

'A VOICE FOR RICHARD': in search of the man behind the myth and clues towards his vocal profile

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Vocal profiling is, essentially, the recreation of an individual's voice, speech and communication style using evidence gathered from as many sources as possible. Science and art meet in its making. As a voice teacher and vocal coach, I have chosen to specialise in and develop this area over the past 15 years. Its application is usually in recreating accurate historical character, where a contemporary audio recording exists for analytical purpose. The work is often used in historical portrayal for stage, screen or studio and most notably in documentaries.

The approach I usually follow initially draws upon criteria within the Vocal Profile Analysis (VPA) Scheme,¹ which is recognised by phoneticians, speech and language therapists, ENT surgeons and voice and singing coaches as 'a reliable part of voice assessment in both therapy and research'.² It studies the physical features in the vocal tract (lips, jaw, tongue, palate, pharynx, larynx, vocal folds) as well as prosodic elements (pitch range, pace, rhythm and intonation patterns).

Beyond this perceptual analysis scheme other clues are searched for from contemporary accounts, historical phonology and an understanding of the cultural context in which the person lived. The priority is to work from reliable sources for accuracy and, where there might be gaps to fill in the profile, to work with creative integrity.

I will briefly touch upon evidence gleaned from the cranio-facial reconstruction, dentistry, forensic psychology and biographical detail but my main focus in this article will be on the historical linguistic evidence that has come to light in recent months.

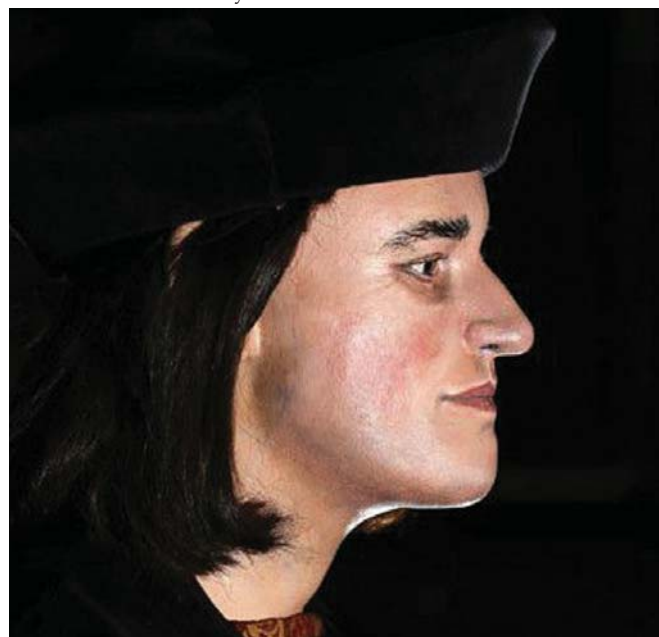
Physical evidence

In work with Professor Caroline Wilkinson and the cranio-facial reconstruction of King Richard III created in her laboratory, current consideration is being given to a number of physical clues that are being integrated into the overall vocal profile – most notably the position of the lower jaw to bring the front teeth into 'edge-to-edge occlusion'. Certain consonants, such as 's', 't', 'd', can be influenced by this, with everything from a more pronounced quality to varying degrees or, in the extreme, a full-on 'whistling' effect in some people who are classified as having this articulation. Other evidence would indicate the 'whistling' quality to be very unlikely in Richard's case.

At a skeletal level, evidence points to the scoliosis in his spine being neither deforming nor debilitating. There is still discussion about a very subtle degree of breath quality in his voice. This would not be enough to make him sound either out of breath or struggling in any way but rather to potentially add a 'softer/gentler' quality to his voice. This would avoid what is called 'rough/harsh' onset in the VPA scale. Initial indications imply a more 'soothing' and less 'assaulting' sound within the spectrum of what we call voice 'quality'.

The levator muscles that raise the corners of the mouth are stronger than the depressor muscles for him. This indicates that, in the default or 'at rest' mode, King Richard's face would have had anything from a

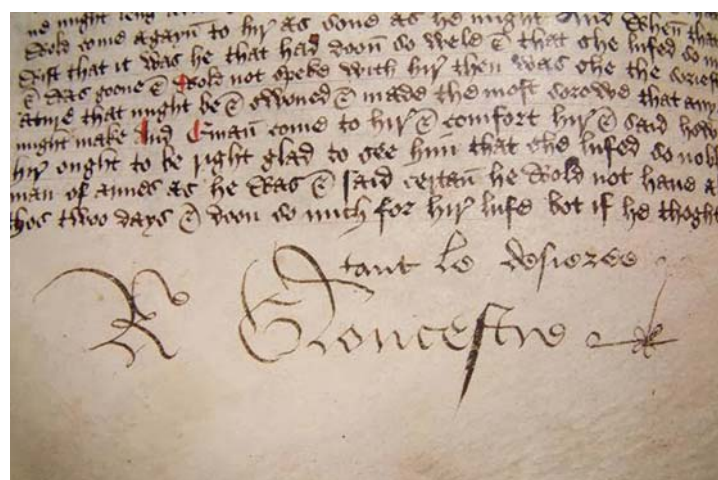
The cranio-facial reconstruction of King Richard III in profile.
© The Richard III Society





Above: Letter from King Richard III about Buckingham, 'the most untrue creature'. © The National Archives

Below: Extract with personal signature of one the books personally owned by King Richard III. © BNPS



pleasant expression through to a slight smile. Facial expression impacts tone of voice: consider the number of ways we can say something as simple as 'hello' with a frown, smile, scowl, twinkle in the eye, etc.

