

Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting October 2019

Richard III: from Car park to Cathedral - Rhian Morgan

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Roger Malvern welcomed everyone to the October meeting, commenting that the morning attendance was “record breaking”. He mentioned that the recently published Art of Writing group book written by members and composed of short stories, with illustrations by the Art group was still available, the proceeds going to the excellent cause of Wales Air Ambulance. He also said that U3A Christmas lunch forms were available for members to complete. On the second Friday of November (8th) the Film Group would be showing “Grand Slam” telling of Welsh rugby fans visit to France-- a very topical subject. The Mid Wales U3A Quiz would be held on October 30 at the Metropole Hotel. A prior notice was given of National U3A Day on June 3 2020--- a first time event. Also a visit to Stratford upon Avon for a “Winter's Tale in November 2020.

The Chairman then introduced the speaker for the morning Rhian Morgan from Cardiff University, whose talk was entitled “Richard III from Leicester car park to Cathedral”. Rhian said she would be talking about the King's background, his DNA, the genetics, and setting the scene following the discovery of his body. Richard's claim to the throne in 1460 was at the time of opposition to Henry VI. Richard was Lord Protector and he called into question the legality of his two nephews and their claims to the throne. By 1484 Richard became King and was on the throne for 26 months, (he was the last Yorkist King) during which time his son died. Two days before the Battle of Bosworth Field, where he met his untimely early death, (which incidentally ended the Battle of the Roses) he stayed at the Blue Boar Inn, Leicester, and the last night under canvas. In the battle in which they were outnumbered, Richard led from the front and two men close to Henry Tudor were killed. However the eventual outcome was that Richard became trapped in rather marshy ground, fatal sword injuries occurred, his armour was removed, and more injuries sustained resulted in him losing his life in battle.

His body was taken back into Leicester, and it was thought he was buried somewhere in the city. Following this burial it was thought that some bones were thrown into the river, but this and other stories were proved not to be true. What really did happen? It is believed he was buried in the Greyfriars area, a Church/ Priory region of Leicester, which remained as such until 1530 when there was a break with the Catholic Church. Over the centuries the land was built on, cleared a great number of times, rebuilt on with houses, and later a Boys School. The remainder of the land was purchased by Leicester City Council, and became Greyfriars Park. In 1986 a researcher thought Richard III remains could still be under the car park. In 2012 it was decided to raise funds in order to uncover the grave, with the following aims. Firstly find the remains of the Priory, position and original line of Richard's bone structure, area where burials were, and locate mortal remains. Very surprisingly the immediate area where the skeleton was found had never been built on, but the edge of some buildings were very close. In an excellent lecture, the speaker showed a power point presentation including two short videos of when the body was found and secondly the DNA work done, which necessitated extracting a tooth from the skeleton. More detailed analysis were undertaken of the skeleton which showed striking resemblance to Richard and what the researchers expected. Crushed bones were taken for samples, results showed that bones dated from correct

period of 1475 – 1530, and indicated the victim's gentry diet had been rich in meat and fish. DNA samples from his teeth tell about his early and later life, such as injuries sustained and food consumed etc. Researchers were marvellously able to identify ELEVEN injuries inflicted at the time of death. Two serious wounds showed he was very much attacked around the head, whilst injuries to the body were mainly humiliation wounds. The researchers were further able to reconstruct the face from the skull, and the speaker showed face construction.

The religious grave was shown to have been hastily dug, but no pomp and ceremony was involved. The grave was uncovered on September 5 2012, no less than 527 years after burial !!!! The scale of the recovery work was incredible, with those involved wanting the last piece of DNA evidence to build up a psychological profile of Richard III 's upbringing, later life, and what sort of person he was. Family history showed that at least two 21st century ladies were directly related, however one had died, so DNA samples were taken from the surviving female and the other's son. It was proved that Wendy and Michael were definite matches to the skeleton. Full result studies revealed blue eyes, hair when younger was blond, darker later but quite light at the time of death. Richard III was 32 years of age when he met his end, buried in the Greyfriars area of Leicester, he had curvature of the spine and unequal length shoulders. The DNA material convinced researchers they were 99.9% sure that the skeleton was actually Richard III. The 2012 procession to Leicester Cathedral from the original burial site to funeral ceremony, and reburial concluded an incredible story

Chairman Roger Malvern commented that the applause rating by members signified that the speaker was worthy of a prize. A number of very appropriate questions then asked by the very appreciative audience, were well answered by Rhian Morgan. In summing up the Chairman thanked the excellent speaker, and offered the following very complimentary comment, “this morning's lecture has been the most memorable presentation we have experienced” -----high praise indeed but well deserved.