

# Anne Mowbray: royal child bride

Behind the discovery of the remains of a forgotten 15th C princess lies a remarkable history and a sorry resolution. Bruce Watson has investigated how things went so horribly wrong.

Some archaeological discoveries are a newspaper reporter's dream; they have everything that makes a great story: mystery, romance and royalty. In 1964 during the redevelopment of the former church of the Abbey of St Clare Minors, Tower Hamlets, workmen uncovered a subterranean vault, which contained a small anthropomorphic lead coffin. The workmen extracted this coffin and then informed the press. Later they took the coffin to Leman Street Police Station, where it was handed over to Dr Francis Celoria, Archaeological Field Office of the London Museum. The Latin inscription on the coffin stated it contained the remains of Anne Mowbray Duchess of Norfolk, who at the age of five in January 1478 had married Richard Duke of York, the younger son of Edward IV (aged four). As the only child of the Duke of Norfolk Anne was a rich heiress. Edward IV saw that a marriage to his younger son would allow him to control her estates.<sup>1</sup> Anne died in November 1481 at Greenwich, shortly before her 9th birthday. Initially she was buried in the chapel of St Erasmus in Westminster Abbey, as befitted a member of the royal family. This chapel was demolished during the early 16th century when Henry VII's new Lady Chapel was constructed and it is believed that Anne's remains were then transferred to St Clare's, where her mother had lived and was also buried (died c 1506-07). Sadly Anne's husband did not live much longer as shortly after the death of his father in 1483, he and his elder brother (Edward V) were detained in the Tower by their uncle Richard Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III) after he seized the throne. Soon afterwards Richard reputedly had the two boys murdered.

The 20th C recovery of Anne's remains attracted huge press interest, as the chance discovery of the burial of a named medieval person is extremely rare, especially one who was a member of the royal family. Therefore, Celoria decided to capitalise on this chance discovery of this forgotten princess and child bride by organising a comprehensive programme of analysis of Anne's remains that included studying her skeletal remains, teeth, hair, shroud, the botanical and insect remains inside the coffin, and even the metallurgy of her coffin.<sup>2</sup> This programme started dramatically, at a press conference at the London Museum, Kensington Palace on the 15th January 1965, a date carefully chosen, as it was the 487th anniversary of Anne's wedding. The press were shown Anne's open coffin and her jumbled remains, caused by the manhandling of the coffin before it was in the custody of the London



Photo: © Christie's Images / Bridgeman Art Library

**LEFT** *The Marriage of Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, to Lady Anne Mowbray* by James Northcote (1820, private collection).

**BELOW** Overhead view of the restored and cleaned coffin, scale 1 foot long (0.3m) (LAARC AMS64 image 64)

Museum. Unfortunately two immediate results of the public interest in this discovery were criticism of the non-archaeological way that her discovery and initial handling of her remains had taken place (for which the London Museum was erroneously and unfairly seen to be at fault) and the strident demand from the modern-day representatives of Anne's family that the analysis be curtailed and she be reburied immediately. With hindsight it would have been much wiser to have only shown the press the unopened coffin. The impression is that soon after the press conference the London Museum completely lost control of the situation. To try to placate everyone Anne was reburied in Westminster Abbey on 31st May 1965, near the probable remains of her husband.



# Festival of British Archaeology

17 July to 1 August 2010



Join the throng at the Tower or a select lunchtime lecture at the BM, learn to classify pottery or how to draw a section, visit Roman sites or go back to the blitz - it's all there for the asking at this year's Festival of British Archaeology (FOBA). Museums, local societies, heritage sites and projects are organising a wealth of activities to get kids, families and adults involved in archaeology right across London.

Visit *London Archaeologist* members at the Museum of London on 24/25 July where we demystify stratigraphy in a fish tank and solve pottery puzzles as part of a weekend full of activities for all ages.

The FOBA website ([festival.britarch.ac.uk/whatson/](http://festival.britarch.ac.uk/whatson/)) has regularly updated details. Here is just a taster...

