

Greyfriars  
Research

in January, 1871, it was resolved by the Town Council that Municipal Buildings should be erected upon this site. In the following year, however, this resolution was rescinded, and it was agreed that the new Town Hall and offices should be built on the land where the old Cattle Market used to be held. The Corporation then cleared the ground which they had bought from Mrs. Burnaby's Trustees, and made a street through it named "The Grey Friars." Subsequently, by an Indenture dated the 30th September, 1873, the Corporation took a conveyance of the land from their five Trustees, by the following description:—"All that piece of land situate in the parish of St. Martin's in the Borough of Leicester and lying between two streets there now called Friar Lane and St. Martin's and which said piece of land was lately the site of a messuage or mansion-house for some years formerly occupied as two messuages with the gardens yards and out-buildings thereto belonging known as 'the Grey Friars,' and one of which said messuages was formerly in the occupation of Mary Burnaby widow deceased and the other of which said messuages was formerly in the occupation of John Henry Davis and which said mansion-house and premises have since the date of the lastly recited deed" (the Conveyance to the Corporation's Trustees), "been pulled down and the ground cleared and a street formed upon the said land by the Corporation." The Corporation of Leicester have since the date of this deed parted with the whole of the land, which is now built on. The site of the old mansion-house and grounds at the present day comprises the Grey Friars Street, with the Leicester Savings Bank and two blocks of offices, extending from St. Martin's to Friar Lane, on the West side of the street, and the London County Westminster and Parr's Bank and blocks of offices, extending from St. Martin's to Friar Lane, on the East side. If then the Grey Friars' Church and the burial place of Richard III were in Robert Herrick's garden, Richard's remains must now lie, if undisturbed, somewhere beneath the Grey Friars Street or the buildings that face it. The exact place cannot be more nearly identified.

The story told by Wren is far the more credible of the two. The popular tale of the desecration of Richard's tomb rests on no good authority, and seems to have grown up in the following manner:—

Very soon after the Battle of Bosworth Field, a report became current that the defeated King had been buried "in a ditch like a dog." Four years after the battle, in the course of some legal proceedings which took place at York, this report was contradicted, and it was stated as a fact that Richard was not buried in a ditch, "for the King's grace had been pleased to bury him in a worshipful place." There is indeed no question about the burial at the Grey Friars' Church, which is quite well established. Nevertheless, the common rumour survived, and seems to have been the basis of a statement made by Bacon, in his life of Henry VII, that, although Henry "of his nobleness gave charge unto the friars of Leicester to see an honourable interment to be given to him, yet the religious people themselves being not far from the humours of the vulgar, neglected it; wherein, nevertheless, they did not incur any man's blame or censure." Holinshed mentions the burial of Richard in the Church of the Grey Friars, and the erection of the alabaster monument, but says not a word about any subsequent disturbance of the tomb, either in the first edition of his Chronicle, published in 1577, or in the enlarged edition of 1587. The tradition of this desecration appears to be mentioned first by John Speed, in his "History of Great Britain," which was published in 1611. He states that, at the suppression of the Grey Friars' monastery, Richard's monument was "pulled down and utterly defaced, since when his grave overgrown with nettles and weeds is very obscure and not to be found. Only the stone chest wherein his corpse lay is now made a drinking-trough for horses at a common inn. His body also (as tradition hath delivered), was borne out of the city, and contemptuously bestowed under the end of Bow Bridge." In the account of Leicestershire contained in his "Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain," Speed omitted the latter part of this statement, mentioning only Richard's burial at the Grey Friars' monastery, "whose suppression hath suppressed the plot-place of his grave,