

# Experts find remains of England's King Richard III (Update 4)

February 4 2013, by Jill Lawless

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Jo Appleby, a lecturer in Human Bioarchaeology, at University of Leicester, School of Archaeology and Ancient History, who led the exhumation of the remains found during a dig at a Leicester car park, speaks at the university Monday Feb. 4, 2013. Tests have established that a skeleton found , including this skull, are "beyond reasonable doubt" the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, missing for 500 years.(AP Photo/Rui Vieira, PA)

He was king of England, but for centuries he lay without shroud or coffin in an unknown grave, and his name became a byword for villainy.

On Monday, scientists announced they had rescued the remains of Richard III from anonymity—and the monarch's fans hope a revival of his reputation will soon follow.

In a dramatically orchestrated news conference, a team of archaeologists, geneticists, genealogists and other scientists from the University of Leicester announced that tests had proven what they scarcely dared to hope—a scarred and broken skeleton unearthed under a drab municipal parking lot was that of the 15th-century king, the last English monarch to die in battle.

Lead archaeologist Richard Butler said that a battery of tests proved "beyond reasonable doubt" that the remains were the king's.

Lin Foxhall, head of the university's school of archaeology, said the discovery "could end up rewriting a little bit of history in a big way."

Few monarchs have seen their reputations decline as much after death as Richard III. He ruled England between 1483 and 1485, during the decades-long battle over the throne known as the Wars of the Roses, which pitted two wings of the ruling Plantagenet dynasty—York and Lancaster—against one another.

His brief reign saw liberal reforms, including the introduction of the right to bail and the lifting of restrictions on books and printing presses.

But his rule was challenged, and he was defeated and killed by the army of Henry Tudor, who took the throne as King Henry VII and ended the Plantagenet line. Britain's current monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is distantly related to Richard, but is not a descendant.

After his death, historians writing under the victorious Tudors comprehensively trashed Richard's reputation, accusing him of myriad

crimes—most famously, the murder of his two nephews, the "Princes in the Tower."



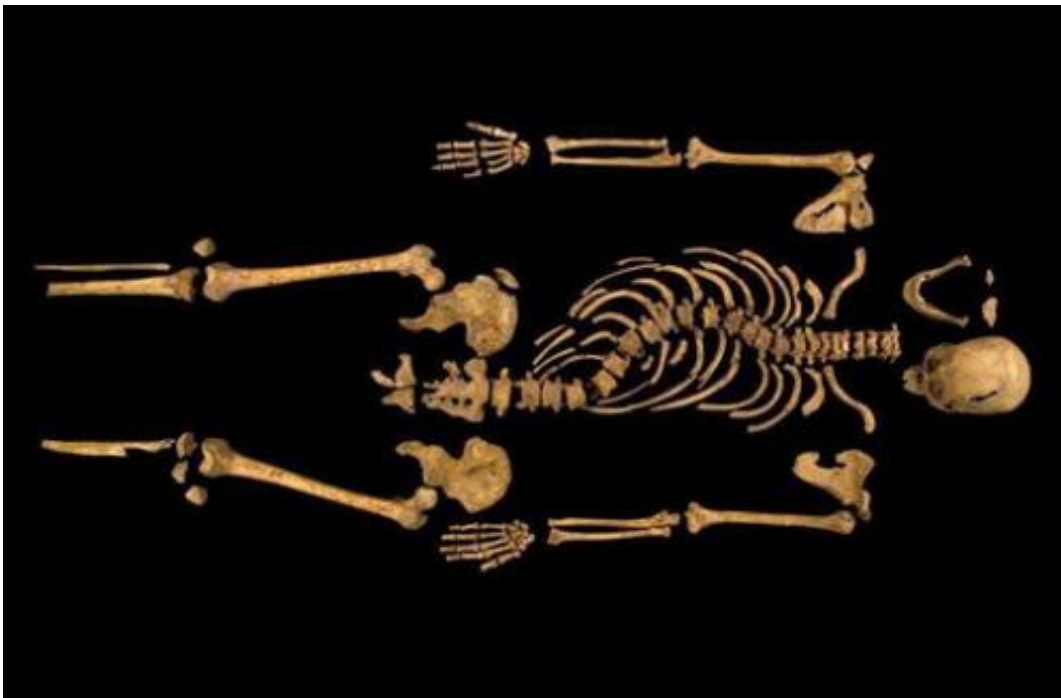
Undated photo made available by the University of Leicester, England, Monday Feb. 4 2013 of the remains found underneath a car park last September at the Grey Friars excavation in Leicester, which have been declared Monday "beyond reasonable doubt" to be the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, missing for 500 years. Richard was immortalized in a play by Shakespeare as a hunchbacked usurper who left a trail of bodies—including those of his two young nephews, murdered in the Tower of London—on his way to the throne. (AP Photo/ University of Leicester)

William Shakespeare indelibly depicted Richard as a hunchbacked usurper who left a trail of bodies on his way to the throne before dying in battle, shouting "My kingdom for a horse."

