

# Looking for RICHARD – the follow-up

## Two papers and a documentary

Following the successful Greyfriars excavation there has been a regular flow of new research papers and documentaries. Since the last *Bulletin* we have had two more papers and a new documentary.

*The Lancet* recently published a paper entitled 'Perimortem Trauma in King Richard III: a skeletal analysis' by a team of authors including Jo Appleby, Bob Woosnam-Savage, Turi King, Mathew Morris and Richard Buckley (*The Lancet*, Early Online Publication, 17 September 2014).

The paper concluded that:

The injuries were consistent with those created by weapons from the later medieval period. We could not identify the specific order of the injuries, because they were all distinct, with no overlapping wounds. Three of the injuries – two to the inferior cranium and one to the pelvis – could have been fatal. The wounds to the skull suggest that Richard was not wearing a helmet, although the absence of defensive wounds on his arms and hands suggests he was still otherwise armoured. Therefore, the potentially fatal pelvis injury was probably received post mortem, meaning that the most likely injuries to have caused his death are the two to the inferior cranium.

The full paper can be accessed at:

[www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)60804-7/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)60804-7/fulltext).

*The Journal of Archaeological Science* published a paper in October 2014 entitled 'Multi-isotope Analysis Demonstrates Significant Lifestyle Changes in King Richard III', authored by Angela L. Lamb, Jane E. Evans, Richard Buckley and Jo Appleby. The article can be accessed at:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305440314002428>.

This paper formed the basis for the television documentary *Richard III: the new evidence*. Regrettably, some aspects were rather taken out of context by the programme makers, leading to some tabloid-style headlines about Richard III's apparent excessive eating and drinking. Professor Jane Evans, one of the papers authors, has kindly provided us with a summary of the scientific findings, at the same time setting Richard's diet in its proper context. We've used this very interesting article for this issue's The Man Himself, which can be found on p. 51.

Sue Taylor kindly provided the following summary of the programme, which was shown on Channel 4 on 17 August:

This intriguing documentary set out to investigate just what Richard III would have been capable of, given his scoliosis of the spine. Using the latest scientific evidence

from examination of his skeleton and the services of a 'body double', the programme demonstrated Richard's fighting abilities and physical state after becoming king. His spine was bent at an 80° angle, some joints were normal, but the thoracic bones showed signs of osteoarthritis, which might have caused him pain. Dominic Smee, 27, saw reports on TV of the discovery of Richard's scoliosis and realised it was very similar to his own. He willingly volunteered to act as Richard's double, taking part in experiments specifically designed to test his mobility and strength. On examination, his scoliosis proved to be almost exactly the same as Richard's.

Initial tests were positive, but on the treadmill, Dominic tired easily and became breathless due to rib displacement restricting his lung capacity. He then went on to ride a horse and be fitted with medieval-style armour and take part in hand-to-hand combat. His armour, fitted by a Swedish expert, had to be personally tailored due to his condition, but once he was fully dressed his condition was not visible. Meanwhile, further examination of Richard's bones revealed that there was a change in his diet once he became king, with a wider variety of food, especially meats, and a higher consumption of wine.

The next challenge for Dominic Smee was to recreate Richard III's last 1,000-metre cavalry charge at Bosworth. The medieval-style saddle, with stiff supports back and front, actually helped Dominic, being more secure for him than a modern saddle. He made the charge successfully and hit the waiting quintain, thus proving that, when fully armed and mounted on horseback, Richard would have been a formidable warrior. Once dismounted, however, he would have been more vulnerable.

In conclusion, the programme proved that Richard III's scoliosis would not have prevented him from being an effective force on the battlefield. He would have had to be very fit, trained for battle since childhood. The contribution of Dominic Smee helped the scientists bring to life the king's likely capabilities.

We asked Dominic if he would be willing to share his experiences of the programme with the *Bulletin*, he agreed and his story follows.

## ***Richard III: the new evidence – Dominic's story***

King Richard III was publicly diagnosed with severe adolescent onset idiopathic thoracic scoliosis during Channel 4/DSP's *Richard III: the unseen story* documentary, a follow up from *The King in the Car Park*, a documentary that would capture the discovery of the remains of the last king of England to die in battle, and soon inspire a global media frenzy. This programme fascinated and intrigued me as I also have the same type of scoliosis and the degree of my curve looked to be very similar to Richard's.



