight, Queen Margaret's forces defeated the York forces at Wakefield, killing Richard's father and older brother Edmund. Richard and three of his siblings went to the court of the Duke of Burgundy for protection until England would be safe again for them. And thanks to their elder brother, the children only had to wait until June the following year. Back in England, Edward IV ascended the throne and elevated his young brothers. He recognized George as his

heir-apparent, making him Duke of Clarence and Richard, the spare, became Duke of Gloucester. Crown and heir secured, Edward imprisoned the deposed Henry VI and coronated Elizabeth Woodville as his queen, having married her in secret the year before.<sup>9</sup> Edward's strategic actions in securing the throne acted as an early introduction for Richard to the politics of securing a throne.

When he was thirteen, in the later part of 1465, Richard entered the household of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Richard's maternal first cousin once removed. After three years, Richard, not yet sixteen, joined his brother Edward as part of the royal court in 1469. At court, political power balances had shifted due to Queen Elizabeth's expansive family, lack of foreign connections, and her ability to produce heirs. Disgruntled by this shift, Warwick hoped to alleviate his concerns by arranging a marriage between Isabel Neville, his eldest daughter, and the Duke of Clarence. Edward, however, prohibited the match. Clarence, insecure in his position as his brother's heir, disagreed and married Isabel in Calais, allying himself with Warwick against the Crown. Warwick and Clarence then moved unsuccessfully against Edward in 1469. Warwick and Clarence acted to unseat a king they had previously supported, demonstrating the volatile and personal nature of politics, as well as indicating that the conflict surrounding the throne was ongoing – a perpetual struggle with years of calm rather than true peace. Richard's loyalty never wavered from Edward, however, and he proved himself trustworthy. Edward rewarded him with his first major land grant in Lancaster and Cheshire, a year later, shortly before his eighteenth birthday, naming him constable of England.<sup>10</sup> This

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Murray Kendall, *Richard the Third* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1956), 27. Desmond Seward, *Richard III: England's Black Legend* (Great Britain: Franklin Watts, 1984), 22. Rosemary Horrox, *Richard II: A Failed King?* (Great Britain: Allen Lane, 2020), 5. Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, Comprising the Reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, K.H. (New York, New York: AMS PRESS, INC., 1968) 113. Horrox, *Richard II: A Failed King?*, 6-9.

<sup>10</sup> Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 120. Horrox, *Richard III: A Failed King?*, 7-11.

tangible sign of trust from Edward is used by scholars to demonstrate Richard's position in his brother's court, and in accounts of English history, this series of events often serves as the moment of Richard's introduction: suddenly, he is a player in the politics of the realm.

Warwick worked hard to regain his lost power, marrying his second daughter, Anne, to Queen Margaret's son Edward of Lancaster, solidifying an alliance to restore Henry VI. In Warwick's quest for power, his old enemy became his ally. Richard accompanied Edward IV in the fall of 1470 when he sailed for Flanders rather than risk immediate capture or death, while the pregnant queen stayed behind in the sanctuary of Westminster. There Queen Elizabeth gave birth to Edward IV's first son in November – also called Edward – thereby making Clarence second-in-line for the throne.<sup>11</sup>

The spring of 1471 saw the successful invasion of Edward IV and his forces. Seeing the success of his brothers, Clarence abandoned Warwick, rejoining Edward and Richard to defeat his father-in-law at Barnet – where Warwick died – and for the resounding defeat of Queen Margaret's forces at Tewksbury. Edward of Lancaster died at Tewksbury, leaving Anne Neville a widow, while Henry VI died shortly thereafter in the Tower of London. With the York brothers reunited and their enemies in the ground, Edward distributed the lands of his vanquished enemies to his followers. Edward gave Richard all the Neville lands in Yorkshire and Cumberland, and the chief stewardship of the duchy of Lancaster. Possession for the Neville lands carried additional significance for Richard, as he intended to marry Anne Neville, but Clarence resisted his efforts, as he hoped to claim the Neville inheritance through his own wife, Isabel, even attempting to hide Anne away from Richard. Richard appealed to Edward and with

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Dan Jones, *The War of the Roses: The Fall of the Plantagenets and the Rise of the Tudors*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 2014), 223.

<sup>11</sup> Horrox, *Richard III*, 12. Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 131, 133. Jones, *The War of the Roses*, 227.

a papal indulgence granted in April, 1472, he married Anne and brought her home to Middleham.<sup>12</sup>

The brotherly struggle over the Neville lands continued, ending when Richard acquiesced to Edward's efforts to remain in the king's favor. Around this time Anne gave birth to Richard's only legitimate son, another Edward. With an heir at home, Richard joined Edward's force in 1475, as the king moved troops to Calais, preparing to wage war against France. However, war never materialized, as the monarchs negotiated for peace – despite objections from Richard – agreeing to Edward's retreat to England in exchange for an annual payment.<sup>13</sup>

Isabel Neville died in December 1476, likely from complications from childbirth, devastating her widower, Clarence. Clarence gathered supporters the following spring in a manic attempt to bring justice to supposed murderers of his wife, subverting the judicial process to execute four people. This act could not be allowed to stand, as it challenged the authority of the monarch over these matters. In 1478 Edward IV brought Clarence to trial for all his past misdemeanors. Found guilty after refusing an attorney, Clarence was put to death in the Tower on February 20, 1478.<sup>14</sup> The nature of Clarence's conviction – attainder – effectively removed his children from the line of succession, a fact that was imminently clear to his contemporaries. Yet the loss of a rival and brother did not clear Richard's political path as the faction controlled by the queen's family – the Woodvilles – exerted their influence over the king.

Richard's acclaim and positive reputation for military and political actions in Scotland from 1480-1482 as lieutenant-general of the army, led Edward to name Richard Protector of the

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<sup>12</sup> Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 136, 152. Jones, *The War of the Roses*, 228, 240. Seward, *Richard III: England's Black Legend*, 61-2. Horrox, *Richard III*, 12, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Seward, *Richard III: England's Black Legend*, 63, 65-7. Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 161-165.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *The War of the Rose*, 253-254. Horrox, *Richard III*, 19. Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 167. According to Vergil, Clarence was drowned in a butte of malmsey.

Realm, much to the chagrin of the Woodville faction. When Edward IV died on April 9th, a messenger informed Richard at his castle in Middleham.<sup>15</sup> Even before the news reached Richard, the struggle for power had begun.

Up to the death of Edward IV, historians agree on the general facts of Richard's life: he was loyal to his brother Edward throughout a dynastic struggle for power. But from 1483, Richard's actions become more enigmatic. Richard was in the north when his brother died, and he rushed south. Historians and enthusiasts disagree over the intent and effect of all of Richard's actions from that dash south onward. Did Richard intend to seize the throne, or did he hope to assert his power as protector to diminish the outsized influence of the Woodvilles and their supporters? From the moment of Edward IV's death, the mythmaking began.

The minutia of all the events that followed have been covered in depth, but a general overview provides the necessary background without straying too far into debated territory. Yet even by trying to provide this less-biased background I am aware I am straying into contested ground. To understand the central tension of the debate we must attempt to separate events from emotional motivations, including Elizabeth Woodville and her elder son's attempt to expedite the crowning of the young prince Edward. The widowed queen hoped to circumvent the need for a protectorate by crowning Edward, allowing their family to retain power, but other councilors tried to limit the dominating power of the Woodville faction. With his nephew, Richard rode into London, attired simply in black, positioning himself visibly as the protector of young Edward. In so doing, he pronounced his actions necessary for the safety of king and kingdom in the face of a Woodville conspiracy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Horrox, 21. Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 170, 173. Kendall, *Richard the Third*, 168, 170, 190, 193.

<sup>16</sup> Horrox, 25, 27.

Richard asserted that the Woodvilles' attempt to remove him from young Edward and refuse Edward IV's wishes to make Richard Protector of the Realm, amounted to treason. Confirmed as Protector by the transitional council, Richard rooted out the Woodville political supporters, filling the vacated seats with men from his dead brother's household. Confronted with a dwindling power base, the Woodvilles plotted to forcibly remove Richard from his position as Protector, only to be rounded up by Richard. The exception was the widowed queen who stayed in sanctuary in Westminster with her younger son, the Duke of York. The council agreed with Richard that the Duke of York was essential for the upcoming June coronation of his elder brother, and he joined Edward V in the Tower of London. Later that same day, the coronation was postponed to November.<sup>17</sup>

By mid-June, it was clear that the coronation of Edward V was indefinitely postponed. At St. Paul's Cross the preacher Raphe Sha proclaimed to a large audience Richard had the best claim to the throne, as Edward IV's children were illegitimate. The petition before Parliament several days later – known as *titulus regius* – states Edward IV could not have legitimately married Elizabeth Woodville, as he had been pre-contracted to marry another woman, making any children Elizabeth had unfit to inherit the throne.<sup>18</sup> Richard also leveraged his own greater resemblance to their father who had been "very little... [and] short and rownd."<sup>19</sup> Four days after the public declaration of Edward V's ineligibility, Richard received a petition to take the throne, which he promptly did.<sup>20</sup> This rapid series of events is either viewed as necessary for the good of the realm or the actions of a power-hungry schemer, depending on who tells the story.

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<sup>17</sup> Vergil, 177-8. Horrox, 28, 30-33, 35-6.

<sup>18</sup> Vergil, 183. Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard the Third*, 97. Horrox, 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> Vergil, 184.

<sup>20</sup> Horrox, 42. Vergil, 186-187.

