

## King Richard III archaeological unit makes new discovery under Leicester car park

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A view across the site showing the spread of medieval pits. Credit: University of Leicester

The University of Leicester archaeological unit that discovered King Richard III has spearheaded another dig and discovered a 1,700-old-Roman cemetery – under another car park in Leicester.

The latest dig follows the historic discovery of [King Richard III](#) by colleagues from the same unit.

The find has revealed remains thought to date back to 300AD – and includes personal items such as hairpins, rings, belt buckles and remains of shoes.

In addition, the team has found a jet ring with a curious symbol etched onto it, apparently showing the letters IX overlain. Opinion as to its meaning is divided; it may just be an attractive design but it is also reminiscent of an early Christian symbol known as an IX (Iota-Chi) monogram taken from the initials of Jesus Christ in Greek.

The University of Leicester [archaeologists](#) have also identified the unusual practice of Christian burials alongside pagan burials.

In total, archaeologists have identified 13 sets of remains at the car park in Oxford Street in Leicester's historic city centre.



The jet ring just after it had been uncovered, showing the design. Credit: University of Leicester

[Archaeological Project](#) Officer John Thomas said: "We have discovered new evidence about a known cemetery that existed outside the walled town of Roman Leicester during the 3rd-4th Centuries AD.

"The [excavation](#), at the junction of Oxford Street and Newarke Street, lay approximately 130m outside the south gate of Roman Leicester, adjacent to one of the main routes into the town from the south (Oxford Street). Roman law forbade burial within the town limits so cemeteries developed outside the walls, close to well-used roads.

"Previous excavations on Newarke Street had discovered numerous burials to the immediate east and north of the present site, all of which

appeared to have been buried according to Christian traditions - buried in a supine position, facing east with little or no grave goods.

"Unusually the 13 burials found during the recent excavations, of mixed age and sex, displayed a variety of burial traditions including east to west & north to south oriented graves, many with personal items such as finger rings, hairpins, buckles and hob-nailed shoes.



Two Roman burials under excavation. Credit: University of Leicester

"One in particular appears to have been buried in a Christian tradition, facing east and wearing a polished jet finger ring on their left hand which has a possible early Christian Iota - Chi monogram etched onto it, taking the initial letters from the Greek for Jesus Christ. If so this would

represent rare evidence for a personal statement of belief from this period.

"In contrast a nearby and probably near contemporary grave appeared to indicate very different beliefs. This grave had a north-south orientation, with the body laid on its side in a semi-foetal position, with the head removed and placed near the feet alongside two complete pottery jars that would have held offerings for the journey to the afterlife. This would seem to be a very pagan burial, so it is possible from the variety of [burials](#) found that the cemetery catered for a range of beliefs that would have been important to people living in Leicester at this time."

The excavations also add information to the increasingly well documented medieval southern suburb of the town, revealing remains of 12th-13th century quarries, cess-pits and rubbish pits that would have been dug in the backyards of properties fronting onto Oxford Street.

Mr Thomas added: "All of these pits contained a wealth of information from pottery, bone and environmental remains to help build a picture of medieval life in this part of the town. A large 17th century defensive ditch running alongside Newarke Street was also discovered which was part of the town's defences during the English Civil War."

The site is currently earmarked for development.

Provided by University of Leicester

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