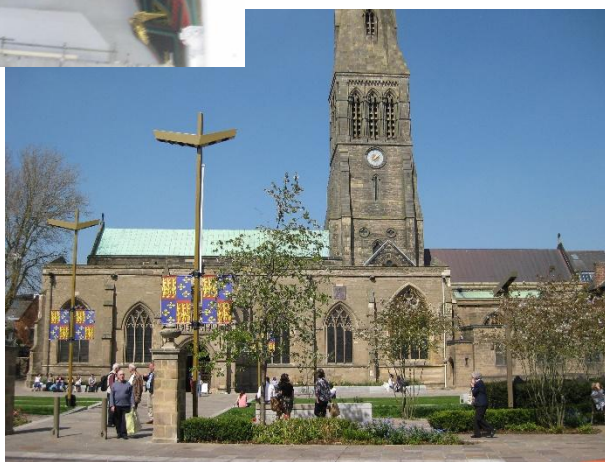


Leicester, Bosworth Field and Thomas Cook



Michael Pierre de Villiers

Leicester, Bosworth Field and Thomas Cook

Michael Pierre de Villiers

Copyright © Michael Pierre de Villiers 2026

All right reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means without the permission of the author. Leicester Cathedral ceiling and the cathedral building.

Any errors that may have occurred are inadvertent. Anyone who, for any reason, detects errors are asked to contact the author, or publisher, so that acknowledgement may be made in any subsequent prints, or editions. All photographs taken and diagrams made by the Author.

Title page: Leicester market, the Haymarket Memorial Clock Tower, the Leicester seamstress commemorating women working in the hosiery industry from small workshops or at home,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

M. P. de Villiers
PhD MSc MDip (FRMetS CMet retired)
2026-06-24

Leicester, Bosworth Field and Thomas Cook

Michael Pierre de Villiers

Introduction

Leicester is close enough to home to be easily accessible for day visits. The first of three trips was for this reason and it was somewhere we had not been before. We were unaware that it was the birth place of the well-known Cook's tours. Interest was also piqued by the discovery of King Richard III's remains beneath a staff car park between Peacock Lane and Friar Lane in Leicester.

Friday 24th October 2014

The Leicester trip was on the spur of the moment. My wife and I set off by bus with our usual backpacks containing picnic lunch and liquid refreshment.

We had heard about a Grade II* listed building, Aylestone Hall. Upon arrival at the Leicester bus terminus, we set off on another bus to the place. It and the grounds were a disappointment, even though a notice board proclaimed it "is one of only a few 14th century medieval houses in the country" and that it comprises "no less than 8 phases of construction spanning over 600 years."



The Guildhall.

So, back to the city centre and random walkabout, which was more rewarding. Saw some of the sights, such as the Grade I listed timber framed Guildhall dating from 1390. As with all guildhalls, it was the meeting place for a select group of businessmen, in this instance, according to a notice board, the Guild of Corpus Christi. By 1563 it had become the Town Hall. Nearby, was our first sight of the Grade II listed Cathedral Church of Saint Martin, or Leicester Cathedral (pretty stained-glass windows and ornate wooden panelled ceiling), both in Leicester's Old Town area. There's a poor photograph of the cathedral in gloomy light. A better photograph will be seen later.



The Turret Gateway.

Further rambling brought us to part of the old city wall and gate; the Grade I listed Turret Gateway that gave access to the inner bailey of Leicester Castle. The notice board further informs that it was probably built in 1423. It separated the Newarke religious precinct from Leicester Castle. All that remains of Leicester Castle is the 1150 built Great Hall, now encased in a late 17th century Queen Anne style frontage. It has scheduled

monument status. Did not bother to investigate.

Also nearby is the Newarke Chantry House built in 1512 by a wool merchant and local benefactor. From medieval time, wool was the most important export from England. It was still important in the 16th century. He founded a chantry (an endowment) for two priests in the collegiate church, founded a hospital for the aged poor as well as boys and girls schools.



Left; Newarke Chantry House. Right; The Jewry wall and Roman baths foundation remains.

We then visited the Jewry Wall, Leicester's oldest building, or rather ruined wall, alongside St Nicholas Church. The wall, consisting of two large archways, was built by Roman inhabitants about 2000 years ago. It was part of public baths in the centre of a Roman city. More information via a notice board. All of them very useful. The baths were probably still in use until the 4th century. Excavated alongside the wall are the foundation remains of the baths according to the St Nicholas guide book.



St. Nicholas Church interior wall.