The mastoid processes on the skull indicate a wider and stronger neck, with a level of fitness that would be considered to be something above average for his build. Physical fitness in the extreme can hinder voice (consider one or two famous male sporting personalities who are very strong and muscular while their voices can often become limited to a 'weaker' quality). Richard would have been very experienced in public speaking and, like many who spoke long before microphones were invented, there was opportunity to practise and learn the most effective techniques. So, while stronger in his upper body (at least), other indications steer away from him being on that more elite end of the athletic spectrum. The expectations are that there would not be compromise to the quality of either his vocal resonance or his pitch range.

Personality and character

Professor Mark Lansdale, Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Leicester, and Dr Julian Boon, one of the country's leading forensic psychologists,

studied Richard III from a psychological perspective based on contemporary documentation and records of Richard's actions.³ Their work was commissioned by Philippa Langley and the Looking for Richard project.

Among other considerations, criteria were used to test for traits of murderous psychopathy. Both Professor Lansdale and Dr Boon have deemed this 'unlikely' for King Richard. They have proposed the presence of an anxiety disorder instead, called Intolerance of Uncertainty syndrome. Independently, one of the dental surgeons I have spoken with looked at the unusual grinding pattern in Richard's teeth, which indicate a level of anxiety.

Richard III brought significant reforms to the legal system, including the presumption of innocence, bail and a forerunner of legal aid. The actor leans heavily on this kind of information to begin to build the 'inner voice' of thought, attitude, priorities, interests, core beliefs and related areas that can inform personality. Many lines of enquiry are needing investigation at the time of writing to learn more about his daily practice in prayer, his love of books, his core beliefs and his interests and to dig deeper into the accounts that describe him as 'the just', 'the loyal', 'the pious' and 'the brave'.

Linguistic evidence

Professor David Crystal OBE is the expert linguist working with us and is internationally recognised as the pioneer in Original Pronunciation (or OP, as it is known) for different historical periods. He established early on in the research that Richard's grandparents would have spoken with a Chaucerean OP, which can be a challenge for most folk to understand, while his son – had he lived to enjoy a long life – would have been moving towards the Early Modern OP (Shakespearean), which is much more accessible to our comprehension today. King Richard III lived at a significant time known as the Great Vowel Shift. A distinction should be made straight away between OP and accent. I quote Professor Crystal:

People often refer to OP as 'an accent', but this is as misleading as it would be to refer to Modern English pronunciation as 'an accent'. To be clear then: OP is a phonology – a sound system – which would have been realised in a variety of accents, all of which were different in certain respects from the variety we find in present-day English.⁴

There are three basic principles to discovering Original Pronunciation:

1. We can tell from the different ways in which words were spelled how the writer pronounced them. Spelling didn't really standardise until the eighteenth century; before then individual preferences were captured in documents written by them.
2. The direct evidence we can obtain from any contemporary accounts of the language itself.
3. The evidence in the rhythms, rhymes and puns used by writers. We can deduce the stress pattern of a word from sound patterns and the metre of a poetic line. We can deduce the value of a vowel from the way words rhyme. We can deduce whether a consonant was sounded from the way puns work.⁵

So, the underlying phonological system is respected, while there is room to 'season' it with accent colouring.

Intonation and more prosodic elements have been a concern for me – we don't have recordings to listen to the 'emotional colouring' in voices of the time. Professor Crystal found a fascinating and very detailed record in an essay from one Joshua Steele, c. 1775, in which he transcribed intonation patterns in speech on a type of musical stave.⁶ Professor Crystal's analysis concluded that the intonation patterns of around 250 years ago were the same as those of today. The implication is that intonation doesn't change or evolve over time. Human emotion has probably expressed itself in the same vocal

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patterning for many hundreds – if not thousands – of years.

In search of Richard's accent

Each of us acquire our accent from those who are of influence during our formative years. For some people the accent can adapt or even change to something new as a result of either geographical relocation or the influence from our peers or those we aspire to be like.

