

King Richard III search in new phase after 'discovery has potential to rewrite history'

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This is lead archaeologist Richard Buckley with a piece of tracery that once held a window. Credit: University of Leicester

Historic findings of human remains- including a man with apparent battle wounds and curvature of the spine - have been revealed by an archaeological team from the University of Leicester.

The University of Leicester has been leading the [archaeological search](#) for the burial place of King Richard III with Leicester City Council, in association with the Richard III Society. The dig, now in its third week, has yielded dramatic findings of human remains which the University will now subject to rigorous laboratory tests.

The stunning findings of human remains excavated by the archaeologists came from the Choir of the Grey Friars Church.

Richard Taylor, Director of Corporate Affairs at the University and one of the prime movers behind the project, said:

"The University of Leicester applied to the Ministry of Justice under the 1857 Burials Act for permission to exhume human remains found at the Grey Friars site in Leicester.

"The work was conducted by Dr Turi King from the University's Department of Genetics and Dr Jo Appleby and Mathew Morris of our School of Archaeology and Ancient History.

"We have exhumed one fully articulated skeleton and one set of disarticulated human remains. The disarticulated set of [human remains](#) was found in what is believed to be the Presbytery of the lost Church of the Grey Friars. These remains are female, and thus certainly not Richard III.

"The articulated skeleton was found in what is believed to be the Choir of the church.



This is Michael Ibsen (genetic descendant of Richard III) and geneticist Dr. Turi King. Credit: University of Leicester

"The articulated skeleton found in the Choir is of significant interest to us. Dr Jo Appleby has carried out a preliminary examination of the remains. There are five reasons for our interest:

1. The remains appear to be of an adult male.
2. The Choir is the area reported in the historical record as the burial place of King Richard III. John Rous, reports that Richard "at last was buried in the choir of the Friars Minor at Leicester".
3. The skeleton, on initial examination, appears to have suffered significant peri-mortem trauma to the skull which appears consistent with (although not certainly caused by) an injury received in battle. A bladed implement appears to have cleaved part of the rear of the skull.
4. A barbed iron arrowhead was found between vertebrae of the skeleton's upper back.
5. The skeleton found in the Choir area has spinal abnormalities. We believe the individual would have had severe scoliosis – which is a form of spinal curvature. This would have made his right shoulder appear visibly higher than the left shoulder. This is consistent with contemporary accounts of Richard's appearance. The skeleton does not have kyphosis – a different form of spinal curvature. The skeleton was not a hunchback and did not have a "withered arm".

"Both sets of remains are now at an undisclosed location where further analysis is being undertaken.

"I need to be very frank. The University has always been clear that any remains would need to be subjected to rigorous laboratory analysis before we confirm the outcome of the search for Richard III.

"We are not saying today that we have found King Richard III. What we are saying is that the Search for Richard III has entered a new phase. Our focus is shifting from the archaeological excavation to laboratory analysis. This skeleton certainly has characteristics that warrant extensive further detailed examination.

"Clearly we are all very excited by these latest discoveries. We have said finding Richard was a long-shot. However it is a testament to the skill of the [archaeological team](#) led by Richard Buckley that such extensive progress has been made.

"We have all been witness to a powerful and historic story unfolding before our eyes. It is proper that the University now subjects the findings to rigorous analysis so that the strong circumstantial evidence that has presented itself can be properly understood.

"This is potentially a historic moment for the University and City of Leicester."

Leicester's City Mayor Peter Soulsby said: "This is truly remarkable news.

"Although further tests and investigation are needed, the location and condition of the bones suggest that Leicester University has uncovered a potentially staggering find.

"If the experts finally conclude these are indeed the bones of King Richard III, this will have enormous implications for our city.

"From Leicester Castle where he is known to have often stayed, to the Magazine Gateway, from where he rode off to the battle of Bosworth – Leicester has many sites of historical interest connected to Richard.

"We have recently seen renewed interest in these and other important heritage sites, which we opening up to the public once again as part of a new telling of the story of Leicester.

