

**A Watching Brief
Trial Pit Excavations at 2-4 Peacock
Lane/16 New Street, Leicester.**

NGR: SK 585 043
By Tim Higgins



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A Watching Brief

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Leicester**

NGR: SK 585 043

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An Archaeological Watching Brief 2-4 Peacock Lane/ 16 New Street Leicester.

Tim Higgins

Summary

On 30 August 2017, University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of test pits on land at 2-4 Peacock Lane/ 16 New Street, Leicester NGR SK 585 043. None of the trenches contained any archaeological features apart from brick and concrete foundations. The site archive will be held by Leicester City Council Museums under accession number A14.2017.

1. Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on land at 2-4 Peacock Lane/ 16 New Street, Leicester SK 585 043 by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on 30 August 2017. The monitoring was undertaken in order to ensure that any archaeological deposits which might be affected by a series of test pits excavated for ground-investigation purposes would be adequately investigated and recorded. The work was carried out as part of a pre planning enquiry prior to the submission of an application for development at 2-4 Peacock Lane/16 New Street, Leicester (see Figures 1 and 2).

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* this document provides details of the results of the archaeological investigations.

2. Site Description, Topography and Geology

The watching brief was undertaken on land located at the rear of several properties which included 2-4 Peacock Lane and 16 New Street. The site lies within the former precinct of the Greyfriars (Figure 2) and broadly covers a city block bordered by Friar Lane to the south, New Street to the east and St Martin's to the north (SK 585 043 centre). Today, the sub-rectangular area of land is largely filled with buildings on all four sides, notably 18th- and 19th-century town houses along Friar Lane, St Martin's and New Street; and the former Alderman Newton's School on St Martin's. Until recently, some of these were offices of Leicester City Council (LCC).

The land is currently open space and utilised as a privately owned New Street car park, to the west of New Street, and measures *c.*1733 square metres.

The British Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 156 (Leicester), indicates that the underlying geology is likely to consist of superficial deposits of sand and gravel of the Birstall Member across the southern side of the area overlying bedrock deposits of Triassic clay belonging to the Branscombe Mudstone Formation (BGS 2008). The site lies on relatively flat ground at *c.*65m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

