

Eulogy for King Richard III

We are assembled today to commit the mortal remains of an anointed King of England to their final resting place in this Cathedral. This is not a funeral at which we mourn, but rather a service of remembrance that provides a dignified context for the re-interment of the last King of England to die in battle. The Franciscan friars who buried King Richard in haste in 1485 will have accorded him a simple funeral, but nothing on a scale that befits a king. In the events that culminate in this service, Richard has been treated with a wholly proper dignity. He has lain in repose since Sunday evening's service of compline, and thousands of people have been able to pay their respects. Now we must return his bones to the earth.

Richard was a son of the Midlands who had strong ties with the North and South of England, and with Wales. He was born at Fotheringhay, his family seat in Northamptonshire, 35 miles east of here. He died at Bosworth Field, in Leicestershire, 14 miles west of here, and was buried in the Franciscan church a few yards from this Cathedral. When he was seven, he moved with his mother to London, and a few months later his father and his elder brother Edmund were killed in battle. When the Lancastrian forces reached London, Richard and his surviving brother were sent to Utrecht and then Bruges for safety. Richard returned to England for his brother's coronation, and a few months later he was created duke of Gloucester, at the age of nine. He entered the household of the earl of Warwick, where he was to remain until he was 16. Thereafter he became constable of England and chief minister of Wales. In 1471, Richard was granted the Neville Castle in

Middleham, where he had lived for almost three years as a child, and so established a strong link with Yorkshire. When he was appointed steward of the duchy of Lancaster, he became, in effect, the representative of the crown in the north of England as well as the most powerful figure in Wales.

In June 1483 Richard, aged 30, was proclaimed King of England; 26 months later, aged 32, he was dead, slain at Bosworth Field, and his body was carried in ignominy to Leicester. Richard's posthumous reputation has been less than glorious, because in the sixteenth century, many people, including Shakespeare, judged him harshly. In recent decades, however, that adverse judgement has been challenged. Indeed, Richard III has the greatest following of all English monarchs, apart from our present Queen. Organisations such as the Richard III Society are the visible manifestations of a sentiment that draws huge numbers of people to King Richard.

We have assembled in a spirit of reconciliation, not to enter into argument about whether or not Richard was a good king, or even a good man. We do, however, remember some of the indisputable facts of his life. He was a faithful son of the church. He was committed to equity and legal process. He had a form of scoliosis that gave his back an unusual appearance and so may have distressed him. His only legitimate son, Prince Edward, died about the age of nine in 1484; according to one chronicler, Richard and his Queen were for a long time 'almost out of their minds with grief'; more than five centuries later, those words still have the power to move us. A year later, Richard's consort, 28-year-old Queen Anne, followed their son to the grave; she is buried in Westminster Abbey. Richard was also predeceased by his sister

Anne of York, the Duchess of Exeter, who is buried in St George's Chapel, Windsor. Lady Anne has been an important presence in the genetic analysis of the bones found in the car park a few yards from here, because mitochondrial DNA is passed down through the female line. Richard inherited his mitochondrial DNA from his mother, and his sister passed it down through the generations, where those who inherited it include Michael Ibsen, who not only assisted the University with its research, but also built the coffin in which King Richard will soon be buried.

The recovery and identification of the bones of King Richard were the work of the University of Leicester's archaeology team, led by Richard Buckley, and of scientists and historians in other University departments. Beyond the University, valuable assistance has been afforded by Philippa Langley (on behalf of the Richard III Society and the Looking for Richard Project), Sir Peter Soulsby, our mayor (on behalf of the City of Leicester), The Right Reverend Tim Stevens, our Bishop (on behalf of the Church) and Lady Gretton, our Lord Lieutenant (on behalf of the Crown). All these people, and many others, have contributed to the process that has culminated in this service, in which we commit the mortal remains of King Richard to their final resting place. *Requiescat in pace.*

Written by Professor Gordon Campbell