"The discovery of King Richard's final resting place – if this is what we have –will enhance the telling of that story in a way we could never have planned.

"I would like to thank the university and all of the staff and experts who have supported them for their tremendous work in finding this important historical site, which is of great value to the city in its own right.

"I would also like to thank the Richard III Society and Phillipa Langley for their determination, and perseverance in seeking out the King's burial place.

"Whatever happens next it is clear this site is worthy of further excavation, and for that reason I have given the university the go-ahead to continue with their work.

"We need to have further discussion about the long-term future of the site, but I will certainly be doing everything in my power to make sure the City of Leicester supports and celebrates this exciting discovery."

Commenting on the findings, Philippa Langley, a screenwriter and member of the Richard III Society, who conceived the idea of searching for King Richard III and instigated the project three years ago, said:

"We came with a dream –and if the dream becomes reality it will be nothing short of miraculous."

Philippa has worked tirelessly to bring about the partnership between the University of Leicester and Leicester City Council in association with

the Richard III Society. She also secured the funding for the dig project and is now working with Darlow Smithson Productions and Channel 4 on the forthcoming TV documentary about the search for King Richard's grave that will be aired later this year.

"It's been a long, hard journey," she adds, "and has demanded unceasing optimism to pull together all the resources needed to find King Richard's last resting place. I am incredibly grateful to the University of Leicester for funding the project in association with the Richard III Society, and to Leicester City Council for agreeing to facilitate it and allow us to do all this excavation work. The University of Leicester Archaeological Services is one of the UK's leading archaeological teams and I cannot thank Richard Buckley enough for agreeing to come with me on this unique journey of discovery.

"If the impossible dream is now made possible, it is thanks to a group effort by a wonderful team."

Dr Phil Stone, Chairman of the Richard III Society, said:

"This has been a momentous undertaking, and one that needed to happen. It represents a huge leap forward in terms of learning more about Richard III and his period, which is the Society's main goal. We hope it will encourage an upsurge of interest in this seriously undervalued king."

Richard Buckley, the University of Leicester archaeologist who led the search for Richard III, said:

"This is an historic and perhaps defining moment in the story of Leicester and I am proud that the University of Leicester has played a pivotal role in the telling of that story.

"From the outset, the search for Richard III was a thrilling prospect but it has involved many hours of dedicated research by our team that has led to the astonishing finds we have disclosed today.

"The search has caught the imagination of not only the people of Leicester and Leicestershire but beyond and has received global media attention. It is a measure of the power of archaeology to excite public interest and provide a narrative about our heritage."

"Whether or not we have found Richard III, this archaeological project has been exciting because of what it has uncovered about Leicester's rich and varied past."



This is Karen Ladniuk (Richard III Society) cleaning a path made from re-used medieval tiles. Credit: University of Leicester

The Very Revd Vivienne Faull, Dean of Leicester, said:

"The news from the excavation is very exciting and I congratulate Philippa Langley of the Richard III Society for her persistence and Richard Buckley and his team of archaeologists for their painstaking work. Leicester Cathedral, along with Leicester City Council, and the University of Leicester, has worked closely with the Richard III Society for many months on the current search.

"There has been a major memorial to King Richard at the heart of the cathedral and adjacent to the Herrick Chapel since 1980. This is the only cathedral memorial to Richard in the country and has been the focus for remembrance, particularly on the anniversary of the Battle of Bosworth. The memorial states that Richard was buried in the graveyard of the Church of the Greyfriars in the parish of St Martin (now the cathedral church).

"If the identity of the remains is confirmed, Leicester Cathedral will continue to work with the Royal Household, and with the Richard III Society, to ensure that his remains are treated with dignity and respect and are reburied with the appropriate rites and ceremonies of the church."

If you want to discover the final chapter of this story, you will need to tune in to the forthcoming documentary being made by Darlow Smithson Productions for Channel 4.

Provided by University of Leicester

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