

ISOLDE WIGRAM 1920 - 2009

With the death of its senior vice-President, Isolde Wigram, the Richard III Society has lost its last link with Saxon Barton, who founded the Society as the Fellowship of the White Boar in 1924.

Born in 1920, Isolde became interested in Richard III by chance when in 1952 a friend gave her a copy of Josephine Tey's recently published detective novel *The Daughter of Time*. The novel lit a fire that was to burn for the rest of Isolde's life; it sparked a fierce belief in Richard III's innocence and an equally fierce resolve to do something about it. She read widely on the subject, and came across references to Saxon Barton and the Fellowship. Eventually contact was made with him, only for her to discover that the Fellowship was almost moribund, but with Saxon's help, and aided by fortuitous external events, it was refounded in 1956.

Isolde was greatly supported in her work by her mother Olivia Wigram, a notable Ricardian in her own right and author of the pro-Richard III play *The Sun of York*. The years preceding 1956 had seen the growing popularity of Josephine Tey's novel, the release of Olivier's classic film of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the publication of Paul Murray Kendall's sympathetic biography of the king, and the Royal Court Theatre production of Olivia Wigram's play. All these and the publicity generated created the right conditions for Ricardians to come together again.

Despite all these helpful factors, a lot of hard work was still required to re-found and build the Fellowship, which became the Richard III Society in 1959. Much of this fell to Isolde, who was appointed its first secretary, a role she carried out with skill and fortitude until her retirement in 1967, by which time the Society was firmly established. She was modest about her contribution and always declined the office of President; she felt she did not deserve it when in fact she deserved it more than anyone. She was modest too about her contribution to Ricardian studies, but her interventions through the pages of *The Ricardian* and the *Bulletin* all show a sharp mind and a real familiarity with late-fifteenth-century history.

After her retirement from office Isolde remained an ever-present source of advice and encouragement, moving effortlessly into the role of the Society's 'Grande Dame'. In more recent years ill health prevented her regular and much loved presence at AGMs and other Society events. She lived to see the Society enter the internet age and grow far beyond anything she and Saxon Barton could have dreamed.

None of this would have been possible without the pioneering work and personal dedication of Isolde Wigram. The Richard III Society will forever be in her debt.

This is a shortened version of a full obituary that will appear in the March issue of the Ricardian Bulletin, together with other tributes.