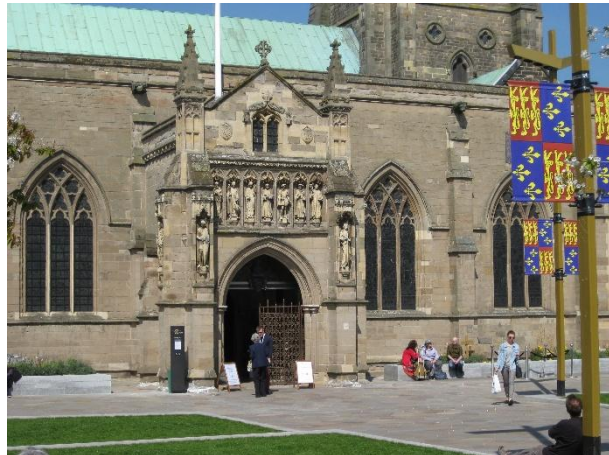
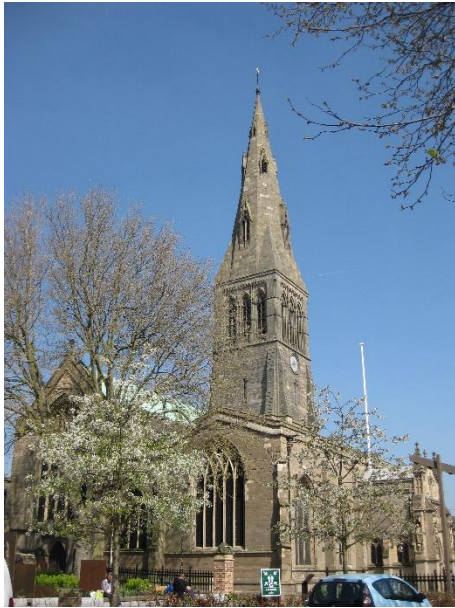
Next-door is St. Nicholas Church. Built originally in Saxon times, around the 9th or 10th centuries, it has been remodelled since. However, the original walls of the nave (the main central hall) still remain, as well as Norman arches and tower added around the 11th century. There is evidence that use was made of building material from the ruined baths, such as Roman tiles incorporated into Saxon windows on the north side of the church and the facade. According to the church website the Roman ruins were used by locals as a source of building material, including the church "being built almost

entirely out of stone and brick" that was obtained from the wall. The history section in the website is well worth reading. The link is in the bibliography.

By the way, it can be added that Leicester has the best kept and clean public toilet facilities that the author has seen. It is located at Market Place South. It was not a fluke that it was so good. On subsequent visits to Leicester, it was found it to be to the same high standard. The author has a reputation for being an authority on public toilets around Britain. Always use the facilities is the motto.

For a spur of the moment trip and disappointing beginning, it was well worthwhile, even the one hour and ten minutes bus trip between Coventry and Leicester was interesting.

Tuesday 21st April 2015



Leicester Cathedral and the main entrance.

This time, with the usual backpack picnic lunch, the trip on cloudless day was to see was to see the tomb of King Richard III (1452-1485) after his well-publicised reburial. They made a big thing of it with a ceremonial cortege and reburial at Leicester Cathedral.



Stained glass east window.

Richard III was made interim Lord Protector when his brother Edward IV died in April 1483. The heir to the throne being Edward IV's son 12-year-old Edward V. Edward V's coronation was arranged for 22nd June 1483. However, before this could happen the marriage of his parents was conveniently, or by strange coincidence, declared bigamous. Therefore, their two sons, Edward and younger Richard, were illegitimate and could no longer be in line to the throne. 25th June 1483, the assembly of lords and commoners conveniently agreed and proclaimed Richard the rightful king. He was crowned on 6th July 1483. Edward and Richard were taken to the royal apartments on the Tower of London and never seen again after August.

King Richard III was killed during (and obviously lost) the Battle of Bosworth at what is now known as Bosworth Field, near Market Bosworth, against Henry Tudor on the 22nd August 1485. His body was taken to nearby Leicester and unceremoniously buried. No one was sure where. After thorough research the site of his ignominious burial was established as where Grey Friars Priory once stood, now a car park. Skeletal remains were found where the church choir area would have been. The Greyfriars Friary in Leicester, covering several hectares, was established in the early 13th century, located between present-day Peacock Lane and Friar Lane. The friary was dissolved in 1538; its site being redeveloped over the following centuries.

After very thorough forensic analysis that confirmed known physical characteristics of King

Richard, wound marks on the skeleton, radiocarbon dating and mitochondrial DNA comparison with two matrilineal descendants of his sister Anne, it was beyond reasonable doubt that these were the remains of the king. After some considerable claims as to where the remains should be reburied, such as in York, he was reburied in Leicester Cathedral on 26th March 2015.



