

Information Pack 6: Remembering Richard III

Once Leicester Cathedral had been designated as the site for Richard III's reinterment, the cathedral chapter decided to develop a space dedicated to Richard's memory that would include his tomb. Richard's life was also remembered during the reburial week in March 2015, which involved members of the local Leicestershire community and was broadcast live by Channel 4. Both the tomb and the events brought together Christian symbolism and national history in order to remember Richard not only as a king of England, but as a human being.

Richard III's Tomb

The design of a physical monument to Richard's life became a contentious issue. As early as 2010 the Looking for Richard project had commissioned designs for a tomb in preparation for Richard's possible rediscovery. Designed by Dr David and Wendy Johnson, the tomb was intended to be simple and to reflect the king's "personal religious preferences". It was to be decorated with Richard's heraldic symbols, such as the white rose of the House of York and Richard's personal emblem of a boar, upon cream stone and with Richard's titles and motto, "Loyaulte me lie", inscribed upon the surface in gold. The motto was seen by many Ricardians as an important statement of Richard's morality, of the loyalty which was "an intrinsic part of his character". As such, the tomb would embody and impart a 'rehabilitated' view of Richard's life to future generations, one which could reverse the long-standing Tudor vision of his reign.

Meanwhile, the Dean and Chapter of Leicester Cathedral developed their own approach to the presentation of Richard's memory within the context of a one-million-pound redevelopment of the cathedral's interior. Initially the cathedral proposed that Richard be commemorated by a simple stone slab in the cathedral floor, but this suggestion was met by a particularly negative reaction with 91% of respondents to an online *Leicester Mercury* poll voting in favour of a tomb. Subsequently, the cathedral envisioned a monument which would impart an open message about Christian faith. As the only tomb within the cathedral, Rev. Alison Adams explained that Richard III's presence should convey a more general teaching to all visitors of "our shared human life, and the search for meaning beyond this material world".

In June 2014 Leicester Cathedral's final design for the tomb was unveiled. Situated in a particularly holy place within an ambulatory to the east of the cathedral (a homage to the spot within the friary where Richard III was found), the tomb would be carved out of Swaledale Fossil Stone, the "long dead creatures immortalised in stone" reflecting Richard's own transition from long-lost to forever remembered. The tomb would be raised slightly towards the east and incised with a cross which would enable the light of the rising sun to flood the design. Finally, it would be placed upon a black marble plinth inscribed with Richard's arms, name and motto. The divergence from the Looking for Richard team's own proposal provoked some opposition. Philippa Langley argued that a *Leicester Mercury* poll had shown that 79% of respondents opposed the slashed cross design, which they argued dishonoured Richard by reminding visitors of his ignominious death and the mutilation of his body as it was borne to Leicester. Moreover, she objected to the inscription of his name upon black stone, suggesting that this symbolised Shakespeare's "black legend". While the Very Rev. David Monteith respected Langley's views, he responded that "Richard III doesn't belong to Philippa nor the Richard III Society, he belongs to the nation", and therefore he supported the cathedral's decision to promote a universal message.

Evidently, the debates concerning Richard's tomb reveal a contest over *which* Richard and what memory would be immortalised. While both the cathedral and 'Looking for Richard' team wished to show Richard's piety in life, the Looking for Richard project adopted a more dynastic and traditional approach, while Leicester Cathedral proposed a 'modern' design which would impart a Christian message to future, cosmopolitan visitors. As the only tomb within the cathedral of a proudly multicultural city, Richard III's is a space where national history and personal faith can converge with minimal bias about the controversial questions of the past.



A tomb fit for a king? Left, the Johnsons' design for Richard's tomb rendered by *Lost in Castles* (© Looking for Richard Project 2013); right, the final tomb design by architects van Heningen and Haward (Credit: Leicester Cathedral, <http://leicestercathedral.org/about-us/richard-iii/richard-iii-tomb-burial/>)

Richard III's Reburial Week

Richard's reburial week comprised a series of events which took place in Leicester between 22nd and 28th March 2015, beginning with a procession from the University of Leicester to Bosworth Field and ending at Leicester Cathedral, where the king was buried at the end of the week before his tomb was revealed to the public. These ceremonies provided an opportunity for the local community and the nation more generally to engage with the memory of Richard III and to celebrate his life.

The procession of Richard's remains from the university to the cathedral was organised in order to reflect upon his final days as king and the historic significance of his death. Although some critics argued that this procession represented a morbid re-enactment of Richard's final journey to Leicester after his death, the Richard III Society expressed early support for the proposals. The initial idea for processions even included several weeks' worth of events, though this was narrowed down to a single day after university experts expressed their concern for the fragility of Richard's remains. These were taken by hearse from the university to Bosworth battlefield, before moving on to Leicester via the parish churches of Dadlington (where some of the dead from the battle are buried) and Sutton Cheney (where Richard may have had his last mass). The cortege then proceeded to Bow Bridge in Leicester, where the remains were transferred to a horse-drawn carriage which bore them to the cathedral. After the compline service which marked the reception of Richard's remains, they were laid in state for three days prior to reinterment, offering visitors the opportunity to pay their respects. Together, these events emphasised local communities' connections to Richard III's history while enabling the public to express their respects both in the cathedral and by attending or witnessing the processions.

The educational potential of Richard III's reinterment was demonstrated by the involvement of local schoolchildren in the reburial events, thereby promoting the transmission of Richard's memory while engaging children in medieval history. Two hundred schoolchildren from ten schools across Leicester participated in art workshops in order to create eighty pennants which would feature in the procession from Bow Bridge to the cathedral. Likewise, pupils from the King Richard III Infant School created woollen bags to hold some of Richard's remains within the ossuary, and others at Bosworth Academy fashioned 5,929 white roses to decorate the procession route, doubly poignant as each rose represented an instance of a Leicestershire citizen going missing every year. Not only did these projects enable the creative involvement of schoolchildren in a national and historic

event, but it tied them directly to local history through their active participation and underlined their association with Richard III's modern memory.

Through the elaboration of plans for Richard III's tomb and reburial, public understandings of his memory and history were given a new physical and enduring representation. Once again debates emerged reflecting the diversity of perspectives surrounding Richard's life, and a contest over *which* Richard would be portrayed. The cathedral's decision to promote an inclusive religious message, without condemnation or rehabilitation of Richard's life, means that many people today with a variety of beliefs, be they faiths or historical perspectives on Richard's life, can view Richard's tomb and reflect upon the human experience throughout history. The reburial week marked an extraordinarily significant moment in Leicester's local history, and the widespread participation of the entire community ensured the transmission of Richard's memory through active participation.

Sources

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