**Dominic Smee, who suffers from the exact same form of scoliosis as Richard III.** Photo courtesy of Channel 4.

Due to this apparent similarity, I volunteered to take part in a documented experiment to find out whether it was possible for me to replicate some of Richard's recorded achievements. To determine whether he was in fact crippled because of his scoliosis, I was to undergo intensive riding and fighting training to prepare me for a final test at the end of a gruelling four months. During the course of filming, I went to Sweden to have some parts of armour custom-made by Per Lillelund Jensen, an armorer personally recommended by Dr Tobias Capwell. The aim was to discover whether or not it was possible to build a working harness for somebody with severe scoliosis. In doing so we could then suppose that Richard's own armorer may have tackled his physiological differences in a similar way.

During the final shoot at the end of the programme, we filmed a sequence where I was sitting on a vaulting horse, surrounded by halberdiers. We were trying to demonstrate how easily Richard could have defended himself, on an incapacitated mount – stuck in a swamp. The plan was to film a little of that with me and have a stunt double come in and get dragged off – for real. In a dramatic turn of events, one of the halberdiers

unwittingly hooked his weapon onto my war hammer and pulled me over, simulating the saddle being cut and the king dragged off to his death. I cover what went through my mind at this very moment in the following excerpt from the book that I am writing:

Surrounded! Betrayed! Abandoned! There are too many – we cannot hold! Where are my men? The merciless onslaught of blows continues to assault me. My arms grow heavy; my body shudders from the relentless attacks. I force myself to carry on; to stand to the last.

Left by God and country to die . . . my heart sags under the hopelessness of it all. I watch as the legs of my loyal standard bearer are cruelly hacked off.

I raise my arm in protest to block a halberd, but I cannot stop them all. I desperately twist and turn, panic rising as I fight for my life, seeking to parry and deflect the inevitable. The beak of my war hammer is hooked around my opponent's weapon and the world starts to blur. I tense.

Overcome by a sense of finality; powerless to act, I am paralysed. My armour, once a fortress of protection, was to be my undoing, my tomb. A thousand thoughts flash unwittingly across my mind as I am dragged from my mount.

CRASH! I hit the ground. My face thrust forwards, a mouthful of grass, aware yet blind, focused yet frantic. Anger bubbles up within as I struggle in vain to prize myself from the dead weight pinning my prone form to the sodden, marshy ground. Once my noble steed had carried me into battle, now he violently thrashes in defiant death throes. Feeling humiliated, and punished by a curvature of the spine, I can do nothing to neither confront nor escape the oncoming hail of blows soon to be raining down upon my stricken body. I feel my crown unceremoniously torn from my head. My final thought; 'Traitors!', as my body is punctured, pummelled and pillaged.

An unseen connection tied; a strand of the past united with the present; a sole witness through the visor of time. Suddenly, abruptly, I am acutely aware of how Richard may have felt in his last moments. Once a king, now just a man scrambling to survive – raw, uncontrolled primal fury lashing out desperately, clinging, clawing onto life at any cost.

Throughout the whole process I struggled with my levels of strength. I know that Richard was also described as being of gracile build and of little strength. There is some conjecture as to whether this is describing his physical characteristics, or just the charging force accompanying him. My scoliosis does cause me to tire quickly in certain situations, but many of the combative techniques require muscles that we rarely use in everyday life. Richard would have conditioned his body from an early age to do this, so the question is, would he have noticed the same issue? We do know that Richard believed his sword arm was cursed, which, in my opinion might be in reference to a reduction in either mobility or physical capacity to do what he required of it, because of his scoliosis.

I think having scoliosis has gifted me a level of wisdom. By being disadvantaged, I have felt like you have to work harder to get where you want to be, so you are constantly analysing things to determine the best course of action. Richard's scoliosis may have led him to have an awareness of who and what was important. Because of his own weakness, he may have been able to see the value in everybody around him, which is why he did so much for the common man, and had such a loyal following.

All things considered, my experience in the *Richard III: the new evidence* programme has only bolstered my respect for an incredibly courageous man. He lived his life in appreciation of the chevalier, and went out in a heroic last stand. He protected the weak and the innocent by introducing the bail system and court of requests. He was pious, loyal and devoted. He was a scapegoat for Tudor propaganda, and betrayed by those around him.

