

My kingdom for a grave: court rules on Richard III burial site

May 23 2014, by Danny Kemp

British judges on Friday finally ended a bitter debate over the burial of king Richard III, ruling that his remains should be laid to rest in a cathedral in the city where they were found under a car park.

Descendants of the infamous hunchbacked ruler, who died in battle in 1485, had fought for his skeleton to be buried in York Minster, in the northern city that gave its name to Richard's royal house.

But the High Court said that there was no reason that Richard, who was immortalised by Shakespeare as one of history's greatest villains, should not be buried in Leicester, eastern England where his remains were found in 2012.

"It is time for Richard III to be given a dignified reburial, and finally laid to rest," the judges said in their ruling.

The decision was greeted by applause as it was read out in Leicester Cathedral by the Bishop of Leicester, Tim Stevens.

British authorities have drawn up plans for a grand re-interment ceremony at Leicester Cathedral but it was not immediately clear when he would be buried in the cathedral.

The York-Leicester row went as high as a government minister, while it became so bitter that the head of York Minster church contacted police last year after receiving hate mail.

Richard, the 14th great-granduncle of Queen Elizabeth II, became the last English king to die in battle when he was killed in the Battle of Bosworth Field in August 1485.

His death marked the end of the Wars of the Roses between the houses of Lancaster and York—named after their respective heraldic symbols of the red and the white rose—and the rise of the Tudor [dynasty](#).

Historical accounts said his body was transported naked and bloody on the back of a pack horse to Leicester before being buried in an unmarked grave at a Franciscan friary.

500-year mystery

But the whereabouts of Richard's remains were the subject of a 500-year-old mystery.

His skeleton was finally discovered in September 2012 during the construction of a municipal [car park](#) in the market city of Leicester.

Archaeologists subsequently identified the bones as Richard's using DNA that matched that of descendants of the king's sister, and evidence from battle wounds and the twisted spine of his skeleton.

It was the archaeological team who decided that the battle-scarred body should remain in Leicester, at the city's cathedral, and their decision was backed by Britain's Ministry of Justice and the local council.

But the so-called Plantagenet Alliance, effectively the late king's supporters' club, claimed it was the wish "of the last medieval king of England" that he be interred in York. Richard grew up York and funded part of the city's gated walls.

In an unusual legal judgement that ranged back through more than 500 years of history, taking in Shakespeare, Thomas More and DNA evidence, the judges said that "passions have been roused and much ink has been spilt" by the choice of burial site.

But they said there were "no public law grounds for the court interfering with the decisions in question" to bury Richard in Leicester.

William Shakespeare's play long sealed the image of Richard III as a hunchbacked, treacherous usurper and bloody tyrant, although later historians have called the depiction into question.

In the play, Richard cries out the line "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" as he seeks to flee the battlefield, before he is killed by the future Henry VII.

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