

JW

And so for our final award tonight, when we find out who will be honoured with this year's prestigious recognition of:

Outstanding Contribution to Tourism

MP

This is not an award that is made lightly or without considerable thought and care, and to receive it is a true honour. Each year we consider a number of nominations and review them rigorously. For this important award we look for an individual or organisation that has truly made a contribution to the success of the Tourism Sector locally through a remarkable effort, dedication, commitment or resolve. This year's recipient embodies all of those qualities and much more.

JW

Like so many great things, our award this year starts with a story. And what a story! It's a story that started over 500 years ago, remained a matter of debate, controversy, speculation and conjecture throughout that time and most importantly it's a story that was never forgotten. And this is because it's a true story of real people.

MP

However, like many great stories told over time, things get corrupted. People put their own angle on it, sometimes for fame, sometimes for notoriety, often for personal gain. And because of this, the version of the story that becomes embedded in our culture can be light on facts.

JW

So how does a story that is over 500 years old that had become retold so many times it had moved into the realms of myth rather than truth, lead us to this year's award for Outstanding Contribution to Tourism?

Because one remarkable person decided it was time to ensure the story that we know is the true story, based on fact, evidence and data rather than myth, legend and poetic licence.

MP

At this point I need to declare an interest. We jump forward a few hundred years to a date that will always be a landmark in my tourism career. What were you doing in the morning of Thursday 21 July 2011? Well, I was having a hastily arranged coffee in Pret a Manger in the middle of Leicester with someone I'd never heard of. The meeting needed to be short for two reasons. Firstly, like many others before me I felt the subject of the meeting seemed far-fetched and secondly we just happened to have a meeting of the Leicestershire Promotions board of directors that afternoon, coincidence or fate?

What I was told and shown during that short meeting was nothing short of extraordinary. With absolute clarity and backed up with fastidious and painstaking research presented using charts, maps and historical extracts, it became clear that the person in front of me had single handedly dispelled 500 years of myth and legend and uncovered the truth.

However, to move to the next stage and finally resolve this story she needed some help. As a result of a hastily rearranged agenda, this story was told again at our board meeting that same afternoon, directors unanimously agreed to offer that help and the rest quite literally is history.

Absolutely none of this would have happened without the dedication, determination, tenacity, commitment, resilience and passion of a remarkable researcher and writer who made it her mission to uncover the truth of the story of King Richard III. She led the search for Richard through her original 'Looking For Richard Project' and pushed through what at times must have seemed like insurmountable barriers to eventually instruct the exhumation of the mortal remains of King Richard III.

JW

Her story has been told in many places. Compelling documentaries showing the stresses, obstacles and emotions of the search and excavation. Fascinating books that reveal the true level of dedication, professionalism and skill invested by our recipient that brought this all about. And of course, her story has even made the 'big screen.'

For Leicestershire and the tourism industry, the discovery has transformed our profile, driven massive growth and led to many projects and opportunities that would not have happened otherwise. As we speak, a new trail of world class sculptures is being created in west Leicestershire, a transformation of Leicester Cathedral nears completion, the Bosworth Battlefield Visitor Centre celebrates its 50th anniversary and the King Richard III visitor centre is 10 years old. The Richard III Society is also 100 years old this year and of course 2025 marks 10 years since the reinterment of King Richard III.

MP

It gives me immense pleasure to present the 2024 award for Outstanding Contribution to Tourism to Philippa Langley.