After Richard and Anne's coronation on July 6th, Richard began a progress across the country marked by pageantry and gift-giving. While in York, he invested his son, Edward, as Prince of Wales – a lavish event on the feast of the Nativity Virgin – and Richard and Anne ceremonially progressed the streets. The pomp and circumstance surrounding Richard's coronation, unknowingly, contrasted starkly with the funeral he would later be given by his enemies. With Richard's nephews assumed imprisoned or dead – as was the fate of Henry VI, who died in a mysteriously timely manner after Tewksbury – although no one could say exactly how they could have died.<sup>21</sup> The fate of the so-called princes in the tower became the subject of intense speculation and debate through the centuries. Indeed, the central judgement about Richard's character often comes down to whether we believe he killed his nephews and his wife.<sup>22</sup>

Tragedy struck the royal family the following year: Edward, Prince of Wales, died in April at Middleham castle "after a short illness."<sup>23</sup> Despite his intense grief, growing opposition and his need for a recognized successor, Richard named his sister's son – John, Earl of Lincoln – as his heir. Strained relations with France, and the looming threat of Henry Tudor did not get in the way of a lavish Christmas, Anne's last. She fell seriously ill in the spring, passing away on March 16th, the day of an eclipse. She was buried with all the dignity befitting a queen in Westminster.<sup>24</sup> Within the space of a year, Richard had lost his only legitimate heir and any possibility of other legitimate children, ending his direct line of descent.

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<sup>21</sup> Vergil, 188, 190. Horrox, 46, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Murray Kendall has an appendix on the topic in *Richard the Third*. The debate is evident centuries prior in Jane Austen's *The History of England*. Austen mentions the debate over whether Richard killed his nephews and his wife, and the majority of her entry on Richard III discusses what he might or might not have done.

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459–1486* (London: Alan Sutton Publishing for Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 1986), 171.

<sup>24</sup> Horrox, 69, 72. Seward, 169. Pronay, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459–1486*, 175.

Rumors flew that Richard intended to remarry immediately, and to his niece, no less. Richard publicly denied any intention to marry his niece and complained about rumors that suggested he poisoned Anne to be able to marry Elizabeth. While he did not intend to marry Elizabeth, Henry Tudor most certainly did, as he had sworn on the sacrament that he would marry her if he took the throne. Henry gathered support in France, landing in Wales on August 7th with mercenaries from Charles VIII, meeting no real resistance. Richard called on his subjects to defend themselves, yet support had already drained away. With great pomp, Richard marched out of Leicester on August 21st, camping before the battle at Bosworth field.<sup>25</sup>

There are four main, extended accounts of Richard III's reign that we turn to: those of the *Crowland Chronicle*, Dominic Mancini, Thomas More, and Polydore Vergil. The accounts from Mancini and the *Crowland Chronicle* were written during and shortly after his life, while More and Vergil – both celebrated individuals in their own right – wrote their accounts from interviews they conducted decades later. As this thesis focuses on understanding Richard's history based in part on his bones, comparing descriptions of Richard's appearance and death offer distinct opportunities for source comparisons. Efforts to portray Richard as possessing a crooked body to match his crooked heart began as explicitly understood criticisms of his character and evolved into descriptions that were accepted or challenged as illustrations of his appearance.

Domini Mancini's account offers minimal information on any of these fronts. Mancini, an Italian man of letters, was likely sent to England in part to collect information about what was happening there. Mancini never had the "opportunity to observe him sufficiently," and his

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<sup>25</sup> Horrox, 62, 73, 82-3, 86. Seward, 174, 188.



account ends with Mancini's departure from England in December 1483.<sup>26</sup> However, Mancini does offer us a picture of a man who – Mancini believed – destroyed his nephews to claim the throne.<sup>27</sup>

Unknown until the end of the Tudor period, the *Crowland Chronicle* proves to be an important independent source, unconnected to the works of Vergil, More, and later, Shakespeare. In 1486, the Continuator recounts the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. The *Crowland Chronicle* is a compilation – starting with the origins of the Crowland Abbey – with additions by three anonymous authors, the second of which wrote the account from 1459 to 1486 and who is referred to as the Continuator. While lacking a full physical description of Richard, the *Chronicle* offers commentary on the events of his reign, from the rumored deaths of the princes to what Richard wore to his final battle, stating "the king left Leicester with great pomp, wearing his diadem on his head."<sup>28</sup> The Continuator goes on to note that King Richard, "like a spirited and most courageous prince, fell in battle on the field and not in flight... King Richard's body having been discovered amongst the dead ... many other insults were offered and after the body had been carried to Leicester with insufficient humanity (a rope being placed around the neck)."<sup>29</sup> The lack of description of Richard's physical appearance left an opening for future chroniclers to create an outward image of a man that reflected a maligned character.

Sir Thomas More, a boy when Richard died at Bosworth, never completed his account of Richard III, but he provides one of the most enduring descriptions of Richard, as it appears

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<sup>26</sup> Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard the Third*, trans. and intro. C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard the Third*, 4, 61 and 105.

<sup>28</sup> Pronay, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459–1486*, 179. Michael Hicks, "The Second Anonymous Continuation of the Crowland Abbey Chronicle 1459-86 Revisited," *The English Historical Review* 122, no. 496 (2007): 349-51, accessed May 4, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4493807>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 99, 163, and 183.

verbatim in the *Holinshed Chronicles* in 1577.<sup>30</sup> Written in the mid-1510s, More left his account unpublished at his death in 1535. More is best known for his work *Utopia*, acting as a trusted councilor in the Tudor court while he maintained a personal relationship with Henry VIII, and noted as being a man of wit, eloquence, and learning. With this reputation for learning, the assumption that More offers an entirely accurate source could be made, as demonstrated by the inclusion of his work in the *Holinshed Chronicles*. Yet More did not provide an unbiased account, nor was he accurate. More incorrectly states Richard is the third son, comparing him to his surviving brothers as "in wit and courage equal to neither of them, and in body and prowess far under them both."<sup>31</sup> More continues with a physical description of Richard and how his body outwardly manifests his character, tapping into accepted assumptions of bodies and monsters.

... little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard favored of visage, and such as is in states called warly, in other men otherwise. He was malicious, wrathful, envious, and from afore his birth, ever forward. It is reported that the duchess his mother had so much ado in her travail, that she could not be delivered of him uncut, and that he came into the world feet forward, as men be borne outward, and (as the fame runneth) also not untoothed — whether men of hatred report above the truth, or else that nature changed her course in his beginning, which in the course of his life many things unnaturally committed.<sup>32</sup>

More continues a laundry list of accusations and evidence of Richard's evil character, including accusing him of personally killing Henry VI. More's use of physical deformities emphasizes an unnaturalness in Richard that contemporaries would have read and understood as an outward manifestation of Richard's character, the physical presence of someone who committed immoral acts. More's account does not take Richard to Bosworth, thus remaining incomplete. More

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<sup>30</sup> St. Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III and Selections from the English and Latin Poems*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), xv-xvi, 3-4.

Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles: England, Scotland, and Ireland*, Volume Three, introduction by Vernon F. Snow (New York: Ams Press, Inc., 1976), 362.

<sup>31</sup> More, *The History of King Richard III*, 8. Frederick L. Baumann, "Sir Thomas More," *The Journal of Modern History* 4, no. 4 (1932), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1899363>, 613-615.

<sup>32</sup> More, *The History of King Richard III*, 8.

could not have produced an account that was anything but biased, as himself was raised in the household of John Cardinal Morton, affecting his view of Richard. Morton was key in deposing Richard and became the chief administrator of Henry VII. Understanding that More grew up in Morton's household, and wrote during the reign of Henry VIII while depending on his relationship with the monarchy for his livelihood, puts More's critical perspective into context: he was steeped in the rhetoric and atmosphere of the victorious dynasty.<sup>33</sup>

Polydore Vergil published the first official English history in 1534, a task imposed on him by Henry VII. Born in Urbino, Italy and educated at the University of Bologna, Vergil arrived in England in 1501 sent by Pope Alexander VI, and around 1507 Henry VII requested he write this History. While Vergil himself had not lived in England during the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III, he communicated with people who did, taking twenty-eight years to complete his *History*. Vergil provides a distinct description of Richard's physical appearance, stating "he was lyttle of stature, deformed of body, thone showlder being higher than thother, a short and sowre cowntenance, which semyd to savor of mischief, and utter evydently craft and decyt [sic]."<sup>34</sup> Vergil does not make a distinction between objective appearance and the interpretation of Richard's character.<sup>35</sup>

Accounts of Richard's life and reign have long faced intense scrutiny, as his reputation has been hotly debated even before his body hit the ground. While Henry VII intended to appear the heroic figure to Richard's dastardly uncle, generation after generation returns to Richard, not Henry.<sup>36</sup> The *Crowland Chronicle*, Mancini, More, and Vergil all present conceptions of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, xiii, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, Comprising the Reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III*, 226-7.

<sup>35</sup> Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, i-iv, xiv, xxiv, xxviii, and xxx.

<sup>36</sup> Sharon D. Michalove, "The Reinvention of Richard III," *The Richardian* (December 1995), <http://www.r3.org/online-library-text-essays/sharon-d-michalove-the-reinvention-of-richard-iii/>.

Richard that Henry VII could appreciate – unsurprisingly for More and Vergil.<sup>37</sup> While it is tempting to group these authors with Shakespeare – who takes Vergil's connection between physical appearance and character and runs with it – these chroniclers should be understood as the early crafters of Richard's history, with their work serving as the basis for future historians to build on or challenge.

A chronological jump to the twentieth century brings us to a period of lively controversy around Richard III as well as the academic landscape that influenced the Richard III Society, and Philippa Langley specifically. A complete study of the historiography of Richard III is beyond the scope of this thesis and is a topic covered elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> Yet the works created in the twentieth century remain in conversation with histories of Richard III from the 16th century. Long-held legends that stemmed from More, Vergil and others persisted, as revisionists worked to redeem a maligned monarch in a cycle that has been visible since Horace Walpole published his *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* in 1768.<sup>39</sup> For the twentieth century, Paul Murray Kendall stands out as an authoritative voice continuing and modernizing Walpole's work.

