

A member of the Guard of Honour, one of the veterans of the British Forces who stood guard over Richard III's coffin. Photograph by Susan E. Frost.



# WITNESS TO HISTORY

## Reflections on the Burial of Richard III

History has always been a strong interest of mine. But the discovery of my own royal ancestry and a relatively close relationship to European monarchs is particularly compelling to me. As a Plantagenet descendant and fifteenth great-niece of King Richard III, I was astounded that his skeleton had actually been found and identified in my lifetime!

I kept close tabs on the story and when the University of Leicester announced plans to reinter the remains of Richard III on March 26, 2015, I decided I had

to attend as a journalist and photographer. For me, it was the experience of a lifetime.

### Finding Richard III's remains

If it weren't for the persistence and determination of three key players—historian John Ashdown-Hill, Phil Stone (chairman of the Richard III Society), and screenwriter Philippa Langley—the dig, discovery, and reinterment would have not have occurred.

During my interviews with these three people, Ashdown-Hill described his extensive research on Leicester's Grey Friars site, originally a Franciscan friary established in 1250. "While researching the site, I discovered an unpublished sentence in a difficult-to-read



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manuscript at the British National Archives which stated that in 1495, when the royal tomb was erected, the bones of Richard III lay at “a Friary church in Leicester,” said Ashdown-Hill. “Before this there had been controversy about where Richard’s bones had been buried, based on the existence of five different fifteenth-century accounts.” Ashdown-Hill concluded that the Friary church must have stood on the northern side of an existing parking lot.<sup>1</sup>

In 2003, Belgian scientists, trying to determine whether bone fragments found in Belgium belonged to Richard III’s sister, Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, asked Ashdown-Hill to find an mtDNA sequence for Richard III and his siblings. This effort prompted a thorough genealogical search for direct maternal-line descendants of the House of York. Ultimately, Ashdown-Hill established that Canadian Joy Ibsen had a matrilineal descent from Anne of York, another sister of Richard III—a discovery that would later be essential to identifying Richard III’s remains.<sup>2</sup>

Ashdown-Hill and Langley had difficulty convincing civic authorities that the Grey Friars parking lot was the

right place to begin the dig. Philippa Langley approached Phil Stone to ask if the Richard III Society would support the dig. “There was skepticism but we funded the first ground-penetrating radar search. And, at the eleventh hour, when funds ran out, we helped Langley secure the funds needed,” said Stone.

Langley attributed her unwavering commitment to finding Richard III’s remains to a combination of Ashdown-Hill’s research, her own extensive research, and her gut feelings. “I was compelled to search for Richard III’s grave and couldn’t give up on it because of my strong sense that Richard III was buried precisely where I was standing in the car park. And, this feeling was backed up by my four years of research,” said Langley.

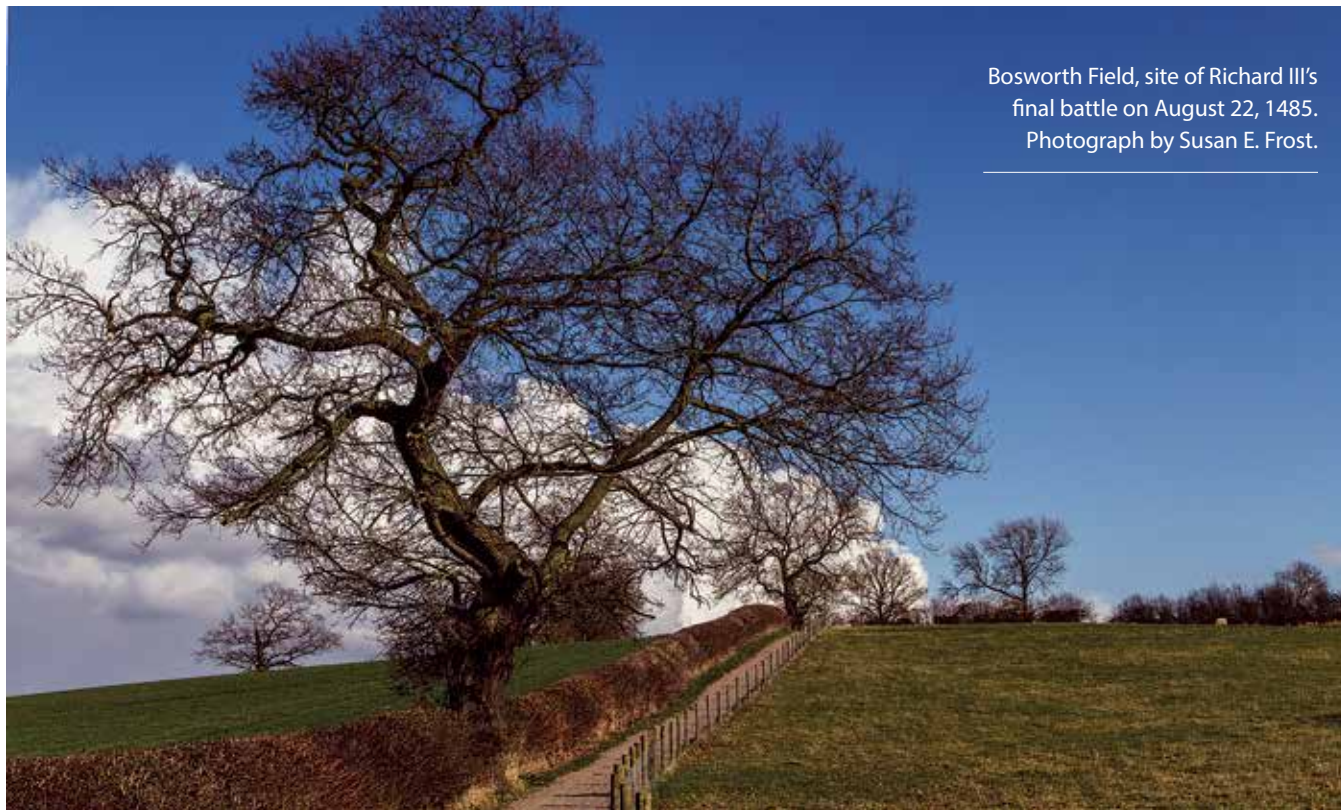
“For me it was a no-brainer,” Langley continued, “but every historian and academic (bar a small handful) all believed that: 1) Richard’s remains had been thrown into the River Soar (as noted by the exhumation license in which the archaeologists confirmed this belief, written three days before discovery of Richard’s remains); and 2) the Grey Friars church was located elsewhere