**Sat 17 July–Sun 1 Aug**

**Hands on Archaeology:** activities, walks, visits and behind the scenes insights with a special weekend on **24/25 July**. 10.00-18.00, Museum of London, London Wall, EC2. See [museumoflondon.org.uk](http://museumoflondon.org.uk)

**Archaeology in the Paul Hamlyn Library** 10.00–17.30, British Museum, WCI

**Roman Greenwich Culture Shock**

Greenwich Heritage Centre, Artillery Square, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, SE18

**Archaeology with the Thames Discovery Programme:** activities on and about the foreshore see [thamesdiscovery.org](http://thamesdiscovery.org)

**Medieval Harrow: Moats, Manors and Muck!** 14.00-17.00, Harrow Museum, Headstone Manor, see [harrow.gov.uk/museum](http://harrow.gov.uk/museum)  
**Sat 17–Sun 18, Sat 24–Sun 25, Sat 31 July–Sun 2 Aug**

**Rose Theatre:** visit the Elizabethan theatre site 11.00–18.00, 56 Park Street, London SE1

**Sat 17 - Sun 18 July**

**COLAS at HM Tower of London:** with Historic Royal Palaces. See [colas.org.uk/news/natarchwkend.html](http://colas.org.uk/news/natarchwkend.html)

11.00-16.00, Queen's Stairs, HM Tower of London, EC3

**Sat 17 July**

**Digging Dad's Army and the Invasion that Never Was:** conflict archaeology and remains of WWII defences 12.00-17.00 Oxleas Meadow/ Oxleas Café, Shooters Hill. See

**Sun 18 July**

**Roman to Air-raid:** dig and archaeological activities. 10.00-16.00, Church Farmhouse Museum, Greyhound Hill, Hendon. See [hadas.org.uk](http://hadas.org.uk).

**Mon 19 - Sat 24 July**

**The Time Cheam:** studying, sorting and handling pottery Various times, see [cheamware.org.uk](http://cheamware.org.uk).



photo: Thames Discovery Programme

/cont'd

It was proposed that the results of study of Anne's burial be published as a monograph edited by Celoria. Although this monograph was never completed, two articles were published on her teeth and skeleton and some aspects of her study featured in the London Bodies exhibition.<sup>3</sup> Some years ago Bill White and I, assisted by Dorothy Thorn (whose late husband attended Anne's re-interment in Westminster Abbey and wrote an account of this event) and Barney Sloane, decided to collate all the archive material with the intention of publishing a comprehensive account

of the discovery of her burial, its context, and the 1960s analytical work which was carried on both her remains and coffin.<sup>4</sup> This included using electron activation to determine the metallurgical content of her hair. The analysis showed an unusually high level of antimony which might have been ingested as either medicines or cosmetics. The research will be submitted to the *Antiquaries Journal* for publication.<sup>5</sup>

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Cath Maloney of the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC) and Professor Roger Warwick for their assistance during our research, and also to the late William Winmill of Yates Construction for his account of the discovery of the burial and its context. Thanks to the Society of Antiquaries of London for funding the production of the illustrations for the article.

**Notes**

1. A Papal Dispensation for the marriage was obtained in May 1477, as they were too young for a legal marriage according to canon law which gave the minimum age for marriage as 12 for girls and 14 for boys.
2. As the coffin had been punctured in antiquity there was no organic preservation apart from her hair (which was well preserved) and fragments of her linen shroud.
3. M.A. Rushton 1965 'The teeth of Anne Mowbray', *British Dental Journal* 119, No 8, 355–59; after this article was published Celoria observed 'that Rushton jumped the gun' (letter 1981); R. Warwick 1986 'Anne Mowbray: skeletal remains of a medieval child' *London Archaeol* 5, No 7, 176–79; A. Werner (compiler) 1998 'London Bodies: the changing shape of Londoners from Prehistoric times to the present day', Museum of London Exhibition catalogue, p69-70.
4. Reports in Museum of London Archaeological Archive, site file AMS 64.
5. B. Watson and W. White with contributions by B. Sloane and D.M. Thorn 'Anne Mowbray, Duchess of York: a 15th-century child burial from the Minorities London' forthcoming in *Antiquaries Journal* (to be confirmed).

**RIGHT** Opening the coffin in the presence of the research team those present included Dr Harden the Director of the Museum of London and Dr Francis Celoria, plus a number of specialists who were studying aspects of the burial (LAARC AMS64 image 104)