In his 1955 biography, Kendall offers a portrait of a king who was a "paragon of justice... and a determined friend of the poor."<sup>40</sup> He also offers a unique explanation for the descriptions of Richard as deformed. Kendall proposes that Richard was a sickly boy who threw himself into the art of war, training with such intensity that "his right arm and shoulder grew to be somewhat

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<sup>37</sup> Jeremy Potter, "Richard III's Historians: Adverse and Favorable Views," *Richard III Society – American Branch*, accessed August 29, 2020, <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/jeremy-potter-richard-iiis-historians-adverse-and-favourable-views/>.

<sup>38</sup> For a more extensive overview of the historiography, I recommend Jeremy Potter's "Richard III's Historians: Adverse and Favorable Views" from 1995 or the more extensive *Richard III: The Making of the Legend* by Roxance C. Murph from two decades earlier.

<sup>39</sup> Potter, "Richard III's Historians: Adverse and Favorable Views."

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

larger than his left."<sup>41</sup> The physical description of Richard's body matters for Kendall, pushing back against the understanding that a warped exterior reflected Richard's character by offering a noble explanation for a physical difference rather than dismissing conceptions of Richard's appearance. In the first appendix, Kendall goes into depth on the mystery of the young princes, offering an analysis of why Buckingham likely killed them, as "his guilt fits... a complex pattern of actions which sprang from Richard's assumption of the crown."<sup>42</sup> Kendall implies that this kinder view of Richard comes from a thorough review of sources, presenting only facts so readers can make the moral judgements. He acknowledges Richard is a controversial figure and invites people to criticize his conclusions. By stating readers do not need to take his word for the actions of Richard, Kendall allows himself room for flights of interpretive fancy, including the memorable familial interaction where "Anne doubtless tried to explain to her frail little prince, Edward, now ten years old, why his father looked so pale and stern."<sup>43</sup> How Richard reacted physically to the news of Edward IV's death is pure speculation, and Kendall's interpretation emphasizes his intent to show Richard as a figure worthy of empathy and positive consideration. Richard's appearance remains central to Kendall's narrative.

Of course, Kendall has not stood unchallenged, with Desmond Seward publishing his biography of Richard several decades later, coming to a decidedly different conclusion regarding Richard's character. Seward specifically states in his introduction that he read Kendall's work and disagrees with his assessment that Buckingham killed the young princes. He argues that Richard was just as cunning and callous as popular culture has led us to believe throughout the centuries. Seward decisively states the smooth seizure of power indicates Richard had planned

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<sup>41</sup> Kendall, *Richard the Third*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 494.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 11 and 193.

to take the throne for a while, that he had a withered arm, and fully intended to marry his niece before he was advised against it.<sup>44</sup> A more concise volume, Seward specifically refutes revisionist narratives, calling Richard England's black legend.

With limited source material, histories of Richard take a stance on his character, and the validity of his reputation as a cruel uncle. Artistic representations of Richard have also influenced and maintained public interest in Richard. Infamously immortalized by Shakespeare and redeemed by recent novelists, we will explore the impact of art on our interactions with Richard while his bones lay waiting in the earth.

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<sup>44</sup> Seward, 13, 90, 102, 171.

## Section Two: In Art

"Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
 Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time  
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up,  
 And that so lamely and unfashionable  
 That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—  
 ... I am determined to prove a villain..."<sup>45</sup> – William Shakespeare, *Richard III*

We owe much of our visual understanding of Richard III to Shakespeare and Shakespearean actors. Richard III is Shakespeare's most infamous villain, complete with supposed hump, withered arm, and limp. One of his most famous lines, the last he utters in the play, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!" has inspired many parodies. In fact, looking for a horse is how Blackadder – a character portrayed by Rowan Atkinson in the 1980s comedy show *Blackadder* – encounters Richard at the end of the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, and promptly proceeds to kill the monarch in defense of his horse. Even adaptations of Shakespeare with a modern twist, such as Ian McKellen's *Richard III* (1995) ensure the deformities described by the bard remain prominent – McKellen sports a prosthetic hump underneath his 20<sup>th</sup> century military attire, and he does not use one arm. Thomas More suggests that Richard's physical appearance indicated something about his character, and others continue to make similar claims even today.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2014), 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> We know that Shakespeare read the Holinshed Chronicles for information for his histories, and More's description was reproduced word-for-word in the Chronicles. This makes Shakespeare's interpretation unsurprising, and he imbues his interpretation of Richard's villainy in the play. Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 10-11, 301. *Blackadder*, "The

With such vivid visuals, it is entirely unsurprising that the Shakespearean interpretation of Richard remains popular, helped, of course, by the popularity of the bard, and his 1597 creation retains unshaken popularity. Even after the exhumation and identification of Richard's bones, we see a return to Shakespeare's description over any attempt to connect to the person. Released in 2015, *The Hollow Crown* limited series brings the Wars of the Roses history to film, ending with *Richard III*. From the character's first speaking appearance, supposedly as a teen, Benedict Cumberbatch, 39 at the time of the release, plays the role. Cumberbatch, a talented actor, leans into his monologues, drawing the audience into his character's scheming in the final play. The filmmakers choose to emphasize Richard's hunched back and withered arm, opening the episodes with Cumberbatch shirtless, hunched over a chessboard, a prosthetic showing severe scoliosis on prominent display.



Still of Benedict Cumberbatch portraying Richard III in *The Hollow Crown*, courtesy of the BBC.

This visual also contrasts with the more quaffed Richard of we see in other episodes, with a curtain of dark hair, resembling one of the few known portraits of the monarch.

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Foretelling," episode 1, directed by Martin Shardlow, written by Rowan Atkinson and Richard Curtis, with dialogue from William Shakespeare, BBC One, June 20, 1982. More, *The History of King Richard III*, 8.





Still of Benedict Cumberbatch portraying Richard III in *The Hollow Crown*, courtesy of the BBC.

It is unsurprising that few portraits survive of Richard, and sad that none that do came from his lifetime. The best-known version is in the National Portrait Gallery in London.



*King Richard III*, by Unknown artist, oil on panel, late 16th century, 25 1/8 in. x 18 1/2 in., courtesy of National Portrait Gallery.

Painted in the late 16th century, many of the portraits since use the distinctive features presented here.<sup>47</sup> The dark, chin-length hair, the hat, and, of course, the slightly higher shoulder are all iconic. Here, Richard appears pale against a luxurious red backdrop, a large, jeweled collar around his shoulders, playing with a ring on his hand. The calm face of this portrait seems so unlike the evil uncle Shakespearean actors present us with, is it any wonder other writers have worked to redeem him?

Josephine Tey worked to do just that in her popular 1951 novel *The Daughter of Time*. Better known for writing plays under the pseudonym "Gordon Daviot," Scottish-born Elizabeth Mackintosh taught physical taught before she wrote full-time. Her obituary notes that she had an "uncommon insight into character," and that her stories written under "Josephine Tey" were distinctive and usually historical, as is the case with *The Daughter of Time*.<sup>48</sup> Posed as a detective story, the bed-bound Inspector Alan Grant investigates the case of Richard III with the help of an enthusiastic American history student to look through the archive. Tey systematically presents descriptions of Richard in popular history texts and uses her inspector's skills to pull apart a construction of a villain. Tey argues that Richard did not kill his nephews, as he would have had no reason to do so, and that all slanderous views of Richard are the result of Tudor propaganda. Henry VII, victorious in battle against Richard, became the first Tudor king, marrying Elizabeth – Edward IV's daughter – ending the Wars of the Roses and uniting the two houses in his children. Henry did not have a direct claim to the throne – though he could claim English royal descent through his mother and French royal ancestry through his father – necessitating, in Henry's eyes, work to strengthen the case for his ascension to the throne. The

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<sup>47</sup> "King Richard III," National Portrait Gallery, People and Portraits, accessed January 8, 2021. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp03765/king-richard-iii>.

<sup>48</sup> Pamela J. Butler, "Josephine Tey," Richard III Society, accessed May 2, 2021, <http://www.r3.org/links/to-prove-a-villain-the-real-richard-iii/every-tale-condemns-me/josephine-tey/>.

work done during Henry's reign and continued by his descendants presented a well-crafted story to the English people. This Tudor propaganda created the concept of the Wars of the Roses, including the York white rose, to allow Henry and his marriage to embody the successful reunification of the York and Lancastrian factions. The concept of the white rose was created to facilitate the symbolism of the united Tudor rose or red and white. As the Tudor propaganda machine worked to make Henry's reign ascension more palatable, it is unsurprising that his vanquished predecessor – an anointed king of England – would not be left untarnished. From this emerges the concept of the "Tudor myth," meaning that during the process of justifying Henry VII's ascension a slanderous myth of Richard III was intentionally spread to make Richard seem as villainous as possible, thereby making Henry a hero who freed the kingdom from an evil usurper. This narrative pins the blame for the disappearances of Edward IV's sons on Richard – as well as the death of his wife, supposedly from poison – as obstacles to Richard's reign rather than as obstacles to Henry's. Tey works to expose the narrative crafting of the Tudor propaganda efforts, explicitly stating Henry VII had more motivation to remove the boys than Richard, as the declaration of their illegitimacy would have removed them as a threat to Richard. She concludes her novel with the American student upset that this is not a new discovery, but rather one that is made every generation. Inspector Grant encourages his colleague not to be dispirited, but to be the person for his generation to lead the crusade against invented history, as every generation needs to expose the truth about Richard III to combat the cultural myth of his villainy.<sup>49</sup> With such a passionate ending, and such engaging writing, is it any wonder that *The Daughter of Time* brought increased interest to standing efforts to redeem the king?

