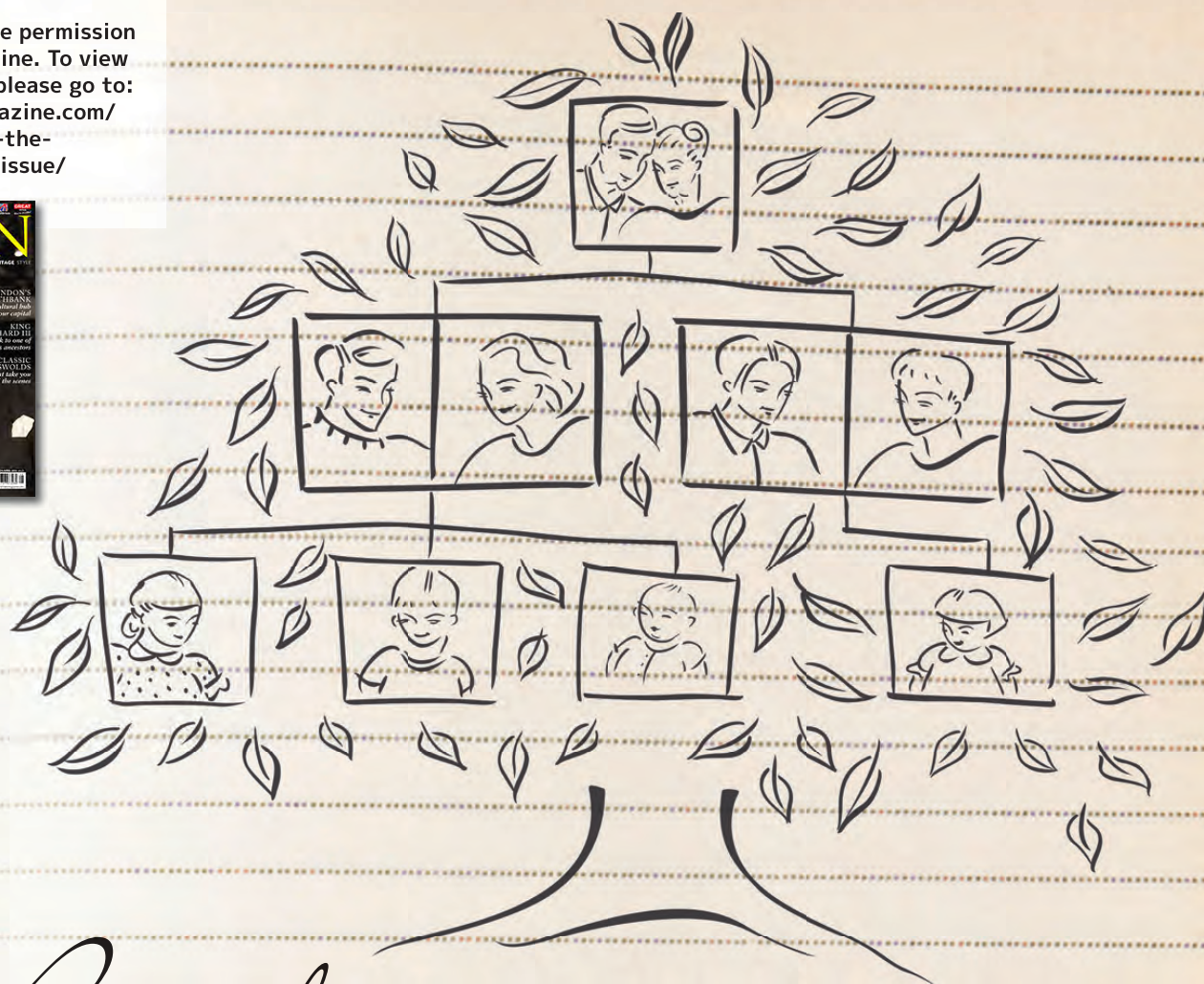


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Back to my roots

A descendant of the Plantagenet household tells of her journey of discovery, piqued by the unearthing of King Richard III's remains in a Leicester car park in 2012

WORDS **SUSAN E FROST**

One day, when I was still at high school, my grandmother told us we were related to Mary Queen of Scots. Royal ancestors: kings and queens, why would I care? I certainly didn't live the life of a princess and so I quickly forgot about it.

