



D6 Richard III — Finding a King: High Performance and Low Cost

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand elements of planning a major undertaking and using information to guide decision making.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating how a major multidisciplinary project can be planned and managed to achieve a successful outcome.

The Richard III project received worldwide attention and clearly demonstrated how multidisciplinary teams can collaborate to demonstrate the efficacy of skillful planning together with modern forensic techniques to efficiently identify the location of a 500-year-old British king's remains. This endeavor was managed like a textbook example of a forensic missing person case from the outset.

The first step involved identification of the known facts and listing the information known with certainty regarding the circumstances surrounding Richard III's death. These facts were that Richard III was in Nottingham when he learned of Henry Tudor's (Henry VII) landing in Milford Haven. Richard III's army rode into Leicester on August 20, 1485, passing through the North Gate, continuing along the High Street, and spending the night at the Blue Boar Inn. The next morning, he rode out of Leicester across Bow Bridge toward Market Bosworth, 12 miles to the east of Leicester. On August 22, he was killed in battle at Bosworth while fighting against the army of Henry Tudor.

After Richard III was killed, his body was stripped naked, thrown over the back of a horse, brought back to Leicester, where his corpse was taken through the town to the Newarke (a religious precinct and home to a college of priests), then displayed in the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two or three days later, Richard III's body was taken from the church and hastily buried in the choir of a Franciscan friary church known as Greyfriars.

The Greyfriars monastery was dissolved in 1540 and the exact location of Richard's grave was lost; however, analyses of historical records have suggested the approximate location of the friary and its likely situation in relation to the modern urban landscape of the town of Leicester.

These analyses indicated that the likely site of Greyfriars was under a car park belonging to the Social Services at Leicester. Open spaces constituted 17% of the total friary precinct. Because both access to this site and financial resources for research were limited, only approximately 1% of the friary precinct could be excavated. The key decision involved where to utilize scarce resources needed for expensive excavation (typically trenches dug by large hydraulic earth-moving machinery) on the site. Ground-penetrating radar was used to survey all three of the most likely open spaces in the hope that one of these trenches would identify some portion of the friary walls. Excavation of the first two trenches identified only anomalous spreads of rubble and modern service lines. Six hours and 43 minutes into excavation of the third trench, a skeleton was discovered. Only after much additional research did the significance of this find become evident: the site where this skeleton was found meant that the skeleton was likely a person of significance.

The second step involved identifying the known anatomical facts concerning Richard III. Richard was 32 years of age at the time of his death. Contemporary accounts described him as being of slender build, "small of stature,"



Engineering Sciences - 2017

and having “unequal shoulders, the right higher than the left.” Because Richard III died in battle, his body should have had forensic evidence of trauma consistent with combat of this era.

A key element to the efficient success of this project involved managing the team from Leicester, who were involved with identifying, organizing, and disseminating historical information obtained from the relevant academic literature. Team members were responsible for interacting with other individuals from Leicester City and the Richard III Society to aid in locating his remains. A further aspect to the project involved management of the intense media interest and public scrutiny of the endeavor.

This presentation will discuss the elements of: planning a major undertaking; identifying, collecting, and assimilating both known facts and information that may not be accurate; operating under a constrained budget; managing a large multidisciplinary project and the various personnel involved; and controlling the dissemination of information at key times. All of this resulted in a highly successful outcome that exceeded expectations.

Richard III, Multidisciplinary, High Performance