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<sup>49</sup> Josephine Tey, *The Daughter of Time* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), 175.

Specifically, the Richard III Society saw a dramatic increase in membership with the popularity of Tey's compelling novel. Originally called the Fellowship of the White Board, Saxon Barton, a Liverpool surgeon, and a small group of his amateur historian friends founded the group in the summer of 1924. From the beginning, members believed that Richard's reputation had been unjustly treated after his death, and they hoped to promote a more balanced view. The Richard III Society's mission is to support research into the life and times of Richard III, working to reclaim "the reputation of a king of England who died over 500 years ago."<sup>50</sup> The Society website proudly states that Tey's novel increased interest in the monarch in the 1950s. Today, the Society has thousands of members world-wide, and the patronage of HRH the Duke of Gloucester.<sup>51</sup> Exploring the origins and continuing motivations of the Richard III Society is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis, but this basic understanding provides a sense of the organization that helps contextualize their involvement in the discovery of Richard III's remains.

In the twenty-first century, a *New York Times* best-selling series brings attention and interest to the Wars of the Roses and figures involved, including Richard. Philippa Gregory wrote three books set during Richard's life from the points of view of Elizabeth Woodville, Anne Neville, and Margaret Beaufort.<sup>52</sup> Centering her novels around powerful women gave Gregory engaging perspectives to explore in her novels, the first of which is called *The White Queen*. Gregory's Richard supports his brother, the king, winning battles for him, with Edward IV naming Richard Lord Protector for Edward V. And then "something happened to change

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<sup>50</sup> "ABOUT US," Richard III Society, accessed September 11, 2020, [www.richardiii.net/aboutus.php](http://www.richardiii.net/aboutus.php).

<sup>51</sup> "ABOUT US," Richard III Society, accessed September 11, 2020, [www.richardiii.net/aboutus.php](http://www.richardiii.net/aboutus.php).

<sup>52</sup> "The White Queen: Philippa Gregory on resurrecting history," *BBC*, June 13, 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/tv/entries/350cdf08-ee38-3c34-bf0b-7ee66afce8f3>.

Richard's mind," leading to Richard executing Richard Grey and Anthony Woodville and ascending the throne. Gregory does not blame Richard for the disappearance of his nephews.<sup>53</sup>

The popularity of Gregory's work has led to several mini-series adaptations of her work by the BBC, starting with *The White Queen* in 2013. Airing from June to August in 2013, the limited series originated as an adaptation of the three novels featuring Elizabeth, Anne, and Margaret, and was the first film adaptation of Richard to air after the identification of his remains.<sup>54</sup> This series takes a very different approach to Richard III than the Shakespeare adaptation that followed a year later.



Promotional image of Aneurin Barnard as Richard, Duke of Gloucester in *The White Queen* (2013).

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<sup>53</sup> "Richard III," *Philippa Gregory*, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.philippagregory.com/characters/richard-iii>.

<sup>54</sup> "The White Queen: Philippa Gregory on resurrecting history," *BBC*, June 13, 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/tv/entries/350cdf08-ee38-3c34-bf0b-7ee66afce8f3>.

Filmed from September 2012 through March the following year, *The White Queen* provides a more sympathetic portrayal of Richard. Portrayed by Welsh actor, Aneurin Barnard, this Richard is brooding, strategic, and loyal. Barnard, 23 at the time, stated he wanted to present the truth of Richard, who he saw as a very loyal man and a great leader who has long been misunderstood as a villain.<sup>55</sup> Here, a strong, handsome Richard strives to do what he believes is best for the country, even if he gets sidetracked by his niece before the final battle. As an early-2010s brooding love-interest, the lack of any visual nod to disability is unsurprising. The creators of the show explicitly reject the possibility that Richard played any intentional part in the deaths of his nephews – with Margaret Beauford ultimately deciding their fate – rejecting a physical difference in Richard not only bows to a cultural ideal for a male love-interest, it also farther rejects a “Tudor myth.”

With such conflicting versions of Richard III presented as part of our visual culture, the controversy remains a central part of his narrative. And with a hunched back, withered arm, and reputation at stake, it is no wonder the discovery of a lost king makes for great television, as we leave Barnard's and Cumberbatch's Richards lying in the mud on the field of battle.

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<sup>55</sup> "Bruges gears up for BBC filming," Together Online, August 20, 2012, <https://togethertmag.eu/bruges-gears-up-for-bbc-filming/>. Keith Watson, "The White Queen star Aneurin Barnard: Richard III gets a raw deal," *Metro*, July 19, 2013, <https://metro.co.uk/2013/07/19/actor-thinks-richard-iii-gets-a-raw-deal-3888865/>.

### Section Three: The Quest and Discovery of Mortal Remains

Richard's corpse was stripped and thrown over the back of horse to be taken into Leicester where the public could witness the proof of their former king's demise.<sup>56</sup> The body "was brought to thabbay of monks Franciscanes at Leycester, a myserable spectacle in good sooth, but not unwoorthy for the man's lyfe, and ther was buried two days after without pompe or solmne funerall."<sup>57</sup>

It would be reasonable to assume that with a written record of his burial, and an alabaster effigy, the grave of a monarch would be hard to lose. Not so for Richard III. About half a century later, when Richard's great-nephew – Henry VIII – dissolved the monasteries in England, the monastery in question – Grey Friars – was included. Useful resources, such as the tiles from the floor and the stone from the walls, were removed from the site, and the land was put to new use. With the useful building materials removed, people forgot where the Grey Friars friary once stood.

A story that emerged suggested Richard's body had vanished with the building. Another story from Leicester stated that when the monasteries were dissolved, Richard's corpse had been exhumed and thrown in the River Soar. The modest tombstone erected by Henry VII vanished, and the story that his empty coffin was used as a drinking trough for horses gained popularity. Richard remained a prominent part of Leicester history, remembered around the city through road names, plaques, and even a statue commissioned by the Richard III Society.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459–1486*, 183.

<sup>57</sup> Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, 226.

<sup>58</sup> Seward, *Richard III: England's Black Legend*, 197. Mike Pitts, *Digging for Richard III: The Search for the Lost King* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2014), 32-37, 45. The Richard III Society statue, unsurprisingly, does not depict Richard as presented by Shakespeare, and the positive attitude of the plaque, Pitt notes, is clever and successful work to rehabilitate Richard's image.

Because of its rich history, archeological excavation occurs frequently in Leicester. Roman walls surrounded the city until the late 15th century, when they were pulled down to reuse the stone, with many of the roads that are still in use today created in 1450. Churches rose above other buildings, and these landmarks lend their names to roads, including Friar Lane, named for Grey Friars. Richard is believed to have stopped at the Blue Boar Inn – then called the White Boar Inn – which stood for another several hundred years before being demolished in 1836, followed by the Bow Bridge, which Richard's army used to cross the River Soar. It remained in use until 1861 when a steel bridge replaced it. Leicester has a history of being an important strategic spot, with the Motte Castle build there in 1063 by William I. Many projects have been connected to preserving and documenting findings that would otherwise be destroyed by new building projects, including a 1973 excavation looking for the Austin Friars. The Grey Friars, however, had not been located. Excavation at the supposed location of Grey Friars proved unsuccessful, and the continued interest in locating Grey Friars provided a broader framework for any project to unearth the remains of Richard III.<sup>59</sup>

Phillipa Langley met Richard III through Paul Murray Kendall's biography of the king. Entranced by this vision of Richard, Langley – a hopeful screen writer who worked in marketing and advertising who now defines herself by her work on Richard III – hoped to make a film that portrayed Richard as a complex individual, envisioning Richard Armitage in the lead role. When she visited Bosworth and Leicester in 2004 as part of her writing process, she was directed to New Street car park by local members of the Richard III Society. While she stood in the car park, she got a feeling Richard was buried there. The car park itself seemed particularly

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<sup>59</sup> "The Streets of Medieval Leicester," Story of Leicester, Leicester City Council, accessed February 14, 2021, <https://storyofleicester.info/a-place-to-live/the-streets-of-medieval-leicester/>. Pitts, *Digging for Richard III*, 34-5, 38, 56, 57. "The Castle Motte – Story of Leicester," Story of Leicester, Leicester City Council, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://storyofleicester.info/civic-affairs/the-castle-motte/>.



unremarkable. Surrounded by modest brick buildings, the Social Services lot had been a car park for over 75 years, appearing in 20th century maps as Leicester worked to accommodate cars on its streets. When Langley returned to the same spot, a year later, someone had painted an "R" on the car park in white paint which motivated her to do something to help uncover the lost monarch's grave.<sup>60</sup>

Coincidentally, Dr. John Ashdown-Hill had recently traced living female-line descendants of Richard's immediate family. Ashdown-Hill was noted for his work as a genealogist and historian whose wrote extensively on late medieval history, and Richardian history specifically. He looked for mitochondrial DNA to identify the skeletal remains of Richard's sister Margaret who was buried in Mechelen at a Franciscan friary. And he found it. Ashdown-Hill traced the female decedents of Richard's oldest sister, Anne, to a Joy Ibsen in Canada. Mothers pass along their mitochondria to all their offspring, meaning that a positive match of mtDNA can confirm individuals are related to a common female ancestor. In other words, if Richard could be unearthed, Ibsen's mtDNA could positively identify him. Ashdown-Hill independently identified the car park as a likely location for Grey Friar's as well.<sup>61</sup> Langley got to work.