Sometimes life events can cause you to change your interest and your path. In 2004, this happened to me when I was in London for a book signing [Susan is a published author – Ed] and I stopped to visit the Tower of London. I was drawn to a large picture of one of the queens of England. As I moved closer to the picture, it seemed like I was looking in the mirror and I got goose bumps. This queen

looked just like me but I didn't know who she was. When I returned home to the US, I discovered that she was Queen Mary of Teck, wife of King George V and grandmother to Queen Elizabeth II.

This experience started me on my quest to prove my royal ancestry. I really didn't know where to begin so I sought recommendations from a genealogist who specialises in New England and royal ancestry. We started with my grandmother's records from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Together we worked up the line to my gateway ancestor, Dr Richard Palgrave, my 9th great-grandfather and then as far back as King Edward I, my 20th great-grandfather.

When the remains of Richard III were discovered, I wanted to find out how he fitted into my family tree



Left to right: Susan E Frost, author and descendant of King Richard III; Queen Mary of Teck – grandmother of Queen Elizabeth II – do you see a resemblance?

Once my lines were proven by the genealogist with copies of the birth, marriage and death records, I began to explore where my New England lines connected to my royal ancestors.

I was primarily interested in learning that I'm descended from several of the Plantagenet kings and queens, but when the remains of King Richard III were discovered underneath a car park in the ruins of the Greyfriars Friary in Leicester in 2012, my focus changed. With the uncovering of a Plantagenet king in my lifetime I wanted to find out how King Richard III fitted into my family tree. And so I went like a bloodhound to learn more about my ancestral relationship to the notorious king.

Prior to my quest I'd had a rather negative impression of the last Plantagenet king but after joining the Richard III Society, I became more open-minded about his actions and intentions.

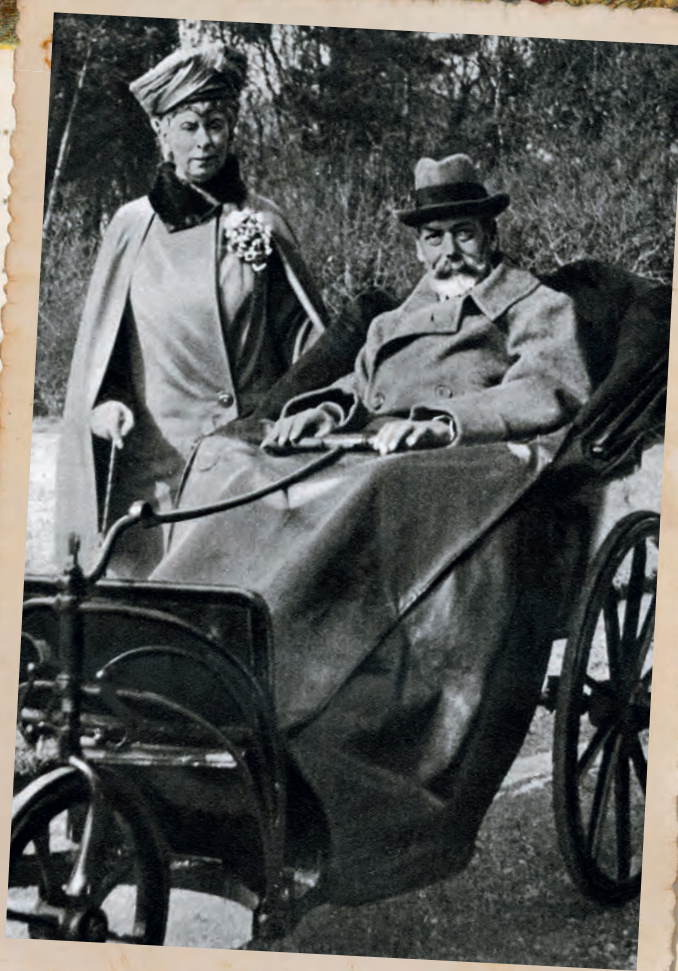
The book, *Loyalty*, by fellow Ricardian, Matthew Lewis, helped dispel many of the negative myths I'd held on to. I now have a much clearer understanding of Richard III – Lewis's depiction of Richard's love for his wife, Anne Neville, and his son, Edward (his

only legitimate child, who died a year before his father, aged only 10), plus his dedication to ruling England in a firm and just manner, shone a favourable light on the king.

