

Richard III's skeleton came within inches of destruction

August 26 2013



Richard III in the grave. Credit: University of Leicester

Leicester archaeologists have revealed the bones of Richard III came within inches of destruction.

A team from the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) have discovered during a second, follow-up dig, a massive disturbance at the Grey Friars site where the bones of the medieval

monarch were found last year.

The news comes one year on from when archaeologists began the Search for Richard III at the Grey Friars site on 25 August last year.

During their second excavation at the Grey Friars site last month, the archaeologists found a large area of the church which had been completely destroyed.

The area – measuring over 5 metres by 10 metres – was just inches away from Richard III's skull, meaning the remains of the Last Plantagenet King came very close to being destroyed.

The disturbance covers a far larger area than the remnants of the Victorian toilet which were also discovered near Richard's grave during the first dig last year.

Site director Mathew Morris said: "It's a miracle that Richard III's skeleton was where it was. To the east, there is a massive disturbance that has removed all evidence of the church – which must have come within inches of his head.



Richard III in the grave. Credit: University of Leicester

"The disturbance is so big we didn't have all of it in the excavation area. We uncovered an area more than 5 metres by 10 metres. We never got to the bottom – it is at least 1.8 metres deep.

"We don't know what caused it yet. It's possible it was related to the demolition of the Grey Friars church – or it could have happened any time after the friary was disbanded. Whatever it was, it came very close to removing Richard's head.

"It's entirely possible that because he was underneath the Victorian

outhouses, he was protected from it.

"We found some pottery remnants in the area, but until we have examined those we won't have any idea when the disturbance happened."

The team first started digging on the Grey Friars site on 25 August, 2012.

They came across Richard's remains on the very first day – but didn't exhume the skeleton until they were able to determine where the bones were buried within the friary.

The archaeologists worked with a team of experts from a wide range of disciplines – including genetics, osteoarchaeology, forensic pathology and genealogy – to determine the skeleton's identity.

The results revealed that – beyond reasonable doubt – the remains were those of the medieval monarch, and the University announced its discovery to a global audience in February.

Leading UK construction and infrastructure company Morgan Sindall is currently on the Grey Friars site constructing a King Richard III Visitor Centre to showcase some of the finds from the site. Morgan Sindall worked with the archaeological team to enable access to the site whilst building work continues.

Provided by University of Leicester

Citation: Richard III's skeleton came within inches of destruction (2013, August 26) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-richard-iii-skeleton-inches-destruction.html>

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