under roads and buildings. I needed to know if the research stacked up and it did.” Ultimately, the hard work and persistence triumphed, and the king’s burial site was found under the parking lot. Linked by DNA evidence to Joy Ibsen’s son, Michael, the remains proved to be those of Richard III.

### Witnessing the reinterment

Gaining entrance to the ceremony was not an easy task. Thousands of people wanted to attend the reinterment—and the cathedral had only 700 seats. The City of Leicester held a drawing for 200 seats available for the public and more than 14,000 people submitted ballots. Lyn Core of East Sussex, England, one of the lucky people selected, told me, “I was overwhelmed with extreme joy. It was such a privilege to attend. I always believed in Richard III and I believe he did his best as King.”

Many people, including me, traveled halfway around the world for the reinterment. One of my most memorable experiences during my three days in Leicester was meeting some cousins (three sisters from Helmay, Norway) for the first time. Unni Løvlien, a retired



Bosworth Field, site of Richard III's final battle on August 22, 1485.  
Photograph by Susan E. Frost.

nurse on the board of DIS Norway in Hedmark, the largest association for genealogists in Norway, is also related to Richard III, and we had been communicating about our shared ancestry on Geni.com for about a year. When I invited her to join me in Leicester, I was delighted that she accepted and brought her two sisters, Solvar and Vigdis. We had dinner together on our first night, and it was such a treat to meet them and share life stories. After the trip ended, Løvlien recalled, “The most interesting experience we had was entering the old Leicester Cathedral and passing by Richard III’s beautiful decorated coffin. The church was filled with white roses, and the guards stood still in solemn respect. What an honor to be present! When the reinterment itself took place on the following day, we watched the procession of royal and other prominent people on their way to the cathedral and then we found a pub and watched it on a wide-screen TV. So, we had a real sense of having participated!”

Kelly Fitzgerald, a former history teacher and another distant relative of Richard III, traveled from Laredo, Texas, to attend. She told me how impressed she was by the many ways the people of Leicester and surrounding communities honored Richard III. “Children made banners and posters in school, and then displayed them in the windows of their homes. Tiny villages held community gatherings to mark the procession as it came through. Large crowds lined the streets to see the procession of the coffin in a horse-drawn carriage. Knights on horseback rode up to the doors of the cathedral and formed an honor guard for the coffin as it entered the sanctuary. At our last stop, just before sunset, we just stood in the road and gazed over the fields at Bosworth where Richard died. We all seemed to feel his presence,” said Fitzgerald, who shared her experiences on her blog, *Sunnes & Roses*.

Before the service in the cathedral, a procession of perhaps 100 selected VIPs and dignitaries walked from the Guildhall into the cathedral in small groups. Each group was led by two uniformed marching guards and—apart

from a small group of children (representing the future) and civic leaders—comprised key people in the Richard III story. The groups included the Looking for Richard team; the University project team; the Richard III Society; the DNA donors; the Bosworth Peers with the College of Arms; and Bosworth Battlefield descendants.

Those of us fortunate enough to be inside the cathedral during the service included myself and other members of the media; key people instrumental in finding and supporting the process of the discovery of Richard III; 200 winners of the drawing from the City of Leicester and 25 winners from the Richard III Society drawing; a small

group of people with relatives who fought on both sides of the Battle of Bosworth; and members of the royal family, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and the Countess of Wessex.

### Battle of Bosworth descendants

Professor Kevin Schürer, University of Leicester Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise, identified descendants and relatives of twenty families who fought at the Battle of Bosworth, in which Richard III was killed on August 22, 1485.