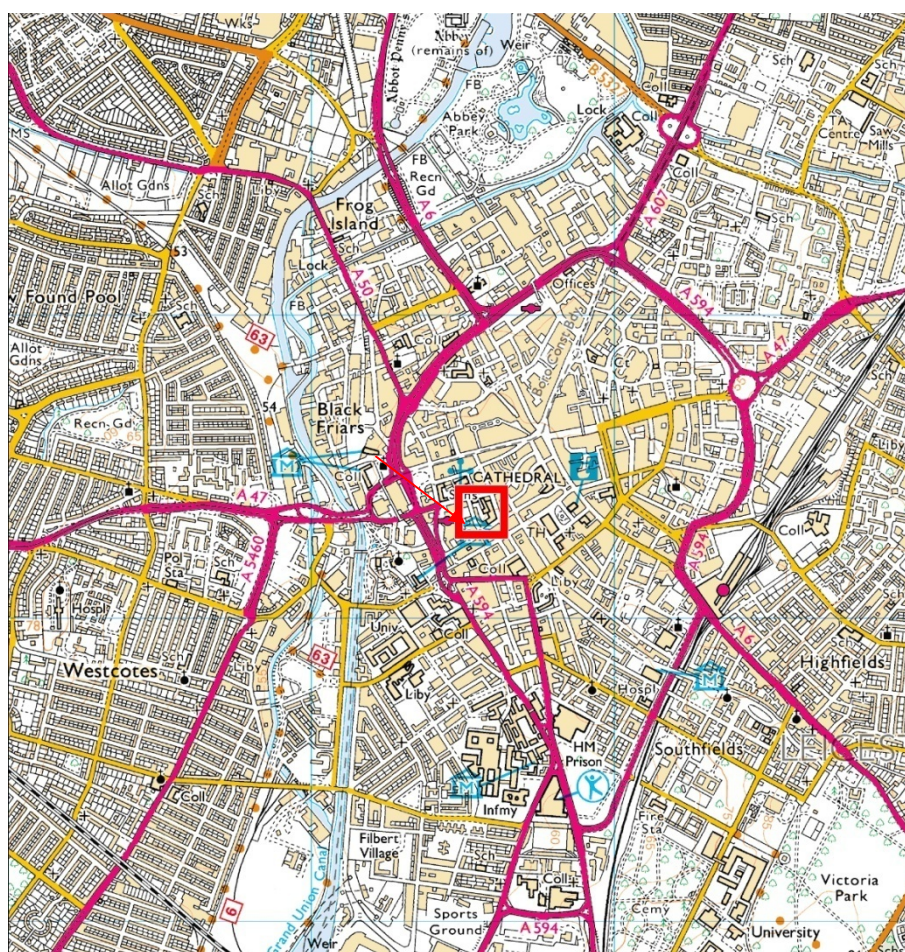


Figure 1: Site location plan within the UK and county of Leicestershire

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3. Historical and Archaeological Background

The site lies within the precinct of Leicester's Franciscan Friary, Greyfriars, which was dissolved in 1538 and demolished soon afterwards. The site was redeveloped in the 18th and 19th centuries with residential properties, two new streets (Greyfriars and New Street) and later commercial buildings. Until recently, little was known about the layout of buildings within this religious house but one event stands out in its 300 year history. On 25 August, 1485 King Richard III was buried in the friary church following his defeat by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth. On Saturday 25 August, 2012 – 527 years after King Richard III was buried in Leicester - University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) began a historic archaeological project, in collaboration with Leicester City Council and the Richard III Society, with the aim of discovering whether Britain's last Plantagenet King still lay buried in Leicester City Centre. The project represents the first ever search for the lost grave of an anointed King of England.

The friary was founded in the mid-13th century. In 1402 some of the friars were executed for treason, for spreading seditious rumours about the legitimacy of Henry IV's rule. Little else is known, except that the choir of the church was chosen as the burial site for King Richard III in 1485. Ten years later, Henry Tudor, now King Henry VII, had a tomb erected over the grave. The friary was dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1538 and most of the buildings were demolished soon after. In the early 17th century, the land was bought by Robert Herrick, a former mayor of Leicester, who built a large house and garden on the site. In his garden, he erected a memorial pillar inscribed 'here lies the body of Richard III sometime King of England'. As Leicester flourished and expanded during the ensuing centuries, Herrick's land was sub-divided and built on and the precise location of the church and the tomb became lost in. Fortunately, a map of Leicester dated 1741 still shows the Greyfriars site. Using historic descriptions of the friary and map regression analysis, a search area was established in the south-east quarter of Leicester's historic medieval town centre, specifically within the former Social Services car park on the eastern side of new Street and in an adjacent property. .

A first attempt to find the friary used Ground Penetrating Radar. It was hoped that this would find the walls of the church under the ground before digging began. Unfortunately, it proved unsuccessful, the results being too confused by modern activity across the site. Subsequently, two trenches were opened in the Social Services car park. These were laid out north/south, the reasoning being that a church should be aligned east/west, and therefore digging trenches at right-angles across it should provide the best opportunity to find some of its walls.

Medieval archaeology was found over a metre below the ground. In the southern half of Trench 1 was an east/west building containing the remains of a tiled floor and stone benches built up against its walls. This building continued into Trench 2, where it joined a long north/south corridor or building running the length of the trench. Its floor had also been tiled, now missing, but their impressions were still preserved on the underlying mortar. Although parts of the friary had been found in these first two trenches, there was little evidence for the church where King Richard III was reputedly buried. So a third trench was opened to the north-east of the first two. In this (Trench 3) was the remains of a large east/west building (about 10m wide). This had been floored with decorated tiles and contained the remains of choir stalls and demolished tombs; whilst amongst the building rubble were the remains of a grand 15th century perpendicular window. The building and the corridor found in the first two trenches are most likely the friary's chapter house and part of the eastern cloister walk or east range; whilst in Trench 3 is the eastern end of the friary church, including part of the choir and presbytery. This means that the rest of the choir can be projected west into Trench 1, where modern buildings had destroyed evidence of the building.