Dominic Smee

## Richard III: the king in the car park portrayed as the 'office psychopath', a glutton and a 'Star Wars character'

### Introduction

During July Martin Freeman's controversial new production of *Richard III* received both praise and proscription from the reviewers (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Evening Standard* and *Times* 10/7, *The Lady* 18/7, *Theatre Record* July and *Sunday Times* 31/8). His production was set in a London office during the 1979 'Winter of Discontent' and Richard was portrayed as a psychopath. Drowning the duke of Clarence in a goldfish tank upset some vegans and animal rights activists, who were concerned about the well-being of the fish (*Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* 13/9, *Sunday Times* 14/9). Freeman's decision to cut parts of the text and add some new material, including the murder of Anne Neville, prompted comment. However, it should be remembered that cutting part of one of Shakespeare's cycle of history plays is not really a radical step, as the three parts of *Henry VI* are regularly abridged. This year's prize for the worst adaptation of *Richard III* should be awarded to the *Drag King Richard III* (*Times* 31/7). In 2016 the BBC's new *Richard III* will be broadcast as part of *The Hollow Crown*, their ongoing adaptation of Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses plays (*Times* 2/10).

On 26 July the new £4.5 million Richard III Visitor Centre in Leicester opened, allowing the public to view his empty grave and a 3D replica of his skeleton (*Guardian* 23/7; *Daily Telegraph* 25/7; *Leicester Mercury* 23–25/7, 4/9 and 9/9 and *Current Archaeology* September). Prof. Housley stated that the new 'centre does the last Plantagenet proud' (*Leicester Mercury* 28/7). However, it has not received universal acclaim, as an image of Richard III in his suit of white-painted armour makes him look like a 'Star Wars' stormtrooper. Annette Carson has described Richard's white armour as 'grotesque' and the projected image of the king in his grave as 'ghoulish' (*Daily Telegraph*, *Metro*, *Times*

*We asked Dominic to tell us more about the book he is planning:*

'Very briefly, the book I'm writing will talk about the events leading up to my involvement in the documentary, as well as my experience in the programme (in much more detail than you will get from the programme or in any subsequent talks or Q&As). It has been a journey of self-discovery, as much as an experiment uncovering more about Richard. I have re-evaluated myself and my scoliosis, certainly over the years that it developed, but especially during the filming of the programme. The book will talk about this process, the ups and the downs. How I felt along the way, and how I coped with it all. I will share my own life experiences, and how everything has contributed to giving me a few ideas about Richard the warrior, and Richard the man. It will probably finish with my experience having been on television and how my life has changed, and how I see my future. But who knows, it could change yet again as I write it.'

30/7, and *Times HE* 7/8). Richard's Society of Antiquaries portrait was No 70 in a list of '100 objects to see in the UK that bring history to life' (*Daily Mail* 3/9).

The debate over where Richard III should be reburied has even reached Test Match Special, when Yorkshire cricketing legend Geoffrey Boycott 'complained that the remains of Richard III have been "pinched" by Leicester to make money'. This allegation was immediately refuted by Leicestershire cricket commentator Jonathan Agnew (*Independent i* and *Leicester Mercury* 11/8). Meanwhile details concerning the events connected with the king's reburial in Leicester Cathedral on 26 March 2015 have been released (*Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* 8/8). The Plantagenet Alliance were dismayed that the Queen was taking no formal interest in the reburial of her '14th great-grand uncle'. Their chairman, Stephen Nicolay, stated 'the reinterment of a former monarch should be an issue of national significance. Any such reburial should have the input of the royal household.' (*Times* 21/8). Leicester Cathedral caused more 'controversy' by their clumsy attempt to recoup some of the costs of constructing Richard's new tomb by seeking individual donations of £2,500 'for attendance at a private service marking the entry of the confined remains of Richard III' into the cathedral on 22 March, at the start of the week-long reinterment commemoration (*Daily Mail* and *Times* 2/9). Cathedral representatives have admitted that they expect this event to raise £100,000 (*Leicester Mercury* 4/9). But, the Chapter would do well to remember Christ's words when he drove the money-changers and vendors from the Temple: 'Stop making my Father's house a market place!' (John 2:16). Richard's actual reburial service will be probably be conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Justin Welby, and his Roman Catholic 'equivalent', Cardinal Vincent Nichols (*Daily Telegraph*, *Leicester Mercury* and *Times* 8/9). The 'debacle' over Richard's reinterment and the new 'installation' commemorating his life in the Cathedral gardens provoked adverse comments (*Leicester Mercury* 23/7 and 28/7).

In August the publication of new multi-isotope analysis of elements of Richard III's skeletal remains, revealed evidence of a significant change of diet toward the end of his life (when he