The tomb.

We arrived at the cathedral at a time when it was closed to the tourists due to a service. While waiting to go in, we therefore sat outside on a bench and had our picnic lunch.

Not much to see really. The tomb is minimalistic. A block of, apparently, Swaledale fossil stone with its length and breadth deeply cut cross the top, placed on a Kilkenny black marble plinth with name, coat of arms and Latin inscription “loyaulte me lie”, which means loyalty binds me. Apparently, it was his motto from a young age that indicated his close relationship and

loyalty to his brother Edward IV. Somewhat ironic considering it is most likely that he had his brothers two sons, potential heirs to the throne, murdered.

Before moving on to our third visit to Leicester in 2016, it is appropriate jump forward to 2017 to mention Bosworth Battlefield.

Thursday 16th March 2017 (Bosworth Battlefield)

It took us some time to get around to visiting Bosworth Battlefield about 20km west of Leicester. This time travelling by car to the scene of the historic Battle of Bosworth between King Richard III and the Earl of Richmond, fought on 22nd August 1485. Obviously, the Earl of Richmond’s army won. He became King Henry VII, the first of the Tudor monarchs and the end of the Plantagenet dynasty.

Richard III was the last English monarch to die in combat after becoming unhorsed. Leading to the famous last words, true or not, quoted in act 5, scene 4 of Shakespeare’s Richard III where he shouts “A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”

According to the visitor centre’s website absence of detailed battlefield “location description from the time” made it difficult to pin point the exact location of the battle. However, a “multi-disciplinary survey commissioned by Leicestershire County Council with Heritage Lottery Funding discovered the true location of the Battlefield in 2012.”

While the visitor centre is informative and educational, the truth be said, there is not much to be seen. There is a lengthy marked walk with strategically placed information boards.

The walk starts at the visitor centre on Ambion Hill where it is now accepted was the site of Richard III’s camp the night before the battle. Rather confusing, the notice board map on the next page has north pointing to the left rather than usually being aligned with north pointing toward the top of the page. Crossing a field one arrives at the Bosworth Memorial Sundial on



The notice board map.

Ashby Canal and the old, now disused, railway bridge, before retracing one's steps to the path to the visitor centre. An easy walk and educational.

Ambion Hill, built in 2011 to commemorate the discovery of the battlefield to the south-west of Ambion Hill. To the south of the sundial and west of the camp/visitor site is a well from which Richard III most likely drank water before the battle. From the sundial, the path goes west to where it meets the Battlefield Heritage Railway's southern end of line Shenton Station. One can then walk further south along the now trackless cutting before turning east alongside Ambion Wood passing the well back to the visitor centre. Alternatively, one can walk further along the cutting, minus railway track, to the

Monday 25th January 2016

As a result of going on a heritage railway Great Central Railway train trip from Leicester North Station to Loughborough on the 19th September 2015, we realised that there was more to Leicester than we thought. It was discovered that heritage railway was the very trip that Thomas Cook used for his very first day outing for people in Leicester and the birth of the international travel company Thomas Cook and Son. His son John was responsible for much of the success of the business. Our third visit to Leicester on the 25th January 2016, was to see what we had missed.

Early in adulthood Thomas Cook became a strict Baptist missionary and Temperance movement member in the Leicester area. The first trip he organised was Temperance excursion by train from Leicester to a teetotal rally at Loughborough on the 5th July 1841. He took around 500 people, at a shilling each for the round trip from Leicester Campbell Street station to Loughborough (one shilling was 12 pence in the decimal system).

This was the start of many tours including to Europe in 1851, a world tour in the early 1870s conducted by him and the Nile expedition in 1884 when Cook steamers, already plying the Nile, assisted in the Relief of Khartoum. Also known as the Gordon Relief Expedition (1884–85), it was a British mission to relieve Major-General Gordon trapped at Khartoum, Sudan. The relief arrived two days too late on the afternoon of 28th January 1885. Khartoum had been overpowered by Mahdists early on the 26th with apparently between 5000 and 10000 killed, including Gordon. It was also realised that on our previous two walkabout trips to Leicester, we were very close to the original office building that he had built with train and travel friezes above the 1st floor windows. As a child my mother always referred to any family outing as going on a Cook's tour. Obviously, we had to return to Leicester see the building.