Findings evidence indicates that the friary was mostly built of grey sandstone, with slate roofs decorated with glazed ridge tiles. Inside, the walls were plastered and the floors tiled. These were mostly monochrome, except in the church where many were inlaid. Some of the windows were glazed. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the friary was stripped of everything of value and left as a ruin before eventually being demolished. Evidence of the people who lived in the friary was sparse, but pottery dating from the 13th to the 16th century was found, along with a couple of medieval silver halfpennies, including one of Richard III's older brother Edward IV. In the church some brass letters were found, most likely from tomb inscriptions. The grave identified as that of King Richard III's was located at the west end of the choir, most likely against the southern choir stall. The grave appears to have been hastily dug and was too short for the body, which had been partially propped up at one end. No evidence for a coffin, shroud or clothing was found. This fits with historical accounts, which say that Richard III

was buried without pomp or solemn funeral. In particular, the disposition of the arms is unusual, raising the possibility that the hands could have been tied. The skeleton was in good condition apart from the feet which are missing, almost certainly as a result of later disturbance. Radiocarbon dating provides a date of death of AD 1456-1530, consistent with someone who died in 1485. The individual is male, in his late 20s to late 30s, compatible with Richard's age of 32 at death, with a gracile build. He had severe idiopathic adolescent onset scoliosis. Unaffected by scoliosis, he would have stood around 5ft 8in (1.73m) tall, above average height for a medieval man, though his apparent height might have decreased as he grew older and his disability may have lifted his right shoulder higher than his left. This is consistent with the few contemporary reports of Richard III's physical appearance. Initial analysis of the mitochondrial DNA has revealed a match between the skeleton and two direct descendants of Richard III's sister Anne of York through the female line. The man had ten wounds to his skeleton, consistent with injuries received in battle. These include a puncture wound to the top of the head, most likely caused by a dagger, and evidence that the back of the head had been cleaved open by a sharp bladed instrument, probably a halberd and a sword. The latter wounds would have been fatal. Other minor injuries include a nick to the jaw and one of his ribs, and damage to his right cheek. There is also evidence that his corpse may have been deliberately humiliated after the battle, with a sword or dagger thrust through the right buttock. Like any modern forensic case, the evidence must be assessed together. Combined it makes a strong and compelling case that the skeleton is indeed the remains of King Richard III, the last Plantagenet King of England.

Figure 2 is a plan showing the postulated plan of the friary based on the 2012 and 2013 excavations and Figure 3 shows the location of the test pits which are the subject of this report. These had the potential to reveal evidence for the western cloistral range or cloister garth and possibly the west end of the church (depending on how far it extended to the west).

