

England in the time of Richard III

A review of the course available on FutureLearn and hosted by The University of Leicester.

I was introduced to FutureLearn known as MOOC's (Massive open online course) by my partner; she thought I might be interested in a course hosted by the University of Leicester, on England in the time of Richard III. This was of interest given the publicity surrounding the finding of the King's body in a social services car park in Leicester, and the excellent talk I attended by Matthew Morris, one of the team from the University who were responsible for finding the remains. The duration of the course is 6 weeks. I started the first presentation in November 2013 and finished in January.

It is run by the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University and the tutor was Deirdre O'Sullivan, along with invited experts to help cover a range of perspectives on the period. The course looked at some of the key aspects of England during the 15th century, which set the scene for the social, political and martial activity surrounding Richard III. The weeks were divided as follows:

- Week 1. Medieval battles and the Wars of the Roses
- Week 2. Peasants and farmers
- Week 3. Books, literacy and printing
- Week 4. Death and commemoration
- Week 5. Food
- Week 6. The road from Bosworth

The course is set at a level 1 (entry level course) and is simply yet comprehensively set out. It was easy to follow. There were about 20 sections each week clearly laid out when you finished one section you moved on to the next, each week taking approximately 2 hours of time to complete, you moved along at your own pace and were encouraged to look at further readings or material if you wanted to go into more depth on a particular subject. At the end of each week there was an end of week review quiz. These were 5 questions on the weeks study each with multiple choice answers. I found I was able to answer all but one question by reading the articles carefully. The one question I could not answer from the multiple choices I am still unable to answer. I have re-read the article several times and still cannot understand where the answer they were expecting came from. After your 3 attempts to give the correct answer the web site gave you the correct answer. You then mark that week as complete and eagerly await for the next week's instalment.

I found the course easy to do; however, I suppose that depends on what level of higher education you are used to studying. I would think that if you had an interest in the subject most would find it very satisfactory. There are some amusing items within the course. You are invited, in fifth session, to cook some dishes that were common in the 15th century for which you are given the recipes; I chose not to pursue that particular venture. Throughout the course there are openings for group discussions where you were encouraged to make comments on various questions posed by the team. This was a little cumbersome, particularly when four or five hundred comments

were being left. I found I had little time to read more than a few of each, and I only made one comment throughout the entire course.

On the whole I found the course interesting and informative. I now feel I have a greater understanding of the dynamics in play and the major players involved with the period. I was surprised to have several preconceived ideas I had about the 15th century dispelled. One being that it turned out to be a reasonably prosperous period in history even for the farmers and peasants, when I had believed it was not. I would encourage you to have a look at this course and MOOC's in general. There are many courses on any number of subjects. A colleague of mine has just finished a 10 week course on the Music of the Beatles run by Harvard University I believe, which has 100,000 subscribers. The Richard III course attracted 10,000 people from around the world. As Deirdre O'Sullivan, the course tutor, commented she has never had so many students in a room at the same time. The course is run several times a year and is completely FREE. Give it a try.

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