That view was repeated by many historians, and Richard remains a villain in the popular imagination. But others say Richard's reputation was unjustly smeared by his Tudor successors.

Philippa Langley of the Richard III Society—which seeks to restore the late king's reputation and backed the search for his grave—said that for centuries Richard's story has been told by others, many of them hostile.

She hopes a new surge of interest, along with evidence from the skeleton about how the king lived and died—and how he was mistreated after death—will help restore his reputation.



Undated photo made available by the University of Leicester, England, Monday Feb. 4 2013 of the remains found underneath a car park last September at the Grey Friars excavation in Leicester, which have been declared Monday "beyond reasonable doubt" to be the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, missing for 500 years. Richard was immortalized in a play by Shakespeare as a hunchbacked usurper who left a trail of bodies—including those of his two

young nephews, murdered in the Tower of London—on his way to the throne.  
(AP Photo/ University of Leicester)

"A wind of change is blowing, one that will seek out the truth about the real Richard III," she said.

Langley, who helped launch the search for the king, said she could scarcely believe her quest had paid off.

"Everyone thought that I was mad," she said. "It's not the easiest pitch in the world, to look for a king under a council car park."

The location of Richard's body was unknown for centuries. He died in August 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth Field in the English Midlands, and records say he was buried by the Franciscan monks of Grey Friars at their church in Leicester, 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of London.

The church was closed and dismantled after King Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in 1538, and its location eventually was forgotten by most local residents.

There were tales that the king's bones had been dug up and thrown in a nearby river in the 16th century.



Jo Appleby, a lecturer in Human Bioarchaeology, at University of Leicester, School of Archaeology and Ancient History, who led the exhumation of the remains found during a dig at a Leicester car park, speaks at the university Monday Feb. 4, 2013. Tests have established that a skeleton found, including this skull, are "beyond reasonable doubt" the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, missing for 500 years. (AP Photo/Rui Vieira, PA)

Then last year a team led by University of Leicester archaeologist Richard Buckley identified a possible location of the grave through map regression analysis, starting with a current map of the general area of the former church and analyzing earlier maps to discover what had changed and not changed. Ground-penetrating radar was used to find the best places to start digging.

The team began excavating in a parking lot last August. Within a week they had located thick walls and the remains of tiled floors. Soon after, they found human remains—the skeleton of an adult male who appeared

to have died in battle.

He had been buried unceremoniously, with no coffin or shroud—plausible for a despised and defeated enemy.



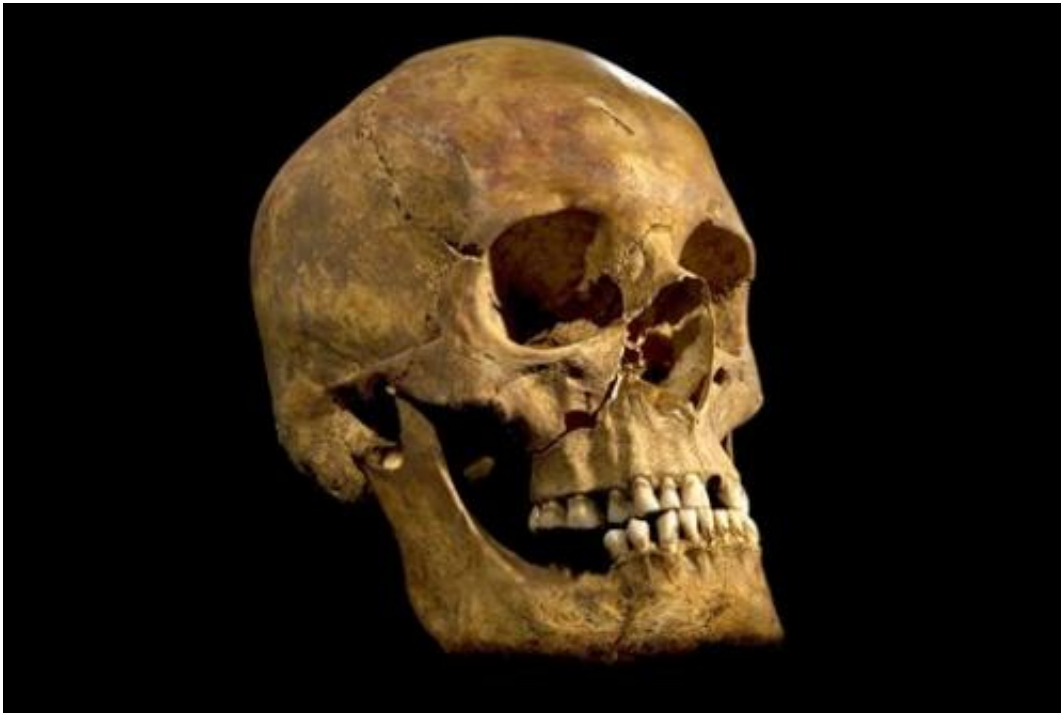
Undated photo made available by the University of Leicester, England, Monday Feb. 4, 2013 of the earliest surviving portrait of Richard III in Leicester Cathedral, ahead of an announcement about the identity of the skeleton found underneath a car park last September. Richard was immortalized in a play by Shakespeare as a hunchbacked usurper who left a trail of bodies—including those of his two young nephews, murdered in the Tower of London—on his way to the throne. (AP Photo/ University of Leicester)

Increasingly excited, the researchers set out to conduct a battery of scientific tests, including radiocarbon dating to determine the skeleton's

age, to see whether, against the odds, they really had found the king.