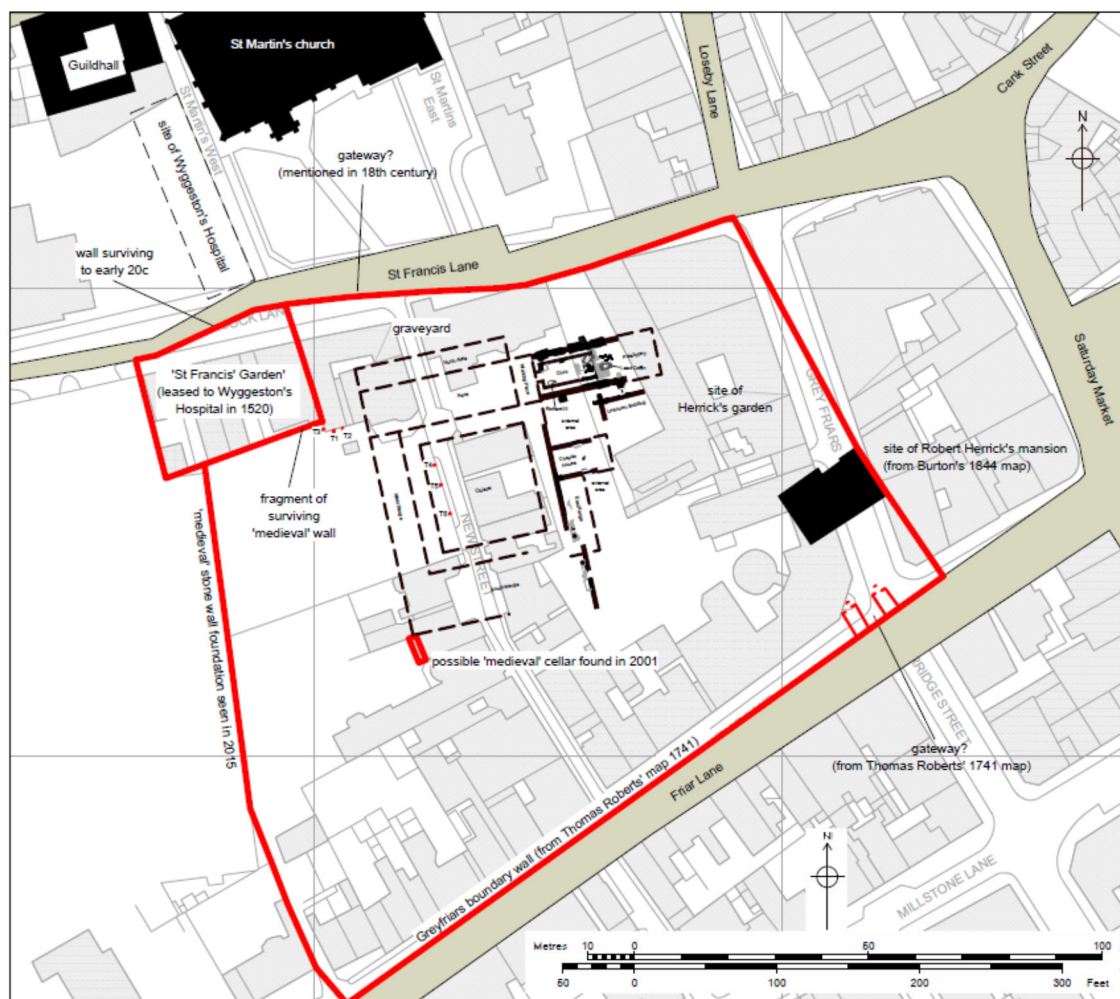


Figure 2 Development Area and postulated position of various Grey Friars Structures boundary walls and Herrick's Mansion

4. Aims and Objectives

Aims and Objectives.

The purpose of the archaeological work may be summarised as follows:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To describe, record and if possible provide a date range for the stratigraphy.
- To produce an archive and report of any results

Research Objectives

At the outset of the project, local and regional academic research objectives were identified from the East Midlands Research Framework (Cooper ed. 2006) and strategy (Knight *et al.* 2012), and also considered in relation to national research aims. Research aims would be reviewed and updated as the work progressed and new information came to light.

It was considered that the following research objectives had the potential to be addressed by the project

Early Medieval

1. Ritual and Belief: What was the relationship between pagan temples and other contemporary or later sites? (Knight 2012 para 6.2.5, 82)
2. How can we further enhance further our understanding of the development of pre-Viking churches, cathedrals and monasteries? (Knight 2012 para 6.2.6, 82)

High Medieval

3. Religion: Can we identify additional pre-Conquest church, minster and monastic sites? Knight 2012 para 7.5.1, 94)
4. How can we refine our understanding of local and regional architectural styles, including sculptured stone work, decorations and monuments? Knight 2012 para 7.5.5, 94)

Specifically, the project has the potential to furnish information on Leicester's Franciscan friary, including structural features, floor deposits and burials.

5. Methodology

Prior to excavation of test pits, general photographs of the site areas were taken.

The test pits were hand excavated. The modern overburden and overlying layers were removed under full archaeological supervision until either the top of archaeological deposits or required depth was reached. Trenches were examined for archaeological deposits or finds by hand cleaning. The trenches were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid and then were backfilled and leveled at the end of the evaluation.

The work followed the approved design specification (Clay 2016) and adhered to the Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (2013).

6. Results

The results of all excavated trenches are presented below, ordered according to each specific area of the site that was evaluated.

