

A note from Yvonne Morley-Chisholm, Voice coach and project originator, about the chosen texts in the *A Voice for Richard* project. Dated 3rd July 2025

Words had to be chosen for the animated facial avatar of King Richard III to speak. From the documents that exist it had always been my aim to select manuscripts that would give us a sense of Richard as a person rather than from one of his less personal and more formal public addresses. I wanted to explore words that were born out of key relationships in Richard's life, if they could be found.

Given that the focus of the *A Voice for Richard* project was "to separate the man from the myths", an opportunity presented itself to learn more about the real person both as man and as monarch from the words we would hear him speak rather than to use texts that were either official judgements in courts of law or used on the many formal occasions of state.

After a period of consultation three pieces were chosen:

1. The Letter to the Bishops is from Harleian MS433, Art 2322, f. 281. The text is an English translation from the Latin original by Peter Hammond and Rosemary Horrox.
2. The Prayer - Richard's Book of Hours is held at Lambeth Palace Library, MS 474, ff. 181-3. Originally in Latin. The English translation is by Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs (*The Hours of Richard III*)
3. The Letter to Cecily Neville - Harleian MS433, Vol I, p3 . This is Richard's only surviving letter to his mother, written in English, dating from 1484 and is found in Harleian MS 433 [f2b], in the British Library.

The first piece is a rare glimpse into King Richard III on a happy day. It is not how he is often perceived in our present time. Within this piece addressed to Bishops, his young son, Edward of Middleham is nearing the time of his investiture as Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester. The language used to describe his son is both personal and very specific to Edward. Here then is a King Richard as a proud and a loving father.

The second piece is often called "Richard's prayer" and gives us a glimpse into his faith in God. He is Trinitarian: his relationship is with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Richard has personalised what was a pre-existing prayer and puts himself directly before God. He knows Biblical scripture, he considers his relationship in the presence of the Divine. He shows both humility and courage in his reflections and petitions. His uncompromising faith in God through worship and through work is evident. Richard understands the imperfection of his human condition and although he petitions God to relieve him of his present struggles and sufferings he ultimately bows to the One who he honours and serves.

The third piece is relatively brief in length but contains glimpses into the depth of bereavement and great personal loss for Richard. It is written about two months after the untimely death of his young son, Edward. He reaches out to his mother, Cecily Neville, asking for her support at this time. Other practical matters around administration are included too. Brief though this letter may be, it is a clear indication of his respect for and relationship with his mother, who is described as "the most saintly woman of her generation".

Working with actors at home and abroad who are multi-lingual I have always been impressed by their ability to communicate with others while switching seamlessly between the languages they have in common. For example, many years ago I worked with actors in the Middle East who had come from several different countries including Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the Lebanon. They all had Arabic, French and English in common, some had a fourth and a fifth language. In conversation with each other I could hear them change seamlessly between these language at times. I was impressed by their sincere communication. Their conversations seemed to flow with equal fluency of mind and heart regardless of which language they spoke at any given moment in time. They had at their disposal superior skills to my own (I am fluent in only one language). They would use the opportunities presented in each language to convey their meaning with a greater precision and depth of reflection.

When I consider King Richard III I have no issue with the fact that he had more than one language to communicate in: English, Latin, French and potentially other languages in addition that were spoken in the countries where he and his bother, Edward, lived in exile for many years. The important matter would be the quality of the English translation of any text in a language other than English for this project. The first two pieces selected (ibid) are written in Latin while the letter to Richard's mother is written in English.

Professor David Crystal is known for his work in historical English linguistics and regarded as the leading expert in Original Pronunciation. I approached him to ask if he would investigate the Original Pronunciation that King Richard III would have used. NOTE: Professor Crystal has written a chapter for the forthcoming book *A Voice for King Richard III* (to be published by Cambridge University Press in 2026). His chapter focusses on the letter to Cecily Neville which King Richard wrote in English.

I invited Professor Crystal's thoughts on these first two texts given that were originally written in Latin. What follows are Professor Crystal's reply to me. (NOTE: reference is made to "Thomas". He is the actor finally selected to be the voice of Richard III. It should also be noted that Thomas Dennis had to learn the Original Pronunciation and, as any good actor does, dig down deep underneath the words to consider the interpretation and delivery).

From correspondence with Professor David Crystal:

"The bass linguistic distinction is between form and meaning - and of the two, meaning (semantics) is the more important. That, after all, is what language is for - to convey meaning. The whole worlds of translation and interpretation depend upon this principle. We have no problem accepting audio recordings of literary works in translation, which capture the meaning of a source text, though not the form. If I read War and Peace in English (or listen to an audio recording of it in English) I have no problem saying that 'I am reading Tolstoy'. It's the same with Richard. We are listening to his meaning, though not in the form he originally used. The translation used, and Thomas's reading of it, captures that meaning excellently, and that is the important thing. To ignore the semantics at the expense of the form is, in my view, mistaken. We do in fact give a strong acknowledgement to the form by using original pronunciation for the words.

In all such projects one has to be pragmatic, otherwise nothing would ever get done.

It might be worth adding that, from a phonological point of view, it makes no difference whether the texts used were Richard's own or a translation. The phonological representation would be the same. And indeed, this is evident in the transcription I made

of Richard's letter to his mother, which I used for the chapter in the ... book (publication in summer 2026). If the intention was to give an impression of Richard's voice, then the text you chose is as good as any other. I happen to think that the translation of the investiture text was a really good one, which does capture the sentiment and rhetoric of how it would have been if Richard had written it himself."

The investiture piece then is the first of the three texts that have been completed so far and which can be seen and heard on FaceLab's YouTube channel.

Here then is the full text in the English translation from the Latin original by Peter Hammond and Rosemary Horrox:

An address by King Richard III detailing the conferment on his son, Edward, of the offices of Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester 24th August 1483, Nottingham. (NOTE: The investiture itself took place in York)

The clarity and charity of the sun's light is so great that when it is poured on the other heavenly bodies the sun shines with no less light and splendour, nor does it suffer any diminution of its strength, rather it is pleased to be seen, to shine as a king in the midst of his nobles and to adorn the greater and lesser stars in the whole court of heaven with his outstanding light which without doubt we should take as an example. Seeing the vocation to which we are called, that is, by the favour of the Almighty to govern and be set at the head of all the mortals of this realm. We have turned the gaze of our inward eye to the greatness of this noble state and of its members, having great care that, in the great anxieties which press upon us, those who are necessary to support us should not now seem to be lacking. And since among the provinces subject to us, none requires separate and immediate rule under us as much as the principality of Wales, because of its remote position and because of the language and customs of the people remote from those of other areas, and the county of Chester which almost adjoins and borders it.

We therefore, following the footsteps of our ancestors, and with the assent and advice of the said prelates, dukes and barons of our realm of England, have determined to honour our dearest first born son Edward, whose outstanding qualities, with which he is singularly endowed for his age, give great and, by the favour of God, undoubted hope of future uprightness, as prince and earl, with grants, prerogatives and insignia and we do make and create him Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester to have the charge of those parts and govern them and defend them.

And we invest him as the custom is by the girding on of the sword, the handing over and setting of the garland on his head, and of the gold ring on his finger, and of the gold staff in his hand, to have and hold to him and his heirs, Kings of England, for ever.

Wherefore we firmly decree for us and our heirs that the said Edward our son shall have the name, style, title, dignity and honour of the principality of Wales and the earldom of Chester, aforesaid, to him and his heirs for ever.