



Digging for Richard III: The Search for the Lost King

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In 2012, archaeologists found the grave of Richard III. Its sight had been unknown for centuries. The quest had taken years of preparation followed by intensive archaeological study and almost no one had expected a result. As the astonishing story of the discovery emerged, millions watched around the world.

First came the news that archaeologists were searching for a king in a parking lot. Next it was said they had located the church where Richard had been buried. Finally it was announced that a skeleton with a curved spine and battle wounds had been found and was thought to be that of Richard. Archaeologists urged caution as media frenzy led to questions in Parliament. The scientific consensus came early in 2013. All the studies, including analysis of anatomy, DNA, high-resolution scanning and a digital facial reconstruction, led to the conclusion that the skeleton was indeed Richard III, England's most disputed monarch and the probable murderer of the Princes in the Tower.

The events of Richard III's reign and his death in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth are known worldwide, made popular by Shakespeare's most performed, filmed and translated history play. *Digging for Richard III* is the page-turning story of how his grave was found and the people behind the discovery. It is the first complete narrative of a project that blended passion, science, luck and detection. Told by a noted archaeologist with access to all the parties involved, it follows the quest from an idea born in an Edinburgh bookshop to the day, fourteen years later, when two archaeologists carefully raised the bones from the parking lot in Leicester, and the scientific studies that resulted.

The vivid tale of a king, his demise and his rediscovery, this is also an insider's gripping account of how modern archaeology, forensics and the meticulous analysis of clues can come together to create a narrative worthy of the finest detective fiction.

Digging for Richard III: The Search for the Lost King Details

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John says

This book could easily have been some boring academic treatise but it is exactly the opposite. It is one of the most interesting books I have read in a long time. It covers Richard III's life and death at Bosworth, one lady's obsession with his story and getting him found, convincing groups to fund an archeological dig, the dig itself, reassembling the skeleton, identifying injuries, reconstructing his face and finally DNA confirmation that the skeleton actually is Richard III. An easy read that just rips along like a good mystery should.

This will be one of my all time favourite books!

Larraine says

"History is written by the victors." Winston Churchill

As a 12 yr old, I read a book called The Last Plantagenet, an utterly romantic book of historical fiction narrated by a young commoner who is the mistress of Richard III. The author makes the case, through this narration, that Richard III was vilified by history. Josephine Tey wrote a book about a bed bound detective who investigates the story and finds enough in the historical record to indicate that Richard III was NOT the villain that Shakespeare made him out to be. (Regardless of that, Richard III is an amazing play. The film starring Ian McClellan which places Richard III in a 1930's Nazi Britain is wonderful.) Shakespeare was, after all, trying to make the regime, Tudors, look good. Or so some would say. Perhaps he truly believed the stories that make Richard out to be evil and twisted, both in body and mind. A few months ago, I was listening to NPR which featured an interview with Mike Pitts, British archaeologist and author of this book. Happily, our library bought some copies. This is a fascinating and (mostly) absorbing book. It demonstrates the power of an individual, in this case, Philippa Langley, a screenwriter and "presenter" who fell ill and took a book with her on vacation - one that most of us would not pick up. It was a book written in the 50's that said that history had it all wrong: Richard III was actually a good guy. By sheer force of will and her ability to connect with people, she literally gets the ball rolling. Who knew that there are Ricardian societies all over the world who love Richard III and defend his honor? Ms. Langley was able to get them excited enough to help with the project financially. The rest of the story is in this book. What got me interested was learning that they had found his skeleton under a car park in Leicestershire. If history and/or archaeology interest you, then get this book. It's a blast.

Damaskcat says

This is a totally fascinating and compelling book and is as exciting as an adventure story. It tells how Philippa Langley became interested in Richard III and determined to find his grave having had a feeling she knew exactly where it was. The task was taken on by an archaeological unit in Leicester which undertakes

digs for the construction industry and local authorities when new building work is taking place to ensure that historical evidence is not overlooked and destroyed.

Their investigation had two aims - to find the site of the long demolished Grey Friars in the centre of Leicester and also to try and find Richard III's grave. Richard Buckley, the head of the archaeological unit thought finding Richard III's grave was a totally outside chance but he did believe they would find Grey Friars as all the records pointed to the area where they were going to dig.

The book is well written with plenty of notes at the end of the book and a bibliography for those who want to read more about Richard III and the investigation. I was completely absorbed in this book to the extent that I read for about three hours yesterday afternoon without moving. It is that sort of book. If you've ever watched Time Team or similar archaeological programmes you will love this.

Alex Farrand says

Honestly, it wasn't what I wanted to read. Note to self: read the full title. I missed the "Digging For" and only read Richard III. I expected to read some information about this malignant man. Oh well. It was interesting once they got to the analysis of the skeleton, and when I do read more information about him I know the truth of some features, like his back.

Pamela ?I Blame Wizards? says

There is a lot to be said for a writer with an academic background who can make history and academic sciences appealing and accessible to the general reading public. Mike Pitts in 'Digging for Richard III' has achieved this with panache.