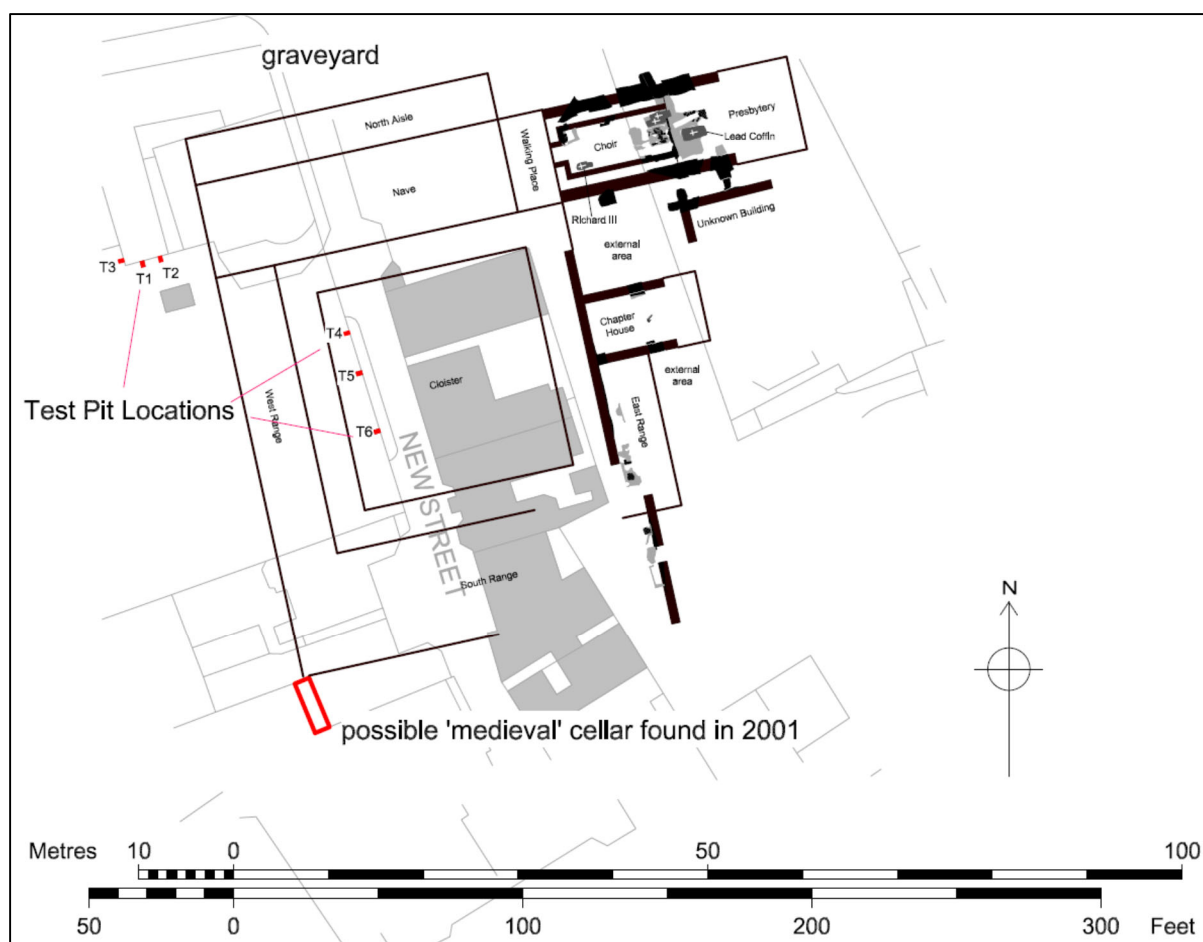


Figure 3 Test Pit Locations

Test pits

Three test pits or trial holes (test pits 1, 2 and 3) (Figure 3) were excavated by hand towards the north-east corner of the car park and were placed against the wall of an existing single office-block structure (Figure 4). Test pits 1 and 2 were placed against the south wall and measured approximately *c.* 0.60m long and 0.40m wide and were excavated by hand to a depth of between 0.60m and 0.70m. In both test pits a mixed gravel surface was removed measuring 0.10m deep. Underlying this, a dark greyish-brown silty clay garden soil was found in both test pits and measured 0.50m deep. At the base of Test Pit 1, an auger hole was bored to a depth of 0.70m at which point it hit a hard obstruction. Overlying this, the auger bored through a layer of brown silty clay mixed with abundant crushed sandstone fragments. This was thought to be potential archaeological layer. Both test pits indicated that the office block was constructed on vaulted foundations built of a different type of brick (Figures 5 and 6). This might suggest that the brick vault wall foundations were possibly reused from an earlier structure.

