

MP of the month

JON ASHWORTH

The MP for Leicester South's strong desire to rehabilitate Richard III wins him this month's accolade



campaigning of Jon Ashworth, the Labour MP for Leicester South – thus earning him the accolade of MP of the month.

Ashworth possesses a keen understanding of the historical significance of such a find, if the DNA results confirm the remains as belonging to the former ruler, and is keen that old 'Crouchback' should receive a burial befitting his position: "There is a serious argument about how you treat the body of an ex-monarch, the last monarch to die on a battlefield. Serious questions about whether it should be a state funeral, given that the monarch is head of the Church of England."

With such an exciting discovery, the Leicester South MP was up against both the city of York and John Mann, MP for Worksop, in securing the king's burial rights, with the MPs having passionately debated the issue in the House of Commons. "There's been staunch opposition from Worksop in the form of Jon Mann," admits Ashworth, "and there's been opposition from York. I've argued with them in the Commons where I've raised it continually."

He maintains that Leicester Cathedral is the only proper place for the monarch: "He was buried by the Greyfriars in Leicester 520-odd years ago, who took his body and... gave him a proper burial... in the Greyfriars church. That church is long gone and ended up being concreted over by a Leicester City Council car park, which is where he was found, but the site is just yards away from Leicester Cathedral."

While there is much history to consider, the Leicester MP is not wholly unaware of the commercial benefits of having an infamous king interred in his constituency's religious centre. Despite drawing criticism for previously having mentioned the potential for economic boosts, Ashworth maintains that it would be a good thing for local income. "It probably would mean a tourism boost for the city of Leicester," he explains. "We've already seen thousands of people coming to the site to look at where they found him." With some estimat-

ing the financial benefits that would likely reach the millions, the Labour MP illustrates that his constituents come first. "At the end of the day, if I

that if he is confirmed as the 15th-century king, his final resting place will be Leicester Cathedral. This is thanks to the heated debates and tireless

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can do something that supports jobs and investment in my constituency," he says, "then so be it."

Ashworth does see the humorous side of it all, though, admitting, "It could all be rather embarrassing if it turns out not to be him." He was also quick to praise the archaeological department at Leicester which made the discovery, and feels that, if for no other reason, keeping the remains in Leicester serves as a reminder of their achievements: "It is [the] archaeological department who did this tremendous research [and] it's a great example of the brilliant work of Leicester University. So it seems only fair that he should stay in Leicester also as a kind of reminder of what a fantastic university we have that is doing some really excellent research".

Among the other potential benefits of having Richard III and the excitement surrounding his possible discovery in his constituency, Ashworth believes this could serve as an opportunity to rehabilitate the former monarch's image and reassess the good works he did during his short reign. Commenting on his character as portrayed by Shakespeare, he remarked: "I love Shakespeare, but I think Richard III's reputation has been traduced somewhat over the centuries, and maybe this is an important opportunity to re-evaluate him. He was a social reformer in the north." ■

FROM THE EDITOR

Jon Ashworth MP came up against opposition when he first declared that Richard III's remains should reside in Leicester Cathedral. If the remains are proven to be those of the late monarch, their discovery will mark an amazing achievement for the University of Leicester's archaeological team and be a great historical addition to Leicester. Recognising the significance of the find and the potential benefits for his constituents, Ashworth fought against other cities and other MPs in the House of Commons. When the government announced its decision to have the remains buried at Leicester Cathedral, Ashworth was at last successful. His determination and resilience have won him the honour of having a king buried within his constituency and the accolade of MP of the month.

Ben Duckworth

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

MARK RECKLESS

Conservative MP for Rochester and Strood



Reckless has been praised for spearheading the Tory rebellion against EU budgetary

increases. The coalition had been pushing for a freeze on real-terms spending, which would see the UK's EU budgetary spending rise in line with inflation. The Tory rebels, however, felt that this wasn't sufficient, arguing that only a real-terms cut would suffice. The 53 Conservative MPs involved voted on the amendment tabled by

Reckless, which called for real-terms cuts, and which passed by 307 votes to 294, marking the most significant defeat of the coalition since its 2010 formation. Reckless has been praised for his continued efforts to assert parliamentary democracy and for his success in leading the rebellion.

ANDY BURNHAM

Labour MP for Leigh



Burnham has been nominated for his tireless efforts to seek the truth about the Hillsborough disaster.

On the 20th anniversary of the tragic event in 2009, he stood at Anfield to reassure the crowd that both he and Maria Eagle MP were working towards justice for the victims and their families. Due to frustrations and disbelief, he was met with cries of "Hypocrite".

Three years on, after persuading the government to launch another

inquiry, Burnham delivered a speech to the Commons on the Hillsborough Independent Panel report. The panel found that the crush was foreseeable due to poor safety regulations, that police reports were altered to deflect blame, and led ultimately to the resignation of Sir Norman Bettison from the West Yorkshire Police.

SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY

Conservative MP for Worthing West



Backbencher Sir Peter Bottomley receives the final nod this month for his assistance in helping Worthing Sixth Form College secure funding

for their 'New College' site at The Warren.

The funding will go towards the refurbishment and conversion of existing buildings for use by the college, with the total cost of the scheme reaching £25m. Worthing Sixth Form College, established in 1973, will benefit from improved facilities thanks to the acquired buildings, including

new seminar rooms, lecture spaces and a central library.

Bottomley and his associates have been praised for helping the college become a reality and a source of pride for the community, while the principal of the college has stated that "...this will be life changing for generations of young people for many years to come".