

The Richard III Society

Promoting research into the life and times of Richard III since 1924

Patron: HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO, Founder S Saxon Barton



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THE HOURS OF RICHARD III

- **King Richard reunited with his prayer book**
- **The origin of the Hours**
- **Debunking the ‘myth’ about his personal prayer**
- **The king’s piety**
- **Society helps fund the facsimile of the Hours**

When King Richard III’s mortal remains entered Leicester Cathedral on Monday they were reunited with his personal prayer book, known as *The Hours of Richard III*. The manuscript, which is normally kept at Lambeth Palace Library, and known as Lambeth Ms. 474, has been loaned by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Dean and Chapter of Leicester Cathedral. It will be used for the services during the re-interment week and thereafter, will remain in Leicester for a further three months before being returned to Lambeth Palace.

This Book of Hours was not originally made for King Richard III but was produced in London around 1420 for an unknown owner, possibly a cleric. It is a text of unusual length and has some distinctive features. Sometime after his coronation King Richard chose to use the manuscript as his personal book of hours; presumably both its liturgical contents and its decoration appealed to him. During his reign King Richard added at least ten pages of personal devotional text, including the prayer which has become known as ‘King Richard’s prayer’ but which was also used by others in the fifteenth century. This is the last *Hours* he owned – it was probably found in his tent after Bosworth. The additions King Richard made to the Book suggest he only obtained it after the death of his son, Edward and his wife, Anne (Neville). The unique word in his copy of the Prayer which he added to the book is *dolor* (grief).

The editor of the Richard III Society’s scholarly journal, *The Ricardian*, the historian Anne Sutton, together with fellow historian and Society member, Livia Visser-Fuchs, studied the manuscript and their research was published by the Richard III & Yorkist History Trust, the Society’s charitable arm, in 1990, under the title *The Hours of Richard III*. By studying the text the king would have read every day of his brief reign, Sutton and Visser-Fuchs’ provided, for the first time, a sound basis for considering and evaluating Richard’s piety. It can be argued that an individual’s religious convictions are fundamental to an understanding of their character and behaviour. King Richard’s piety has provoked speculation in that it was a result more of his ‘crimes’ and the need to atone. Parts of the *Hours* have been taken out of context, especially his ‘prayer’, and used as evidence for this without any full analysis or understanding of the manuscript.

In contrast, Sutton and Visser Fuchs' book provides a comprehensive assessment of Richard III's piety, considering both his private devotion and public piety, wisely noting that his faith was between himself and God 'which is ultimately unknowable and unmeasurable'. By close study of the King's 'personal prayer' they argue that after analysing and comparing the text 'there is nothing ominously unique in his choice' or that he had any 'sense of guilt'. They concluded that in his public piety King Richard 'seems to have passed with flying colours' and his religious foundations 'responded to the demands placed on a prince to provide prayers for the living and the dead'. Sadly, we do not have any extant documents written by King Richard himself which might throw light on his personal piety, so the *Hours* is a vital source for any assessment. That it was 'simple and unostentatious' in content and is known 'specifically for its many prayers' perhaps indicates its appeal to the King. They concluded that 'Richard's religion was that of the later middle ages, humanised, fervent and personal within the strong and controlling framework of the church'.

When the original manuscript of King Richard's *Hours* is returned to Lambeth Palace its place in Leicester Cathedral will be permanently filled with a facsimile, allowing future visitors to appreciate this modest and beautiful work of art. The Richard III Society is proud to have contributed to the cost of its production.

-ENDS-

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*.

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The reinterment of King Richard III – with dignity, honour and solemnity