Langley hoped that public interest in Richard III would lead to funding for a dig from a television program. She had encouraged Ashdown-Hill to send his findings in 2005 to the Time Team show – an archeology show – with no luck. This marked the beginning of Langley's journey to find the necessary funds and interest to move the excavation ahead. With her interest in screenwriting, Langley naturally looked to television networks first, seeing the entertainment

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<sup>60</sup> Pitts, *Digging for Richard III*, 48-51, 70-1. Channel 4 News, "King in the Car Park: Richard III skeleton authentic," February 4, 2013, video, 4:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-etaxcuJSyo>. "About Philippa Langley," Philippa Langley, accessed May 2, 2021, <https://www.philippalangley.co.uk/>.

<sup>61</sup> Pitts, *Digging for Richard III*, 54-56. "John Ashdown-Hill," Revealing Richard III, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.revealingrichardiii.com/ashdown-hill.html>.

value in finding Richard's bones as well as an opportunity to get the real, sympathetic Richard out to a broader audience. With Langley's pitch, Channel 4 – a British television network – did express interest in the project, and the Leicester City Council agreed to the dig, considering the possible historical and economic impact for the city if the body could be located. With the necessary interest and some funds in place, Langley needed experts to do the actual excavation of the car park. People directed Langley to Richard Buckley at the University of Leicester Archaeological Services, as he had decades of experience in the archeology of medieval Leicester.<sup>62</sup>

Buckley never thought that the project would locate the bones of a long-dead king. Instead, he was excited to investigate the friary, if they could locate it. He advised commissioning a desk study, working through written sources and maps to corollate the location of Greyfriars, as well as any accounts that would indicate Richard remained buried there. The standard reference map for medieval Leicester put Greyfriars in the right location, but Richard's skeleton might not be there. Vergil's description is well-known, and it is certain that Henry VII memorialized Richard's grave with an alabaster monument, as is the disassembling of the site with the dissolution of the friary. Yet, the desk search did not uncover records of what happened to the monument or grave, or whether the bones had truly been removed. The alabaster monument had become a garden ornament by 1729, yet Richard's bones should still have been in the Greyfriars site.<sup>63</sup>

Then, Langley and the Richard III Society spent over five thousand pounds on a ground-penetrating radar survey, or GPR, of the site, as it had never been excavated before. At the time, the survey was simply unhelpful and expensive. The lack of success with the GPR also led to a

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<sup>62</sup> Pitts, 57-8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 58-60, 63-5.

major sponsor pulling funding. However, Sarah Levitt, Head of Arts and Museums at Leicester City Council, supported the project, and she suggested pushing back the dig from April of 2012 to August. With the delay, the dig would start on August 25, the anniversary of Richard's burial. With time running out to get funding, Langley appealed to international members of the Richard III Society, and donations flooded in from around the globe. Just a month before the dig was scheduled to break ground, the funding for the Grey Friars Project was secure with over half the funds coming through the Richard III Society, and with significant contributions from the University of Leicester, the City Council, and Leicester Shire Promotions.<sup>64</sup>

The dig was intentionally named the Grey Friars Project as Buckley believed from the beginning that finding Richard III was a very long shot. Every archeological excavation has a written schedule of goals, numbered in order of descending probability of accomplishing them. The Grey Friars Project goals ran as follows: find some remains of the medieval friary, figure out the orientation and position of the buildings, locate the church, locate the choir, and finally, search for human remains to see if Richard III could be found. Richard Buckley put Matthew Morris in charge of the dig, and Morris was on site when the first trench was opened.<sup>65</sup>

The University of Leicester saw the Grey Friars Project as a marketing opportunity, a moment to show off their archeology department. And for marketing, having all the pieces of the narrative together makes for great visuals and an engaging story. As such, the events of the dig happened on camera from the start. Turi King – a geneticist who's work combines genetics with history and archeology – took a symbolic DNA sample from Michael Ibsen (Joy Ibsen's son), and they were off.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Pitts, 82-4, and 87.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 98 and 100.

<sup>66</sup> The Royal Institution. "Richard III and the Greyfriars Project - Turi King at Ada Lovelace Day 2014. March 9, 2015. Video, 17:59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjUd7Tjk4IQ>. Pitts, *Digging for Richard III*, 88 and 94.

In the first trench on the first day of the dig, they found a bone. Morris hopped down into the trench to discover whether it was a single loose leg bone, or if it was part of an articulated skeleton, which would indicate an undisturbed grave. With cameras rolling, Morris found the other leg his expert eye picking out the shape of the deep brown of the bones with streaks of tan that pop from the dark dirt that surrounds them. On film, Langley hovers just out of frame, providing helpful comments about what could have happened to Richard at Bosworth, and how we "don't know what they did to him."<sup>67</sup> A matter-of-fact Morris tells his audience that they will cover up the skeleton, and proceeds to do just that with a bit of plastic and some rocks, while Langley watches over his shoulder.<sup>68</sup>

Further excavation identified the cloister walk and the chapter house, with the first skeleton, called Skeleton 1, seeming to be in the choir. But before the remains could be exhumed, the team needed exhumation licenses. Presuming it takes a day to exhume each grave, time and budget needed to be considered – they applied for six permits for the project.<sup>69</sup> Morris and Buckley did not know if that would be enough.

With the permits obtained, Jo Appleby could enter the trench to exhume Skeleton 1 at last. Based on the position of the leg bones, the archeologists reasoned the skeleton would be lying on its back, with quite a bit of material above it for Appleby to dig through. Appleby went to work removing sediment and found the skull with her mattock. The problem was the skull was positioned a lot higher than expected in the grave. As Appleby kept digging, she saw trauma to the head, which immediately indicated this was not a normal skeleton. Then Appleby uncovered the spine of Skeleton 1: it was severely curved. In another trench, on the other side of

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<sup>67</sup> University of Leicester, "The Moment Archaeologist Mathew Morris Found Richard III's Remains," March 6, 2015, video, 1:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSh1eW7V7KQ>.

<sup>68</sup> University of Leicester, "The Moment Archaeologist Mathew Morris Found Richard III's Remains."

<sup>69</sup> Pitts, *Digging for Richard III*, 111-2.

a wall, Buckley had no idea what Appleby was uncovering. Consulting with Glyn Coppach and Deirdre O'Sullivan, the three determined that based on the findings in both trenches, Skeleton 1 was indeed in the choir, and was where it should be if there was any chance it was Richard III.<sup>70</sup>

Shocked, Langley looked on as Appleby revealed to her and the cameras that the skeleton had a hunched back, but no withered arm. The bones were carefully removed from the grave, after being properly documented, and loaded into a box for transport. Though the bones had yet to be positively identified as Richard III, Langley wanted to drape his flag over the box. The visual of Richard's flag is highly evocative but would have been inappropriate if the bones turned out not to be his, and Morris was a bit uncomfortable with the idea. However, it was decided Langley could lay the flag on the box, a task she felt uncomfortable with and the job ultimately fell to Ashdown-Hill who was present at the dig.<sup>71</sup> Richard's bones left Grey Friars in a cardboard box, draped in a modern reproduction of a medieval flag under the watchful lenses of documentary cameras to be transported to the lab for testing.

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<sup>70</sup> Pitts, 119, 122 and 124.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 130, 132-3, and 135.

## Section Four: Reveal Your Secrets



Skeletal remains of Richard III, courtesy of the University of Leicester.

With the bones safely back at the lab, work could begin verifying whether these were indeed the remains of Richard III and proceed gathering information through scientific analysis. Appleby used a CT scanner in the Leicester Royal Infirmary to scan the bones before and after cleaning them and set off the images of the skull to undergo modern facial reconstruction modeling. This model, completed before any analysis of the ancient DNA was finalized, became the basis of a bust, allowing us to see an approximation of the skull's face.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Pitts, 147-8.



Facial reconstruction created by Professor Caroline Wilkinson at the University of Dundee, courtesy of the Richard III Society.

Of course, I am writing this thesis because the remains were indeed those of Richard III, but when Turi King began her genetic analysis, she did not know one way or another. With the help of Kevin Schürer, King confirmed Ibsen was a female-line descendent, as well as identifying Wendy Duldig. King confirmed that Ibsen and Duldig's mitochondrial DNA matched each other. Their mtDNA proved to be a rare haplotype, practically eliminating a chance that the mtDNA from the bones could match with that of the identified female line by accident. When King extracted and sequenced mtDNA from the bones, she found it to match the mtDNA from Ibsen and Duldig, essentially confirming the remains to be those of Richard III.

King hoped to confirm a match through the male line as well, tracing the Y-chromosome, which is passed from biological father to son, locating descendants of the 5th Duke of Beaufort. With DNA samples from five descendants, King found one modern false-paternity, as well as the interesting fact that the patrilineal descendants of Beaufort did not have the same Y-haplotype as the skeleton. This meant that somewhere in the nineteen generations separating Richard and

Beaufort, there was a false-paternity event. While this does not negatively impact the identification of the remains as Richard's, it brings up interesting questions about the legitimacy of the claims to the throne of the Yorkists and the Lancastrians in the Wars of the Roses, as either Richard or Henry Tudor descended from the individual whose biological father did not match his supposed father.<sup>73</sup>

King sequenced the DNA from Richard's bones to discover his phenotype from his genotype – in layman terms, what the genes in the DNA indicate Richard looked like. Sequencing indicated that Richard more than likely had blue eyes, and – at least in childhood – blonde hair. As there are no contemporary portraits of Richard that survive, the predicted phenotype allows us to assess the accuracy of the earliest surviving portraits. The portrait with blue eyes and lighter hair likely resembles Richard best, meaning the standard painting for Richard's appearance should be the portrait at the Society of Antiquaries of London – shown below –rather than the portrait in the Royal Collection.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> British Council Germany. "Queen's Lecture 2016 by Dr Turi King | King Richard III - the resolution of a 500-year-old mystery." November 3, 2016. Video, 1:19:49. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEU9\\_fbXW7I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEU9_fbXW7I). A probability calculation of all the factors occurring together concluded that there is a less than one percent chance that an individual of the appropriate age range, with battle injuries, scoliosis, buried in Grey Friars, with a mtDNA match could randomly occur and not be Richard III.

