

RICHARD III SOCIETY

Patron HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO

Founder S Saxon Barton



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RICHARD III: HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AS KING OF ENGLAND

With the announcement of the results of the tests on the Greyfriars skeleton only weeks away it is a timely opportunity to focus on Richard III's achievements during his short reign of twenty-six months

The discovery of a human skeleton on the site of the Greyfriars in Leicester and the prospect of this being confirmed as the remains of Richard III has reignited the five hundred year old debate that has raged over his reputation and given him new relevance.

Richard III was an innovative king of England; initiatives such as the Council of the North, an early example of devolution, lasted until the mid-seventeenth century; his legal reforms continued long after his death, with some still embedded in our laws today. Noteworthy aspects of his reign include:

- being the first king to use English to swear his coronation oath and to record acts of parliament.
- a commitment to fair play in the judicial system: his actions and proclamations stressing that his laws were to be administered impartially without delay or favour.
- development of an early form of Legal Aid, which provided support for those unable to afford lawyers by allowing people to make direct petitions to the Royal Council. Under Henry VII this became the Court of Requests

Richard III's only parliament met in January 1484, and was notable for its enlightened legislation which helped the lower classes as much as the gentry and merchants.

- There was a particular emphasis on addressing maladministration and reducing the risk of bribery amongst jurors. Action was also taken to abolish forced loans to the crown, restoring Parliament's prerogative to vote all taxes to the king. Bail was introduced so that the accused were not imprisoned or their goods confiscated until they were found guilty, helping to establish in English law a person's innocence until guilt is proven.
- By the 1480s the common law had become complicated and open to fraud particularly with land disputes; Richard's Parliament simplified conveyancing and made it more transparent.
- The fledging book printing industry was helped by the removal of trade restrictions, a policy reflecting the king's own personal interest in books. Richard III actively encouraged the expansion of the book trade and its skills-base; an enlightened attitude that contrasts so favourably with that of his successors.

Richard's detractors sometimes suggest his actions as king were insincere attempts to court popularity; however this is lazy acquiescence with the traditional and politically biased accounts of his reign. His record both as king and duke of Gloucester provides evidence of a genuine interest in the law and a commitment to the fair administration of justice for all. It is time his achievements were acknowledged and celebrated.

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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

Peter Secchi

+44 7780 866225

peter@crunchcommunications.co.uk

www.richardiii.net

Wendy Moorhen

+44 7525 002135

wendy.moorhen@btinternet.com