

RICHARD III SOCIETY

Patron HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO



Founder:
S Saxon Barton

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REVEALING THE FACE OF THE GREYFRIARS SKELETON

- Richard III Society announces funding of the facial reconstruction

A facial reconstruction is currently in progress aimed at revealing what may be the features of King Richard III.

In August the search for King Richard's grave, led by the University of Leicester in association with Leicester City Council and the Richard III Society, excited world attention. In September a male skeleton was unearthed at the Greyfriars site in Leicester.

Although the identity of the skeleton is not confirmed, the Richard III Society has commissioned a facial reconstruction, based on a CT scan taken by the University of Leicester, to be carried out by a leading expert in facial anthropology.

The resulting reconstruction is expected to feature in a Channel 4 programme early in 2013, which will document the life of King Richard and the search for his grave. Following transmission the Society will make the reconstruction available to the media.

No portraits of Richard III survive from his lifetime, nor any detailed physical descriptions apart from comments on his slim build and 'quite slender limbs'. He was certainly smaller than his brother, King Edward IV, who was well over 6 feet and corpulent in later life.

The best known of the earliest surviving portraits of Richard III are those from the Royal Collection and the Society of Antiquaries. Dendrochronology dates them both from the second decade of the sixteenth century; they were probably based on lost originals painted during the king's lifetime. In the early 1970s the Royal Collection portrait was x-rayed to reveal that at a later date the right shoulder had been made to look higher than the left. Other features had also been altered, in particular the right eye, nose and mouth in order to portray a more stern and determined expression consistent with the image of the Tudor and Shakespearian inspired myth of the 'deformed villain'. The second portrait, owned by the Society of Antiquaries, was cleaned and conserved in 2007 and it was found that the mouth had been similarly altered but the restored painting shows a more genial expression.

Perhaps the most popular image of King Richard III is the one in the National Portrait Gallery. It was the inspiration for Josephine Tey's novel 'The Daughter of Time', where it inspired her fictional detective to investigate the mystery of the Princes in the Tower. It was probably copied from a copy of a lost original and it dates from over a century after his death and may not be entirely accurate.

Richard III Society chairman, Dr Phil Stone, has commented 'For centuries the true face and character of Richard III have been hidden behind propaganda and spin. The Richard III Society has worked hard for nearly ninety years to promote a more positive view of the king, and if the Greyfriars skeleton proves to be him, we are close to seeing what we hope will be his true likeness. We are delighted to provide the financial support for the reconstruction; the revealing of the face will potentially be both an historic and poignant occasion for all who have an interest in this much misunderstood king.'

Philippa Langley, Originator of the search for the King, added, "It's taken nearly four years to get to this position in the Looking For Richard project. To be at the point of seeing what could be the face of the last warrior King of England is an incredibly exciting prospect. I cannot thank the Richard III Society enough for funding, without hesitation, what could be a truly breath-taking step in the search for the real Richard III."

Meanwhile, scientists at the University of Leicester continue their rigorous forensic tests on the fallen warrior found at the Greyfriars site. The location of the grave, together with physical signs of scoliosis and battle wounds, raises serious hopes that the search for King Richard has been successful. However the University caution that it is still too early to confirm the skeleton's identity; the results of their investigations are expected early in the New Year.

A positive identification in scientific terms may of course never be forthcoming, but whoever the skeleton belongs to this commission by the Richard III Society will take us closer to seeing its facial features. This face may well prove to be that of a king whose likeness has for so long been misrepresented and distorted.

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The Richard III Society is proud of its partnership with the University of Leicester and Leicester City Council through the 'Looking for Richard' project.

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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.

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