Turi E. King, Gloria Gonzalez Fortes, Patricia Balaesque, Mark G. Thomas, David Balding, Pierpaolo Maisano Delsler, Rita Neumann, Walther Parson, Michael Knapp, Susan Walsh, Laure Tonasso, John Holt, Manfred Kayser, Jo Appleby, Peter Forster, David Ekserdijian, Michael Hofreiter, and Kevin Schürer. "Identification of the remains of King Richard III." *Nature Communications* (December 2, 2014), <https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms6631>, 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> King, "Identification of the remains of King Richard III," 4. The image is below.





*Richard III (arched)*, after 1510, oil on oak panel, 320 x 205mn, courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

The facial reconstruction, completed before the phenotype analysis, received new eyes and a new wig to match.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Phil Stone, email to the author, October 6, 2020.



Facial reconstruction with modified hair and eye color, courtesy of the Richard III Society.

Analysis of the make-up of Richard's bones extended beyond sequencing his DNA to looking at the elemental isotopes found throughout his body. Isotopic analysis is a chemical procedure that allows archeologists to study an individual's diet, geographical movements, and where they came from. As different bones mineralize and remineralize at different points during an individual's lifetime, samples taken from dentine – tooth enamel – and ribs offer access to Richard's diet at different points in his life.<sup>76</sup>

Examining the enamel of Richard's teeth provides a "time transgressive picture of childhood conditions."<sup>77</sup> Through analysis of Richard's childhood diet, we gain understanding of his movements and status. What little we know about Richard's childhood has been covered in a previous section, as the details on that part of his life are sparse, yet the isotope levels in his teeth place Richard at a geographical location during a specific period of his life. Isotope levels are

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<sup>76</sup> Angela L. Lamb, Jane E. Evans, Richard Buckley, and Jo Appleby, "Multi-isotope analysis demonstrates significant lifestyle changes in King Richard III," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 50 (2014): 559-565, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305440314002428>, 559-60.

<sup>77</sup> Lamb, "Multi-isotope analysis," 560.

consistent with an early childhood spent in east England, matching with our previous knowledge that Richard was born in Northamptonshire. By the age of seven or eight, analysis indicates he lived in western Britain, aligning with records of Richard living at Ludlow Castle.<sup>78</sup>

Comparing Richard's diet with those of other contemporary people allows us to understand his social status. Researchers analyzed isotope concentrations in his femur and rib to paint a full picture of Richard's diet throughout his life. As a rule, the wealthier the individual, the more fish and meat they consumed. The remains did have isotopes indicating the consumption of fish, and quantities that are comparable to those of aristocracy and clergy in the period.<sup>79</sup> Comparing the variation of isotope concentrations between Richard's femur and rib also allow us to examine any shifts in Richard's diet that occurred when he became king.

The composition of femur bones shifts over a 10–15-year period, while the rib contains isotopes from the last few years of an individual's life. Comparing the results from the two bones shows that Richard increased his consumption of fresh fish and wildfowl, both luxury foods, with the ability to eat wild birds especially marking social standing in the Late Medieval period. Isotopic evidence also indicates Richard's fluid consumption also shifted, as he probably drank more wine as king than he had before, as wine was a staple for the very wealthy. These shifts in consumption align with written accounts of elaborate feasts, increasing his rich food and wine consumption.<sup>80</sup> Modern scientific techniques allow us to understand that Richard truly embodied the kingly lifestyle and raise questions about the motivations of other portrayals of Richard.

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<sup>78</sup> Lamb, 561-2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 562.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 563-4.

Some vestiges of kingship stayed with Richard in death. Evidence from the excavation indicates that Richard lay buried in a high-status position in the choir. Located against the southern choir stall, the grave was in a prime location, and even received an alabaster monument to mark the spot. Yet the royal treatment did not extend down into the grave itself. The position of the body and the archeology of the grave corollate with Vergil's account of Richard being buried without great ceremony. The grave was too short for the body, unusually elevating the skull, and the placement of the body on one side of the grave indicates a hasty process, with the body entering the grave feet first. Another unusual feature of the grave that demonstrates the lack of preparation for the burial is that there is no evidence of a shroud or coffin. The hands of the corpse rested off to the right, once again unusual, and illuminating that Richard's hands were most likely bound when he was buried.<sup>81</sup> All this information builds a visual of a king's naked corpse coming into town over the back of a horse, being displayed, and then thrown into a grave – quite evocative.

The positioning of the body in a too-small grave raised questions over the positions of the vertebrae – did the curve in Richard's spine result from his scrunched burial conditions? Famously described as a hunchback, with a higher left shoulder, and a smaller build, analysis of the bones through CT 3D reconstructions complicates this description. Reconstructing each bone as polymer replicas allowed Jo Appleby and her team to align the bones of the spine as they would have been in life, unaffected by the position of burial, revealing the curve of the spine reflected life rather than burial conditions. Such reassembly shows a well-balanced curve with

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Buckley, Mathew Morris, Jo Appleby, Turi King, Deirdre O'Sullivan, and Lin Foxhall, "'The king in the car park': new light on the death and burial of Richard III in the Grey Friars church, Leicester, in 1485," *Antiquity* 87, no. 336 (June 2013): 519-538, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/king-in-the-car-park-new-light-on-the-death-and-burial-of-richard-iii-in-the-grey-friars-church-leicester-in-1485/EB678293FE20EF21D246D149766A95F4>, 519-20, 531, 533, 535.

an estimated Cobb angle of 70-90°, while the cervical and thoracic spines remain in alignment relative to each other. Appleby also determined that the type of scoliosis Richard had is adolescent onset idiopathic scoliosis, which probably started after the age of ten.<sup>82</sup>



As the curve was well-balanced, the visual impact of the scoliosis would likely have been minimal, with the right shoulder slightly higher, a proportionally short trunk, without impacting Richard's ability to exercise due to decreased lung capacity. As what remains of the leg bones are symmetrical, Richard is unlikely to have walked with a limp, and combined with good

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<sup>82</sup> Jo Appleby, Piers D Mitchell, Claire Robinson, Alison Brough, Guy Ruty, Russell A Harris, David Thompson, and Bruno Morgan, "The scoliosis of Richard III, last Plantagenet King of England: diagnosis and clinical significance," *The Lancet* 383, no. 9932 (May 2014): 1944, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)60762-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)60762-5/fulltext). Buckley, "'The king in the car park': new light on the death and burial of Richard III in the Grey Friars church, Leicester, in 1485," 536.

tailoring and custom armor, is likely to have had minimal visible physical differences.<sup>83</sup> Richard would not have appeared significantly disabled or monstrous, which raises questions about why authors choose to portray him as such.

These authors tapped into existing rhetoric surrounding abnormal bodies and what such bodies indicated about the moral qualities of the individual. When a king is representative of a realm, it matters if he is broken. Breaking Richard's reputation posthumously bolstered the reputations of those who defeated him.

The last piece of the skeletal evidence analyzed is the perimortem trauma present on the remains. Wounds inflicted shortly before or after death provide an opportunity to reconstruct Richard's death in battle. With comparisons to skeletons from the Battle of Towton, even the weapons used to inflict the injuries can be identified. In total, Richard sustained eleven perimortem injuries: nine to the skull and two to the postcranial skeleton. Attackers inflicted relatively few injuries on the face – a knife wound to the right side of the jaw and a stab through the right cheek – likely to aid in public recognition of the corpse. The pattern of injuries indicate that Richard died under sustained attack or facing multiple attackers. We know with certainty that Richard lost his helmet, and retained his other armor at death, as the injuries to the head could not have occurred with a helmet on. A helmet would have protected Richard from a blow delivered from above that created a keyhole injury. Without overlapping injuries, we cannot know for certain what blow killed the king. The tip of an edged weapon went through the vertebra, skull, and brain and hit the interior of the skull. Fatal in a short period of time, the most

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<sup>83</sup> Appleby, "The scoliosis of Richard III, last Plantagenet King of England: diagnosis and clinical significance."

evocative element of this injury is that the angle which the weapon entered the skull could only be achieved if Richard lay prone or kneeling.<sup>84</sup>

Thus dispatched, the story of Richard's final injuries does not end. Stripped of his remaining armor, the corpse of a king would present a tempting target, thrown over the back of a horse, and someone took aim; Richard was stabbed in the right buttock. Combined with an injury to the ribs, this stabbing confirms that Richard's armor was removed, as neither injury could have been inflicted with the armor in place.<sup>85</sup>

Scientific analysis confirms Richard's identity, allows for comparison to contemporary accounts, and provides exciting insight into his life and death. Interdisciplinary collaboration made the work to gather information from Richard's bones possible. Without modern scientific and technological advances, the mysteries of the medieval monarch would remain enigmatic. Uncovering the physical evidence of Richard's body also provides information about how he lived, and allows us to consider his physiological conditions and experiences as well as the impact of the choices people made in their descriptions and depictions of him after his death.

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<sup>84</sup> Jo Appleby, Guy N Ruttly, Sarah V Hainsworth, Robert C Woosnam-Savage, Bruno Morgan, Alison Brough, Richard W Earp, Claire Robinson, Turi E King, Mathew Morris, and Richard Buckley, "Perimortem trauma in King Richard III: a skeletal analysis," *The Lancet* 385, no. 9964 (January 2015): 253-259, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)60804-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)60804-7/fulltext), 253-6, 258. Appleby also notes a "gracile build."

<sup>85</sup> Appleby, "Perimortem trauma in King Richard III: a skeletal analysis," 257.