They found the skeleton belonged to a man in his late 20s to late 30s who died between 1455 and 1540. Richard was 32 when he died in 1485.

Archaeological bone specialist Jo Appleby, a lecturer in human bioarchaeology at Leicester, said study of the bones provided "a highly convincing case for identification of Richard III."



Undated photo made available by the University of Leicester, England, Monday Feb. 4 2013 of the skull found at the Grey Friars excavation in Leicester, potentially the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, ahead of an announcement about the identity of the skeleton found underneath a car park last September. Richard was immortalized in a play by Shakespeare as a hunchbacked usurper who left a trail of bodies—including those of his two young nephews, murdered in the Tower of London—on his way to the throne. (AP Photo/ University of Leicester)



Appleby said the 10 injuries to the body were inflicted by weapons such as swords, daggers and halberds and were consistent with accounts of Richard being struck down in battle—his helmet knocked from his head—before his body was stripped naked and flung over the back of a horse in disgrace.

Appleby said two of the blows to the head could have been fatal. Other scars, including a knife wound to the buttock, bore the hallmarks of "humiliation injuries" inflicted after death.

The remains also displayed signs of scoliosis, a form of spinal curvature, consistent with contemporary accounts of Richard's appearance, though not the withered arm Shakespeare describes.



Jo Appleby, a lecturer in Human Bioarchaeology, at University of Leicester, School of Archaeology and Ancient History, who led the exhumation of the remains found during a dig at a Leicester car park, speaks at the university

Monday Feb. 4, 2013. Tests have established that a skeleton found , pictured behind, are "beyond reasonable doubt" the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, missing for 500 years.(AP Photo/Rui Vieira, PA)

DNA from the skeleton matched a sample taken from Michael Ibsen, a distant living relative of Richard's sister. The project's lead geneticist, Turi King, said Ibsen, a Canadian carpenter living in London, shares with the skeleton a rare strain of mitochondrial DNA. The same DNA group also matches a second living descendant, who wants to remain anonymous.

King said that between 1 and 2 percent of the population belongs to this genetic sub-group, so the DNA evidence is not definitive proof in itself of the skeleton's identity. But combined with the archaeological evidence, it left little doubt the skeleton belonged to Richard.

Ibsen, a 17th great-grand-nephew of Richard's older sister, said he was "stunned" by the discovery.

"It's difficult to digest," he said.

Some scientists felt qualms about the haste with which the Leicester team announced its results. The findings have not been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, though the university said they soon would be.



Jo Appleby, a lecturer in Human Bioarchaeology, at University of Leicester, School of Archaeology and Ancient History, who led the exhumation of the remains found during a dig at a Leicester car park, gestures at the university Monday Feb. 4, 2013. Tests have established that a skeleton found , including this skull, are "beyond reasonable doubt" the long lost remains of England's King Richard III, missing for 500 years.(AP Photo/Rui Vieira, PA)

"It's a bizarre way of going about things," said Mark Horton, a professor of archaeology at the University of Bristol—although he said "overwhelming circumstantial evidence" identified the skeleton as Richard's.

Archaeologist Mike Pitts, editor of British Archaeology magazine, also said he found the evidence persuasive.

"I don't think there is any question. It is Richard III," said Pitts, who was not affiliated with the research team.

The discovery is a boon for the city of Leicester, which has bought a building next to the parking lot to serve as a visitor center and museum.

On Monday, the king's skeleton lay in a glass box in a meeting room within the university library. It was a browned, fragile-looking thing, its skull pocked with injuries, missing its feet—which scientists say were disturbed sometime after burial—and with a pronounced s-shape to the spine.

Soon the remains will be moved to an undisclosed secure location, and next year Richard will, at last, get a king's burial, interred with pomp and ceremony in Leicester Cathedral.

It is a day Langley, of the Richard III Society, has dreamed of seeing.

"We have searched for him, we have found him—it is now time to honor him," she said.

**More information:** Press release: [phys.org/wire-news/121440048/updated-richard-iii.html](http://phys.org/wire-news/121440048/updated-richard-iii.html)

The Search for Richard III: [www2.le.ac.uk/projects/greyfriars](http://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/greyfriars)

Richard III Society: [www.richardiii.net/](http://www.richardiii.net/)

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