Seen on the next page, the Grade II listed Thomas Cook building, in Gallowtree Gate Street near the intersection with Humberstone Gate Street and close to the Haymarket Memorial Clock Tower, was ordered built by son John in 1894 as a memorial to his father who died two years previously. More importantly it was larger premises for the expanding Cook's Excursion, Tourist and Shipping Office business and the increasingly important foreign banking and exchange department. The exterior is in Renaissance style with buff terracotta and glazed



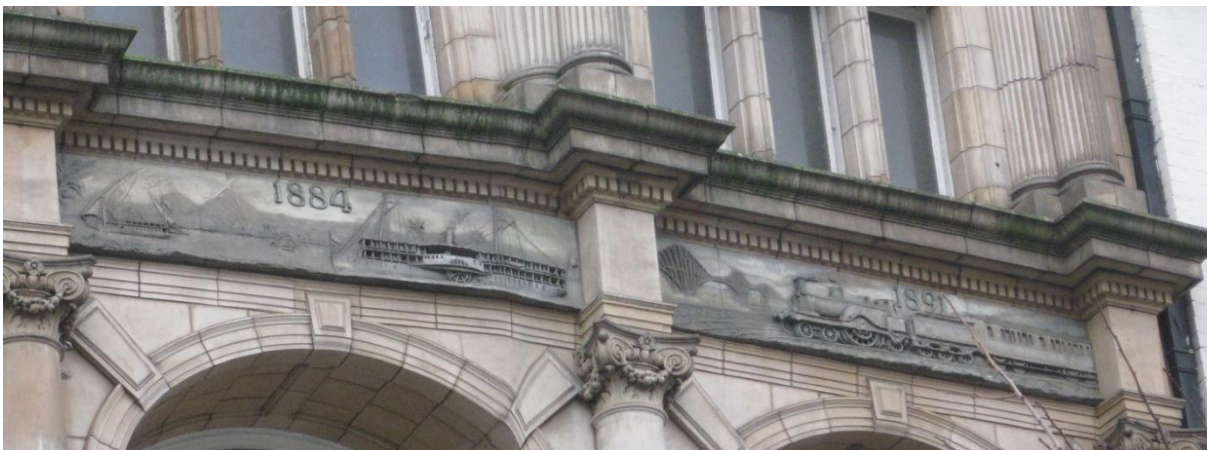
The Thomas Cook building.

faience decoration, which means moulded glazed or unglazed terracotta blocks used structurally or as cladding. Take their word for it. Above the 2nd floor, left to right, in 4 relief panels above each of the 4 windows is inscribed 1841, T.COOK, & SON Ld. 1894. See the third photograph below.

The really interesting 4 terracotta relief panels above the 1st floor, are shown in the composite photographs below. The 1st panel, below left, with the date 1841 and a small 0-4-0 (4 driving wheels) steam engine with coal tender, two open 3rd class passenger carriages and half shown closed carriage set before an open hilly landscape, represents the first excursion to Loughborough. The 2nd panel, below right, with the date 1851 represents the visit to the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. It shows the exhibition building on the left while approaching from the right is a 2-2-2 (two driving wheels) steam engine with coal tender and a single enclosed 3rd class passenger carriage.



The 3rd panel, below left, dated 1884, depicts a steam paddle ship and Nile sailing boat representing the role of Cook's steamers in the Relief of Khartoum. To recap; its steamers, already used for tourists on the Nile, were used to render 'signal aid to the British Army then serving in Egypt' in the relief of General Gordon's forces in Khartoum. The final 4th panel, below right, dated 1891, depicts two important technological advances. Advancing from the



right, dominating over two thirds of the panel, is a Midland Railway 4-2-2 (two driving wheels) express steam engine with six-wheel tender and enclosed passenger carriage. In the left background is the Firth of Forth Bridge.

The final top panel, above the 2nd story windows, shown below carries the inscription 1841 T, Cook & Son Ltd. 1894.



When we were there the ground floor was occupied by a shoe shop and the first floor by a retailer of hair products. The 2nd and 3rd floors appeared empty.

After pottering around for a while, we headed home.

Bibliography

- Crofton, Ian. 2008. The kings and queens of England. Quercus Publishing Plc, London.
Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre. History.
<https://www.bosworthbattlefield.org.uk/history/> . 2026-06-23
- Leicester Cathedral. King Richard III. <https://leicestercathedral.org/king-richard-iii> . Accessed 2026-06-23.
- St. Nicholas guide book, 2011. Leicester.
- St. Nicholas Church Leicester. History. <https://stnicholasleicester.com/history> . Accessed 2026-06-24.
- Story of Leicester. Thomas Cook Building. <https://storyofleicester.info/leisure-entertainment/thomas-cook-building/> . Accessed 2023-03-10.
- University of Leicester. The Grey Friars – a brief history. <https://le.ac.uk/richard-iii/richard-iii-and-leicester/grey-friars-history> . Accessed 2026-06-23