## Section Five: On the Surface

How we understand Richard's body now remains distinct from how he and others understood his body during his lifetime. The contrast of what we know from Richard's remains and the exaggerated deformities added to his description after death and the medieval significance of the treatment of his mortal remains aid our understanding of the significance imbedded in the physical body of a medieval king.

First, people understood their bodies in relation to the interaction of their body and their soul – separate entities with the soul issuing orders, and the body obeying. The body confined the soul to a corporeal existence, while the soul harnessed the body to its will. Physical health was tied to spiritual well-being, reflecting the understanding that the body acted as the fulcrum for medieval life. While people strived to master their bodies, the interior remained inaccessible for the owner, private from everyone.<sup>86</sup> With the interior out of reach, the presentation of one's body held additional meaning, offering hints about people's hidden internal lives and character.

The body of the king represented not only his own identity, but the body politic of the nation. He was the head, and much of English national political identity is constructed around his physical form.<sup>87</sup> This made beheadings especially powerful, as the head "made certain mankind's place as king of the cosmos," leading to powerful symbolism especially in regard to the body politic when the head lost is the king's.<sup>88</sup> With or without their heads, the bodies of

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<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (USA and Canada: Routledge, 1996), 12, 16, 20. Jack Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies: Life and Death in the Middle Ages* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 22, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Donna Beth Ellard, "A Death so Sublime: Theorizing death and Dying in Medieval England." PhD diss. (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010), v.

<sup>88</sup> Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies: Life and Death in the Middle Ages*, 32, 44.



monarchs were tokens of dynastic currency, leveraged by themselves and their followers.<sup>89</sup> For a king, the right body was everything.

With such an emphasis on one's physical form, the significance of any deviance from "normal" increases. When bodies strayed from conceptions of "normal," they became monstrous.<sup>90</sup> This is essential for understanding descriptions of Richard III proliferated after his death. A hunched-back meant something: having one would immediately classify Richard as a maimed individual. Despite what we now know that Richard was normal in appearance at birth, Thomas More describes him as born with teeth, feet-first. The unnaturalness of this description of Richard's birth emphasizes More's claim that Richard was destined to commit unnatural acts over the course of his life.<sup>91</sup> The additions of a withered arm and limp further distance Richard from his contemporary's understanding of a normal body. By including a withered arm, a limp, and a hunched back, Richard becomes monstrous – physically embodying villainy – as Shakespeare so intentionally demonstrates.

The fate of Richard's mortal remains contain meaning, as the treatment of his corpse reflects medieval conceptions of disgrace. Richard III followed an interesting pattern of Ricardian English kings. Like the previous two King Richards, he died without a surviving heir. Richard II did not receive a proper burial as well, bookending with Richard III a period where monarchs were frequently deposed.<sup>92</sup>

Parading Richard III's naked corpse through Leicester demonstrated the once-king was indeed dead, as well as further humiliating him. It is one thing to learn someone stabbed a dead

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<sup>89</sup> Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies*, 115.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>91</sup> Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3. More, *The History of King Richard III*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Ellard, "A Death so Sublime," 136-7, 152.

king in the buttock, it is another to understand how the degradation of the corpse made that action possible. In medieval society, clothing reflected the owner, even in death. Removing Richard's clothes stripped him of the last remnants of agency. Skin and clothing were bound to ideas of sin and wantonness, and such a flagrant exposure of Richard's added to his humiliation.<sup>93</sup>

The chosen location of a grave also carried intense significance. The deceased relied on the prayers of the living for their well-being, with graves acting as transactional mourning sites. The actions visitors took at grave sites affected the quality of the deceased's eternal salvation.<sup>94</sup> When the monks buried Richard in the choir, they placed him in a high-status location. Choirs were used frequently, and visitors would have ample opportunity to interact with Richard's grave.

The quality of the monument erected for the deceased also indicated their status in life. As previously mentioned, Henry VII did not initially mark Richard's grave with a monument, but later he commissioned an alabaster marker. Alabaster as a material contained particular significance in England, as it carried ties to the very land itself. A native English material compared to the French marble, the whiteness and purity of alabaster connected to ideas of spiritual purity.<sup>95</sup> Used for high-status monuments, alabaster befits a king, even one that was the enemy of the reigning monarch. However, the monument and the Church of the Grey Friars itself soon vanished with the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII – a Tudor who could not care less about honoring his fallen great-uncle.

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<sup>93</sup> Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies*, 103, 105.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 117, 121.

<sup>95</sup> Hartnell, 122. Rachel Dressler, "Identity, Status, and Material: Medieval Alabaster Effigies in England," *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 5, no. 2 (2015): 67.

While Richard's bones remained out of reach to his contemporaries, we must consider how they would have interacted with them. During life, bones were "clearly important but unattainable and interior beneath the skin," yet depictions of skeletons appear frequently on funerary monuments.<sup>96</sup> People approached bones in a range of ways: with fear, with respect, with hope, and playfully. In a world where the body was a stage for performing one's identity, even bones could talk.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Hartnell, 110.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 132, 289.

## Conclusion: Unseen, yet Heard

Richard's final stage is his new tomb. The Leicester Cathedral chose to commission a "twenty-first century tomb for a fifteenth century monarch," that was clearly not medieval but imbued with meaning that could be understood into the future, and marked the rediscovery as occurring "in a particular point in history."<sup>98</sup> The result is a speckled gray rectangle of stone, studded with tiny fossils, with a cross incised deeply into it on top of a thinner black slab bearing Richard's name, motto, and coat of arms. The cathedral leaned into a more common understanding of hope and the Christian faith, the light from the east symbolizing the resurrection – and the belief in the coming resurrection – rather than simply acting as a dedication for a reinterred monarch.<sup>99</sup> The Leicester Cathedral chose to be actively involved in their own act of memory creation within the story of Richard.



Richard III's tomb in Leicester Cathedral, placed following his reburial in 2015. Courtesy of Leicester Cathedral.

<sup>98</sup> University of Leicester, "Richard III - The Tomb Design," June 20, 2014, video, 4:10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGulijLwz1c>.

<sup>99</sup> University of Leicester, "Richard III - The Tomb Design," June 20, 2014, video, 4:10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGulijLwz1c>.

Richard's first – and only – coffin received thoughtful attention as well. Michael Ibsen, Richard's many-times great-nephew, is a carpenter by trade, and he crafted the coffin from English oak sourced from Cornwall. Ibsen considered medieval coffins, using the angle of the hat in a portrait of Richard III for the reference for his own angles, and choosing English oak as a material that the public might identify with – as well as linking with Richard – shaping the coffin for practicality during the reinterment services. The rectangular coffin first emerged from the University of Leicester for the ceremony transferring Richard's mortal remains to the care of the cathedral, starting a week-long journey culminating in reburial.<sup>100</sup>

Thousands of people lined the roads of Leicester to watch horses pull the coffin by and to pay their respects at a ceremony at Bosworth. Thousands more came to the cathedral to pay their respects before the funeral. On March 26, 2015, the solemn ceremony commenced. Attendees had a variety of connections with Richard III, from Philippa Langley who motivated his discovery, to Wendy Duldig and Michael Ibsen as his relatives, the team from the University of Leicester – including Richard Buckley, Mathew Morris, Jo Appleby, and Turi King – to the current Duke of Gloucester and actors Richard Lindsey and Benedict Cumberbatch, who have both portrayed the monarch.<sup>101</sup> In a service presided over by the foremost Catholic prelate in England – Cardinal Vincent Nichols – Gloucester and Cumberbatch both took part in the service

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<sup>100</sup> University of Leicester, "Michael Ibsen and Paul McKenzie Discuss the Design Influences Behind Richard III's Coffin," March 23, 2015, video, 3:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etYgqLskri4>.

University of Leicester, "Richard III Leaving the University of Leicester - FULL CEREMONY," March 22, 2015, video, 28:39, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4-8utmsESo>.

<sup>101</sup> John F. Burns, "Richard III, Previous Visit a Bust, Is Warmly Received 530 Years Later," *New York Times*, March 22, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/23/world/europe/richard-iii-previous-visit-a-bust-is-warmly-received-530-years-later.html>.

University of Leicester, "Richard III - Reburial Date Press Conference," August 8, 2014, video, 13:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A86Q-4uWfTY>.

Reel Truth History Documentaries, "King Richard III The Burial of the King: Live Reburial | History Documentary | Reel Truth History," video, 45:36, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSwWgbPObB0>.

with readings, Cumberbatch reading a poem written for the occasion by poet laureate Carol Anne Duffy. The poem opens with the words “my bones,” and continue from the point of view of Richard to talk about death, loss, and reclaiming a lost dream of honor in death.<sup>102</sup> The reburial ceremony centered around the concept of finally interning Richard III with the proper pomp entitled to a medieval king, celebrating him and the opportunity to honor his remains with dignity.

Yet, the controversy surrounding Richard's legacy continued, as papers heatedly reminded their readers of Richard's villainous ways, and supporters rallied behind the Richard III Society.<sup>103</sup> A memorable headline from the *Daily Mail* on March 23, 2015 runs “It's mad to make this child killer a national hero: Richard III was one of the most evil, detestable tyrants ever to walk this earth, says MICHAEL THORNTON,” while the *New York Times* runs the more sympathetic “Richard III Gets a Kingly Burial, on Second Try.”<sup>104</sup> The life and actions of Richard III have long been debated, and that debate will continue in perpetuity (unless the Richard III Society has something to say on the matter). Yet in many ways the Richard III Society has won the battle, though not the war. When we try to describe Richard's life in “neutral” terms, the narrative tilts towards the Society's perspective, as demonstrated in the funeral. “Neutrality” can have political meaning, as rejecting a specific narrative implies the rejected narrative is biased, and often, politically motivated. In presenting a “neutral” portrayal

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<sup>102</sup> Cumberbatch also happens to be third cousins sixteen times removed with Richard III. John F. Burns, “Richard III Gets a Kingly Burial, on Second Try,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/world/europe/king-richard-iii-burial-leicester.html?searchResultPosition=2>. Channel 4 News, “Benedict Cumberbatch reads the poem 'Richard' at the Richard III reburial service | Channel 4,” March 26, 2015, video, 2:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38nodTfpro4>.