Hugh J. G. Wood, a semi-retired registered nurse from Brisbane, Australia, and descendant of a Bosworth veteran, was invited “out of the blue” by Schürer

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General Sir Richard Dannatt GCB CBE MC DL, Constable of the Tower of London and former head of the British Army, being interviewed by Robert Hardman of the *Daily Mail*; author Susan Frost with her Norwegian cousins at the King Richard III Visitor Centre. Photographs by Susan E. Frost.





Leicester's King Richard III statue was given to the city in 1980 by the Richard III Society. Photograph by Susan E. Frost.

to attend the reinterment. "To say our family was surprised is an understatement!" said Wood. "Our first reaction was disbelief, then excitement. I found the reinterment service and events somewhat surreal. I would never have imagined being involved in such an event with the dignitaries and even members of the royal family." Wood spoke about his Bosworth ancestor, John Hardwick. "He was known as the 'King's Array' and was responsible for recruiting soldiers, obtaining equipment, and providing information to Richard III. Hardwick obviously had loyalties to Henry Tudor and possibly provided critical information to Henry and his commanders in regard to the battle ground and positioning of his troops. His activity would have put him at serious risk of his life had he been caught. My ancestor may have influenced the course of history on that fateful day in 1485."

Conrad Hugo Penny, CEO of Penny Brothers and owner of Chartwell Castle in South Africa, has a long list of registered royal pedigrees and documentation of his status as a sixteenth great-nephew of Richard III. He was interested in having his DNA be used to help provide proof that the bones discovered were those of Richard III. He contacted Professor Schürer and offered to have his DNA tested. However, Penny's line to Richard III was neither a matrilineal nor patrilineal line, so Penny's House of York

lineage could not be verified through DNA testing. But, after further research, Schürer discovered that Penny's ancestor, Sir Roger Kynaston, was at the Battle of Bosworth, so he invited Penny to join the select group of Bosworth Battlefield descendants at the service. Surprisingly enough, Penny had eleven ancestors who were at the Battle of Bosworth, so, with Schürer, Penny led the descendant group into the cathedral.

When I spoke with him, Penny said, "I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to Leicester and I'm proud to be related to most of the players in this dramatic story. The reinterment was a very moving event and helped reverse the nasty reputation that the Tudor victors and Shakespeare cast over him. Richard was a brave knight and soldier and now better aspects of his character will be accepted. The service gave Richard III a dignified return to the earth after the ugly, naked, two-day public parade

and most ungracious burial that he was subjected to in 1485."

The story of finding the 530-year-old remains of the last Plantagenet king captured the world's imagination and drew thousands of people to Leicester. The ceremony was watched on TV by 366 million viewers. This interest culminated in Richard III's reinterment at Leicester Cathedral with all the pomp and ceremony of an honored king of England and helped lay to rest the perception that King Richard III was an evil villain. As Phil Stone so aptly noted, "Richard III was neither the black legend nor saint." ♦

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In her article for the Ricardian Society journal, "The Grey Friars, Leicester," *The Ricardian* 3 (September 1975): 3–7, Audrey Strange provided historical background on the Greyfriars site that was sold to Robert Herrick in 1612. In the corner of the property was a three-foot-tall stone pillar with the inscription "Here lies the body of Richard III sometime King of England."
- <sup>2</sup> Professor Kevin Schürer, University of Leicester Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise, later identified Wendy Duldig of Australia as a second matrilineal descendant of Cecily Neville, mother of Richard III.

### To learn more

- **The University of Leicester's extensive Discovery of Richard III webpages** [le.ac.uk/richardiii/index.html](http://le.ac.uk/richardiii/index.html)
- **Two blog posts by Christopher C. Child on the NEHGS blog, *Vita Brevis*** "King Richard III's Matrilineal Kin" ([vita-brevis.org/2015/04/king-richard-iiis-matrilineal-kin](http://vita-brevis.org/2015/04/king-richard-iiis-matrilineal-kin)) and "Thoughts on the Y-DNA of Richard III" ([vita-brevis.org/2014/12/thoughts-y-dna-richard-iii](http://vita-brevis.org/2014/12/thoughts-y-dna-richard-iii))
- **King Richard III biography and timeline by Wendy E. A. Moorhen** [r3.org/richard-iii/king-richard-iii-bio-timeline](http://r3.org/richard-iii/king-richard-iii-bio-timeline)
- **Richard III: a "car park king" timeline by Emma McFarnon** [historyextra.com/feature/richard-iii-burial-timeline-%E2%80%98car-park-king%E2%80%99-Leicester](http://historyextra.com/feature/richard-iii-burial-timeline-%E2%80%98car-park-king%E2%80%99-Leicester)
- **"Back to My Roots," by Susan E. Frost in *BRITAIN* magazine** [FrostPhotography.com/#!/p/magazines](http://FrostPhotography.com/#!/p/magazines)
- **King Richard III Visitor Centre in Leicester** [kriii.com](http://kriii.com)
- **Historical background and genealogy charts of Bosworth Battlefield descendants** [dropbox.com/s/cxwm0h298qzw61o/Details%20of%20the%20Bosworth%20descendants.pdf?dl=0](http://dropbox.com/s/cxwm0h298qzw61o/Details%20of%20the%20Bosworth%20descendants.pdf?dl=0)