Even though Lewis's book is a piece of historical fiction, his story is based on facts and he provides tremendous insight into what motivated Richard III to make the very tough decisions that landed him on the throne.

The more I discovered about the king, the more I became convinced that he was an honourable and ethical man and perhaps even ahead of his time. My opinion was that he was surrounded by back-stabbing 'friends' who continually sought to undermine his authority and good works. Richard III was very loyal to his friends and country but many of his contemporaries wanted to remove him as king, because they wanted the power he had.

One case in point is that of Thomas, Lord Stanley, and his wife, Lady Margaret Beaufort, who wanted her son, Henry Tudor, on the



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throne. Henry didn't have a true right to be king but secured his place as the future monarch by having Richard III killed.

Henry was born in Wales and lived there until he was 14. His only claim to the throne was as the great, great-grandson of John of Gaunt, the third surviving son of King Edward III. Once Henry defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, Thomas, Lord Stanley and Lady Margaret began a series of nasty, untrue rumours about Richard III, which helped garner support for the newly crowned King Henry VII: the first monarch of the Tudor household.

In his book, Lewis describes Richard's gruesome demise and how he bravely fought hand-to-hand with his friends and cousins (now enemies) to the bitter end. I was surprised to learn that Richard III's fatal blow may have been delivered by the Welsh nobleman, Sir Rhys ap Thomas, not in fact his cousin, Henry Tudor.

With his halberd or poleaxe, Sir Rhys ap Thomas is said to have brutally sliced off part of Richard III's head at the Battle of Bosworth on 22 August 1485. Welsh poet, Guto'r Glyn said: "Sir Rhys killed the boar and shaved his head". ▶

Clockwise, from top left: Lady Margaret Beaufort was the mother of King Henry VII; King Richard III was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485; King George V and Queen Mary of Teck during the king's convalescence from septicemia in 1929; King Henry VII, also known as Henry Tudor, was the first Tudor monarch



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This image and right: Both Queen Elizabeth II (this photo) and Susan had curly fair locks as children – could they be related? Below, right: Her Majesty the Queen



Richard III's parents are my 15th great grandparents, which would make Richard my 15th great uncle

The brutal end of the last Plantagenet king paved the way for the next chapter in English history – more than 100 years of Tudor reign.

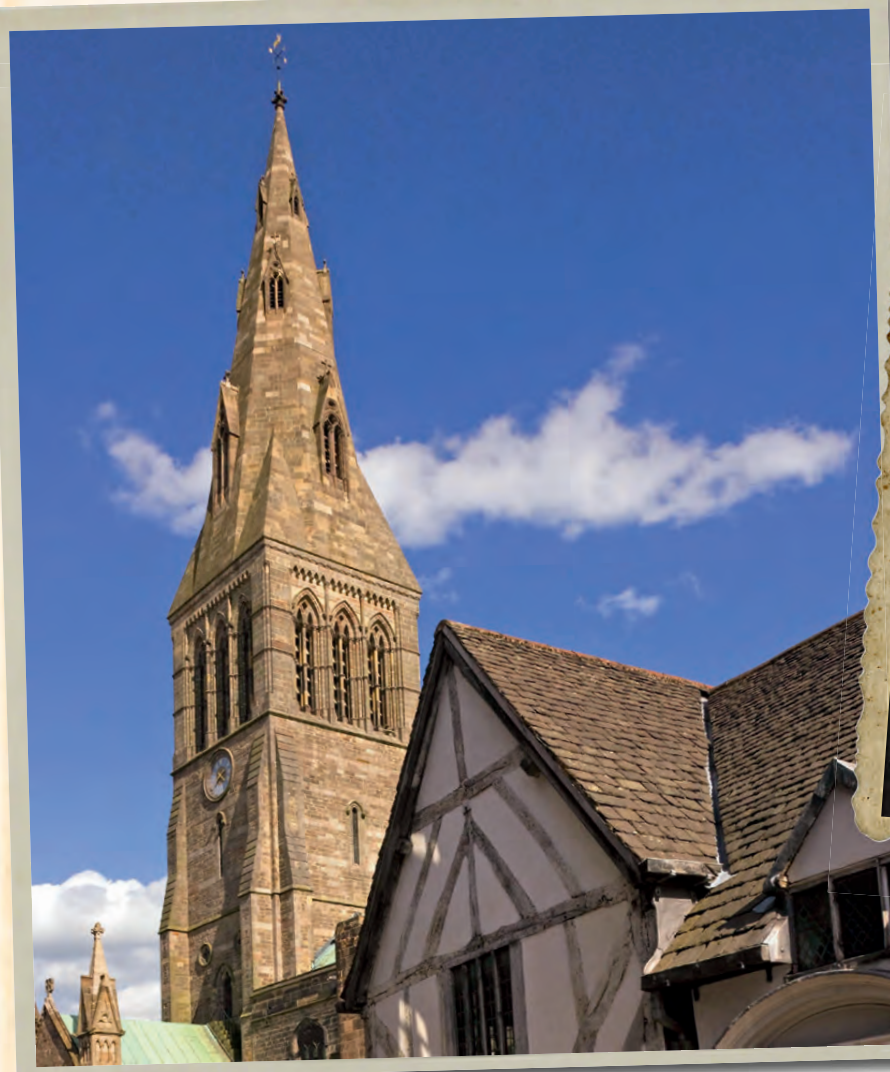
As a descendant of King Edward I, (I discovered that I am his 20th great granddaughter), I knew I was related to Richard III through various lines, but I wasn't clear how closely related.