<sup>103</sup> Burns, “Richard III Gets a Kingly Burial, on Second Try.”

<sup>104</sup> Michael Thornton, “It's mad to make this child killer a national hero: Richard III was one of the most evil, detestable tyrants ever to walk this earth, says MICHAEL THORNTON,” *Daily Mail.com*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3008671/Richard-III-one-evil-detestable-tyrants-walk-earth.html>. Burns, “Richard III Gets a Kingly Burial.”

of Richard, the Cathedral inherently accepts that Tudor propaganda warped Richard's legacy – an argument supported by the Richard III Society. At the reburial, descriptions of Richard's actions highlighted the positive moments of his life, rather than any actions he may have taken to harm family members. While this makes sense for a ceremony honoring Richard, remaining aware of this is important for conceptualizing the ongoing mythmaking surrounding Richard. The Richard III Society succeeded in establishing a new avenue through which Richard can be reassessed. Though I have yet to set foot in the Richard III Visitor Centre, I do not doubt that the exhibitions are sympathetic to him, including the life-sized three-dimensional replica of his skeleton about to enter a CT scanner.

The practice of history lies in the constant reexamining of everything we think we know. To paraphrase a lecture I attended in 2018, given by Professor Kate Greenspan, as historians we need to be comfortable not knowing, and knowing we do not know things. We did not know everything about Richard III's life and death, and we still do not know everything. Interpretation and reinterpretation of historical moments, people, events, and movements are central to our continued engagement with history. There is never just a single story – there are many woven together.

Engaging with primary scientific sources broadens and complicates our understanding of medieval people and events; to embrace this complexity is to embrace interdisciplinarity. Science offers new methods of examining medieval existence, documenting concretely circumstances that we have previously relied on myths to understand, and in the process providing the opportunity to deconstruct the myths and how they were established. Embracing scientific evidence changes how we engage with history, as we impose meaning on scientific data, weaving a story from diverse sources of information. Now we add to our understanding of

Richard III that he had adolescent-onset scoliosis, but no withered arm, nor limp. His diet tracks with written sources on his location throughout his life and provides new insight into how social status changes individuals' diets. We can even reconstruct, to some extent, Richard's final moments in battle, and we know with certainty how and where Richard's bones rest. We also learn about the mythmaking surrounding Richard through the disconnect between descriptions of the king and the archeological evidence, opening up questions about how and why his body was portrayed in a particular way.

Unfortunately, historians have yet to take full advantage of the scientific sources available to us. The most recent biography of Richard III I could find – Rosemary Horrox, 2020 – did not engage with the scientific publications that are now available, and quite accessible, for years, though she does not include information about his physical appearance that we now know to be false, such as a withered arm. No, instead, Horrox only references Pitt's *Digging for Richard* which, while an engaging account of the archeological dig, was published the findings of the research team.<sup>105</sup> Fortunately, this is not the case for all published historians, as Dan Jones uses Appleby's analysis of perimortem trauma to describe Richard's gruesome end.<sup>106</sup> With the limitations of writing for a popular press, only including the information relevant to Richard's death makes logical sense for a book on the Wars of the Roses. Yet Jones apparently did not read Appleby's article, instead depending on her summary on the University of Leicester website. Scientific literature should not intimidate us as historians. With a bit of commitment and effort, we can and should include information from primary scientific sources in our work.

Scientific analysis of Richard's bones goes beyond simply opening a new source of information to us; it brings Richard firmly into the twenty-first century. It is worth bringing

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<sup>105</sup> Horrox, 100.

<sup>106</sup> Jones, 299, 363.



medieval figures into our own episteme to challenge existing myths and complicate their – and our own – history. It also offers us the chance to critically examine why these myths emerged in the first place. Added nuance within the study of medieval history will aid the discipline as a new method of examining prevailing myths that impact our own lived reality.

Richard lies for the foreseeable future under three tons of rock. The Leicester Cathedral have dedicated space at his new final resting place, forever changing the landscape of their church. Yet the information in Richard's bones has not disappeared from sight. The scientific research already appears as examples in textbooks, and the data continues to be available to researchers.<sup>107</sup> The understanding gained from scientific examination will continue to affect our understanding of Richard and his period, but it also might solve yet another centuries-old mystery: the fate of the princes in the tower, the very nephews Richard allegedly had murdered.

Bones believed to be those of the two young princes were discovered in the seventeenth century during renovations of the tower. Accepted as those of the lost princes, the bones were moved to Westminster Abbey. The Home Office and George V allowed the bones to be examined in 1933, and they should be examined again.<sup>108</sup> In 1933 the scientists did not have the ability to analysis DNA evidence the way we can now, and as the bones were examined by a historian and an anatomist, the geneticists should have a turn. With Richard's Y-chromosome sequenced, a simple comparison will tell us whether or not the individuals were related to Richard. He and any biological sons of his brother should have the same Y-chromosome, one way or another clarifying whether these bones belonged to individuals who were his nephews.

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<sup>107</sup> One such textbook is the following: Kathryn C. Twiss, *The Archaeology of Food: Identity, Politics, and Ideology in the Prehistoric and Historic Past*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Facial reconstruction and DNA analysis also could allow us to reexamine medieval portraits and identify individuals, as well as understand which portraits have the closest likeness to the individual, as was done for the portraits of Richard III.

<sup>108</sup> Sharon D. Michalove, "The Reinvention of Richard III," *The Richardian* (December 1995), <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/sharon-d-michalove-the-reinvention-of-richard-iii/>.

And how exciting would it be if they were not? Or if the bones dated to a different era? This information is available to us, if only specialists, such as Turi King, gain access to the remains and are allowed to add to our body of knowledge of the medieval world. If we have the information and the ability to understand yet another centuries-old mystery, and yet do nothing, we indicate to ourselves and future historians what our values are as a society, and the value of scientific fact versus perpetuating myths.

Scientific analysis is the future of medieval bodies. As techniques advance, DNA analysis also affects the study and understanding of classical history. Remains discovered in 1900 and labeled as attributed to Pliny the Elder have recently been reexamined. The DNA profile lines up with known information about Pliny, yet the jaw belongs to a different individual.<sup>109</sup> The ability to analyze remains opens a new type of engagement with bones recovered from Pompeii and other sites of excavation, as well as a chance to revisit and reassess our foundational assumptions about these individuals and why the myths surrounding them took hold. In this process, we cannot assume that science has all the answers, as data needs to be interpreted and contextualized. We must remember that the presence of certain genetic markers does not automatically indicate that the individual had those characteristics.<sup>110</sup>

As archeological excavations continue, researchers "have more and more medieval bodies to hand."<sup>111</sup> More information from medieval remains broadens the data base, if you will,

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<sup>109</sup> Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies*, 295. Franz Lidz, "Here Lies the Skull of Pliny the Elder, Maybe," *The New York Times*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/14/science/pliny-archaeology-skull-vesuvius.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

<sup>110</sup> Epigenetics in a field in and off itself, but the essential point here is that we can carry genes that our cells do not use.

DNA analysis can also be used to confirm the identity of more modern remains, such as those of the Romanovs who were killed in the 20th century. Brigit Katz, "DNA Analysis Confirms Authenticity of Romanovs' Remains." *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/dna-analysis-confirms-authenticity-remains-attributed-romanovs-180969674/>.

<sup>111</sup> Hartnell, 292.

for comparative understanding of medieval experience. Appleby could identify the specific types of medieval weapons that cause the perimortem injuries to Richard because she could compare his wounds to those found on skeletons from the battle of Towton, demonstrating just how powerful such comparisons can be.<sup>112</sup>

Richard's bones demonstrate the profound impact of scientific analysis on history and public perception. One day, after the pandemic, I hope to visit the Leicester's Richard III visitor center. There, in an MRI machine, lie 3-D prints of Richard's bones that will remain visible to the public as the visitors' center works to engage people with the stories of the Wars of the Roses and medieval Leicester through the lens of Richard III, his life, and his rediscovery.<sup>113</sup> Richard's body relieves the skeleton of medieval mythmaking – how the purposeful creation of myths created an image of a broken king that persisted through the centuries. It is a myth that will never leave us, continuing on in theater productions even as the archeological evidence changes our scholarship.

On their website, the Richard III Society now encourages their members to learn more about Philippa Langley's exciting new project: the missing princes. Langley states this project will finally lay Richard to rest by solving the mystery of the "Princes in the Tower," and end the debate on whether Richard III was good or evil.<sup>114</sup> Yet Langley strives for the impossible – we will never conclusively state the nature of Richard's character. There is even room, despite what Langley appears to believe, to accept that Richard was not particularly good or evil. Richard's story has something even more important to offer than a decisive verdict: through Richard we

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<sup>112</sup> Appleby, "Perimortem trauma in King Richard III: a skeletal analysis," 253.

<sup>113</sup> University of Leicester, "King Richard III Visitor Centre," July 24, 2014, Video, 3:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyYnmqWSShc>.

<sup>114</sup> "The Missing Princes," *Revealing Richard III*, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://www.revealingrichardiii.com/langley.html>.

have the opportunity to understand his world that produced the stories about his alleged villainy and broken body. The space between the archival and scientific evidence and popular opinion has something thrilling: room for offering our own understanding and meaning while examining how and why a medieval myth was made.

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