The third test pit was placed against the west wall of the office block and measured 0.40m square and was excavated to depth of 0.20m. The test pit was abandoned at this depth as the brick wall foundation for a demolished structure was revealed (Figure 7)

An additional three test pits or trial holes (test pits 4, 5 and 6, Figure 3) were excavated by hand on the east side of the car park and were placed against the boundary wall and fence running along New Street (Figure 4). Test pits 4, 5 and 6 were excavated against the west side of the wall and measured approximately *c.* 0.60m to 1.10m long and 0.40m wide and were excavated by hand to a depth of between 0.60m and 0.70m. In all three test pits, a mixed gravel surface was removed measuring 0.10m

deep. Underlying, a dark greyish-brown silty clay garden soil was found that measured 0.60m deep. In all of the Test Pits a concrete foundation for the wall was exposed (Figures 9, 10 and 11). In Test Pits 4 and 5, the concrete was 0.30m wide and 0.30m thick. In Test Pit 6 the concrete was more substantial and measured 0.60m wide and 0.50m deep.

Conclusion

The test pits were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.70m and as such probably only disturbed relatively modern overburden based on evidence from the adjacent Greyfriars site where archaeology lay at 0.70-1.0m below present (Morris 2013). Test pit 1 hit crushed sandstone deposits at a depth approaching 0.7m which could possibly indicate the presence of demolition layers relating to the friary.



Figure 4 General location photo of Test pits 1, 2 and 3 looking north east



Figure 5 Test pit 1



Figure 6 Test Pit 2



Figure 7 Test pit 3



Figure 8 General photo location of Test Pits 4, 5 and 6



Figure 9 Test Pit 4



Figure 10 Test Pit 5



Figure 11 Test Pit 6

7. Archive

The site archive will be held by *Leicester City Council Museums Service, under accession no. A14.2017.*

The site archive consists of:

- 1 Unbound A4 copy of this report
- 2 A4 Watching Brief recording sheets
- 1 A4 Photo record sheet
- A4 Colour digital contact print 1 CD of digital photos

8. Publication

Since 2004 ULAS has reported the results of all archaeological work to the *Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS)* database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York (Appendix 1). A summary of the work will also be submitted for publication in the local archaeological journal, the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, in due course

OASIS data entry

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1-353649		
	Project Name	An Archaeological Watching Brief 2-4 Peacock Lane/16 New Street, Leicester		
	Start/end dates of field work	30-08-2017		
	Previous/Future Work	None Unknown		
	Project Type	Watching Brief		
	Site Status	None		
	Current Land Use	Car park		
	Monument Type/Period	None		
	Significant Finds/Period	None		
	Development Type	Residential		
	Reason for Investigation	NPPF		
	Position in the Planning Process	Pre Planning		
	Planning Ref.	Planning Ref:		
PROJECT LOCATION	Site Address/Postcode	2-4 Peacock Lane/16 New Street, Leicester LE1 5PS		
	Study Area	1733 square meters		
	Site Coordinates	SK 585 043		
	Height OD	65m AOD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	ULAS		
	Project Brief Originator	Local Planning Authority Leicester City Council		
	Project Design Originator	ULAS		
	Project Manager	Richard Buckley		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Tim Higgins		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Williams Homes		
PROJECT ARCHIVE		Physical	Digital	Paper
	Recipient	Leicester Mus Service	Leicester Mus Service	Leicester Mus Service
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	Author	Higgins, T.		
	Other bibliographic details	ULAS Report No 2017-142		
	Date	30/08/2017		
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	Description	Developer Report A4 pdf		

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Morris, M., 2013, *The Greyfriars Project The archaeological search for the last known resting place of King Richard III, Grey Friars, Leicester (SK 585 043)* ULAS Report No. 2013-013

10. Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was carried out by the author Tim Higgins ULAS. Dr Richard Buckley managed the project. Grahame Appleby of the Leicester City Council monitored the work on behalf of the planning authority.

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