On first hearing, an accent might be described in pronunciation terms alone (vowels and consonants). Listening more closely, there are specific details around pace, rhythm, tuning and intonation. Looking more closely, there are specific physical settings associated with an accent (how much the jaw does/doesn't open, whether the lips move to shape particular vowels or not). Then everything is blended within the culture that birthed the accent to include its socio-economic, historical and even geographical foundations. I needed to learn more about those closest to Richard who would have influenced his accent. I am indebted to Sally Henshaw, secretary of the Leicestershire Branch of the Richard III Society for her help in compiling the following:

- Richard's paternal grandfather: Richard, earl of Cambridge, was born in Conisbrough Castle Yorkshire. He was executed in 1415 when King Richard's father, Richard, duke of York, was only four years old.
- Richard's father: as a young boy, Richard, duke of York, seems to have first been placed in the custody of Robert Waterton of Methley (Yorkshire), constable of the royal castle of Pontefract. Eight years later, on 13 December 1423, at 12 years of age, his wardship and marriage were purchased from the Crown by Ralph Neville for 3,000 marks. He then lived with Ralph Neville and later went on to marry his youngest daughter, Cecily, who would become Richard's mother.

- Richard's maternal grandfather: Ralph Neville had estates in County Durham as well as Sheriff Hutton and Middleham Castle in Yorkshire.
- Richard's mother: Cecily Neville was born in 1415 at Raby Castle and grew up there. When Ralph Neville died, Raby Castle went to the offspring of his first marriage; the Yorkshire castles went to Joan Beaufort, his second wife. Joan Beaufort then passed them onto

her eldest son, Richard, earl of Salisbury (born 1399), who was Cecily's elder brother.

- Richard's mentor: the earl of Warwick, Warwick the Kingmaker, was the son of Richard, earl of Salisbury, so he probably grew up in Sheriff Hutton and Middleham.

- Richard: He was born at Fotheringay Castle in Northamptonshire and went on to live in a variety of other places, including Ludlow Castle in Shropshire, Middleham Castle in Yorkshire, London and the Low Countries.

Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to conjecture that the nobility and those of influence around Richard had medieval Yorkshire accents. How much influence others may have had on him as he journeyed further afield remains open to discussion.

In a letter written at 20 years of age, while immersed in the affairs of office in Yorkshire (in service to Edward IV) and dealing with a dispute between two individuals over cows, Richard uses a 'northern' word for cattle: 'ky'. This might be another indication of accent or at the very least implies what linguists call 'accommodation', that is, that he would choose to adapt his own accent to those he was speaking to. Many people 'accommodate' to create rapport and positive relationship with others.

Documents sent to Professor Crystal for analysis included letters from Richard's mother, Cecily Neville, his father, Richard, duke of York, the earl of Warwick and Richard himself. David extracted 'northern'/Yorkshire qualities from them to blend into the OP.

At this juncture then, evidence is building to indicate a 'northern' accent and possibly Yorkshire more specifically. That said, the medieval Yorkshire of Richard's time, while carrying certain similarities to its modern-day descendant, has its own characteristics. Some specific features of the Ricardian OP include:

- dropping the initial 'h', which, however, could come in for emphasis at times – as many accents today still do, with Received Pronunciation (RP) being the exception
- every 'r' written would be pronounced with a retroflex tongue position (not unlike West Country accents in England today)
- consonants like the 'k' at the beginning of 'knight' and 'knee' would be pronounced
- the 'g' and 'h' contained in the former would have an almost 'German' quality
- certain vowel sounds in words like 'thus', 'days', 'so', 'ask' would carry similar values to those of Yorkshire pronunciation today.

Professor Crystal had told me that, when he first worked out the Shakespearean OP for the Globe theatre in London, he was on an accuracy rating of 75%. With subsequent research over the years, the accuracy has grown to exceed 90% today. I imagined a very different percentage for the Ricardian OP but needed to know where we stood. I wasn't expecting the answer he gave

me but am delighted to learn that he has the Ricardian OP at between 90 and 95%. With such encouraging news it means that the work, from a linguistic point of view, can move into production imminently.

Next steps

In collaboration with Professors Caroline Wilkinson and David Crystal and with the skills and support of accent specialist Tim Charrington, who often accompanies me on speaking engagements, we are looking to train a man with the right face (i.e. like the cranio-facial reconstruction of King Richard III) in the personality and pronunciation of King Richard III. Using state of the art motion capture technology, his face will be 'body-mapped' to capture detail of muscular movement and blood flow.

From the information gathered, it will take a minimum of three months to analyse and load the data into Richard's actual cranio-facial reconstruction. The result will be an animated film of Richard's face breathing, thinking and communicating his own words based on the evidence gathered. Two exhibition displays are planned, one for Leicester and one for York, with each one speaking a different text.

Currently a fund-raising drive has begun to accomplish the work and we are looking to raise a total of £100,000 to create the two distinct displays.

Given that no recordings of King Richard exist, the work cannot look to an 'authentic' result but it can look to a plausible result. Drawing upon the research undertaken from a range of experts, and then piecing the puzzle together with as much evidence as can be found, is the priority and the focus. As a voice teacher and vocal coach I believe that *A Voice for Richard* remains the most important work I will ever undertake.

References

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