

You can almost hear Lady Bracknell shrieking “under a car park” when made aware of the penultimate resting place of one of England’s best known monarchs.

The bones of Richard III have turned up in the middle of Leicester, under a spot where a chapel used to be, but which has been a temporary resting spot for Fords and Toyotas for a few decades.

The first clue was that the skeleton displayed mild scoliosis of the spine, which would have given him a slightly lopsided limp.

However it required DNA analysis to put the matter beyond doubt, and where better for this to be carried out than in the Department of Genetics at the local University where Sir Alec Jeffreys discovered DNA fingerprinting around 30 years ago?

After so many generations, testing chromosomal DNA would have been inconclusive, but mitochondrial DNA provided the vital key, as was done recently (with the help of the Duke of Edinburgh) to identify the remains of the Romanovs.

It is always worth remembering that Jeffreys’ discovery was serendipitous, carrying out what is sometimes called “blue skies research”. The experimental result needed to alight on a highly prepared mind. It also generated significant income for the patent holders.

Coincidentally, DNA testing was also to the fore in the recent (and current) investigation into the presence of horse flesh in the food chain. Additionally, it allowed a huge number of puns in newspaper headlines. I am happy to put some of these rumours to bed by stating that it is most unlikely that a burger company will be sponsoring the next Grand National!

At least we now know that Richard’s expiring exhortation “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse” was merely expressing a desire for a burger.

With great speed, the P&SC organised a discussion meeting on the use of random testing to protect the public. This explored several aspects – quality control as determined by the Trade Descriptions Act, as well as potential toxicological consequences. Was the deceased horse taking drugs prior to slaughter, and could these cause harm to burger munchers? It was noteworthy how little the Government spends on such protection of the electorate and their offspring.



Andrew Miller MP  
Chairman, Parliamentary  
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# SCIENCE IN PARLIAMENT sip

The Journal of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

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The front cover is a montage from the launch event for the London Mathematical Society report, *Advancing Women in Mathematics: Good Practice in UK University Departments*, on 27th February.