I dug deeper and discovered that my New England Gardiner grandparents connect me to King Richard III. By logging onto my profile on Geni.com and typing in 'King Richard III', the kinship calculator found that my ancestors – Gardner, Boss, Wilkinson, Conyers and Lumley – continue all the way back to King Edward IV, my 14th great grandfather and brother of King Richard III. This means that Edward's parents, Richard Plantagenet and Cecily Neville, would be my 15th great grandparents, which would make King Richard III my 15th great uncle. I was elated at this finding.

To research ancestors born in England in the 1500s, you have to start with the parish where they lived, and even then the process is rarely straightforward. Sometimes on my quest I've got lucky and found a key record, which makes me feel as though I've won the genealogy lottery. But one record found leaves several others missing and creates more unanswered questions: right now, I have plenty of these, which is frustrating.

For further clarity, I spoke to Dr Turi King, Lecturer in Genetics and Archaeology at the University of Leicester, who specialises in the relationship between Y chromosome types of DNA and paternally inherited surnames. She told me that in order to use 'Y-DNA' to look for a





Above: King Richard III.
Left: The steeple of Leicester Cathedral, where the king's remains are to be interred

Genealogy is a continual puzzle - sometimes the pieces fit into place and sometimes they don't

match, it has to be paternal to paternal all the way back through history.

Most of us – including my brother and I – have a mix of maternal to paternal DNA in our various lines that lead to our royal ancestry. The good news is that our ancestral connection to our 9th great-grandfather, Dr Richard Palgrave, and his lines to the royal families, is proven with verifiable records by my genealogist.

Genealogy is a continual puzzle. Sometimes the pieces fit together and just fall into place, other times they don't and the records simply don't exist; perhaps they have been destroyed by fire or some other unfortunate event.

Life is a journey and researching one's ancestors is an ongoing process and I will continue my research. I'm very pleased that the world at large has a much better understanding of Richard III and I'm elated that he will have a proper burial and place of honour in Leicester Cathedral. I'm proud to be related to him and I'm looking forward to the reinterment activities at Leicester Cathedral and within the city in which he will finally be laid to rest. **B**

For more on King Richard III visit the BRITAIN magazine website at www.britain-magazine.com/richardIII

THE BURIAL OF A KING



In May 2014 a High Court judge ruled that the remains of King Richard III, which had been discovered in a car park in Leicester two years previously, should be reinterred in Leicester Cathedral, despite a strong campaign by the city of York who wanted his remains returned to the city of his royal household.

The long anticipated event will take place from 22 to 28 March 2015. For a full schedule go to www.britain-magazine.com/richardIII

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