With an historical context for every step of the journey, we can follow Richard through birth to death, through popular culture, and even modern prejudices. No stone is left unturned, and it is refreshing to see a book focus on the archaeology itself within a broader historical context.

Mike Pitts writes in a way which is wholly accessible. He has an ease of style which makes this book a joy to read. He doesn't inundate the book with unnecessary facts, a criticism I know has been levelled at this work. I felt however that he included everything necessary without making this book a boring academic treatise, as so many archaeological texts are wont to be.

If you're looking for something purely evidence based full of facts, figures, dates and name dropping, this is not the book for you. But if you're looking for a narrative reconstruction of one of the most fascinating archaeological finds in recent history, and indeed the process of archaeology itself, then this is a must read!

<http://iblamewizards.com/review-diggi...>

CatBookMom says

2/22/18 - I've had this in my OverDrive Wish List for a while, and was sad to see that my library says that its

license has expired, so it no longer has the rights to the ebook. Dunno if I want to buy it or look for a print copy.

MAP says

A really good book detailing the many steps it took to dig up the car park that housed Richard III's body. I loved reading about the philosophically different approaches between Langley and the archeologists, the hoops that had to be jumped through at each process, the initial (quiet) shock when the scientists realized what they might have found, and the forensics involved in confirming who it was. What I found most fascinating was how the injuries to the skull really created a narrative of precisely how Richard III died. We so often can't know these final moments, but they were able to create with remarkable specificity what probably happened.

Less than 200 pages, this is a nice short read for any Ricardian or Tudor history buff.

K. says

A brief but easy to read discussion of the discovery of Richard III's skeleton in Leicester. Pitts covers all sides of the story, from those who fought to have the excavation happen to the archaeologists who thought their clients were a bit nuts and who were wholly unconvinced that they'd never find him to the scientists who performed the DNA tests that established the skeleton's identity.

It's definitely interesting, although large parts of it are anecdotal and based on discussions with the various key players rather than on actual scientific evidence. This is probably perfectly fine for most readers, but (and this is going to make me sound like a pretentious arsehole) I have an archaeology degree so there were numerous moments that made me go "EVIDENCE PLEASE". Probably if I'd read it in conjunction with the articles published in peer reviewed journals to date, it would have been a much more fascinating reading experience. But that's probably just me.

In short, enjoyable but a little light on at times.

Jon Carton says

An enjoyable and easy read that manages to avoid the slow and difficult pacing that similar books often encounter. This is probably because it is less of a history book and more of a recounting of the build up to the excavation, the dig itself and the aftermath. Whilst it does include a chapter that gives the reader a basic understanding of Richard III's life and the cultural turmoil that England was in, the main focus is on the archaeology.

The other main factor in making this book an enjoyable read is the writing style. Mike Pitts writes with all the ease and knowledge that you would expect from someone who has been editing Britain's major archaeology magazine (British Archaeology), and this book will appeal to enthusiasts and professionals alike because of this.

Although it does examine what went on behind the scenes, in particular the differing motivations between the archaeologists and the Ricardians, if I was being picky I would have personally preferred a bit more 'academic rigor' and more information on the science-side of things. He does a good job of explaining the techniques that are mentioned however without being too technical, for example when he talks about how radiocarbon dating works, and this once again is to the books credit.

Would definitely recommend to anyone interested in learning more about the excavation at Grey Friars and the recovery of Richard III's remains. Lacks some of the scientific rigor of an academic report, but then that's not what Mike Pitts aimed to achieve anyway. This book aims to cut through the hype of the media and deliver a balanced account of the evidence - and it does just that.

Lindsey says

(I won a copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads.)

Digging for Richard III is a fascinating look at the process of finding Richard III's body, and the subsequent process of determining that the body was, in fact, his.

It starts at the very beginning, when the dig was first commissioned - when no one believed that he was even buried there, much less that they would actually find him - and follows each step, up until the final press conference.

It was interesting to read about the archaeological side of the discovery, as well as the scientific side, not to mention the historical aspects involved. While not an in-depth biography of Richard III, of course, the author still manages to include some background information about him.

I really enjoyed reading this book, and while it was a bit slow at times, it still held my interest. I would recommend this to those interested in this discovery, especially if they are fascinated with archaeology.

Janet says

I think this book could have been better. I'm not sure if it was the tone or perhaps the general manner in which it was written, but I felt bored reading this book that I should have devoured in a day. I became fascinated by Richard III when I read *The Daughter of Time* by Josephine Tey in junior high school. Having read news accounts of the quest for his bones, I was excited to read all about it. But I was bored. On some reflection, I wonder if this book was written for an English audience and so referred to English personalities and television shows that I am ignorant of and so caused my eyes to glaze over. No matter, the coverage in the NY Times was good. I just thought a book with more information would be better.

Neil Pierson says

In 2012, archaeologists unexpectedly found the remains of Richard III, King of England and Shakespearean Bad Guy. This wouldn't have happened if not for a crazy woman named Philippa Langley.*

Richard III was killed in a battle in 1485. His body was brought to the English town of Leicester and was believed to be buried in a friary there. Later, the body might have been dug up and tossed in a river by some ungrateful former subjects. If he was anything like the character in Shakespeare's play, their disaffection was understandable.

