

# RICHARD III SOCIETY

Patron HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO



**Founder:**  
**S Saxon Barton**

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## DISABILITY IS NOT A DEFORMITY

- Greyfriars dig raises questions over Richard III's 'hunchback' appearance
- Richard III Society calls for reassessment of 'lazy hunchback myth'
- What is the difference between scoliosis and kyphosis?

**It is time to end the lazy acquiescence with the Tudor and Shakespearean myths about Richard III. If the body found at the Greyfriars dig is Richard III, it proves he was no hunchback and if he suffered from scoliosis that is no reason to denigrate him. In this Paralympic year, we celebrate the achievements of all who overcome disabilities, let's do the same for Richard III...**

On 12 September at a press conference in Leicester's Guildhall, Richard Taylor of the University of Leicester outlined the evidence that points to the skeleton discovered on the site of the Greyfriars being that of King Richard III. He also confirmed that it had a curvature of the spine known as scoliosis.

Scoliosis is a fixed and abnormal sideways curvature of the thoracic and lumbar regions of the spine. It can result in one shoulder being slightly higher than the other, in the case of the Greyfriars skeleton, the right shoulder.

The press conference also made absolutely clear that the skeleton did not have kyphosis, which can result in a hunchback. **So if this is Richard III, he was not a hunchback, contrary to the myths about his physical appearance.**

Nowadays severe scoliosis can be corrected by surgery, although those with the condition still face challenges in their lives. The Scoliosis Society notes that some are inspired by older siblings to overcome such challenges; Richard may well have been similarly inspired by his charismatic elder brother Edward IV. As duke of Gloucester and king Richard led an active life as an effective administrative and military commander, if he had a disability he clearly overcame it.

However there is no contemporary evidence that Richard III suffered from any visible physical problems. The only surviving description of the king is provided by a Silesian visitor, Nicholas van Poppelau, who spent time at Richard's court in 1484. He described the king as lean, with delicate arms and legs and that he was 'three fingers taller' than Poppelau himself.

The legend of Richard's hunchback began in the early days of the new Tudor dynasty when it was expedient to denigrate the reputation of the dead king; to contemporaries, a deformed body was easily associated with an evil mind. This reached its climax with Sir Thomas More, who described Richard as being 'little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook backed ...'. Tudor chroniclers repeated the legend and provided the basis for Shakespeare's portrayal of a king who is 'determined to prove a villain'. It was all character assassination and historical 'spin'.

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### About the Richard III Society

With a worldwide membership and local branches the Society is actively engaged in original research through its own initiatives and through collaboration with other institutions bodies and scholars. Through the Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, a charitable body established by the Society, we publish important academic works and make research grants. The Society publishes an annual journal, *The Ricardian*, with original articles on fifteenth century history and a quarterly members' magazine the *Ricardian Bulletin*.

Members of the Richard III Society are available for media interview on any topic concerning the life and times of Richard III, the Leicester dig or any related matter.

### Richard III Society Press Office

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