

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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RICHARD III'S SCOLIOSIS: A CONDITION NOT A DEFORMITY

- **King Richard suffered from scoliosis and not from kyphosis – he was not a ‘hunchback’**
- **Why was King Richard portrayed as a ‘hunchback’**
- **Scoliosis is a common condition which presents challenges**
- **The challenges can be overcome**

One of the most important outcomes from the Greyfriars dig and the identification of the remains of King Richard III was the confirmation that the King had scoliosis. Scoliosis is a condition in which the spinal column bends to the side and the vertebrae rotate, pulling the rib cage round to produce a protrusion on the back. It can result in one shoulder being slightly higher than the other, in the case of Richard III's skeleton; the right shoulder.

The evidence clearly shows the king did not have kyphosis, which can result in a hunchback, contrary to the historical myths about his physical appearance. 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. However, it is now a known medical fact that scoliosis in most cases does not cause a ‘hunchback’ or ‘crookback’ and today it is unacceptable and insensitive to refer to people affected with scoliosis in these terms.

Although many people have not heard of scoliosis it is surprisingly common; in the UK between three and four in every 1,000 children need treatment for the condition. Nowadays it can be corrected by surgery, although those with the condition still face challenges in their lives. The Scoliosis Society notes that many are inspired by older siblings to overcome such challenges so King Richard III may well have been similarly inspired by his charismatic elder brother, King Edward IV. As the Duke of Gloucester and as King, Richard led an active life as an effective administrator and military commander. He rode horses in full body armour and wielded a sword in battle, demonstrating that scoliosis doesn't necessarily limit physical capability.

Dominic Smee has a form of scoliosis similar to King Richard's and for last year's Channel 4 documentary, *Richard III: The New Evidence*, Dominic was subject to various riding and training tests to determine if the condition could have had any negative effects on the King's ability to fight in battle.

Dominic commented, 'All things considered, my experience in the programme has only bolstered my respect for an incredibly courageous and brave man.'

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 and described the King as lean, with delicate arms and legs and that he was 'three fingers taller' than Poppelau himself.

In this week of Richard III's reburial it is time to end the lazy acquiescence with the Tudor and Shakespearean myths, King Richard III was no hunchback, he did not have a withered arm and, if he suffered from scoliosis that is no reason to denigrate him. We rightly celebrate the achievements of all who overcome disabilities; we should do no less for King Richard III.

-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*.

Visit www.richardiii.net

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