But there has always been controversy about Richard's character. Will didn't let history get in the way of a good plot. Also, Shakespeare was a man of his times, and in his times, England was ruled by Tudors. The Tudors had wrested the crown from the Yorks. Richard III was a York. To write a sympathetic treatment of a York king would be the ultimate Bad Career Move for a playwright.

For a number of reasons, Philippa believed that history was unfair to Richard. Finding his grave was part of her effort to rehabilitate his image. And she thought she knew where it was, because she had experienced an odd sensation when standing in a Leicester parking lot. Twice!

She made contact with archaeologists in Leicester. They didn't put any stock in Philippa's odd sensation, but they wanted to find the friary. If Philippa could raise the money for a dig, they were willing to dig. She did, and they did.

Some of the writing in this book can be a little hard to follow--the author is British, it seems to assume some basic knowledge of English history, and sometimes, it's just not clear. But it's an interesting tale of how science and irrational belief came together for a remarkable discovery.

** Goodreads Reader Activity: Name five things that wouldn't have happened if not for a crazy woman. ***

***Your marriage doesn't count.*

Susan says

This book gives a fascinating account of the archaeological dig which unearthed the bones of Richard III under a car park in Leicester. Although the bones were confirmed as Richard III's remains in February 2013 the dig began in August 2012 and, of course, the background goes back many years before that. The book begins with a summary of Richard's life – the last English monarch to die in battle. There are also all the rumours about where Richard was supposedly buried and what might have become of his body – including myths it was later thrown into a nearby river.

It was screenwriter Philippa Langley, along with the extremely capable and enthusiastic, Richard III Society, who eventually approached archaeologist Richard Buckley with the idea of searching for Richard's remains. Philippa Langley's story is an intriguing one; she became interested in Richard II almost by chance and, instinctually, she felt he was buried in the car park when she visited there. It is easy, in this scientific study, to overlook such things as human intuition – but I am not sure you can ignore them completely. Certainly, Philippa Langley did her research, but her cold shivers while standing in a Leicester car park, is certainly part of the story.

It is fair to say that, even while the University of Leicester were brought on side, their priorities were different from those of Philippa Langley and the Society. While Langley was clear that her interest was in finding Richard III, Richard Buckley and his team were more interested in discovering the church of the

Greyfriars, where he was rumoured to be buried, and which lay in the area of the dig. Indeed, Richard Buckley informed Philippa Langley that they were unlikely to be successful in discovering much, but she was optimistic. Indeed, despite setbacks and lack of funding, it was an astonishing dig – with major finds, including those of the skeleton which was later proven to be Richard III, coming thick and fast.

I really enjoyed this book. It is well told, from the very beginning, through all the testing and research done later – from the excavation to the DNA testing and facial reconstruction. Of course, the research continues, but already we have learnt more about how Richard III loved, died, was buried and later forgotten. This dig was full of controversy, but also made possible by effort and enthusiasm. If you are interested in discovering how Richard III was found and the background behind the search, this is a very interesting, and well written, read.

Joseph Adelizzi, Jr. says

I found Mike Pitts' **Digging for Richard III** to be interesting, intriguing, and indisposing.

The scientific information Pitts shares is very interesting, from the archaeological revelation that archaeologists don't really like to find human remains, to the biological morsel that eating a diet heavy on seafood will skew Carbon 14 dating, to the forensic ability to recreate the final moments of life.

I found the subtle nod to the paranormal intriguing. Did the spirit of Richard III draw Philippa Langley to the exact location of Richard's grave? My previous paragraph concerning the wonders of science leads me to believe not, but the unheard of success of finding a particular individual's skeleton in the almost literal first shovelful of dirt certainly calls my incredulity into question.

Describing how **Digging for Richard III** left me feeling indisposed is tricky; openness relative to this topic is not something I've become used to over the last 45 years or so. I, like the skeleton of Richard III, have dealt with adolescent-onset scoliosis, and, judging from my X-rays and his skeleton, to a greater degree than Richard III. I live the description of Richard III irrationally working to hide his condition from society, and my mood sank at Ms. Langley's angst over finding Richard III really did suffer from scoliosis. It felt to me she believed his deformity re-enforced the evil deeds attributed to him whereas not suffering from it would somehow have cleansed his reputation (if not his guilt). Yes, to Mr. Pitts' credit he does state that scoliosis "does not make monsters," but seeing the blinding eye-catching tenacity of scoliosis surviving death and centuries in the ground has me glad my funerary plans include cremation.

Digging for Richard III is an excellent read, a fascinating glimpse into the amazing search for and discovery of the body of this famous short-reigned king. It did depress me for a time, but don't mind me - I'm twisted.

Kinksrock says

I've decided not to finish this. I was an Anglophile in college, and was particularly interested in the much maligned Richard III. I was fascinated when his bones were recently found and watched tv footage about it. But somehow this very interesting king and finding make for this quite boring book. The author throws an

awful lot of names at us, and the tiny print does not help.
